The Thriller

The Paper with a Thousand Thrills

2d.

The Silent Six

A Story of Baffling Mystery

By T. Arthur Plummer


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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 clenching 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 night 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 early murmur of London’s traffic.

He shrugged his shoulders. It was his own fault for buying such a practice; somebody 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 “Lsh!”

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 rush 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.
Dick Brandon did not hesitate. The red blood of youth ran in his veins. Adventure had always come 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 half-opened door, 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, staggering 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's 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! I 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 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 cut 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 at 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 little cramped, Doctor Brandon!" he mocked.

"I've enjoyed the trip, as much as I shall enjoy the explanation," came the retort.

"You'll better keep your hand on your pistol, for I'm a fractious 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 hung a hasty glance about him. The place at whose portals they had pulled up was a magnificent house, almost standing in its own grounds. He was amazed—indeed, every minute he was becoming more and more amazed! A plea for help, a bustle 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 Brandon curtly.

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

"Look here!"

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

"We've waited too much time. Get indoors, doctor. Here, go Harvey Debro curtly.

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

The 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 Debro into the hall and was taken to a room on the left. It was furnished with astonishing good taste—everywhere were signs of affluence. Brandon left him with that stolid-faced flunkey on guard at the door.

Brandon began to see that his quick wits had been taken in, and he set about examining the内re.

"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 know 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 Debro entered. He flung a swift glance at the servant, a slow smile spreading over his good-looking features.

"You can go, Frant!"

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

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

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

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

Brandon glanced quickly into Harvey Debro's eyes, found there a cynical expression on it, and a strange light in his eyes.

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

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

"I'd like to have the first nineteen minutes with the last of the way!" Brandon said.

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

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

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

"Oh, don't let that scream upset you—that is not your concern. Women get hysteria now and then, too 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 experience—your experience—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 the light within the brilliantly lighted 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 still, and mask-like; her eyes were deep-set, and her skin of a waxy pallor. Near her was another woman in nurse's uniform, while on an operating-table was a figure with shut lids and compressed lips.

Nurse—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 Debro. But now there had come a keen awareness of reality. The nurse 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 brain. 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 mistakes?"

"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—do you want to know how I am going 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?—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 squad 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-dress 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 a post-mortem—"What did you do to him—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 Debro grinned. His head, 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 with an ace of death, so don't try to double-cross me!"

He quit 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. He lived—his 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 U.S.F. sight-seeing car.

He wanted, too, to get at the bottom of this weird mystery. At the end of that long hour Dick Brandon straightened himself up in the lamp that 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 she 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 tennent and go; and, after all, how brave a man may he be, he does not coolly contemplate with any degree of pleasure being hunted into the Unknown through the medium of an assassin's sight.

He took off the operating-coat and washed his hands. The door opened. Harvey Debro 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! That whisper of your expect you are hungry?"

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

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

"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 dressing!"

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. There were 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 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 woman whose revenge had rarely left his mind since she had guessed pleasingly out of that car at him!

WHEN THE DUMB SPEAK

SHE 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 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 thought he came to Brandon, for it was Harvey Debrog 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 touch them. Not one of them spoke a single word.

At last the meal ended. Debrog saw to it that Brandon and the girl had no opportunity to speak to each other; indeed, the young width that always came to Brandon was that it was Harvey Debrog who kept the well 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 touch them. Not one of them spoke a single word.

"Then tell me what you can, Mr. Frant. I was kidnap-ped—I expect you know that—to perform an opera-tion. 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 daresay not here, sir. That human devil will follow—he’s always follow-ing, listening at keyholes, nodding and smiling at me, and waiting to pounce."

The fellow was wandering on. Obviously his mind was possessed—hindered by some terrible secret. He ended suddenly and shud-dered.

"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 Debrog—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 pas-sage 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—"

The door slid to: Brandon observed the tiny depression into which Frant had thrust his finger to work the mechanism. The bed-room door opened. Smiling, snive and sus-picions, Harvey Debrog stood on the thres-hold.

"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.

Debrog 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 grief-stricken, and it is really only 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, Debrog," Brandon said grimly. "This is the first time I’ve been alone, and, by god, there’s going to be an understanding!"

The other smiled faintly.

"I hate excitement and violence. They tire me out 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."
The THRILLER

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"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 Debrov 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 savvity was gone and Debrov'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. In santly 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 Debrov. "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 Debrov had produced from his breast-pocket.

"You see," Debrov remarked pleasantly, "it would never do to post it in this neighbour- bourhood; that might localise things, if I may use so cumbersome a word."

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

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

I

took that grim scoundrel unaware.

Before he could twist the pistol and use it Brandon was on him. The weapon clattered to the carpet, almost looking but harmless now. Brandon's right arm was thrust about the other's throat—choking into a guttural gargling the sound of dismay that rose to his lips.

That's what had to be done—keep him from calling for help. Dick Brandon hated to take 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 tinderbox—till 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 Debrov 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. The brute had to be held tight or forced to a surrender to any method. 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.

Debrov'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 gawping helplessly—but still he fought.

Then Brandon loosened his hold and took a pace back, the other hunting towards him. The doctor steadied himself, set his feet firmly; then out shot a physician's right fist with every ounce of his strength behind it. It connected with Debrov's jaw, lifting him clean off the floor. His knees sagged, down he crashed flying into a heap of his discarded clothes, and his face 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 Debrov's pistol and thrust it into his pocket. Then he took off Deliah's' diamond from his pocket, flung it to the bed, flung the clothes back, snatch- ing off the top sheet. Then he cut 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 Debrov to move when he came round. Then he snatched his own handkerchief and thrust into his mouth as a gag, winding another strip about his mouth and face.

His brain was working rapidly. What had that poor devil, Frant, said? That those rooms were a network connected with some 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 section of the house 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 denser sense of smell, which he wondered if everybody in the house knew of this secret passage, or only the two Debrovs and the "dumb" Frant? Possibly the three of them only—so it might be an idea to take this scoundrel along with him.

He caught Harvey Debrov by his coattail and dragged him unceremoniously after him and into the secret passage. He had driven 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 was safe to use it, for he was determined to get back this way if necessary.

He was shut in with Harvey Debrov. As the panel had slipped into place his cars caught the sound of someone knocking on the road and the noise of the road itself.

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 rescue was impressed upon the length of his brain.

He struck a match. It gleamed in the gloom, throwing ghostly shadows about him. He got the feel of the new quarter—and it seemed scarcely bigger than a cell-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 side, and in his excitement pushed it in, the projection, and the panel slid back. He listened acutely. He heard something. It was unnerving 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 Debrov's absence would soon be discovered and a search made for him.

He threw the gauntlet down to Fate and taking off his outer coat he pushed it into 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 was sent her way to him to destroy, had said that day that from the flying motor-car she had passed beyond human ken, and he would never know the meaning of that mute plea; never, indeed, knew who she even was!

He squared his shoulders as the match flickered out, dropping the pistol back into
Brad. 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 started into its cavernous depths to a spot where the light from this room just touched. That beauty, Harvey Debro, was still unconscious. He was glad. He had "outwitted" 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 Debro! 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 Debro said that he was bringing a—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.
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, ch? Well, fire—you 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 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 had seen her draw the 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 edge of life, with nightmares, and who was holding her—and a cry of rage broke from him, followed by an oath.

It was the fellow whom Deboy had called Frant—the "dumb" man who had sworn to help him! Frant—that hypocrite who had cut his crocodile, and had mocked 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 Deboy spoke again—there was naught in his tones now!

"Let go that rope, or I'll pluck you, after all! No, you fancied you could get away? I've the 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—now what are you going to do? I'll give you for that! No one takes liberties with me without suffering!"

Brandon shuddered. He had heard the voice—had seen the eyes—had read the lips. It was a voice he had never heard before. He had never seen the eyes before. He had never read the lips before.

Brandon said that he was a man of chivalry! "I'll hold it firm when I get to the bottom!" he had whispered as he swung out from the girl's sight.

Full of the horror of that face, he stumbled up the dark room, through the crowded hall, and out into the garden. He was not aware of anything else. He was not aware of the crowd that was noiselessly moving about him. He was not aware of the crowd that was noiselessly moving about him. He was not aware of the crowd that was noiselessly moving about him. He was not aware of the crowd that was noiselessly moving about him.

THE SECRET OF BEACON INN

"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, capped by a green, veiling face of a man named Deboy. He fought like a fury, lashing out right and left. That's what he wanted—to feel his fists connect with human flesh.

"Strike a light—somebody!" shouted Deboy.

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—grimacing 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 Deboy himself. He heard his hissing voice near his ear.

"She's after 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 in the darkness amongst themselves. There would have been humour in it if the whole ugly business had not been so tragic.

His hold 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 too 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 to go to the lodge gates, for the sake 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 thickets...
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 there? Who’s there?”

“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 stumbling 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, thee 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
question in as casual a voice as he could muster.

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

"Mr. 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. "Dare," said the latter. "That is, ye've ever stopped at the village o' Swerald. Mr. Debroy's the lord o' the manor, ye might say!"

"Dared," Brandon corrected. "I remember hearing that name quite like Mr. Harvey Debroy. He had built a village club for the labouring men, had endowed it, too—indeed, he was a positive squire."

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 man and had helped himself—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 ungodly 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 same way with 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 obilging 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 other boy of yours!"

Brandon nodded. That motor-bike had been a brilliant idea! He threw himself down on the sofa and pulled the blanket over him. The old chap left him. Brandon heard his footsteps 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 convive a sophisticated 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! He'd been through that 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 is the name of that peculiar and that seemed to be pervading the atmosphere—for all the world like incense? He sat up, throwing the blankets from him! Good gosh, the thing hit him 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-door. He grasped its latch. The stair-door was locked, too! He was 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 Debroy's voice speaking 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 cottage. 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 that of old Debroy himself! He unlocked the stair-door, picking up those blankets and throwing them into the open.

"Poor gentleman!" he murmured chucklingly. "I think somebody must have stolen his mo-tee-boke!"

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 found that they were 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 turned and moved towards the door. He filled his lungs and exhaled. The air was purer now. He went into the open, picking those blankets gingerly up and shaking them. 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 shrumed shape of a car with no lights! Two forms separated themselves from that blur.

"Where is Doctor Brandon?" demanded a voice.

"Nice and comfor'able, and resting?" The words were followed by a cackle.

"What else?" demanded a jumpy command, and the old man did!

Brandon's senseless form was picked up and carried to the car. Soon the car moved, manoeuvring on the grassway to turn. It seemed unnecary, this great car hustling about! 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. TheQueries are for 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 some curiosity, 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—one within 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 bed-side. "You seem to have the acute nose of something sticking out of the other's coat-pocket."

"The poison you hate, doctor?" he remarked. He had a discolouration under one eye and a small cut at the corner of his mouth. "The other brutes are out of ear-shot. The doctor has been brought back."

"You are a brave man. You made an amazing sight of it on the lawn last night against heavy odds. You were aided by the local police!

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

The whole 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 old coincidence he had lighted on some tiny part of this mystery.

"I may know more than you think, Debroy! I've charged you with most of the crime!"

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

Brandon was eating now. "It's pretty thick on you and I, but I really come to grips there will be firework!"

"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 away at all! 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?"

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

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

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

"Frant is a treasure, isn't he, Doctor Brandon? He's the most perfect 'gentleman' 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. Deebry 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, Deebry?" he said. "You
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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 Deebroy. "And so chivalry made you play the brave gallant—eh? You don't dream what her fate will be, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless she fall in with my plan, my medicolegal 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 hired crooks in the nethermost depths of Hades first!"

Harvey Deebroy'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 carcass. He kept control of himself only by an effort. He knew what the outcome would be—just a ballet 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, Deebroy?" 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, keep that faithlessness for yourself!"

"The day of reckoning will come, Harvey Deebroy!" 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 there, his other eye not so keen on eyes as it was.

The girl's story.

B RANDON was silent. He had imagined that he had "touched bottom" in his everyday life at Dead End; but he had ceased to think of anything other than making Dead End, by comparison, into a veritable fairytale!

Harvey Deebroy 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 said few words, the features quiver, heard that odd gurgling noise, and he knew that he had to shout it to be understood.

"Poor Frant!" went on Deebroy 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 your heart,"

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

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

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

"Is it really so, what's it all mean? What did that brute do to your daughter?

Brandon demanded.

The man-servant 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 where 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. Deebroy suggests that you and I should take a stroll in the garden!"

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

FULL OF PRAISE! THE EDITOR GReETS YOU

I AM highly satisfied with the unanimous approval of Edgar Wallace's story, "The Crook in Crimson," in last week's issue of The THRILLER. Every letter I have received since I said 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 the "kink," and the elucidation of a mystery by the whimsical J. G. Reeder was a real winner.

"I knew 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 popular THRILLER? Another like "The Crook in Crimson.""

This correspondent gives no address, therefore I conclude he is one spicing his remarks with a profanity of the Aberdonians, but we all know that this aspersion upon our Northern friends is quite unwarranted. Nevertheless, our jubilant 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 himself. His story in next week's issue will be entitled "The Secret of Beacoon Inn," and will be a story of enterprising adventure. 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 a bet between two well-known writers, Roy Sydne, Herriot, 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 stolidly to the paper that never fails 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 jacket. 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 man servant 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 entered 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 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 riotous 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 a large walled-in garden. Pathis intersected it. Masses of flowers and spreading trees were on every hand. It was altogether charming—this garden of Frant's! But he managed a 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 to himself, and felt so lovely, like some delicate flower—that had been ruthlessly torn from—where?

Brandon moved impulsively nearer to the girl and slid his hand through her arm. She did not resent it—it was as though she felt the act to be one of palmpi. 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. "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.

"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—wits a haunting beauty that lingered 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—"

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 was. 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 narrow back street!"

"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 me 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?"

"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! It's quite peculiar!"

"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.
Brandon took the newspaper, an 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—mean enough 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—whichever 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 nature of a mind of a potential murderer; willing he could 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 the 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 must go with 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; then 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 solder, 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 stepped forward. He caught his foot and larched, thrusting forth a hand as the match went out, to save himself from falling. His hand came away clean.

He struck another match, shielding it from the draught with his curved hand. It raveled to his announcement, 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 yelling.

He closed the secret panel and continued on along the passage till he reached the panel leading to Celia Langdale’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 crept into the living room and listened. The door 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. The scene was quite as 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 there came a flash of flame, vividly blue and startling! No sooner had it died down than another spat out 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!

Frank’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 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!

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 flood into it. 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.

A n 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 chuckling 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 the 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.

“Is there 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 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 only a matter of a few minutes’ time.”

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-bliat!

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

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. He was telling.

“You’ve got me, you bound!” he said hoarsely.

“You see I care a hang for myself? But you hold Celia Langdale in your filthy grubby hands until 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 think—cross me!” Outside this door there are—

“Your infernal Silent Six—you needn’t tell me.” His voice was hoarse—his nerves were—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.

“We’re you the woman who warned Miss Langdale in the night?” he asked abruptly.

She glanced at the locked door and nodded. She turned to the girl. Her expression changed. 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 an assassin now.”

“Your daughter?”

“She was the wife of the younger Debroy; you see, I am Mrs. Frant! My girl had met my husband Debroy at a night club some weeks before the Brandon—well, without our knowledge or consent! We lost sight of her then, but we did not worry, for we understood that she was happy and traveling 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 dark! My husband and I were from a Doctor Brandon, for she was our only child, and, unsuspiciously, we fell into the trap!

“We entered the car, and as it moved off my husband and I lost consciousness. We found ourselves in a country house that the Debroys 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 except for exercise in the walled garden!”

“What happened to your girl?” Brandon asked.

“We learned from her what those 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.

"You're 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 heading 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 over! 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 nothing 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 the him.

"No!" he said.

"Yes! For your sake—yes!"

The veins stood on his temples; this woman, by her amazing self-obliteration, 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 anesthetic.

"I want all 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—bundaging 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 bedclothes, 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 grumbled. "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 formed in Brandon's wake as he passed along the corridor. He reached his 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!"

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

"This practice is to be our unwilling accomplices,"—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 medicus aspire to such heights?"

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

"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 some place in, 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 environs of London!"

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

"You will! It would be an empty shame for you. This is a horrid special to be nailed in the bud, and for one so young as Sir Henry 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!"

"That's all I know to!"

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

"You bound! 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—do not hint of violence! You can't imagine how I feel! But don't call me myself, and threats to me may react upon others—say, upon Celia Langdale!"

Framt came in at that moment. He gesticated, his lips moving quickly. Harvey Debroy began his tale:

"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 topcoat 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 dishes.

"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 writhing sea. He might have been lost. It 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 ash-box 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!"

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.
As the car began to glide into the night Harvey Debrov chucked. "Another phase forward. Soon the final act will be staged! What a vantage point! I have lived for this!"

To Frant, whose eyes, big and mournful, were fixed upon his "master's" face.

Frant made that jabbering sound, and, uncorked electric wire deep humiliation! Then he followed his master back into the house.

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

A little later Harvey Debrov 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, "The death's head. The death's head."

He was wearing a courtier's sour fashion that was alien to him, suggesting a nervous strain that was reaching the climax.

"It is gone, Amos!" he said.

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

"What 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 the shadows were 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 voices: women, now gentle and choking, 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 was closed, gave a tiny squeak.

"What's that?" Harvey Debrov 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 same shadowy figure, rising, now gleaming and slack-jawed, now doubtful and fear-filled, from the darkened passage—saw 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 set about writing.

His task didn't take long. He knew that if he were discovered there would be only one end for—death. But he did not hesitate. There was that little girl who loved him, and the 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-gate.

The 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 precede by a squalid orange flame, the head 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. He could not even see the spires of the copper-lead 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 sleeping. The door was unbolted, the card-guard he saw no signs. The old man sought about till he found a gap in the hedge. Then he proceeded to peer-looking insulated gloves from his pocket and put them on. He huddled till his groaning found the wire, 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 pattern of death Brandon had 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. It was strange. 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 Harvey Debrov had said 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 jet along the lodge wall. He went in, took the letter he had written in his room from his pocket, and dropped it through.

Frant took out his handcuff-chisel and wrenched the hinges loose. 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 bolting the hinges of his own boot off his trousers, and began to creep amongst the shadows towards that gloomy pile standing there, seeming to frown down upon him.

THE PACKET.

Mannheim, with drawn blinds, the car containing Brandon and Darkie was moving swiftly along. Brandon was watching through a blackjack 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 pondered 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 saw him. For some time 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 stop. He picked up that tiny parcel and alighted, and as soon as he was on the ground shot away. Brandon heard a click, and realised that by some clever device concealing shields had been dropped over the identification plates. The Debroys didn't leave the car.

He dodged. Debrov 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 house brothers.Colouring the driver had been travelling all over the place to bail him.

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

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 wished to see him when men were being ordered away by shocked and startled servants.

A cabstand drew him suspiciously. Brandon moved along and up the Edgware Road. Life was already beginning in the little shops. The cab driver 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 must be master-changed, his face. His 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 pname.

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

Number 25 Park Avenue was a big, grey-stone edifice, run down. Men's clothes built for posterity. Brandon wondered what the next few minutes would have in store for him!

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

The man servant glanced down curiously at this very persistent visitor. Then: "Sir Henry is in now," he said. "I will inquire for your friend, sir!"

"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—yes?" 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 you kidnapped her, and how do you know all this?"

"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 'T' as he had so often heard.

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

"Does he 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 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 Debroh'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 her 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. Debroh, 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.

In that struggle in the car Debroh's pistol would play a part. That chauffeur had proved game. But after getting hold of the weapon and "plugging" Amos Debroh, 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 Debroh 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 anguish-marked 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 Debroh 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 Debroh 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 Debroys 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 indiscernible. 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—
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 these beasts have made
others suffer. Will you trust me?"

"The police, they—"

"If Scotland Yard knew what is in my
mind I should be sentenced to 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.

F on 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 identi-
fication! 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 ammun-
tion, and flash-lamps?"

Jimmie grinned. That was the only
answer he vouched for!

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

"Jimmie?" He further said: Blime,
doc—" some half a dozen times, and volun-
teated the information that he was in his
"blinking' element!"

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

"Relax 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

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

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

"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 present—oh a hurried bit, 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 cut!"

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's things a bit?"

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

"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 the then.

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

"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!"

Deboy’s head sagged forward on to his chest. He knew he was up against it now. He had nothing in 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 warned the heart of the young medicus to know that he had got such splendid pals. No sooner had their boat touched solidly on the mud, than a voice called out of the darkness.

"That you, sir?"

"Yes, it’s me, Jimmie!"

"Got the blighters? How many of ‘em?"

"Three!"

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

"Don’t want the gen’lmen to git their toes wet, doc? It’d be a shame—I don’t think it would!"

"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 brand of minutes Jimmie had both Darkie and Deboy securely trusted.

"What shall we do with this posh motorboat, and the tow-boat, sir?" a voice asked.

"Push ’em out. They’ll slope 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 grinned.

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

There was an evil smirk on Harvey Deboy’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 waved her hand. She was not a beauty, but serviceable.

"Get in, Deboy!" ordered Brandon.

Deboy did. He was having a dose of his own medicine now. He hadn’t the vaguest 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, Deboy!" 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. Deboy glimpsed it stalking them. He didn’t know whether it contained a few or a number. Actually it contained merely the trusted-up Darkie and one other, beside the driver.

"Jimmie’s waiting for your instructions, Deboy. Tell him the way to take—this is the main road.

"I’m a stranger to those 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 cozy mansion. Now, Deboy, 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, Deboy snarled.

Jimmie Santler opened up 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, Deboy?" 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 brother sends his girl to give a warning through to your house, mightn’t he?"

"The telephone—ah, the telephone, my friend!" Deboy answered querulously.

"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, Deboy!" 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, Deboy 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 we going to do now, Doctor Brandon?" Deboy 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 Sweeney is less
than a mile away. My dead cottage 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? Through a back entrance he had contrived that my brother and I are benefactors; eccentrics, 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 respected. We never thought that my log-keeper was—let him leave the log-gate open for my return. He little thought that when I passed through them it would be as a passer-by, to which other men meant to quit this neighbourhood."

Debroy continued. "Celia Langsdale was a hostage I wanted to keep. She was to have been mine. Doctor Brandon—all mine—"

Brandon read the seemingly sublimation of defeat to his prisoner, but did not relax his vigilance a moment. This might well be a ruse to throw him off his guard.

But Debroy had taken the drive, keeping in the shadows of the bordering trees. Brandon had ordered those other two in the second car to stay behind with Darbie. Brandon's intentions 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 have come to stem the instant command given to them by this human devil.

"Got your shooter out, Jimmie?"

"You bet, gov'ror."

"Right then. Cover whoever answers the door. You get me?"

Jimmie did. It was eerie. Dimly Brandon saw a glimmer shining through the fanlight over the door. The sound 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 too late!"

"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 ghostly white. The sweat poured down his cheeks.

"Then you got my note, sir? Thank Heaven!" he breathed to the figure he saw hovering beside him.

"Ah," whispered Debroy, "so Frant was the source of the information!"

Frant came half-way down the steps.

"Heavenly, it's horrible, sir! Then he caught at 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 had no shield to block 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. They are the dregs...

"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 foolishness 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 trammeled with six silent men! We had five other custodians of our guard-cottages. Frant does not know, that they, too, have passed away! They were all called to their telephone—true to their duty. 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 alone?"

"No! But you 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 ones 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

There were at the foot of the stairs now, But Debroy contented the prosecution to push Debroy along in front of him. Jimmie Santler was glancing about him undignified 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!"

"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.

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, and explained the sudden turn he had told you on the launch—about Sir Henry Langsdale's packet?" he said.

"Jimmie!" Brandon went on abruptly.

"Keep this brute covered while I investi- gate this body of yours..."

"Not 'arf, doc!" responded Jimmie Santler.

Brandon hurried along the corridor and up the stairs. It was his "sixth sense" that guided him to the destination room, 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, ump?"

"That you get ready at once to accompany me—I've no doubt that your wife can help you!" Brandon replied grimly.

"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 the right hand stretched 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 contesting units of dead heat.

Brandon shuddered and turned away. He left the room, and went downstairs, returning to the others.

"Your brother and your 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 laugher, and said: "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 body flat against a door frame—his body crumpled 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.

"We are doomed in highly inflammable material. I fused the metal which will. They are fuzed 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 they try it? There will not even be time to tear your bed-sheets into linen ropes, Doctor Debroy."

He was edging now towards that secret panel.

"Come away from there, Debroy!" said Brandon, the cracking 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 that 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 the the lurid hideous light. The light of the spluttering flame gleamed through the secret panel at the end where Celia's bed-room was. It threw ghastly shadows dancing on the walls. Brandon stood 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 unseen floor. The air was stifling, but soon it became cooler!"
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 become 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 men 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. But also, the victim 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 recognisable. 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 message had meant Molly Sanders, whose reputation as a fascinating and vivacious flirt was known to all the local young "bloods." 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 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 drag, or anything?"

It was Detective-Inspector Kilman, 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 Sattler and the Frants—Mr. and 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 carried off, and forced to perform operations, dumb men with dulled intellects; a human toe in a parcel; wholesale murders, and—oh, my god, let's get a breath of fresh air!"

It needed a lot to persuade Inspector Kilman—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 Darkie.

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 Sweevil on the small pension Sir Henry Langdale insisted on their having.

Probably a grave in Sweevil Churchyard had a great deal to do with the Frants' decision!

THE END.
INTRODUCTION.

The Trapper, a wealthy but dangerous fanatic, was under the impression that he was performing a 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 organize a gang, one of the first members of which is Dick Estrehan, an ex-convict of the firm of Hint, Hint, Sons & Bartox.

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 velit Grimshaw, two crooks who, ignorant of his real position, fleeced 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, Velvat 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 manifestation of the wire noose, for 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 obligated to assist the assistance, although his only unexpired capacity of Queenstone and Patricia Langton. Thorold, an American millionaire, was already known to the police 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 sus- picious 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 recessed. 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. She was not to see doubts, 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 performance of the adventures of a poor but honest and beautiful factory girl who eluded the wicked machinations 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 the street lamp she had a glimpse of a man running. By the side of a big saloon car another man was leaning over a black blur on the windscreen. 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, and took 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 shrieked 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 catch. 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.

"I'm in for trouble. I'll get my own back," she observed, and dabbed her nose with powder. "I'm going to be blamed for this rough-house business."

A DRAMA
OF THE NIGHT-HAUNTS
OF LONDON

By

GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.

"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 snuff, 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 or 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 the burnt-out house. She glanced about the sombrely furnished apartment and made a little grimace of disgust.

Funny shop this," she commented, removing her glove. "Reminds me of a mortuary. Where's the main guy? Where's Dick?"

Through a pair of heavy plush curtains which concealed the entrance at the other end of the room a man advanced. He wore a rimmed grey beard and moustache and a pair of hornrimmed spectacles. In her 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 into 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 fail for what Violet 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 slightly, 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. "Quer 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 wasn't a party to what Ver...Veralone did. It's part of the 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 the croaking Velvet?"

"Good heavens, no!" he ejaculated. "He deserved it. 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 as if you're not hiding from the police? You're not a natural born crook, Dick. Spell it out."

He gazed gloomily at the floor.

"You ought to know. When—that night—you showed me what a fool I’d been left determined to take what seemed the only way out, not trusting to my guns. I didn't try to put things right, I was desperate—ready to grasp at a straw, and—"

"You fell for it. He spied on his hands wide.

"What could I do? It was that—or the other thing. Besides, Stella, this is not ordinary crime. This is—a sort of crusade. You understand. I'm not a stilly 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, by God."

"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 of her hand on his arm. "Graduation is graft and murder is murder. Now that I know you had nothing to do with putting Velvet out, you'd better whip up what I'd advise you to do, Dick. This bloke's crazy. What good will it do you if they get you in the dock at the Old Bailey to tell the jury that you are 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 pulled at 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 of here?"

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 us?"

"The in the soft, satirical tone which there was subtle shade of menace. Dick shrank as she spoke, but Stella turned upon the newcomer with a sneer.

"You've been listening in. I hope you've lined accurate notes.

"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, striking a false note of Indian sign on Dick, but you can't hypnotize me. Why should we stand for this cranky kind of dirty work you're pulling? If you try to risk your own neck on that's only 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 want to know, Dick."

"What about it, Dick? Come with me. I can handle this bird with his fancy dress and mask—"

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 doing the right thing? 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 attempt to pull him to the doorway. "We're all in the same boat."

"Dick has got sense," interposed the masked man.

The girl 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 the crooked tricks you can do 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 trivial 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 doesn't see sense, you can take your chances that the police are looking for him—and I'm the only man who can save him. Let's finish this thing up, Estrehan. I think 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 notice him. As Dick glared at Estrehan, his head was thrown back and a pair of handcuffs pressed on his wrists.

He were led back to the room they had just quitted.

"You poor fools!" they heard the voice of the masked man.

The HOUSE AT CABOURN.

I was to be pleasing to relate how Martin Wilde, by the examination of a motor Tournament outside Stella Chiffe's apartments, traced the man. This would have been one of those spectacular and more difficult were not to be avoided. There were no distinguishable signs that the chief inspector of communications had not. But where there had been. 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 now set 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 the chance that it had not been noticed, other than as a vehicle on its lawful occasions, but there is little traffic in London streets in the small hours, and since motor burglary became a profession the police are observant. The odds were even that the Police Commissioner, as ten thousand policemen signed off duty, they were questioned.

Now it chanced that a constable patrolling in the vicinity, and knowing the old felt monotony press hard upon him. Five minutes after he had met his section sergeant he gaveNotice he was going. He had a rough, two-syllable way and lit a surreptitious pipe. Since this is a breach of discipline, severely frowned on by the authorities, one must 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 buttercup yellow rooms. Then the car drew off a safe distance and the lute of relief, the constable took the palm of his hand from the top of his pipe and finished his investigation. This broke nothing to arouse his suspicion. Evidently a pair of belated wayfarers had just arrived home. But for some reason the constable was seemed to be coming his way at last. But he was a cautious man, and he knew this was one of those tricks which hasty action might defeat his purposes.

Wilde, to whom he sketched his ideas, agreed with him. There was no doubt that the constable had been seized, and constable was Stella. The probability, but not the certainty, was that the house was a retreat of temporary residence for the woman, whatever she was searching. The point was to entrap as many of them as possible. But several hours had to pass before 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 means of escape, other than cunningly within doors. But even criminals have to sleep, and if the house was being constantly used, it was not improbably be there at night. The problem was not a new one for Scotland Yard, where it is almost axiomatic that the best way 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 Cabourn. These of these were provided with the habit, and equipment of window cleaners. A great deal may be seen while a man is in an upper window. It was their mission to find the amenable occupant of some house which would afford them an opportunity to which they might to some extent confide. Now that the Trapper and his confederates had been long risky. Discretion had to be taken, and he could devise no other means of finding the inconspicuous point of vantage could be obtained.

The other two men, it was decided, should be hawks. They were merely scouts to obtain information from which the main force could derive data for his plans. Besides getting topographical details of the neighbourhood, they were to glean anything that they could of the appearance and habits of those persons who frequented the suspected house. On all of these enquiries Wilde impressed the necessity for the greatest caution on the slightest pretext.

But, in spite of these steps, Wilde was no nearer to discovering who was in the house when the car drew away. Not for hours and hours after had the lone constable from his ear at a point of rendezvous a mile away. It was with some uneasiness that he learned that no one had been seen to enter or leave. The Trapper would not have left any hint of his purpose had leaked out. Yet, if his men were right, there had been no sign of Stella Chiffe, the girl he had hoped to catch.

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 again. The passage of the car were none of them saw, but in the one he would have seen little to attract his attention—possibly a man or a couple of men wrangling quietly in the street. Wilde had studied his tactics carefully. If his directions were obeyed, there would be no bolt hole left amongst them.

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

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button and waited crouched closely against the outside wall. It was impossible that those within would see the alert, and that the mouser 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 finesses. With the butt of an automatic he crashed a pane of glass, and, jerking aside a curtain that obstructed his view, thrust his arm into the room. A ray of light from the torch jerked about the room.

"Nothing here," he muttered, and, springing the catch, flung up the window, and, pulling himself off 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, banks of flowers lightened the sombre aspect of the room.

"These flowers are nearly fresh," declared the inspector. "Come on, lads." He plumped 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, fire 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 heavily into the same instant there was the startling report of a revolver, a doubly loud from the confined space in which it was fired.

Wilde, pistol in hand, dropped on his face and threw the glow of his torch deep down the flight of steps leading to the cellar. No second shot followed. At the bottom of the steps a man was gatting up, his feet off for as a chair by Stella's side and filled his pipe. His face relaxed as he smoked silently and quietly told the police matron to dismiss with a word of thanks, and drew up a chair by the side of the girl.

He regarded him with a faint flush on her face, and a twinkle in his eye. "This is a tough one," he commented. "A booby trap," he commented. "Lucky for you that you're not that sort, 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. Thus 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 fitted up 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.

He was thus engrossed as 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 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 stopped and, lifting her in his arms, 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 by others, 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 quietly told the police matron to dismiss with a word of thanks, and drew up a chair by the side of the girl.

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**BENEATH A HEAP OF SACKS.**

"Say, you're hanging on to me like a fly on a jampan. Waiting for me, Stella Cliffe 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 unnecessary 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 the matter thoroughly." He dropped an eyelid in a knowing wink, but before she could reply the sound of a doorbell announced the approach of the doctor, and Wilde withdrew while an examination took place. He was waiting when the doctor had finished his investigations, and they exchanged a few words.

"The man is completely exhausted," reported the divisional surgeon. "He seems to have been severely shocked, as well as physically strained. He may be all right to-morrow."

"In that case," answered Wilde, "I shall send for a doctor for him to-morrow."

"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. "Perhaps we can talk to her 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 face, and a twinkle in his eye. "This is a tough one," he commented. "A booby trap," he commented. "Lucky for you that you're not that sort, or you'd have been dead as mutton now."

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**BENEATH A HEAP OF SACKS.**

The police found the bound and gagged figures of Stella Cliffe and Dick Estrehan.
The Solution of this week's 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have made your effort to solve the crime. To this end the facts are printed upside-down.