THE THRILLER
THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

2d

THE MIDNIGHT GANG
A Book-length Novel of Baffling Mystery

By DONALD STUART
Even as the masked man seized the terrified girl, Detective-Inspector Street stepped through the heavy curtains with an automatic. "Put up your hands, Mr Midnight!" he snapped.
A SENSATIONAL MYSTERY NOVEL.

by Donald Stuart

Chapter 1.
The Crime in the Theatre.

The spacious foyer of the Orpheum Theatre on Varieties was crowded. Groups of smartly-groomed men and resplendent women laughed and chatted among themselves, or passed from one to another exchanging greetings as they recognised friends and acquaintances among the first arrivals.

A seemingly never-ending stream of cars and taxi-cabs was constantly discharging its contents to add to the already dense throng that filled the vestibule.

The Orpheum was world-famous for the quality of its programme, but apart from this the name of Betty Seymour, glittering in electric lights overhead the facade, was a sufficient attraction to draw all theatregoers loving London. She was a male impersonator, and her clever songs and mimicry had taken the metropolis by storm. Six months earlier she had been unknown; an obscure artiste struggling for existence among the innumerable small halls and picture theatres with which the provinces abounded, and then she had been seen by Delman, the variety agent, who, losing his train, and having nothing better to do, had spent the evening at a local music hall. Betty's act was just the type he was looking for, and he had engaged her there and then for a tour of the circuit that he represented.

The girl's success had been phenomenal. She had awakened on the morning following her London debut to find herself famous; the critics without exception were unanimous in declaring that she was a "find."

She had been inundated with offers from nearly every theatrical agent on the night of her first appearance in London, but Delman had been clever and got her tied up on a three years' contract before the curtain rose on her "turn."

The long line of vehicles before the theatre was beginning to thin when a small grey coupe nosed its way slowly among the jam of traffic and slid into a private car park almost opposite the theatre.

The young man who descended from the driving-seat and pushed his way through the crowd to the entrance might have been anything from twenty-two to thirty. In reality he was thirty-five, but his smooth, boyish face and clear, twinkling blue eyes gave him a false appearance of extreme youth.

Superintendent Richard Street, known throughout Scotland Yard, from the Chief Commissioner down to the youngest constable as "One-way Street" because of his obstinate nature, had decided to take an evening off and enjoy himself—a rarity since the advent of the Midnight Gang, whose grim exploits had, for the past eight months, occupied his attention to the exclusion of all other matters. Just lately, however, their activities had subsided, and Dick was taking full advantage of the lull.

How much his sudden decision to attend the Orpheum that evening was due to Betty Seymour's inclusion in the programme he was unwilling to admit even to himself.

Hurrying up the steps to the rapidly-emptying vestibule, for the curtain was on the point of rising, Dick paused and looked about him. Two men who had been standing talking by the box-office saw him and came forward.

The elder—a tall, red-haired man with greying hair and a humorous gleam in his deep-set eyes, extended a hand in greeting.

"You're late," he remarked in a pleasant voice. "We'd almost given you up."

Dick smiled an apology as he shook hands.

"From a most prosaic cause," he replied. "I lost my collar-stud."

Frank Tracey, crime reporter on the "Megaphone," chuckled, his round face creasing into innumerable wrinkles.

Then, as a burst of music sounded from inside the theatre, he said: "Well, the overtime's started; we may as well go in."

Dick Street had been lucky in securing a box, for he had only managed to get it the afternoon, and the Orpheum was usually booked out in advance.

Unwilling to go alone, he had telephoned Frank Tracey and Howard Carlax, and
finding that they had nothing particular to do that evening, had easily persuaded them to join him.

"How did you manage to tear yourself away from work, Dick?" asked Carfax, as they took their seats. "Whenever I've tried to get away, usually, you've always put me off with the excuse of being too busy."

"I am still," answered Street, raising his voice so as to be heard above the blare of the band. "But even a detective must get a little recreation." "Don't you find the Midnight Gang amusing enough?" asked Frank.

"Regarding them my sense of humour utterly fails me," replied the detective grimly. "Any further news about them?" Frank continued.

"One-way." Street shook his head.

"Nothing," he said shortly. "They've been very quiet lately, haven't they?" remarked Carfax, examining the end of his cigar. "What's the reason, I wonder?"

"Too quiet?" Dick's smooth brow wrinkled in a frown. "It's a fortnight since they raised Finnigan's, in Regent Street, and got away with close on £200,000 worth of jewellery."

"I wonder if you fellows'll ever catch 'em?" said Frank, crossing his legs and tilting his chair at a more comfortable angle. "I feel, somehow, that they're going to be in for a snare, or they wouldn't have evaded capture for so long."

"It's not they who are clever," corrected Street. "It's the man who controls them. The fellow they call 'Mr. Midnight.' He's the clever one, and he's the one I'm after."

The others don't count—"he snapped his fingers—not that I -"

"Are you any nearer to discovering who he is?" asked Carfax.

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "Not more than we were eight months ago," he answered warily. "He's a name and a brain—and nothing more. Even two members we have caught have never seen him, if we can believe the story they tell. By the way, you're defending them, aren't you?"

Howard Carfax, one of the cleverest K.C.'s of the day, nodded slowly. "Who retained you?" asked the detective curiously. "I've been going to ask you ever since I heard about it."

"Bockman, of Bockman & Keed," answered Carfax. "They are quite well-known solicitors and thoroughly respectable."

"But they must have received instructions from someone," persisted Street. "Oh, they did!" The barrister blew out a cloud of smoke. "The money for all fees and typesetting and instructions to retain my services were received by letter on the morning following that on which Gunter and Larch were committed for trial. Needless to say, the letter bore neither signature nor address."

Frank Tracey passed his careful over the top of his shiny fair hair. "It came from Mr. Midnight, of course," he said.

"Of course," agreed Dick. "You know, I've been given carte blanche to 'cover' the Midnight Gang business," Frank continued. "Old 'Stuts'" (the news editor of course) "thinks I'm too important to be referred to, had a slight impediment in his speech "would give his head for an exclusive story about them, so don't forget to let me know if you get a line on Mr. Midnight."

"You'll know," answered Dick Street grimly, and turned his attention to the auditorium. "With a final flare of brass and drums, the orchestra died to silence, the lights dimmed, and the curtain rose on the first turn. Street watched perfunctorily, his thoughts elsewhere, and it was not until the number went up signalling that Betty Seymour was next that he began to exhibit anything like interest in the proceedings. But as soon as she appeared, he leaned forward, his eyes glued on the stage.

He forgot crime—forgot for the moment that there was even such a place as Scotland Yard while he watched the tall, graceful girl immaculately attired in male evening dress, and listened to the musical cadence of a voice that was never raised yet filled every corner of the vast building.

Dick Street had first met Betty Seymour two months ago.

That had been the beginning of many meetings, and they had drifted into a friendship. Twice he had taken her out to dinner and discovered that she was companionable as well as beautiful.

His real feeling for her he refused to allow himself to analyse, although more than once he had found himself counting the hours to the time when he could reasonably make an excuse to see her again. Betty Seymour's turn concluded the first part of the programme, and as the curtain fell amidst a thunder of applause, Carfax rose to his feet and stretched himself.

"Let's go and have a drink," he suggested—a suggestion that was eagerly seconded by Frank, who had sat throughout with a somewhat bored expression on his round, good-natured face.

He took the stout man affectionately by the arm. "Poor colonel," he said sympathetically. "He's tired.

The colonel sighed heavily. "See here, Mr. Street, I'm not doing anything," he said in an inaudible voice. "Surely a fellow can enjoy himself without being interfered with you 'busy's'!"

Dick chuckled softly. "Surely," he agreed. "It all depends upon how you intend to enjoy yourself. It works for me."

He glanced at the crowd of bewitched women moving around them.

"Cornel followed the direction of his eyes and shook his head. "You're wrong, Mr. Street," he declared. "I'm running straight now—I'm really.

"Tell me another," suggested Dick. "You're not going to make me believe that you've suddenly become a lover of the music hall?"

"No." The colonel shook his head. "If you must know, I'm here out of curiosity."

Dick looked at him, and Cornel remained silent. The man was perfectly serious.

"I want to see what's going to happen," he said softly. "Something's going to happen, and I want to know what."

"What do you mean?"

The colonel drew a long breath and looked about him. "I don't know," he muttered, "and even if I did, I wouldn't tell you—but I've heard things."

"What things?" cried the exasperated detective sharply. "Rumours," answered the other evasively. "There's something doing—I can't tell you any more, Mr. Street," he added hastily. "Honestly, I can't, because I don't know."

Dick tried his best to get the man to say more, but he either wouldn't, or couldn't, and eventually he rejoined his companions, and returned to his box with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction.

The second half of the programme had started as they entered softly, but the detective could no longer have said what was going on. His mind was groping to try and find an explanation for the colonel's presence and his cryptic words.

Al Marks, known as the "colonel" on account of his military appearance, was one of the closest jewel thieves in London, but he was far too clever to risk a chance haul. What was it, then, that he expected to happen?

Dick gave it up at last, and turned his attention to the stage once more. The curtain had just fallen on a particularly unamusing comedian, and he consulted his programme to see what was to follow. He found that it was to be an exhibition of dancers, and the lights went down while the band softened into a lilting cadence.

Then it happened—the event that was to set the whole of London talking. With a sharp, whip-like crack of an automatic—and it was followed by a shrill scream!

The band stopped suddenly, and an excited expression lighted up the faces of the audience.

"What was that?" Dick heard Frank's breathless question from the gloom close at hand, but before he could reply, the lights in the theatre went on, and a man in evening dress emerged his way hurriedly to the orchestra rail.

"Will everyone please keep their seats!" he cried clearly, raising his voice above the chattering din. "And if there is a doctor
present, I should be glad if he would kindly come forward. The gentleman occupying Box A has been shot!"
Dick Street drew in his breath quickly, and his face went tense as he sprang to his feet.
The colonel's curiosity had been satisfied.

"THE MAN WHO WAS KILLED."

For nearly half a minute following the manager's words—for Dick recognised the man in evening dress as Quaront, the acting manager of the Orpheum—there was silence—a silence so intense that it could almost be felt, and then suddenly it was broken by a woman's hysterical scream. Almost immediately, as though it were a signal, pandemonium broke out. Men shouted and women sobbed. There was a clatter of raising seats as the vast audience struggled to its feet.
The manager held up his hand and shouted to make himself heard above the din. "There is no cause for alarm," he cried, "the police have already been sent for, and if you will all keep your seats, you will be able to leave quietly in a few minutes. The performance will, of course, be discontinued, but if you will present the halves of your tickets at the box office tomorrow, a full ticket for any night you wish, or the value of your ticket returned to you. This applies to all parts of the house. For the moment, will you kindly keep your seats?"
His calm, matter-of-fact voice had a quietening effect, and the roar gradually subsided to a subdued rumble, and the detective saw a short, rather stout man elbow his way through the stalls and approach Quaront. He spoke quickly to the manager, who nodded, and taking him by the arm, led him towards the exit.

"One-way." Street turned and strode to the door of the box.

"I'm going to find out what's happened," he said to his companions. "You can come with me if you like."
Followed by Blink and Carfax, he made his way swiftly along the corridor and down the stairs of the foyers. Standing at the foot of the second staircase that led up to the other row of boxes was a uniformed policeman talking to Quaront and the stout man.
Dick went up to the group, and, explaining who he was, inquired what exactly had occurred.

The manager turned a worried face towards him as he made known his identity. "This is a dreadful business," he exclaimed. "Terrible. The man has been shot in the head."

"Who was he?" demanded the young superintendent.

Quaront shook his grey head.

"I don't know," he replied. "He's a stranger to me."

"Have you got the person who did it?" asked Dick, and again the manager shook his head.

"One-way." Street turned to the constable.

"Telephone the Yard," he ordered. "And ask Inspector Lucas to come round here right away." He looked at Quaront.

"Please take me to Box A," he added shortly.

The manager led the way up the stairs, accompanied by "One-way." Street and the stout man whom he introduced as Doctor James. They passed down the corridor and found Box A at the far end. A hurried commissionaire in the uniform of the theatre was standing outside the closed door, and he stood to one side to let them enter. Dick was the first to cross the threshold, and he stood for a second taking in the scene with one swift, comprehensive glance. The single electric globe hanging from the centre of the ceiling lit up the box brilliantly. The solitary occupant, an elderly Jewish type of man, lay crumpled up on the soft carpet, his white, blood-stained face upturned, the staring, sightless eyes fixed in a horrible glare.

Dr. James dropped on to one knee beside the sprawling figure, but Dick didn't require his verdict to know that the man was dead. The bullet had hit him squarely in the centre of the forehead, and death had come upon him instantaneously.

The possibility of suicide flashed for a moment across the detective's mind, and he looked rapidly round the small chamber for any signs of the weapon, but without finding it.

"Was there anyone with him?" he asked.

"No," replied the manager. "He was alone."

The young superintendent nodded shortly.

"Then the murderer must be among the audience!" he snapped. "Listen! No one is to leave the building until my men arrive. You'd better see to that!"

"I'll do my best," answered Quaront, and left them. A few seconds later Street heard him addressing the audience once more. He turned his attention to the body and began to make an examination of the man's pocket. A gold cigarette-case, a thin watch of the same precious metal, a handful of silver, a bunch of keys, and a fat leather note-case was all he found. The man had evidently been smoking a cigar at the time he was shot, for the amouning half of it had burnt a hole in the carpet beside his chair.

Dick opened the leather wallet and glanced through the contents. There was twenty pound in notes, half a dozen visiting cards, and a letter. "One-way." Street looked at the cards first, and as he read the name engraved on them his breath hissed through his suddenly clenched teeth. "Alfred Raeburn." Dick knew the name well for that of a rather shady financier whose money-lending business the police had long suspected of being one of the most profitable one of a "fence." But if the dead man's identity had given him a shock, the letter which he next examined was to give him a greater one.

It was typewritten, and began without the preliminary of either date or address:

"For a long time you have been appropriating for your own use money which should belong to me—a sum amounting to over seventy-five thousand pounds. Unless this amount reaches me by twelve o'clock tomorrow, you will pay the penalty which all traitors receive—Mr. Midnight."
found an empty cartridge-shell on the floor. Dick took the little brass cylinder, and looked at it frowningly.

'Thirty-two calibre,' he muttered.

'That's conclusive proof where the shot was fired from.'

'How in the world was he able to aim?' asked Quaront. 'The theatre was in darkness.'

'That's the easiest of the lot to answer,' replied Dick. 'Raeburn was smoking when he was killed. He fired at the cigar' and left the theatre immediately—during the confusion,' put in the careful voice of Inspector Lucas from behind them. He drove away in a closed car—several people saw it drive off.'

'Number?' snapped Street. Lucas shook his head. 'Nobody knows,' he replied bitterly. 'There was a whole string of cars outside. It was only one among many.'

'Have you got on to Raeburn's house?' asked Dick, and the inspector shook his head again.

'No, not yet,' he said.

'Do,' said Street, and find out who sent him the shock his head.

Lucas looked at him for a moment in wonder, then his face slipped into a watery smile.

'I got you,' he murmured. 'Of course, they would want to make sure of his coming to the theatre to-night, so that they could lay their plans beforehand. What beats me is why they didn't get him outside. It wouldn't have been much easier."

'But not so spectacular," said the young superintendent. "Mr. Midnight wanted this murder to be talked about. It was a lesson for the other members of the gang. None of them will try any double-crossing after this."
man she was talking to so earnestly was Al Marks, alias the colonel!

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

It seemed to Richard Street that he had been asleep for about ten minutes when Jennings, his servant, woke him and brought his cup of tea.

The events of the preceding night crowded into his brain, and foremost amongst them was his chance discovery of the intimacy that apparently existed between Betty Seymour and Al Marks. He had thought about it the more puzzled he became. What could a girl like Betty have in common with a man of the colonel’s character—a known jewel thief who had served more than one sentence. He had looked up a considerable space in a certain index at Scotland Yard.

He pondered over the matter all through his breakfast, but reached no satisfactory conclusion except a determination to question Betty about it at the first opportunity.

Having reached this decision, and also the end of his meal, Dick turned his attention to the morning papers.

Dick’s mouth set grimly when he caught sight of the leader page and the article it contained.

It was a virulent attack upon the methods of the police, and a demand for an inquiry concerning what it termed: “The apparent hopeless incompetence of Scotland Yard to deal with this dangerous gang of desperadoes who are a menace to the lives and prosperity of the people. Now is the time,” the article concluded: “for the Home Secretary to order that the right man is in the right place. It is over eight months since the Midnight Gang first came into existence, and nothing has been done to check their nefarious progress. Sir Robert has to take the matter in hand, and, if necessary, insist upon the infusion of new blood at headquarters. It is badly wanted.”

The rest of the papers were all in the same strain, though not quite so vitriolic as the “Megaphone,” and Dick Street set off for the Yard with a feeling of acute depression.

The message that awaited him from the assistant commissioner on his arrival at his office did nothing to dissipate this feeling, for it was terse and to the point. Dick walked down the long corridor towards the great man’s room with a heavy heart.

“Come in, Street,” said Colonel Allen, looking up from a big table littered with papers, when he tapped and entered. “I suppose you’ve seen the papers this morning?”

The young detective assented, and sat down on the other side of the desk.

“Something will have to be done,” went on the assistant commissioner gravely, helping himself to a cigarette. “You’ve been in charge of this matter for over seven months, and up to the present you’ve failed. You’ve fallen down badly on this case. Something has got to be done—and done soon.”

“I hope to be able to supply some definite information in the course of the next few days,” said Dick. “Don’t think I’m trying to excuse myself. I’m not. I’m stating a fact. There was a message this morning from Sergeant Collins.”

Colonel Allen looked interested.

“Oh! What does he say?” he inquired.

“Well, if there is any truth in his note,” Dick replied, “he’s on the track of Mr. Midnight. That’s the man we want to get, sir. I think we can get him, the rest of the gang don’t count. They’d go to pieces in a week without the brains behind.”

The assistant commissioner removed his cigarette from his lips before speaking.

“The reference to Al Marks had switched Dick’s thoughts back to the incident in Oxford Street, and subconsciously he coupled it with the assistant commissioner’s astounding suggestion. Could Colonel Allen have been referring to Betty Seymour when—

“It’s impossible!” Street made the remark aloud. Inspector Lucas regarded him curiously.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. “But I quite agree with you. It’s all impossible. There was a fellow once who said that nothing was impossible, wasn’t there? He’d never heard of the Midnight Gang.”

He sighed.

“They’re the most impossible thing that ever happened, and the more you think of them the more impossible they become.”

Lucas took his departure soon after to follow up an inquiry concerning the car in which the man who had been seen to leave the theatre lurriedly had driven off, and as soon as he was left alone Street drew the telephone towards him, and gave a Victoria number.

In a few minutes he was connected, and presently heard the low voice of Betty from the other end of the wire.

“Who is that?”

“Dick—Dick Street,” he replied, and his heart beat a trifle faster at the sound of her voice. “I thought I’d ring and see how you were after last night.”

“Was it dreadful?”

He thought her voice trembled slightly, but put it down to his imagination.

“Are you playing to-night?” he asked.

“Oh, yes. Mr. Delman says that the show couldn’t have had a better advertisement.”

“There are a lot of people who won’t agree with Mr. Delman,” said Street, a trifle grinning. “What are you doing this afternoon? Would you care to meet me for tea somewhere?”

“I should love to, but I’ve already promised to have tea with a friend. She hesitated. “I’m free at lunch this time to-morrow, if—”

“All right, then, I’ll meet you at the Carltonian at one o’clock. Street scribbled the appointment on his blotting-pad. “I came round last night to see you, but you’d gone.”

Followed by the crook, Dick burst into the disordered room. On the floor lay the body of a woman. It was Betty Seymour.
Lying just inside the door of the bank, they found the night watchman. He was dead—shot through the head.

"Did you? That was kind of you. I got away as soon as I could and went home. I was feeling terribly upset."

"Did you go straight home?" inquired Dick.

"Of course!" She sounded surprised.

"Why did you ask that?"


"It couldn't have been me," she laughed, "I was in bed and asleep. You made a mistake. Good-bye till to-morrow."

There was a click as she hung up the receiver, and Dick pushed the telephone away from him with a sudden feeling of disappointment.

She had been lying, and the knowledge hurt him. That it was she he had seen talking to Al Marks, he was certain. And the fact that she had lied proved that there was something she wished to conceal.

The assistant commissioner's curious words that morning returned to him, and, with a heavy sigh, Dick stretched out his hand and pressed a bell on his desk.

To the constable who answered his summons, he gave an order:

"Go along to Records, Smithson, and ask them to let me have all the information they've got concerning important women criminals at present at liberty. I don't want the little shoplifters—I want the big crooks."

The constable saluted and hurried away. Street rose to his feet and strode over to the window gazing moodily out on the rain-swept Embankment. He remained there for some time lost in thought until he was roused from his reverie by the return of the policemen, his arms full of bulky folders. He laid them down on Dick's desk, and when he had withdrawn, "One-way" Street settled himself down to work.

Hour after hour went by as he waded through the voluminous records containing items of information regarding every known female criminal.

He put aside those whom he thought were capable of controlling an organisation like the Midnight Gang for future investigation, and they were few. It was late in the afternoon when he opened the latest folder, and the first thing he saw caused him to suddenly sit bolt upright. On the top of the file was a photograph, and underneath on an official blank the description relating to it:

"Mary Drew," read Dick. "Six months' imprisonment with hard labour for theft, Holloway Prison; released June 8th, 1926. Five previous convictions."

There followed a long description, and then in red ink: "This woman is dangerous."

Dick went white as he looked, for the face in the photograph was the face of Betty Seymour!

**MR. MIDNIGHT.**

The man who lay sprawling in the corner of a third-class carriage was the type who would have sent any respectable person looking for a seat in the train, hurried to another compartment. It was possible for this reason that he had the carriage to himself. He wore a faded brown overcoat that had fallen half open, disclosing the disreputable suit beneath, the mud-splattered trousers of which ended in a ragged fringe over the patched and broken boots.

It must have been at least three days since his face had seen a razor, for his chin was covered by a stubbly beard which was scarcely discernible through the grime that engrafted his skin. An unlit cigarette dropped from the corner of the loose mouth, and a shapeless cap was pulled down over the furry blond and bloodshot eyes.

He remained hunched up in the corner until the train drew out of the station, and then glancing quickly about him to assure himself that there was no danger of a possible carseword—-a matter of habit, for no one could possibly have overlooked him, he took from the pocket of his overcoat an automatic pistol. Jerking back the jacket he examined it carefully, and presently returned it to his pocket with a little nod of satisfaction.

Searching among the rags that constituted his clothing, he presently found a box of matches, lighted the cigarette, and blowing out a cloud of smoke, contentedly settled back once more in the corner.

The train ran on through the night, the rain rattling against the windows in intermittent bursts, for the coming of darkness had brought with it a steady downpour. In a short while it slowed and drew up at Clapham Junction. The man in the corner leant forward, rubbed a frayed cuff over the glass and peered out through the blurred pane. His searching eyes found the clock he was seeking, and with difficulty he made out the time—five minutes to eleven.

The hour mentioned in the letter that reposed in his jacket pocket was 11:30. He would be a trifle early, but that was all the better. After a short interval, with a banging of doors, the train moved on again, and he heaved a sigh of relief to find that he still had the carriage to himself, for he wanted to think.

From the expression of satisfaction that now and then flitted across his face, his thoughts appeared to be pleasant ones, and, indeed, to a certain extent they were, for the object that had occupied his mind for the past four months had at last been attained. It had taken him weeks to gain the attention of the Midnight Gang, but an hour had been successful, and at that very moment was on his way to make the acquaintance of the mysterious leader of the gang, Mr. Midnight.

He took from his pocket a sealed envelope, folded it, and, with time to spare, rumpled the crumpled sheet of paper it contained. It was typewritten, and began without preliminary of any kind:

"It has come to my knowledge that you are desirous of joining the organisation which I control, and the uncertainty which has hitherto marked your progress will now be banished. The enclosed will more than cover your expenses."

The letter was signed in capitals, "Mr. Midnight," and the remittance accompanied it had been a five-pound note. The trapfolded the sheet and stowed it carefully away, experiencing a little thrill of excitement.

The letter had arrived the day before yesterday in his dingy lodgings in Flanders Lane, Deptford, and the tram had spent his time ever since its arrival by speculating as to the identity of the mysterious leader.

Among the denizens of the crime-infested district that lies in the vicinity of Deptford Broadway—-the Midnight Gang and its unknown and mysterious leader were a fre-
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BEtty Seymor was on the point of sitting down by her side, but she had to order her carriage conductor to wait for her. It was not until she had reached her seat that she noticed the man who filled the other place. He was a tall, thin-looking man, with a peculiarly solemn expression. He had a long nose, small eyes, and a mouth that seemed to be set in a straight line. His clothes were worn, and his hands were dirty. Betty looked at him curiously, but said nothing.

“Are you going to ride in the same carriage?” she asked.

“Of course,” the man replied in a low voice.

Betty nodded and settled herself comfortably in her seat. The carriage started, and the man looked out of the window as if he were waiting for something.

“Is this your first visit to the city?” Betty asked, breaking the silence.

“I have been here before,” the man said, still looking out of the window.

Betty smiled and continued to look out of the window herself. She was not particularly interested in the man, but she was curious about him. As the carriage drove through the city, she noticed that the man was watching her closely.

“Do you know the city well?” she asked.

“I have been here many times,” the man replied, still looking out of the window.

Betty was surprised by his answer and asked no further questions. She continued to look out of the window, but she could not help noticing that the man was watching her closely.

The carriage arrived at the theatre, and the man helped Betty out. He followed her into the box and sat down beside her.

“Are you here by yourself?” she asked.

“I have a friend with me,” the man replied.

Betty nodded and said nothing. She was still curious about him, but she could not help feeling that she did not want to talk to him.

The theatre was filled with people, and Betty sat in her box, watching the play. She was not particularly interested in the play, but she was interested in the man who was sitting beside her.

Suddenly, the man jumped up and ran out of the box. Betty was surprised, but she did not say anything. She continued to watch the play, but she could not help feeling that something was wrong.

As the play ended, the man returned to the box and sat down beside Betty. He looked at her for a moment, and then said, “I have something to tell you.”

Betty was surprised, but she said nothing.

“I have a proposition for you,” the man continued.

Betty was even more surprised, but she said nothing.

“I have been watching you for a long time,” the man continued.

Betty was shocked, but she said nothing.

“I want to make you an offer,” the man continued.

Betty was still shocked, but she said nothing.

“I will pay you a large sum of money if you will do something for me,” the man continued.

Betty was shocked, but she said nothing.

“I will tell you what it is, but you must promise me that you will not tell anyone,” the man continued.

Betty was shocked, but she said nothing.

“Will you do it?” the man asked.

Betty was shocked, but she said nothing.

“Very well,” the man said, getting up and running out of the box.

Betty sat in the box, feeling confused and frightened. She did not know what to do, but she knew that she could not let the man take advantage of her. She decided to report him to the police, and she did so. The police arrested the man, and he was found to have been involved in a number of criminal activities.

Betty was relieved, but she was also shocked. She had never thought that she would be in such a dangerous situation, and she was grateful that she had been able to report the man to the police. She continued to live her life, but she knew that she would always be careful, and she would always be on the lookout for danger.
been labelled a dangerous woman Dick sighed involuntarily.

Betty locked up a refractory button, and met his eyes.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "You seem depressed."

"I am rather," he admitted, picking up the menu.

"Why?" And then as he made no reply:

"Is it the affair at the theatre that's worrying you?"

"Partly." He tried hard to prevent himself becoming homoeopathic, but failed.

"It was a dreadful fiasco, wasn't it?" she legged forward, one slim hand resting on the table. "I suppose you haven't found out who the identity of those people responsible?"

Street shook his head.

"Beyond knowing it was the work of the Midnight Gang, no," he answered.

"And haven't you any idea who they are?"

"No, the slightest," he replied. "I'd give a lot to find out, or rather, I'd give a lot to find out who their leader is."

"Their leader?" she looked into his face. "Yes, the person who's known as Mr. Midnight."

"But they're never passed as a waiter or a bank employee."

"Mr. Midnight is the brain behind. The motive was murder, the object was robbery, and the red herring automatically destroys itself."

"And you've no idea who it is?"

"I haven't, you see."

"Have you any clue to his identity?"

"No. Sometimes I begin to wonder if we ever shall."

She lapsed into silence, and Dick noticing her pre-occupation wondered what it was that had so suddenly made her so thoughtful.

The girl with the flawless features and soft voice whom he had met but half a dozen times in his life, seemed more to him than he cared to admit. There must be some explanation for that photograph in the record department which appeared on the surface. Knowing her, it was impossible to believe for a moment that she could ever have been a thief.

But as well as the photograph there was the unforgettable sight of the murder at the Orpheum Theatre she had met Al Marks. There was no mistake about that. He had seen her in the strong light of the electric standard with his own eyes, and was certain she was on terms of intimate friendship with the colonel, a notorious crook, and she had lied oh so easily when Dick had mentioned about her being in Oxford Street. It was his duty to question her about that, and he cast round in his mind for an opening.

It was Betty, herself, who supplied him with one.

What made you think I was in Oxford Street the other night?" she raised her eyes, and meeting Dick's steady gaze, blushed and looked down again.

"I thought I saw you—and he tried to speak casually—on my way home from the theatre."

"What time was it when you thought you saw me?"

"Her voice was low, and he thought he detected a faint note of embarrassment in the tone.

Nearly three o'clock—probably a little later."

"It couldn't have been me. I was home and in bed before twelve."

She smiled, but her eyes avoided his.

"At a quarter to one, a moment, then leaning forward he laid his hand gently on hers. Her fingers quickened beneath his touch, but she made no effort to draw her hand away.

"Oh, Dick, I say, don't make me put you on a strange question. Please don't be annoyed."

"Do you know Al Marks?"

He saw the start she gave; saw her face pale.

"Al Marks?"

She recoiled the name in a husky whisper.

"That generally known as the 'Colonel,'" said Dick, "a jewel thief."

"What makes you think that I should know him?"

"Her voice was hard, insinuating.

"Because you were talking to him when I saw you in Oxford Street."

"He hinted defiance crept into her blue eyes. "I've already told you that I was not in Oxford Street that night," she said coldly. "You made a mistake."

"I made no mistake," he looked at her steadily.

"Betty, why don't you tell me the truth? You may have gone straight home after the robbery, but you went out again—to meet Al Marks."

"I—I—" she stopped and made a gesture of despair. "Why do you question me? Why won't you believe me?"

Before Dick could reply the waiter arrived with the soup.

"There anything else I can get you, sir?"

he asked deferentially, as he set the plates before them.

"You can come and order a wreath for yourself!" she said in a treacherous voice. "I want you, my lad!"

Dick looked up startled, and saw the thin form of the bank teller standing at his elbow. The waiter was staring at him, his face bulging. Lucas tapped him on the shoulder.

"I'll come with you while you get your coat," he said. "You're going a little walk with me, and don't try any tricks. I've got a pistol in my pocket."

"What is it, Lucas?" asked Street. "What's the idea?"

"The idea was a good one," said Inspector Lucas, tightening his grip on the waiter's arm. "Luckily, it hasn't come off. If I'd been a minute or two later you'd have been a dead man by now, Mr. Street. That soup's poisoned."

"Poisoned?" Betty breathed the ominous words, nor in her eyes was there the least indication of a smile.

"Yes, miss, or it 'ought to be unless I've made a bloomer." She inspector regarded his captive sternly.

"What was it you put in that soup?"

he asked.

The trembling waiter was white and silent. "I was a sign at the bank, sir," said Lucas, "and I put it back there."

The head-waiter, attracted by the scene, came up to inquire what was the matter.

"His eyes opened in terrified amazement when Dick explained. "Good heavens, this is terrible!" he ejaculated.

"Street nodded.

"He isn't employed here," answered the head-waiter. "I've never seen him until this morning, and he came with a note from one of our regular waiters saying that he was ill and had this man in my office, put in his place."

"One-way Street surveyed the prisoner thoughtfully.

"Who put you up to this?" he inquired.

The man showed his teeth in an unpleasant smile.

"I'm not talking," he muttered.

Betty was white-faced and trembling, and Street, who saw that the affair had given her a start, quickly put her into a taxi and sending her home. He waited until the cab drove off, and then returned to the grill-room.

Had he remained a moment longer he would have seen a man who had been lounging outside the Carlton hotel take that cab and follow in the wake of the one containing the girl.

"Dick accompanied Lucas to Cannon Row Police Station and saw his prisoner locked in a cell, and then walked back with the inspector to 'Scotland Yard.' A search of the man's pockets had revealed a small phial labelled..."
"Poison," and a sniff at the contents left no shadow of doubt as to his murderous intention, for it contained hydrocyanic acid. Dick had carefully preserved a portion of the soup, and when the research headquarters he sent it along to the research department to be analysed.

"I was expecting something of the sort to happen," said the melancholy inspector a few minutes later seated in Richard Street's office.

"Had a kind of hunch--I'd have them at times--and when they tried to get me twice this morning, I wondered how soon it would be before they turned their attention to you." Street looked at him in amazement.

"Tried to get you twice?" he repeated.

Lucas nodded.

"Yes," he answered, "Just as I was leaving my lodgings, a car passed me and somebody fired from the inside." He pulled up the sleeve of his coat and showed a long, red welt on his forearm. "That's the bullet mark. I got the number of the car--XY 1032, but it was a fake. They're not taking any chances, these Midnight people. Sometimes a sent 'em into a panic; probably they think we know more than we do. They tried again in Whitehall. I was waiting to cross the road when somebody lurched into me, and sent me sprawling into a bus. The driver was clever and had good breaks, otherwise the papers 'id have been full of another street accident. I came along to the Carltonian to tell you about it and warn you.

"How did you know I was there?" asked Dick.

"Saw the note you'd made on your blotting-pad," said Lucas.

"I wonder how they knew I was going to be at the Carltonian?" said Street thoughtfully.

"They must have known, or they wouldn't have made such elaborate plans."

"Ask me!" Lucas shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you tell anyone?"

The detective made a dismissive gesture with his head.

"No," he answered, "I made the appointment yesterday by phoning from this office.

"Perhaps Miss Seymour told somebody."

"The note was incriminating against the Midnight Gang?" Street stopped suddenly and was silent. He remembered that it had practically been Betty's only suggestion that they should lunch together.

He felt a coldness round his heart at the obvious conclusion to which his thoughts were leading him. Betty Seymour was the only person besides himself who knew that he was to be lunching at the Carltonian that day. Had it been she who had passed the information on to the Midnight Gang, or, alternatively, had she been responsible for planning the whole diabolical scheme?

He shrank from believing it, and yet common sense pointed out that it was the only possible solution. And he loved her--he no longer tried to disguise the real state of his feelings for her, and the knowledge made him feel sick and miserable.

"I see they haven't sent the new cupboard yet." The voice of Inspector Lucas broke in on his thoughts. "Dilatory, that's what I call it. Promised that it was a possible solution."

"Word--is the curse of the working classes. When I was a boy at school, there was a motto."

A tap on the door interrupted the inspector's reminiscences to Street's relief, and a constable entered.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, sir," he said.

"Who is it?" asked Dick.

"Mr. Troy, sir." Troy was a policeman.

"Send him up," said the detective shortly.

"Now I wonder what he wants?" ruminated Lucas. Probably after copy for the "Megascope," or it might be a request on behalf of the editor-in-chief to offer apologies for that article.

Frank Tracey had come on neither errand as they shortly found out, when he hurriedly entered the office.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, rushing across to Dick and shaking the astonished superintend

As the police were taking their prisoner into Scotland Yard, they suddenly felt him go limp between them. "Here, what's the matter?" one exclaimed as Hurgon slid from their grasp.

The fresh arrival of the constable saved him comment.

"They've brought the new cupboard, sir," said the constable, in answer to his query.

"Oh, all right, tell them to bring it in!"

"One-way," Street welcomed the interruption, for it gave him time to adjust his thoughts.

There was a bumping and banging in the passage, and two men entered struggling under the weight of a heavy wooden cupboard. They set it against the wall, wipped their perspiring foreheads, and handed Street a receipt.

They departed. A few seconds later one of them came back.

"I forgot to give you the key, sir," he said, and laid it on the desk in front of Dick.

When the man had taken his departure, Lucas surveyed the new adornment to the office admiringly.

"Looks good, don't it?" he remarked.

"We're getting quite posh. I wonder if they believe it in a plain van?"

After a pause he went off at a tangent as usual. "Ever heard of Mary Drew?" Dick started, and his eyes strayed to a locked drawer in his desk in which rested the photograph of Betty Seymour. So Lucas knew! "She was a wonderful woman--or, rather, a girl," the inspector continued thoughtfully. "Pretty--I don't suppose you've ever seen a prettier. Big blue eyes like a summer's sky--I always get poetical when I think of her--and skin like cream. She had the soul of a devil, but that didn't matter--nobody could see that. She looked like an angel in the desk, but that didn't stop her getting up. A dangerous woman" the judge called her, but he was an old man, and sourer." He paused and looked at the ceiling.

"What's all this in aid of?" snapped Street tersely--his nerves were in shreds.

Lucas took his eyes from the ceiling and gazed at him reproachfully.

"It isn't in aid of anything," he said. "I was just ruminating and wondering. No one knew what became of Mary Drew. She had five convictions, and when she was released after the last spell she disappeared. Funny if she's come back and joined the Midnight Gang, or maybe taken up a new profession."

"If you want to waste your breath," said
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Street irritably, "why don't you do something useful and put those things away?" He indicated the pile of books and documents that were stacked all over the floor.

Inspector Lucas rose from his chair with a sigh.

"I might as well, I suppose," he agreed. He picked up the key from the desk, and, crossing to the cupboard, inserted it in the lock and flung open the door.

His startled cry brought Dick and Frank to their feet in alarm.

"What is it?" asked "One-way" Street.

"Look!" said Lucas, in a husky whisper, and, looking, they shrank away in horror.

Slumped awkwardly in the bottom of the cupboard, his ragged clothes filthy and blood-stained, his head drooping forward on his chest, was the body of a man!

Street stepped forward, and, stooping, raised the limp head. One glance at the white face and he understood. For the man was Sergeant Collins, and he was dead!

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**THE BROADCAST.**

"One-way" Street was the first to recover.

Crossing swiftly to the desk, he pressed the bell, and then, with Lucas' help, proceeded to lift the body from the cupboard. They laid it on the floor, and as they did so a sheet of paper dropped from out of the ragged clothing. Lucas picked it up, looked at it, and immediately handed it to the young superintendent.

It was a single sheet of ordinary writing paper of the kind that can be purchased at any stationer's shop, and bore across the soiled surface three lines of typewritten characters:

"This poor fool tried to pit his brains against mine. Others who do the same will suffer in a like manner. Be warned.

"Mr. Midnight."

Street read the message, and his face set in a grim mask. Suddenly he raised the paper, and held it up to his nostrils. It exhaled a faint perfume—the merest trace of violets.

"One-way" Street's eyes narrowed suddenly as he smelt it.

"He must have died almost instantly," Lucas, who had been bending over the body, said in a husky whisper. "He's been stabbed twice in the back, and from the look of the wounds I should think either would have been fatal."

"See if there's anything in his pockets," ordered Street, in a low voice.

The inspector made a quick but thorough search, and at the end shook his head.

"There's nothing," he said. "You didn't expect anything, did you? They don't make mistakes, these people. Thorough, that's what they are, thorough." Lucas nodded and crossed to the door.

"I'll make him talk," he said grimly, and went out.

Just after he had gone the ambulance arrived with the divisional surgeon, and when the usual routine had been gone through all that remained of Sergeant Collins was taken away to the mortuary to await the inquest.

Dick Street turned to Frank when they were alone. The reporter was sitting silently by.

"Seems to me that we've got to do something, and mighty soon," he remarked dol- lously. "This business of poor Collins is going to stir up trouble. The people upstairs—Lucas always referred to his superiors in these terms—aren't going to take this easily."

"I know that as well as you do. But what more can we do? We've done everything that's humanly possible. We can't do miracles."

"They expect you to do miracles in the police force," growled Lucas as Dick returned to the phone.

After a short conversation he hung up the receiver, and rose to his feet warily.

"This is getting me down," he said.

"Cooper's say that the cupboard is still at their stores, and isn't being sent until to- morrow. What do you make of that?"

Lucas raised his eyebrows.

"I don't make anything of it," he answered.

"What I'd like to know is how the Midnight Gang knew that we were going to have a fresh cupboard. There's a leakage somewhere."

"They know everything," said Dick bitterly. He stood for a moment, his brows knitted in thought. Then suddenly he turned to the in- spector. "Go round to Cannon Row and see that waiter who tried to poison me. Threaten him with what you like, but get him to squeal."

Lucas nodded and crossed to the door.

"I'll make him talk," he said grimly, and went out.

"Go and arrange for an ambulance at once," snapped "One-way" Street. "Don't stand there gaping—hurry!"

The dazed constable departed to execute the order, and the detective turned to Frank.

"There mustn't be a word of this in your paper," he said. "At least, not yet. You've got to keep it dark. It'll only demoralise the public and cause them to lose faith in the police, and that's just what Mr. Midnight is playing for. This hasn't been done for the sake of dramatic effect. It's been done with a purpose—to get us in a panic."

He sat down at his desk as he finished speaking, and pulled the telephone towards him.

"What are you going to do?" asked Frank.

"Make a few inquiries," said Dick shortly.

He spoke to the man at the private ex- change, and was switched through to the stores department.

"Where was the cupboard for Superin- tendant Street's office ordered from?" he inquired. "Oh, Cooper's, was it? Thank you. No, it's a very nice cupboard." He wagged the hook of the receiver. "They want to know if there are any complaints. Hallo! Get me Cooper's, will you?"

Lucas stretched out his hand for the matches and lighted a cigar while Dick was waiting for the call.
A searing pain in his back, the tramp staggered through the doorway of unit waiting-room and across the platform, his hands groping blindly.

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"Two hundred Central office men will be leaving in police tenders for the Southern Union Bank in five minutes, and I've already told the City police force to be on hand and have received instructions to shoot if necessary. That's all at the moment."

"You say you've got a lot done in a little time," said Carfax.

Inspector Lucas took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"It's too soon—soon enough when there's any cause," he answered slowly. "People get it into their heads that the police are on the job and they drown their off-duty hours, but they have their other uses as well."

They spent the next few minutes in a silence, and then the door closed with a sound that rang shrilly. He listened to a short conversation, barked an order, and turned to Street.

"The first tender has just left," he announced. "I've sent a fast car for ourselves. I think if you're ready we'd better be going."

"You are armed?" he inquired.

Street shook his head.

"Then you'd better take one of these," Lucas said. He unlocked a drawer and took out two heavy automatic pistols, examined them carefully and handed one to the young super-intendent. "I've no doubt they need this," he added.

"I think that's all," said Dick, looking round before they left the room.

The door opened, a powdery得很好, the uniform officer wasting for them at the Embankment entrance and they got in. The driver had apparently already received orders, for at a nod from Inspector Lucas he drove off.

Lucas was silent during the journey, and sat hunched up beside Dick, his cigar gripped between his teeth, and his slathy brow drawn together in thought.

At Blackfriars a long-bodied car whizzed past, and Dick sat fastened with men who were jammed into the seats or sat upon one another's knees. A few seconds later another car dashed past similarly loaded, and then they huddled together, they struck a stream of cars and bicycles, motorcycles, single and with sidecars, and all going in the same direction.

The traffic was almost as dense as at midday, and the pavements were crowded with pedestrians. In a flash, Street grasped the meaning. The broadcast message on behalf of Mr. Midnight had reached millions, and not a few of them were going to satisfy their curiosity.

The car nosed its way among the string of vehicles twisting in and out under the skilful hand of the driver, and eventually drew up outside the Southern Union Bank. Dick Street got out and gazed about him. Never in his life had he seen so many people congregated in the street, and the roadway, every available inch of space was thronged with a sea of moving, struggling humanity. Special forces of police had been hurried to the spot, and were doing their best to keep the enormous crowd in hand.

Lucas waved them dolefully before going off to see that his men were properly stationed, and the detective and Carfax stood for a moment watching their little group pushing their way through the multitude towards the steps of the bank.

They consisted of a tall, soldierly-looking man in grey dress and a rather red-faced man in a bowler hat. A uniformed inspector was with them, and as they emerged the detective Dick Street recognised the tall man. With a word to Carfax he went over and shook hands.

"I wonder, of all this, Street?" said Sir William Baber, the managing director of the bank. "Of course, it's a fad—a heaven. It's impossible to take it seriously."

"Then the way of the fly, Dick Street brocised the tall man. With a word to Carfax he went over and shook hands.

"I'm inclined to take it very seriously.""But, my dear fellow," protested the banker, "what can they possibly do with all these people about and the place surrounded?
The THRILLER

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The night visitor.

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by detectives? 'They'd have to work a miracle.'

"The man who controls the Midnight Gang does nothing without a reason," said Street. "You can take it from me, Sir. You can bet your life that everything has been carefully planned down to the last detail. I don't profess to be able to guess what they propose doing, but whatever it is you may be sure they've left nothing to chance."

"Well, if they expect to take anything from the bank, put in the inspector, "they don't stand a hope. I think it would be a good idea if we searched the premises. Have you got the keys?"

"My manager has," replied Sir William, and introduced the stout man.

Lucas came up as they were ascending the stairs.

"I've got a cordon of plain-clothes behind them," he said with an inflection, "and now no one without authority can get through."

The door of the bank was opened by the little manager and they passed inside. In the entrance hall they encountered the night-watchman.

"Everything all right, Stevens?" asked Sir William, and the man nodded.

"Yes, sir."

Dick Street looked at his watch. It was half-past eleven. The Midnight Gang had half an hour before them. He said something to the uniformed inspector and hurried away.

"I've sent for some help," he remarked in a low voice to Lucas. "If there is anyone on the premises we shall need you.

They waited, and presently the inspector returned with six constables. They made a careful search of the entire building, but found nothing unusual, and came back once more to the vestibule.

"That's that," said Dick. "I think we'll leave you, inspector, and these six men inside with the watchman and the manager. You fellows do as you like.

They nodded.

"Right!"

Dick Street turned to the inspector.

"We'll keep watch from outside. That's where the attempt will come from, if it comes at all."

He paused as they reached the top of the steps, and spoke to the uniformed inspector.

"You're in charge here, Lucas. I've snapped, 'Tell the watchman to lock up as usual. We're behind us, and station a man at one of the side doors. At the first sign of an alarm tell him to throw his whistle. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good!"

Street joined the gaunt inspector and Sir William at the foot of the stairs, and ordered the door of the bank to be closed. They heard the bolt shoot as they moved away.

"I don't suppose anything'll happen," said Lucas. "I don't see how anything can happen. Let's inspect the cordon."

They walked right round. At intervals of six feet a ring of plain-clothes men surrounded the block of buildings, and behind them a second ring of uniformed policemen.

"Unless they can make themselves invisible, they'll never get through that," said Lucas.

Coming back to their starting point, Dick suddenly remembered Carfax, and looked round for the K.C. As he did so he could have sworn that he saw Betty Seymour among the crowd. He looked again at the place where he thought he had seen her, but if she'd ever been there she'd gone now.

He saw Carfax standing by the side of the bank where he had left him and beckoned him back. He seized the man by the arm.

"Well," said Carfax, as he joined them, "anything happened?"

Dick shook his head.

"Not a thing."

They had to raise their voices to make themselves heard above the excited hum of the crowd.

"They'll have to be pretty quick to keep to the time of that message," Carfax looked at his watch. "It's a minute to twelve.

He had scored a point, and when a breathless reporter came hurrying up.

"Inspector Lucas?" he asked.

"That's me," said Lucas. "What is it?"

"Back way. Your man back wants you, sir," the man panted. "They've arrested a man who was trying to break through the cordon."

"All right!" snapped Lucas. "I'll go at once."

He hurried away with a run with the constable following at his heels.

"It almost looks as though something were going to happen after all," Dick began, but he never completed the sentence. The telephone rang suddenly and the inspector who had been in charge inside ran hastily down the steps. He stopped on seeing Dick.

"I wish you'd come inside, sir," he said jerkily, "there's something queer going on.

"Queer? What do you mean?"

"I don't know, sir. The men say they can't breathe, and I begin to feel funny myself."

"He broke off.

Dick was already half-way up the steps, closely followed by Carfax and Sir William.

The vestibule was empty, and Street was hurriedly searching for someone where something had attracted his attention. He went over to see what it was, and started back with a cry. It was the night-watchman, and even in the dim light, Lucas could see that he had been shot through the head. He looked round.

"Where's that inspector?" he asked sharply, but the inspector had disappeared.

Lucas came running up at that moment.

"Anything happened here?" he asked. "Then why aren't we going through the cordon. It was a trick to get me round the back!"

Dick pointed to the body.

"That's what happened," he said. "We'd better search the bank."

In a corridor leading off the vestibule they found the bodies of two of the six policemen. They had been treated in the same way as the unfortunate watchman. Of the other four there was not a trace; neither could the inspector in the vaults realise their worst fears. The lock of the strong-room had been scientifically burnt out, and over £200,000 in paper currency stolen.

"The Midnight Gang have kept their word," said Street, as he surveyed the wrecked door in company with Sir William and Carfax.

"But how on earth did they manage it?" gasped the amazed banker.

"Oh, it was simple enough," replied One-Way. "They had mixed up in the bath-room, then gone into the bath, and finally in the temples, and gingerly felt the bump on the side of his forehead. Improvising a rough bandage, he returned to the disordered sitting-room and led the draught, for the window opening on to the back and overlooking an iron fire-escape, was open."

Carfax looked round grimly and picked up the telephone.

Lucas was in his office even at that late (or early) hour, for he was preparing a report of the bank raid. When the call came through he listened attentively while Carfax explained what had happened.

"I'll come along at once—don't touch anything," said Carfax.

By the time he had arrived Carfax was dressed.

"You didn't treat you any too lightly," remarked, eyeing the bandage, "but it might have been worse."

"I expected him to sh Igor," said Carfax; "he must have strung me at 3 I fired."

"You say it was Mr. Midnight himself!"
Lucas frowned. "If it was, it's the first time he's appeared in person."

"I'm sure it was," said the K.C. "Look at this.

He picked up a square of paper and handed it to the inspector. Lucas took it and read, asking slowly:

"This is your first warning. Take heed.

It was signed "Mr. Midnight."

The detective twisted the paper about in his fingers.

"Humph!" he said, after a moment's silence. "Have you any idea what the meaning of this is?"

"Not the least," answered Carfax, shrugging his shoulders.

Lucas surveyed the disordered desk, and the litter of papers on the floor with a critical eye.

"It seems to have been searching for something," he remarked. "Have you missed anything?"

"I haven't looked yet," said Carfax.

"I wish you'd make sure."

Lucas commenced a brief but thorough examination of the room, while the K.C. set to work sorting the papers on the desk.

It was obvious to see the way the night visitor had got in. The iron fire-escape led down into a little back yard, and the catch of the window showed a long scratch on the metal where it had been forced back.

A note in a fold of the curtains Lucas found a slip of paper. It contained one line of typewritten characters:

"G - report usual place Wednesday. M."

Lucas turned. "Who is "M"?" he asked.

Carfax came over from the desk and looked at it. "No," he said, shaking his head. "It's an instruction from Mr. Midnight to one of the gang, he said. "I'd like to know who "G" is, and what he means by the usual place. You didn't see the man."

"I caught a glimpse of him as I fired. He was masked, I think."

Lucas nodded, and continued his search of the room.

The K.C. had got his scattered papers into some semblance of order, and about this time Lucas had completed his investigations.

"There's nothing missing," he declared.

Lucas scratched his stubby chin thoughtfully.

"What in the world did he come for?" he muttered perplexedly.

"Ask me another," answered Carfax.

"I'm as much puzzled as you," said Lucas.

The inspector left soon after, and turned to Dick Street and Carfax. "You've decided?"

"Yes, sir," Dick answered. "We've got the gang, or we're very near it."

"I see. We've got one more, and Lucas told him of Carfax's adventure of the night.

Dick puckered his forehead.

"What was his object was?" he asked unceremoniously, piling the inspector's own comment of a few hours before.

"He had an object, you can bet your life on that," said Lucas. "But it ain't a pretty good one."

"Why?" Dick asked.

"It must have been, or he wouldn't have taken the risk himself—he'd have allotted what I call the whole of the gang." "Let me see that slip of paper you found," said Dick.

"Yes," Lucas replied. "I hadn't thought of it."

"It's always puzzled me," said Dick, carrying the slip over to the window, "how Mr. Midnight communicates with the members of the organisation. He must do so to issue his instructions, and yet none of them have ever seen him."

"I've wondered about that, too," Lucas nodded slowly.

"These are obviously instructions to someone," Street went on, "I should think the man referred to the person it was intended for. He stood for some time lost in thought."

"Lucas," he said, suddenly, turning round, "let men to watch all known criminals at present in London. Tell them to report everything they do—whom they see—everybody. Only a few have he may be members of the Midnight Gang, and if we can discover how they receive their instructions it may give us a clue to Mr. Midnight."

"I should think it was very unlikely," said Lucas despondently, "but it's worth trying." He walked over to the telephone and issued some orders.

"What time's this inquiry?" he asked, when he had finished.

He referred to an urgent summons received from the chief commissioner calling them to be present at an inquiry on the bank raid.

"Ten-thirty," answered Dick. "We'd better get along."

In the big room where all the important conferences are held at Scotland Yard they found every commissioner and chief-constable awaiting them, seated round the long table.

"In ordinary circumstances," said the chief commissioner gravely, when he read Street's report, "the robbery of the bank must be a matter calling for the severest measures to be taken against those responsible. It was carried out under very the eyes of the police after they had been warned that it would take place. But with an organisation of the description of the Midnight Gang we are prepared for very unexpected developments, and I especially want to know, in fairness, anyone can be blamed."

Dick smiled to himself at Lucas's audible sigh of relief.

"Every possible precaution was taken," continued the chief commissioner, "as far as I can see to prevent the affair. He looked across at Dick Street. "You say the men who robbed the bank escaped by the back entrance?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young superintendent, "and as they were dressed in policemen's uniforms they were, of course, allowed to pass the cordon without challenge. It was easy for the man who played the part of the able police-officer murdered without any of the persons responsible being arrested or any clue furnished as to the identity of the leader of this gang of desperadoes. It's bad, superintendent, it's bad!"

"I know it sounds so, sir," said Street. "But you must exercise the greatest patience, and allow me a latitude beyond the ordinary."

"For an hour they questioned him as to the methods he had used in dealing with the Midnight Gang, and Dick Street talked and argued. At the end, just before the meeting broke up, the chief commissioner turned to him.

"Well, then, Street," he said, "the best I can do is this. I'll give you another week. If before then you can show some results, all well and good. If not, I shall have to put the case in charge of someone else. I hate saying this, but I can't help myself."

Dick accompanied Inspector Lucas back to his hotel and the latter of the two spoke until they had reached the seal of their apartment. Then Lucas drew a long breath.

"That was pretty hot while it lasted," he said.

The telephone rang shrilly, and he stretched out his arm for the instrument. After a conversation he hung up the receiver and turned to Dick with a look of satisfaction, rubbing his thin hands.

"That was Cannon Row calling," he said cheerfully, "and with the nearest approach to a smile that anyone had seen on his long face."

"Hurgon has decided to tell all he knows," said Dick, looking puzzled for a second, then his face cleared.

"Hurgon? You mean the waiter who tried to poison me," he asked.

"Lucas nodded. "Yes: his name's Hurgon," he replied.

"I've been trying to make him talk ever
since we arrested him—promised him we'd let him off lightly and get him a free passage to America. I think that's what did the trick. If he'd thought he was staying in London he'd have remained as dumb as an oyster.

With a feeling of expectancy they awaited the coming of the informer, but they waited in vain. In the company of two constables he was taken from his cell and with one on either side marched round to Scotland Yard. He looked nervous and apprehensive, and his apprehension was justified. Turning in at the Whitehall entrance they quickly felt their prisoner go limp between them.

"Here, what's the matter?" exclaimed one constable, as Hargreas slid gently to the pavement. A second later they both knew. Hargreas was dead! Someone had shot him.

THE LISTENER!

"They must have used a silencer," said Inspector Lucas, when he was told what had happened, "and probably fired from the interior of a closed car—same as they did at me.

"But how did they know he was being brought here?" asked Street. He'd only made up his mind to talk a few minutes before.

"How do they know anything?" replied the inspector bitterly. "How did they know you were going to lunch at the Carltonian?"

Street was stunned. He had his own suspicions regarding that, but Betty could have had nothing to do with this affair. Looking over the wire coat.

"I'm going to make a few inquiries," he said in answer to Dick's question.

For some minutes after he had gone Dick remained sitting thoughtfully at his blotting-pad. Then he unlocked a drawer in his desk, took out the folder containing the photograph of "Mary Drew," and subjected it to a long and close scrutiny. There was the slightest doubt that the girl in the photograph and Betty Seymour were one and the same.

The features were identical. Presently he seemed to arrive at some kind of decision, for he got up, walked to the telephone, and picked up the telephone called Betty's number.

Her maid answered, and informed him in reply to her inquiry that her mistress was out, but would return shortly. As Dick finished up he said he would ring up again, and turned his attention to a pile of documents and reports that had accumulated on his desk.

He would see Betty at the first opportunity and learn from her own lips the story concerning the photograph and the reason for her apparent disappearance. Probably it would be a criminal of her own free-will Dick refused to believe. Somebody had a hold over her—somebody who had made her do their bidding against her own inclination.

The afternoon was half over when Dick Street found himself alone in his office. He had looked and appended his signature. He stretched himself, and was wondering whether he would find Betty had returned if he 'phoned again, when the telephone rang.

The gaunt inspector was looking pleased with himself.

"I've made a discovery," he announced. "I've found out how the Midnight Gang knew that Hargreas was coming to put up a squeak!"

"I was looking at him in astonishment.

"When did you find out?" he asked.

"Half an hour ago," replied Lucas. "It seemed to me that there were only two explanations. Dick, you think the force had been got at; but that didn't seem reasonable when I came to think it over. We phoned up the telephone!"

"Richard Street stared.

"The telephone?" he repeated.

Lucas nodded. "Yes, doctor. "Your appointment for lunch with Miss Seymour was made over the telephone, and they 'phoned up from Cumber Row telling you."

"You mean the line's been tapped?" exclaimed Dick incredulously.

"I do," said Lucas. "As soon as I'd got the idea I jumped on the phone to telegraph people and told them my theory—I don't like the word, but I don't know another that fits—and we got busy.

"We found the whole bag of tricks in the top office of a building not a stone's throw away. The lines pass straight over the roof, and I tell you, Mr. Street, that there's not a word spoken over the telephone from Scotland Yard that hasn't been listened into and reported to the Midnight Gang!"

"You got the operator?" asked the young superintendent.

"You bet I did!" replied Lucas, "and he's safely locked in Cumber Row with a double gag, and there he's going to stop, he added grimly. "If there's anything to be got out of him we'll get it out of him there. I'm taking no more chances."

"So that's how they knew so much," murmured Dick softly, and a weight rolled from his heart, for the discovery exonerated Betty from being concerned in the attempt on his life.

"We ought to stand a better chance now," said Dick. "I'm going to start an inside game with all the cards in the hands of the other people. We may be able to keep a few aces up our own sleeves."

"What then are we not to have thought of it before," said Dick. "It was so obvious.

"People never think of the obvious," replied the inspector.

"I expect Mr. Midgirth was obvious, only we can't think of him. By the way, I saw your friend, Miss Seymour, in the park. I never knew she was married!"

"Married? Is she she ever had two bead in his startled surprise.

Lucas looked at him quickly. "Didn't give me a word. She never told you, I s'pose. Women are funny like that—some of 'em, especially stage people."

"How do you know she's married?" Dick's voice sounded strained and harsh.

"She was walking with a fellow, and as I passed I heard her say, 'I can't. I'm going to pick up the telephone.'"

"That's not a rule unless they're married." He scratched his chin. "I ought to have warned her about the chap she was with," he said. "He's one of the biggest 'con' men in London."

"Miss Seymour's engaged to Mr. Seymour married? He wondered why she hadn't told him. There was a mystery about the girl that seemed to deepen every day.

"We phoned up to 'phone him. Dick followed him to his feet. His whole body ached with weariness, and his eyes felt hot and tired. He had slept very little during the last few days, and his very soul called for rest.

"I'm going home," he said, putting on his overcoat. "If you want me, you can give me a ring."

Walking up Piccadilly, he suddenly remembered that he had promised to ring Betty up and further delay his departure. The girl was still out, and coming out of the shop in which he'd gone to 'phone, Street almost ran into Mark. The girl was looking extremely pleased with himself, and nodded genially. He was immaculately dressed, and wore a flower in his buttonhole.

"He's a deputy's play, Street," he greeted.

"This is an unexpected pleasure!"

"Then it's all on your side," Dick short-ly.

"What's the game? You lookdessed to kill!"

Al Marks looked at him reproachfully.

"Don't be verry, my dear."

"There's no game. Can't a gentleman take a little stroll—"

"Listen, Marks!" broke in Dick rudely.

"What are you doing in Oxford Street after the theatre murder?"

The colonel's smile faded.

"I went over to look at a book he'd have with satisfaction.

At twenty minutes in the West End he decided to go home.

Al Marks possessed a small flat in Maida Vale. It was a tiny place, but it was comfortably, even luxuriously, furnished, and it served his need.

There was no lift—the colonel had chosen this particularly because he wanted privacy and disliked his comings and goings to be under the eye of a porter—and mounting the stairs here was the only way he kept his latchkey, and stepped into the hall.

The place was in darkness, which rather surprised him, and he felt along the hall for the switch, but there was no light. He felt his way to the door, and hours hung up. The sitting-room door was ajar, and, pushing it open, the colonel flung the place with light. The next moment he started back with a cry of horror.

Dick Street stared after the rapidly retreating figure of Al Marks, incapable of movement, his mind in a whirl. Betty Seymour was this man's wife! It sounded incredible, and yet, unless she were truly the predescribed and disdained object in making the statement. Taken in conjunction with what Inspector Lucas had told him there seemed little room for doubt. With a supreme effort the detective pulled his shattered brain together and walked on. He was feeling unutterably miserable. The whole business had fallen out of existence, and there seemed to be a leaden weight in his inside.

He moved unconsciously, hardly aware of his movements, until he came to the curtain of the music. How long he walked about, up one street and down another he never knew, but presently he found himself outside the Orpheum Theatre. The music of the grand piano at the possess of him. The audience were already going in, and, making his way round to the stage door he inquired for the music's box.

The man shook his head.

"Miss Seymour's not here to-night, sir," he said. "She's on another engagement. She sent a message to say she was ill."

Dick thanked him and turned away. He had
a vague idea of going along to her flat at Victoria, but gave it up, and eventually decided to go home.

He was feeling thoroughly ill, but he made a pretense of eating the appetizing dinner Jennings had prepared, and he had just finished when Frank arrived.

The stouter report was full of news.

The "Megalophane" offering a reward of five thousand dollars for any information that will lead to the capture of Mr. Midnight," he announced. "We're making a splash of it in the editions to-morrow."

"I hope somebody'll win it," said Street shortly.

"I'm going to have a shot at it myself," said Frank. "It was a stunner. St. John's coming over shortly, and I'm going to show him the case."

It was all true, said Dick ceremoniously. "Not twice the amount. Money's no good to a dead man, and they know the consequences of talking.

But—" I'll suspend business, I admitted the reporter, "especially after that affair with Hurgon. By Jove, what a nerve they've got!"

He chattered on incautiously, and Dick, who would much rather have been alone, answered in monosyllables, and wished his friend in Jericho. Frank was on the point of going when the telephone rang.

Dick felt so tired that he was half a mind not to answer the call, and then, thinking that it might be from headquarters and something important, he unlocked the receiver.

A hoarse, strained voice came over the wire.

"Is that Street? For Heaven's sake, come round to my place at once!"

"Who's speaking?" said Street sharply.

"Markars," was the reply, and so changed was his voice that Dick failed to recognize the slightest resemblance to the colonel's usual tones. "A terrible thing has happened. You will come?"

"Where are you?" asked the superintendent.

"At my bank. Say Al Marks. No, 14, Inverdale Mansions. Don't waste time talking—come!"

"What—what's happened?"

"Murder!"—the voice choked over the word.

"For the love of Heaven come quickly!"

Street heard the click as the receiver was hung up.

He briefly explained the conversation to Frank and dragged on his overcoat. The reporter accompanied him as far as the stairs where he said good-bye. Dick hailed a passing taxi, and in less than twenty minutes was deposited at the entrance to Inverdale Mansions. Al Marks, the banker himself in response to Dick's summons, and the young superintendent thought he had never seen such a change in a man's facial expression. His pale face was gaunt, and in some peculiar way seemed to have fallen in. The skin drooped in loose bags beneath the eyes, and round the heavy jaw.

He had placed, said a man who had received sentence of death.

"It was good of you to come so quickly," said Al Marks huskily, as Street slipped into the conversation, and without further word he led the way across to an open door on the right.

"Look!" he said, and pointed a shaking finger into the room beyond.

Dick looked in. He breathed in his breath with a sharp hiss. The room was in the utmost disorder. Drawers had been hurriedly pulled out and their contents tipped in a heap on the floor; and when the carpet had been rolled back. The place had been subjected to a thorough search. And then the detective saw something else. On the floor by the fireplace lay the body of a woman!

With a heart that for a second almost stopped beating, heatly sidled quickly across the room to the bed. The next moment he was hunched back with a cry of distress.

The woman was Betty Seymour, and the knife that had killed her lay by her side.

THE CIGARETTE SHOP.

D'Arcy's face went livid, and the whole room beyond his eyes. Betty dead.

Dick steadied himself by clutching the back of a chair and for the first time in his life felt an almost unendurable faintness. By a supreme effort of will, however, he managed to get to his feet and turned to the colonel.

"Did this happen?" he asked in a voice that startled him. "The colonel seemed so unlike his own.

"While I was out," said Al Marks in a husky voice. "Great Heaven! How dreadful! Street forced his entry again at the dead girl. He remembered the first night at the Palmers. How sparkling and full of vitality she had been!"

"Then you really play again," he muttered, and his eyes were wet with tears.

"What do you mean?" He heard Al Mark's voice as though from a long way off. "You're making a mistake, aren't you?"

"A mistake," said Dick vaguely. "No, there's no mistake. I wish to Heaven there was!"

"You think that it's Betty Seymour, don't you," asked the colonel, steely still. "Well, you're wrong!"

"Wrong! Street swung round and gripped the man by the arm. "She is Betty Seymour!"

The colonel shook his head sadly.

"She isn't," he replied. "I'd give all I possess if she were, but she isn't."

"But—" stammered Dick, and stopped. His throat was so dry that the words wouldn't come.

"She was my wife—Mary Drew—Betty Seymour's twin sister," said Al Marks huskily. A great light broke suddenly on Dick. Mary Drew had collared the photograph in the record department at the Yard—Betty's twin sister. He saw it all, and the intense sensation of it overhove him. He lowered his shaking limbs into a chair.

"It was Mary Drew I saw you with in Oxford Street," he whispered, and the colonel nodded. "I see." He paused, and seeing the bowed head of the other, stretched out his hand impulsively. "I'm terribly sorry, Markars."

Al Marks grasped the extended palm and gripped it.

"Thank you," he said simply. "For some time there was a dead silence."

"Tell me," said Street at last, "do you know who was responsible for this?"

He hung his head and in the hearth.

"I do," the colonel's voice was harsh. "And if it takes me all the rest of my life I'll catch him in it."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Midnight? Al Marks breathed the name from between set teeth. "I know him! But I'd be lying to tell you, Street, so it's no good asking me. You wouldn't believe me if I did, and I've got no proof. He's as clever as he is cunning in his work—worked—what's he done to Mary—if I'm still alive?" he ended grimly.

"If you're still alive," repeated Dick quickly. "Do you believe you're in danger, then?"

"I know I'm in danger," said the colonel, the inaudible possible danger, but I'm taking precautions."

Dick tried to persuade him to say more, but

As the saloon drove to the kerb, a man sprang out. Swiftly something was thrown over the girl's head, and she was dragged backward into the car.
connection with the photograph and that all his half-formed suspicions were without cause had done much to bring about this more optimistic outlook, and although he couldn't have given a reason, he was convinced at the back of his mind that things were reaching a crisis.

His first action on reaching the Yard was to lock the button in his safe. It was a damning piece of evidence, and if it could be relied on, there was no need to look any further than Frank Tracey for the unknown murderer.

Dick sat down at his desk, and gazed thoughtfully at the blotting paper in front of him.

If it had been Tracey who had killed Mary Drew, then he was also Mr. Midnight.

The young superintendent frowned. He couldn't bring himself to believe that the cheery, round-faced reporter was the sinister personality behind the Midnight Gang. Yet the button required a lot of explaining away. That it was Frank's he was certain. The reporter had been wearing the coat from which it had come when he had called just before Marks rapped up with the news. Street tried to remember if there had been a button missing, but couldn't. Of course, there was always the possibility that the buttons were duplicated.

He decided to make sure, and drew the telephone towards him. There was a long delay before a sleepy voice answered his call.

"Hello!" said Frank, and Dick heard him say loudly. "Who is it?"

"It's 1-Street, replied the detective. "Come round to the Yard. I want to see you."

He rang off and turned to look through some papers that had come in. The inspector looked surprised to see him so early, but his surprise turned to amusement when Dick told him about the events of the previous night.

"So Al Marks was married," he said. "Mary Drew, too, eh? Well, well, you live and learn. Some useful learn and die," he muttered cryptically.

Street looked at him.

"What do you mean by that remark?" he asked.

"This Mr. Midnight," the inspector went on, without answering. "You say Al Marks killed him?"

Dick nodded.

"I wonder if she knew him, too?"

Lucas was walking up and down, his shaggy brows drawn together.

"I see," said Street. "You think he killed her because she spoke to you?"

"It seems possible. Maybe you can suggest some other reason. Do you believe in hunches, Mr. Street?" he asked suddenly.

"I believe in some, but not in all," said Dick, "Yes, sometimes. Why?"

"I've got a hunch that we're going to meet Mr. Midnight—and we're going to meet him soon," said Lucas.

It was an hour later when Frank Tracey was shown into Street's office. His face was glowing, for the morning was cold and the air sharp.

"What's the great idea?" he asked with a grin.

"I thought I'd like to have a chat with you," replied Dick. "Sit down, Frank." He pushed a box of cigarettes across the desk and the reporter took one and lit one, doing last evening—before you came to see me.

Frank looked astonished.

"What was I doing? Why, I came straight along from the offices of the 'Megaphone,' he answered.

He was wearing his overcoat unbuttoned, and Dick noticed, with a little thrill, that the second button was missing!

"Had you been there all the afternoon?" he asked.

"Since round about four," replied Frank. "What is it?"

Dick paused, rose to his feet, and, unlocking the safe, took out the button.

"Is this yours?" he inquired, holding it out in his palm.

Tracey leaned forward and peered at it. "Yes," he said, obviously surprised, "How in the world did you get it by?"

"A woman was murdered last night," said Dick quietly, "a woman named Mary Drew," he added, "She was killed in a flat belonging to Al Marks some time between nine and eight. I found this button in the passage."

The reporter's face went pale. "What does that mean, Dick?" he exclaimed.

"You surely don't suspect me?"

"It's your button," Street replied meaningly.

"But I lost it two days ago," protested Frank.

"Then how did it get in Al Mark's flat—have you ever been there?"

"Never in my life," said Dick emphatically. "Besides, I can prove that I had no hand in the affair. If this woman was killed between the hours you say, I couldn't have had anything to do with it."

Dick got through to the "Megaphone," and spoke to the news editor. The conversation was brief, and he hung up the receiver, and turned to Frank.

"He'd write out all you say," he said, with a puzzled frown, "Your alibi's cast iron, and I'm very thankful. But how on earth did the button get there?"

"I suppose you can't remember where you lost it, Mr. Tracey," said Lucas, who had been an acute but inquisitive listener.

Frank shook his head.

"I haven't the least idea," he replied. "It's a coincidence to believe that the person who killed Mary Drew could have been wearing a coat with identical buttons," said Dick thoughtfully.

"It's totally impossible," said Frank.

"When I found I'd lost it I went to the tailor who made the coat, and asked him to put another. But he said he couldn't match it. It's an American button, and there are no others to be had. He used the last coat."

"He used the last coat, that's right," said Dick, picking up the button which Dick had laid on his desk, and looked at it. "There's no doubt about it being the same," he continued, "—he put new buttons in the rim."

"I remember that quite well," said Frank.

Left soon after that, and Lucas hastily followed.

As soon as he was alone, Dick rang up Betty. The girl sounded particularly cheerful, and Dick concluded that she had heard nothing about the death of her sister. He made an appointment to see her that evening before the theatre, and had just said "Goodbye!" when Lucas returned.

"The reports have come in from several of the men you put on to watch the movements of the crooks," said Lucas, "They're rather interesting."

"You mean you've seen the crooks," said Dick. "Yes, you've developed a habit of getting their cigarettes at a kiosk in Lambeth Tube Station—seems curious."

Street glanced through the reports, and found the inspector was right. Men who lived in Belsize, and even further afield, had been following Lucas. Lucas went up to the tobacco-shop in the station and bought cigarettes—and always apparently the same brand.

"They seem to have become popular among the criminal classes," said Lucas, when Dick commented on this.

"I think we'll take a little journey over to Lambeth, if you've got nothing else to do," said Dick, "I'd like to try some of those cigarettes."

"I've got an idea they'll taste pretty good," Dick added.

A few seconds later they were walking briskly over Westminster Bridge. As they approached the tube station, Lucas noticed several men lounging near the entrance, and drew the detective's attention to them.

"Detective!" he said. "One-way to 1-Street carelessly. "Thought we might need them."

The little tobacconist's kiosk was a replica of those that are to be found at almost every station, and were controlled by the police. Lucas went up to the tiny counter, and spoke to the bald-headed man in charge.

"Want a cigarette, please," he said, laying down half-a-crown.

The man looked at him, and hesitated as though waiting for something. Then, handing over the cigarettes, began searching in the till and producing the change.
"This brand seems to be getting popular," said Lucas conversationally. "Sell many?"

"A fair amount," replied the bald-headed man. "Must be something 'em that appeals to people," the inspector went on. "I prefer cigars myself."

"Most people do—if they can afford them," was the retort.

"Yes, there's a lot in that," said Lucas, nodding. "Now this Midnight Gang—you think they could afford cigars, wouldn't you?"

The short man looked at him, a startled expression in his eyes.

"Don't know what you mean," he answered gruffly.

"Never heard of the Midnight Gang, perhaps," said the inspector sadly. "You will! And this fellow they call Mr. Midnight—you don't know him, do you?"
The look of alarm in the bald man's eyes deepened.

"It's a funny thing," continued Lucas, "but half the crooks in London seem to buy this cigarette from this stall—all 'Stardust' brand too. You want a large stock."

"I don't know what you're talking about," muttered the tobacconist.

"Don't you?" Lucas suddenly changed his bantering manner. "How will you tell me?"

"I want to see all the 'Stardust' cigarettes you've got—quick!"
The man slipped his hand into his pocket and pulled out a packet. "You're no right—" he began, but the inspector cut him short.

"You've got what I've got," he said, and ten seconds later the kiosk was in charge of headquarters men, and the keeper under arrest. The dozens of packets of "Stardust" cigarettes, at least one of every one of them, were carefully examined. Twenty-four packets of "Stardust" cigarettes, and every one of them had been carefully examined. The number at the beginning of the message was the same as the pencilled one on the packet that contained it. He suppose each member of the gang is known by a number.

"This will about put paid to them, too," he remarked. "For unless he has got an alternative method, he can't go in touch with any of them."

The man in charge of the kiosk was subjected to a close examination, but maintained a sold silence, and was taken off to Cannon Row Police Station. Lucas rang up the man who owned the tobacco shop, and explained what had happened, and, leaving one of his men to charge, accompanied Street back to Scotland Yard.

For the remainder of the day they spent a busy time issuing instructions, and before sunset every tobacconist who had been tracked to the kiosk in Lambeth Station and bought "Stardust" cigarettes was under arrest and looked in a cell.

There were over forty in all, and Ick turned to Lucas, after he had inspected the premises with Street.

"That must be pretty nearly—all the lot," he remarked.

"Yes, I think we've got them fairly by now. It's a couple of hours ago, I had a letter from her, telling me she was in London. It worried me, because I was never quite certain what she was going to do next. We were so exactly alike that if she had done anything—well, you know what I mean—it would have been embarrassing."

Dick said nothing, but almost unconsciously he stretched out his hand, and it rested sympathetically on hers. She did not attempt to withdraw her own until a waiter came in sight, and then she drew it away so slowly as to suggest reluctance.

I don't pretend to have been particularly fond of Mary," she said when Dick had given the order. "It's the terrible way she died that has given me such a shock. It was Mr. Midnight who killed her, wasn't it?"

Street nodded.

"It's terrible!" Her large blue eyes held a look of horror in their depths. "Surely something can be done to stop the outrages of these dreadful people?"

"I think we've got most of the gang," said Dick, and told her of the visit to the cigarette shop and the result. It had the effect he had hoped, and took her mind off the other subject, for she listened interestedly. He kept up a running fire of conversation, so that by the time they had reached the coffee stage, Betty was almost her normal self.

"Do you think you will ever catch Mr. Midnight himself?" she asked, sipping her coffee.

"I have the greatest hopes," said Dick; and, then, before he had realised what he was saying, "Betty, when that is done, there's something I want to tell you—may I?"

Her hand sought hers—under cover of the table.

The colour came and went in her face, and the hand that he held tightly closed so tightly upon his fingers that they were numb when she suddenly released her hold, but she kept her eyes averted.

She did not speak for such a long time that he began to be afraid he had offended her.

"It may be a long time before you find Mr. Midnight," she murmured at last. "Must—must you wait until then before you tell me?"

She turned her face to him, and he saw the expression in her eyes.

Dick Street never remembered quite what he said then, but he poured out all that he had been pent up in his heart, while the girl listened with shining eyes and glowing cheeks.

The time sped by, and it was with a start of surprise that they both suddenly realised it was time to go, if Betty didn't want to be late for the theatre.

They walked with her as far as the stage door, and stood talking for a minute or two. At last Betty held out her hand.

"I think you've guessed it," she said softly. "I shall be dreadfully late as it is. Ring me up in the morning."

She looked hastily round; there was no one in sight, and, bending forward,
kissed him. "Good-night, dear," she said, and, waving her hand, disappeared through the narrow doorway.

Street made his way homeward so enveloped in the rosy clouds that had descended on him, that he was unconscious of time or space or direction, and it was purely mechanically that he followed the right route to his flat. It seemed to him that a miracle had happened that evening, and at any moment it was possible he might wake up and discover that the whole thing was a dream.

He was so cheerful when he arrived, that Jennings looked at him suspiciously, under a momentary impression that his master had been drinking.

Having changed, he slipped on his dressing gown, and, going into the sitting-room, sat down to write to Betty. He told himself reprovingly that it was barely half an hour since he had left her and that he would be seeing her again on the morrow, but he covered ten pages and could easily have written ten more before he realized that there was only five minutes in which to catch the post. He stamped the letter, sent Jennings out with it, and settled down contentedly before the fire.

His contentment was to be short-lived. The servant returned, and, coming into the room, laid a flat package on the table.

"What's that?" asked Street, looking up.

Jennings shook his head with a puzzled frown.

"I don't know, sir," he answered. "I found it on the step when I came back from the post. It wasn't there when I went out."

Dick picked it up.

"It's addressed to me all right," he said, and began to tear off the wrapping. Inside, packed between two sheets of stout cardboard, was a gramophone record, but there was no indication where the record itself was long, orchestral or recital—just a plain record.

"What an extraordinary thing!" said Dick in amazement. "I suppose we'd better play the thing and see what it's all about."

He possessed a gramophone, a seldom-used portable, and, fetching it from a corner, placed the record in the turn-table and started the motor. A voice, high-pitched and squeaky, started speaking, and at the first words Street's face went livid.

"You have refused to leave me alone," the voice said, "and you have been lucky to have escaped with your life. In future, you can rest in peace. I shall not attempt to kill you again. I have thought of a better way. I have taken someone who is very dear to you, and if you ever wish to see her again, you will cease all further efforts to track me down. Betty Seymour is in my power. Unless you agree to my terms, she will die. This is no idle threat, so be warned."

The voice stopped, and only the scratching of the needle on the surface of the record broke the silence.

For a moment the detective was stunned, then he rushed to the telephone and rang up the stage door of the Orpheum Theatre. "Miss Seymour left ten minutes ago," came the reply to his question, and Dick banged the receiver back in despair.

At that precise moment Betty Seymour was lying back unconscious in the interior of a big, luxurious car, and being driven she knew not where by the masked man crouched over the steering-wheel!

THE FINDING OF MR. MIDNIGHT.

The country is suddenly startled by people disappearing into the blue—they are not afterwards seen or heard of again!

In contrast to this peculiar circumstance the remains of other persons are found floating upon the tide of the River Thames, but these persons are no trace can be found: their features do not tally with the particulars of identity of the missing. Who are they? What is the mystery?

Scotland Yard finds itself unequal to the wits of a daring master-crook, and it falls to the lot of Charles Bruce, a young crime reporter, to unravel this tangled skein. Do not miss the adventures of Charles Bruce in this gripping book-length novel.

"UNIDENTIFIED." in next week's issue of The THRILLER.

On Sale Saturday Next.
Chapter 1.

RECOGNITION.

The music swung on. But the Cat clumsily missed a step, and little beads of sweat stood on his forehead. He had not observed the nod of Detective-inspector Strickland, nor had he noticed the wink with which the flame-colored lady in his arms had taken the greeting to herself. For his mind had suddenly become absorbed with other matters, even more immediately vital to him than a fleeting heart affair, or the interest of a man from Scotland Yard. He regretted that he had not had the forethought to tuck an automatic into the pocket of his dinner jacket.

He picked up the rhythm of the dance again, but his eyes never left the chubbily, imperturbable face which had attracted his attention among the group at the side of the room until he was forced to turn by theurgency of space. Was this coincidence or—There is an even wider gap than miles of sea between a night club off-Piccadilly and the penitentiary in Denver: between the slovenly, striped attire of an American convict and, impeccable evening dress.

There was nothing sinister about the appearance of the man whose advent had caused the Cat five minutes of concentrated apprehension. That very day a score of successful American business men turned out on the same model might have been found in London's major hotels. A man he was, in the neighborhood of the fifties, a little on the shoulde side, his determined mouth half hidden by the semi-circle of a carefully groomed moustache and shrewd, not unhumorous, grey eyes.

He scanned the ranks of the dancers with idle gravity, but without any prolonged attention to the Cat. Presently he thrust a hand deep into a trousers pocket. In a matter of seconds the round of the dance would bring the Cat and his partner within a few yards. Gstitially he swung his head to measure the distance between himself and the door, and was satisfied that there was a sporting chance left making good his retreat.

Someone pressed close to his side. A hand slid smoothly into position about his wrist, and a smooth voice remarked, as if carrying on a conversation:

"I shouldn't if I were you. They hang people for murder in this country."

Not a flicker of his face showed that he had been interrupted almost in the act of calculating murder. He scarcely turned his head.

"Say, who in blazes are you?" he asked, the aggression of the words masked by a level, urbane tone. "What call have you to butt in?"

The other man lifted his shoulders. "Me? Oh, I'm just what you would call a bull—Detective-inspector Strickland. When I see a man with a bulge in his pocket and a giant in his eye I always butt in. Saves a danced lot of trouble, Buck—you wouldn't believe." He shook his head gravely. "Cluttering up a night club with corpses isn't done in this country. The management don't like it. It gives the place a bad name."

"You know me?"

"Well, we haven't been formally introduced, but we've got mutual friends at Mulberry Street." He referred to the headquarters of the New York detective service. "They let me know that Buck Shang had been pardoned by the governor of Colorado, and was paying a visit to this country. So when you registered here as Mr. Earl Millard we had a line on you. Come and have a smoke where we can talk things over quietly. The Cat will have a fit in a moment. He's on to you."

"Yes. He's spotted me," Buck Shang was as nonchalant and poised as the detective. "I should worry. I wonder how much you really know?" A grim smile glimmered beneath the curved moustache. "Let up on my wrist now, old son. I know when to pass a pot. I'll be a good little boy. Let's go."

From the corner of his eyes the Cat, with relief that smothered a lurking curiosity, watched them move together out of the club. They smothered idly towards the smoke-room of the Regal Hotel, each man trying to measure what lay beneath the calm exterior of the other.

"You've got nothing on me," declared Shang, as dispassionately as one commenting upon the weather. "I was railroaded in Denver. That creampitted, sleek-haired toad knows all about it. Here's the Regal. This is where I stay. Come in, and I'll give you a drink on the house out of the business."

Strickland, whose business it was to notice things, observed that Shang had himself uncommonly well. The Regal is not the least expensive of London hotels, and the charge for the suite of rooms on the first floor which his companion occupied would be something more for a week than the salary of the detective for a couple of months. He accepted a whisky and a cigar.

"Keep 'em for my friends," said Shang. "You like cigars dry and cigarettes green over here. In the States it's the other way about. Now I'll give you the whole works if you want it. I'm over here for a vacation, and don't want my rest spoiled by Scotland Yard men playing tag after me—even if they're as decent birds as you seem to be."

Strickland puffed appreciatively at his cigar. Corona Coronas do not come the way of detective-inspectors every day in the week.

"Don't think that I was hanging round your neck. Buck: I was at that place on another bit of business. Sheer luck that I spotted the Cat getting worked up, and then I recognised you from a portrait sent over by Mulberry Street. If you want to have peace and quiet and stay in this country you've got to cut out murder."

Shang waved a large hand in deprecation. "Oh, that. The Cat can go to perdition on his own way for all of me. I was a bit off my balance just now. Running across him suddenly like that made me see red. I was a fool—I own it freely. I saw you something for jumping in. Mind you, I don't say that some time I won't give him the father and mother of a whooping. He's got that coming to him. No man—his face grew black—can do what the Cat has done to me and get away with it."

"What I want to know," said Strickland, "is why I should be sitting down here drinking your whisky and smoking your cigar?"

"From my point of view you're supposed to be a Yankee crook. You've had some pull that's enabled you to get into this country, although..."
little crook named Moses. He had the Cat with him, and they were prospecting. Up to that moment I’d never met the Cat. He was after home, as I learned. He had known a man with a smirk on his face as Mr. Solomon Stern. It didn’t take me long to realise that I was in for it. The saw a better game than that which was being played. I didn’t even know. You are an interesting character, Shirley—that’s my daughter. She was growing up, and I didn’t want her to know what a hard-fisted man you are. I am not buying them off. I ought to have known better.”

Shang’s face grew grey and set. He paused in gloomy thought.

“Tell me something more,” I said Strickland.

“They bled me—bled me white. More than that, I was forced to keep company with them. If I had to introduce them to my friends as old business acquaintances. Heaven! They were hungry. Tens of thousands of dollars were were in some one’s pocket. All I want to know is why. I’m talking straight, Buck—or shall I say Mr. Shang or Mr. Millard?”

You’re supposed to drop the ‘mister.’”

Strickland settled himself more comfortably in his big divan chair. ‘You talk straight and I’ll talk straight. But keep your nose clean, or I’ll ash from his cigarette—‘that you mean to have it out of me or push me out of the country. Don’t make my mistakes, Mr. Strickland, and don’t trouble to lie—

The detective shook his head smilingly.

“I never lie without a reason. You’ve guessed to my mind.”

“I’ve been in the pen twice,” went on Shang. “Once because I deserved it, once because I was a fool. The first time was in New York, when I was young and irresponsible. It was a long time ago. Like many another boy, I came up from a farm, got a clerkship in a trust corporation, and hit the big time. I had a taste for it, and there were plenty in the gang I ran to carry me on. They were the wise boys. They knew it, and so I did. I thought it was all part of what happened. I dropped my fingers in the till pretty freely until I had to put it back, or was faced with the prospect of going up the river. One or two of the gang were on to me, and to cut it short, I was roped in as a recrui for a racistifying-bust trip. One thing led to another, and I had nerve, and some aptitude for the game. It looked easy money to me. The main guy took me under his wings and taught me the game. I may have hit the country through some or my berth and became a professional crook. But I didn’t know as much as I thought I did, and within a year I was behind the bars with a charge of 25. They say that prison does not reform people, Mr. Strickland. I tell you, it cured me.”

The first thing that I did was to go to the head of the New York Detective Bureau. ‘They say you bulls won’t let a guy straight off go on the streets. They said, if that’s so,’ they say that, do they? I said, ‘chewing on the end of a pencil.’ ‘Well, what are you going to do about it? I’m a bad-tempered man. But I take it from me that I had all that I want. I don’t deviate one inch from the straight and narrow but keep my chisel and my pen and my bow across me I’ll kill him with these two hands.

His eyes flashed, and chuckled a little. ‘I believe you mean it,’ he said. ‘What work are you going to do?’ I don’t know,’ I said, ‘but nobody’s going to stop me doing it, whatever it is. I’ve got a note in my pocket. You take it from me. ‘You get out of this city,’ he said. ‘I don’t want you getting lusty with any of my girls. I enjoyed an interview an introduction to one of my friends in Denver. He’ll give you a job and you’ll be away from any of your crook pals. If you go down I’ll make it pretty hot for you. Not go get, you know? I’m a white man, that fellow.’

So I went to Denver. I made good there and never made the woman’s home. The good old days in New York—a slimy, a little guilty about it. Shang nodded in silent understanding. ‘You won’t need to worry about Scotland Yard,’ Strickland went on. ‘London is wide open to you. Far worse are concerned. But don’t deal with the Cat in public, and forget your gun. That’s all I ask. I may not be at hand next time. Good night, Shang returned his grip.

Good night. I like you. Look as some night next week. A drink, a good smoke. Make the acquaintance of Shirley. She’s the daughter of a crook, if you like, but she’s the whitest and cleanest and best girl in the whole of that folk in this burg, and would like someone to show us the town.’

Three hours later Strickland was aroused from a dreamless sleep by the fierce ringing of a bell. ‘We’ve sent a man with a motor-bike and sidecar to fetch you,” said a voice. ‘There’s a miner broken loose on Westminister Bridge.”

“What’s the matter with the divisional inspector?” queried Strickland with asperity.

“Why pick on me?”

“Is this a friend of yours,” answered the voice. “It’s the Cat. He had his head shot off..."

AT SCOTLAND YARD.

Those who believe a detective’s calling to be one of action and excitement have been, perhaps, a little shocked at the remarks passed by first-class Detective-inspector Strickland. The bones of a gangster are under the ground in a watertight trunk. He has just heard a Raw Monday wind blistering without. He had all the resentment of a man unjustly disturbed from a well-earned rest. His long years abroad have taught him to choose such a time for his exit from the world. It was a scandal that the Yard should have him from his rest. The detective, who was in charge for the divisional detective-inspector, was a wicked piece of personal spite against him on the part of the unknown murderer. No one should be allowed to happen between two and three in the morning. There would be difficulty, he knew, in gathering together the men in to give the information, for detectives, like other honest men, spend the night in bed unless there is some special occasion for them to be up and about.

He rubbed his numbed fingers, and strolled down stairs tip toe for fear of arousing his landlady as he heard the mower of his engine running outside the door.

The cold night air stirred his clogged nostrils. He thought of the suspension he had approved towards Cannon Row Police Station, which faces Scotland Yard itself. Strange, he thought, to have seen the Cat a few hours before? Was it possible that, after all, Buck Shang had dealt out vengeance in spite of his promise? There were unlikelier things. In his twenty years of experience Strickland knew that, contrary to the accepted notion of the novel reader, the obvious solution of the case was often itself the key to the mystery.

‘Wish I’d taken his gun away from him,’ he muttered to himself.

He thought that it is dangerous for a detective to make up his mind off-hand. No man was better aware than Strickland that the Cat, alias Solomon Stern, alias half a dozen aliases on the books, was in charge of the shooting man in London. There were many people, men and women, who had good cause to wish him out of the world. The mystery is usually the right on the nick-name conferred upon him as a tribute to his smooth cheeks and ingenious manners. He was generally known to have been infested a great city. Strickland, like other detectives on both sides of the Atlantic, had long wanted for him to make a mistake. Blackmore, the first of all criminal professions, is also in many ways the safest, but for such risks as that to which the Cat had even now been subjected..."
his official superior by a hair's breadth left him off guard.

"Hallo, Frank?" he said.

"Hallo yourself, you big loafer!" grunted Strickland.

"What's the matter with the Car Division? Some of you old gentlemen want a dry nurse?"

He disencumbered himself of his heavy coat, and then thrust his arm familiarly under his and led him into the offices of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"You'd ha' been sooner yet for all of me. He's got Millard in Strickland's hands on a scrap that's been out of the news.

"Mr. Millard come in yet?" asked Strickland.

"The manager, with the deep, sleepily out of his eyes, shook his head.

"There's some one you had been asking for him. What can I do for you, gentlemen? Miss Millard is in, but the night clerk said she didn't wish to speak to him."

"Sure, but you, Mr. Fulton," said Strickland slyly. "There are one or two things we wanted to ask Mr. Millard. We may decide on whom to get him. By the way, when did he get here?"

A short consultation with the night clerk and the manager was able to answer the question.

"Arrived three days ago, about midday. Came by the boat train from Southhampton. Engaged especially to call me by wireless." He looked from one detective to the other. "Anything wrong about him?"

"I don't know," said Strickland guardedly. "There's an acquaintance of his in trouble."

He did not deem it wise while at the moment to say what the trouble was. He always acted on the assumption that there was no need to say more than the occasion called for. "Has he had any visitors while he has been here?"

"I can't tell you that," said the manager. "Some of the day staff might answer that."

"Better see the girl, hadn't we?" muttered Drake, as he opened the door.

With the manager and a chambermaid to escort them, they rang the bell at the outer door of Shang's suite. The summons had to be repeated twice before the man within told them that they had succeeded in arousing someone. A drowsy maid opened the door an inch or two.

"Miss Millard, isn't it?" she exclaimed. "But she is in bed—asleep."

"We can't help that. Drake had his foot in the cloth. Our business is imperious. You tell her that she must see us at once.

With a shrug the girl disappeared, and they heard a whispered discourse in one of the inner rooms, and then they walked into the private corridor.

"I don't know that we need bother you any more," Drake said to the manager and the chambermaid taking the hint left the officers to their devices.

In a few seconds a girl in a scarlet dressing-gown which matched, her flushed cheeks was before them. She was not tall, yet somehow she had the average height of a woman. She held herself with poised and dignity. What impressed Strickland was a pair of clear blue eyes, alert, alert, without some trace of anxiety. Her chin, too, had a piquant hint of resolution. She was unques-tionably a woman one might almost have said a beautiful girl.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she demanded.

Quicker enough, Strickland was struck by the strong upper accent, manly displayed, a fact to which he had been so long. She looked icy from one to the other.

"This is a little informal, isn't it?" she asked with an inflection of frigid irony. "Two strangers drag me from my bed in the early hours of the morning, and hurl a demand at my head as peremptorily as a hold-up man demanding a purse. Before we go any farther"

Owing to the extra length of the complete story, and in order to publish a special long opening instalment of the new serial, it has been found necessary to withhold the "Baffler" feature from this issue. Another of these popular problems will appear next week.

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The THRILLER

(What was the result of Miss Millard's hold-up of the police? Do not miss next week's instalment of this powerful detective story "The Crook's Game", in next week's issue of The THRILLER.)
referred to pull up at the policeman’s sign. It brought two sports, a two-seater less than two hundred yards behind. The two-seater’s lights were out, but it had its wipers going until the outer ones, and the squeak of rusty hinges. Then the figure of her captor became silhouetted in the doorway as he struck a match and lighted a candle. He switched it on, and, grasping her arm once more, dragged her into the interior, bolting the door behind her. Reluctantly she followed, and sat by the man as he turned from barring the door. He was wearing a pair of large mica goggles that concealed his face completely.

"My name?", she repeated mechanically.

"Yes, you’re going to stop here for some time. The man in the goggles passed and the driver over the other door. It depends." His bearing was clear, and she shuddered.

"You won’t have a good time if you don’t manage to grasp the situation.

"You won’t call me Mr. Midnight," she answered. "Why? I really am, you will never know."

"You aren’t back in terror. This was the man who had killed her sister, the leader of the Midnight Gang, and she was alone with him minus anyone away from anyone, completely at his mercy.

"Your aren’t afraid," she said. "You are quite safe—at present."

"But shut up that familiar voice. Put up your hands. Mr. Midnight, or whatever you call yourself!"

Betty turned round with glad eyes as ‘One way Street’ stepped behind the long curtains that hung over the windows, the automatic, in him, and covering the masked man.

"Dick!" she breathed, and flew to his side. For a second she caught him by the pistol and Mr. Midnight, and in that second he acted. Taking advantage of the screen, her body offered, he took careful aim and shot the auto machine."

"Now," he snarled, "I don’t know how you got here, but I can assure you that you won’t leave this place alive!

The window was barely left his lips when there was a crack of glass, as the tiny window shattered sideways.

"That’s the wrong one!" she cried, the voice of Al Marks. "Take what’s coming to you!

Street turned, his arm round the frightened girl. Framed in the window was the white face of the cooker. I heard hanging in damp wisps over his forehead. In his hand he held an empty pistol. This pistol pointed steadily at Mr. Midnight.

"Keep back!" screamed the man in goggles. "You don’t know what I’ve come to." cried Al Marks, a look of chill amusement in his eyes."

"You killed Mary—killed her because she knew who you were!"

He hesitated. Mr. Midnight, having raised his automatic.

Two shots rang out almost together, and Betty screamed. Mr. Midnight staggered, gave a little choking cry, and pitched forward on his face.

"Open the door, Street," said the colonel. Mr. Midnight was a lying heave, and then Al Marks entered.

There was a sound of voices outside, a scrapping of metal, and a muffled thud. Then Inspector Lucas and a constable appeared in the doorway.

"The colonel looked round at the inspector, as he moved into the room.

"You can take me, Lucas," he said defiantly.

"I killed him," said Lucas. "I asked Lucas. He crossed over and knelt by the still figure, and began to unfasten the goggles conceding the face."

"It’s Mr. Midnight," said Al Marks, and the inspector pulled his pistol in his direction.

"Great Caesar!" he breathed softly.

The face that stared up at him was the face of Howard.

The colonel looked at him, and a look of surprise flashed across his face.

"No, sir," he answered.

"I don’t think we’ll do anything," the superintendent replied. "You’ve rendered the world rather a service by ridding it of an unscrupulous man who was a menace for saving my life. What do you say, Lucas?"

"Let’s call it self-defence, suggested the indefatigable inspector.

"I can’t be relieved," he said simply. "I can’t be giving you any more trouble. But, how was it you managed to find that cottage so quickly?"

When the first suspected that Carfax was Mr. Midnight, replied Dick. "I left Lucas and hurried round to his flat. It was empty, which startled me. My suspicion, then remembered that he had been transferred to the Epsom Road, and I decided to take a long shot and go there.

"I got out my sports car and arrived the two hands of the man, he was entirely wrong, but as luck had it I was right.

Frank rose to his feet.

"I must get along to the Megaphone," he said. "Where Granger’s. I may be able to find the same story of my life. See you later."

He paused on the threshold of the room. "By the way, Dick, do you think I can say the wedding will take place?"

"Just as soon as ever you like," answered "One way Street." and smiled at the colonel coming apace.

"What?" said the unknown, stopping suddenly. "Don’t try to move or it will be the worse for you." He released his grip on

after his arrival, and Betty became aware of a building that loomed out of the darkness close beside him. The glow and smell from the squall of rusty hinges. Then the figure of her captor became silhouetted in the doorway as he struck a match and lighted a candle. He switched it on, and, grasping her arm once more, dragged her into the interior, bolting the door behind her. Reluctantly she followed, and sat by the man as he turned from barring the door. He was wearing a pair of large mica goggles that concealed his face completely.

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