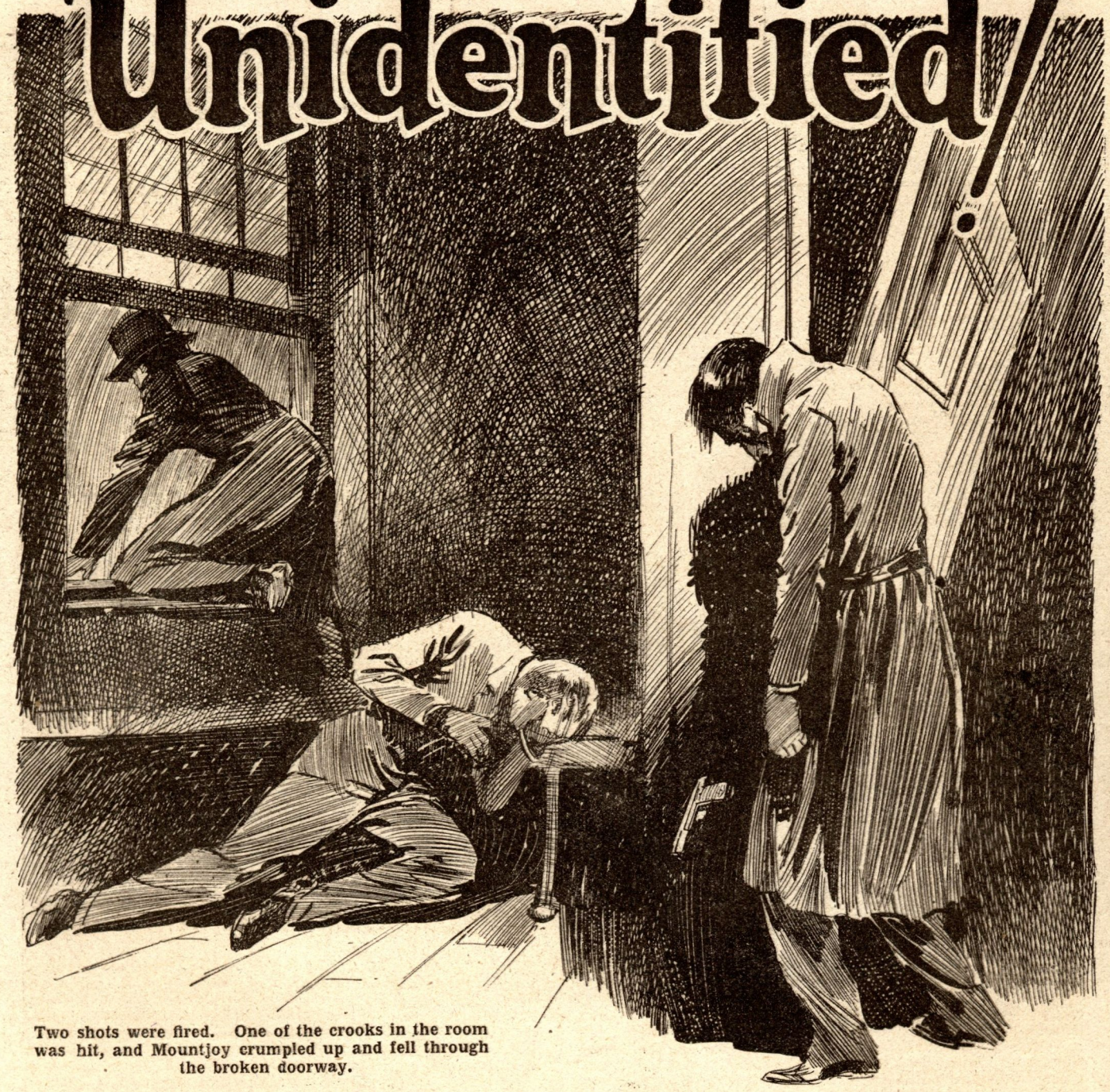
THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

2d.

No. 27. Vol. 1. EVERY SATURDAY. AUGUST 10th, 1929.

Unidentified!



Two shots were fired. One of the crooks in the room was hit, and Mountjoy crumpled up and fell through the broken doorway.

Chapter 1.
"FOOLS RUSH IN——"

OF the manner of Morgan's meeting with the ice lady, who was called Adela Black, and of his reason for contriving that meeting, there was much conjecture before—like ships that speak to each other in the night—they had parted, never again to meet.

Black himself, that inscrutable man who had made Adela his wife, he had his own theory, and it was fatally wrong. Inspector Batswing, of Scotland Yard—he, like Black, reached conclusions wrong and fateful. Others who looked on at the strange game—the game which had no rules and was played for a stake dearer than life itself—they, too, had theories more or less resembling those of Black or of Batswing, and they, too, were wrong.

Only Morgan knew, and he did not talk. Drunk or sober, sleeping or waking, ill or well, he remained master of himself. He said what he chose to say, and that was little.

How Morgan, with his rags and his eternal poverty, came to be driving a car is not the easiest part of the mystery to understand. Certainly the car was, like its driver, rakish, out of date, and dilapidated; but, again, like its driver, it was capable of speed and well under control.

In the wake of the glittering six-cylinder outfit driven by Adela Black came the antiquated flivver driven by Morgan, and as Morgan trailed the luxury car, he cursed with gentlemanly restraint. He cursed because of a certain impasse to which his affairs had come, and which for the moment he saw no way of removing.

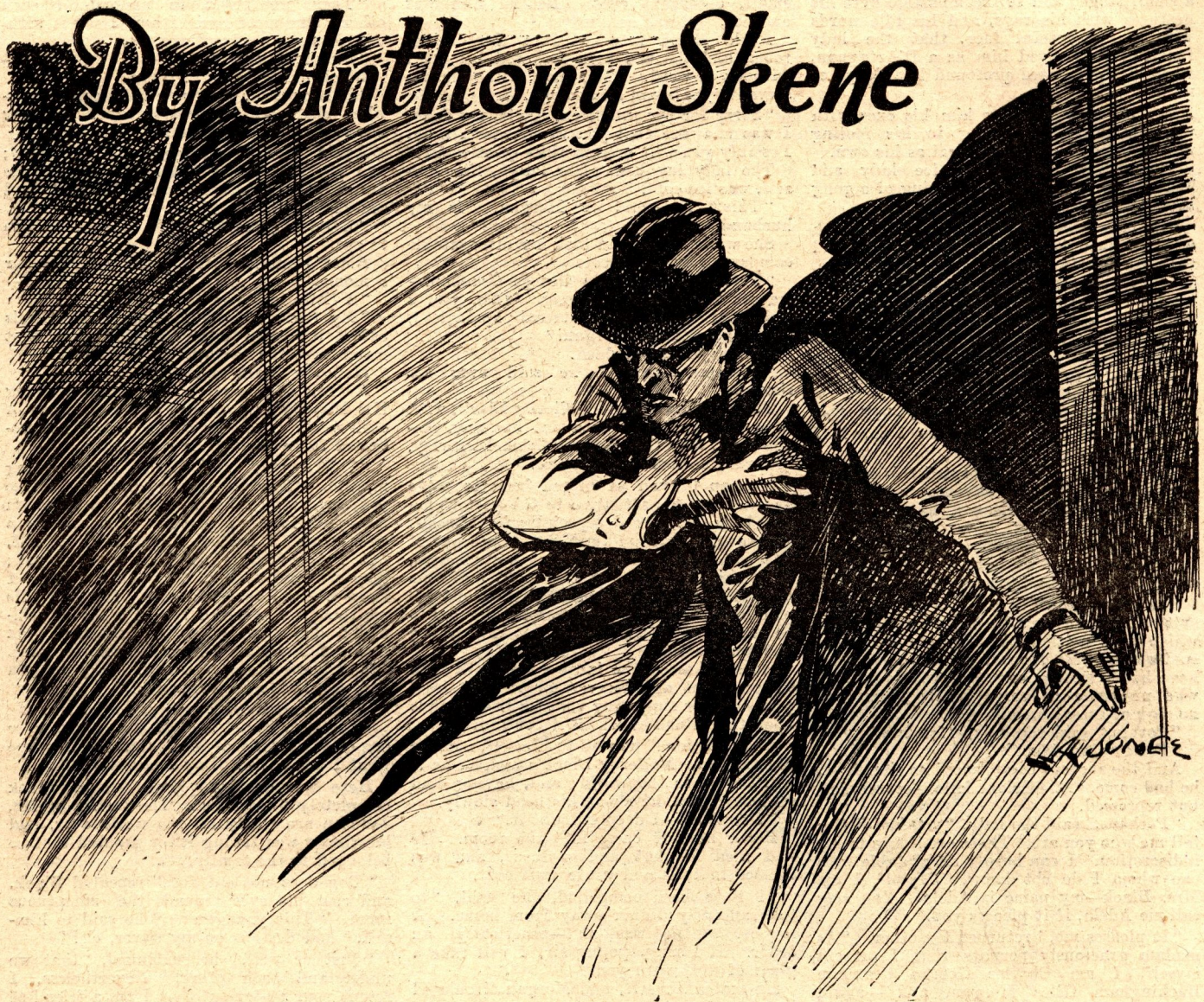
It was necessary to his plans that he should become a familiar of the Black menage, and he aimed to do it through Adela Black herself. So far he had failed completely.

Again and again had he attempted to get into the Blacks' house—by means forceful and strategic—yet ever had luck and her mistress, Fate, been against him.

He was, it will be seen, reduced to desperation. For the best part of three days and three nights he had been engaged either in following Adela Black on foot, or in his alleged roadster, or keeping her front door under observation; what time she took her meals and her sleep. He was getting very tired of it.

Of course, the proposition was difficult. He might have secured an ordinary introduction to the Blacks, but that would not get him anywhere. The introduction which would serve his purpose must be an extraordinary one.

By Anthony Skene



A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL OF THRILLS AND MYSTERY

What the reason was for this sudden intense interest in the affairs of the Black household is not yet to be divulged, but at that moment it was to Morgan the one thing in life that most mattered. And as he ambled his flivver along at a saunter in the vicinity of this house, which had such a strange attraction to him, he kept muttering to himself.

"Luck!" he grumbled. "I don't believe there is such a thing so far as I am concerned. But, dash it, I must get into that confounded place—even if I have to recruit all the crooks in London—only that would scarcely suit my purpose."

Then, as though the great goddess had heard complaints and repented at her oversight, his opportunity came.

At that moment Adela Black, who was alone in her car, signalled her intention of drawing in to the kerb outside her house at Knightsbridge. Morgan stated afterwards that he did not see her signal. It is painful to record that this is not the truth. He saw the signal almost before it was made; and, at the same moment, gave his flivver the gas; and, with a burst of speed, got in on the near side.

Crash!

The impact of his flivver upon the flank of the glittering saloon was staggering. For a few moments Adela Black lost her nerve. Sheer panic got hold of her.

White to the lips, she reeled over the offside of her car; and, but for Morgan's ready arm, might even have collapsed.

This fact served his purpose, for it enabled—even compelled—him to enter her house; and, once there, he made use of his opportunities.

There is reason to suppose that Mrs. Black—ice lady though she was—deliberately postponed her recovery because of the pleasure she found in this whimsical tatterdemalion who appeared so concerned at the harm which he had occasioned.

And he? Whether it was true that he was of Irish descent, or whether that was a lie told to explain his facility in complimentary badinage, I have no means of telling. But it is certainly true that his compliments were daring and that the lady—blase she was and afflicted with ennui—did not hasten to return him to the gutter where so obviously he belonged.

She had seen fit to throw herself into a deep chair and to send her servants away; and now, as he talked, she looked on as one at a play, while he reacted skilfully to the pose which she had taken up.

Against the white and gold of the morning-room, whither she had caused him to lead her, and contrasted with her own extravagant perfection, Morgan should have seemed incongruous. He should have been self-conscious, ill at ease. But he was not aware of these things. He caused even the cynical ice lady to forget them. He had an air, a manner, a personality, which prevented his being measured by common standards, and which intrigued Adela Black more than she would have admitted.

Indifferent to the fate of the expensive car which her chauffeur was even then removing, she encouraged Morgan with a smile and a cigarette from her own tortoiseshell case.

"Smoke, my friend, and go on with your fooling; I am in a mood to listen."

The young man obeyed.

No second invitation was necessary to this tattered rascal, whom one might suppose the gilded blue night had created out of the very dust of its streets. He was, in truth, incorrigible.

Whether his tributes were sincere, or merely wanton, the lady did not trouble to ask herself. He was amusing; and, as she had said, she needed to be amused. He strutted there in the morning-room as upon

a small stage; and so incompatible were his gestures with his rags, and his idle words with his purposeful face, that the lady fancifully envisaged him as a D'Artagnan, wherein she showed profound knowledge of men.

For the rest she gave him his cues with understanding, responding to his fooling with fancies almost as farcical as his own.

Thus they talked, the ice lady and Morgan, until the brazen clanging of a gong brought them suddenly to earth.

The lady looked at the tiny watch which was set upon her wrist. Has it been said that she was in a white gown—dead white, so that she seemed to be sculptured in marble—that she was dressed in expensive perfection, and for dinner?

"Eight!" she said. "You, my Bohemian friend, have annihilated time. I am obliged to you, I needed to annihilate time."

She extended her right arm.

"You shall take me in; you shall dine with me, tête-à-tête. What do I care? I have a right to be amused."

The man, of course, accepted this strange suggestion, like the adventurer he was. With a profound obeisance, he offered his ragged sleeve, and they walked—Adela Black with her expensive perfection, and Morgan with his wildness and his rags—along the broad hall towards an inner door.

The young man did not apologise for that suit which had once been blue, those boots which were neither black nor brown. The contrast between himself and his lady must have had piquancy enough, yet the servant who presently appeared before them gave no sign of astonishment.

"Covers," said the lady, "for two."

"For two, madam!"

And the servant disappeared as silently as he had come. An efficient fellow—observant, but repressed.

"Perhaps," said the lady, "you had better tell me who you are. There are limits to my indiscretion. I can hardly sit at table with one whom I do not know. Myself, I am Mrs. Black—my name is Adela. You may call me Adela, if it pleases you."

"It pleases me," returned the other. "As madam graciously permits that I present myself, I am Charles George Cranham Buckingham Giles Morgan, and"—again he favoured her with one of his courtly bows—"your servant."

The table at which they dined was one which might have seated a dozen; and yet, in that tremendous dining-room in the house of Mellerby Black, the table was a comparatively small oasis in an expanse of dark-hued carpet.

It was what Adela Black was pleased to apologise for as a "simple" meal, and her cavalier accepted the statement with a careless wave of the hand.

She was surprised to notice that the machinery of dinner did not embarrass him. He crooked his knees for the footman to place his chair. He ate and drank—as a gentleman should—with restraint and discrimination. And he talked. The reservoir of his nonsense appeared to be bottomless.

He made love to the ice lady—love so inconsequential that it was innocuous. And the ice lady, sitting there at her table, had the pleasing consciousness that by a word she could vitalise his love-making; breathe life into it; alter words to acts. Being reckless, and in great need of amusement, she was minded to try.

Perhaps it was as well that she deferred this experiment until the time when he should join her in the drawing-room. For when Morgan had risen, and opened the door for her to leave him with his port, they were met by a round-shouldered man, with small, observant eyes. Behind him was another, tall and soldierly.

Adela Black returned into the dining-room, and the two men followed her, still without a word. The man with the observant eyes began an apology.

"Sorry for the intrusion, Adela, my dear; I was unaware that you were entertaining. Possibly you will present this—gentleman!"

The lady laughed. Her laugh, like herself, was ice cold.

"This," she said to Morgan, "is my husband."

She walked over and took her disreputable companion by the sleeve.

"This is Mr. Charles George Cranham—correct me if I go wrong. (Ah, yes, I remember now. A thousand apologies!) Buckingham Giles Morgan."

Mellerby Black nodded.

"Colonel Anerley," he said over his shoulder.

The man bowed, and Mellerby Black, with some murmured words about business, disappeared, with the soldierly Colonel Anerley, towards the rear of the house.

Morgan himself sauntered back to table and devoted his attention to the port which had been decantered especially for himself. His swagger was undiminished, the light of adventure was still in his eye. Nevertheless, with the departure of the lady and his own solitary state, the rather vacuous expression had disappeared from his face, to be succeeded by one which was calculating and purposeful.

He scrutinised the large room with such interest that an observer might have been pardoned for supposing that he had designs upon the valuables which it contained.

"Speculation!" he said to himself, naming the origin of Mellerby Black's wealth, as it was known to the world; and, having said that one word, he shook his head slowly.

"I doubt it—I deeply doubt it."

Black himself came into the room. He had shed his hat and overcoat, and was dressed in tails and white waistcoat.

"I have been compelled," he said, "to take an early dinner away from home. A request which was—ah!—practically an order. If I may, young sir, I will take a glass of port with you."

He seated himself, and Morgan circulated the decanter.

Black's eyes were alert, his mouth was vindictive. His fat face was expressive of that plebeian strain, of which, occasionally, his wife saw fit to remind him.

"Who are you?" he questioned, without any other preliminary.

Morgan smiled.

"I am Charles——"

Black held up his hand. "I know all that."

To Morgan's astonishment he correctly repeated the young man's long string of Christian names.

"But where do you come from? What do you do?"

"I come," said the young man, "from Bloomsbury. I do—nothing."

"From Bloomsbury? Where in Bloomsbury?"

"My address is: Cartel Mansions, Mecklenburg Square. I live at No. 5a. I have a flat there—third floor, looking out over the gardens."

"H'm, you have perhaps some private income!"

Morgan shrugged his shoulders.

"A little, yes. For the rest, I do what comes my way—anything."

Black looked at him with a cunning expression.

"Or, shall we say, anybody?"

Morgan laughed.

"Then we begin to understand each other. One must live. I am—I say it without shame—an adventurer."

"An adventurer!"

Black nodded several times.

"Is it possible that you have ever been—what shall we say—unfortunate in your adventures—the—er—police?"

Again Morgan shrugged his shoulders; and the port being finished, savoured the aroma of the brandy which his host had served to him.

"A trifling matter. We did not see eye to eye."

Black's intense scrutiny did not relax for a moment.

"A little trip over the hills, eh?"

"My friends," said Morgan, "my friends called it eleven clean shirts. Does that mean anything to you?"

Mellerby Black nodded.

A clean shirt is given to a person enjoying His Majesty's hospitality on the first day of each week. The euphemism probably represented three months' imprisonment.

"I like you," said Black, after a long minute. "Have some more brandy. I like you, my young friend, despite your—pardon me—your rags. I perceive that you are a gentleman. I am not a gentleman myself, but I occasionally use such men as you; they are trustworthy. They have a code. I know where I am with them. My wife tells me that you involved her in a motor accident; and that, after the accident, you rather deliberately sought her acquaintance. Let us know where we stand. Why did you seek my wife's acquaintance?"

Morgan achieved a look of contrition.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you were one of the family of Mr. Johnson. You see what I mean, sir? Dog does not eat dog!"

Here was another phrase which Black completely understood. The family of Mr. Johnson are crooks all the world over, and his visitor was taking it for granted that he belonged to the family.

"Dog does not eat dog," repeated Black, and cast his eyes around the sumptuous room. "This young man," he said to himself, "had designs on my silver, eh?"

"Just as well," he continued, "that we understand each other. Nevertheless, I resent your statement that I am a friend of Mr. Johnson. You are making a mistake. I am not a crook.

"Perhaps you have heard my name stated with a certain meaning. They call me Mellerby Black. My real name is Mellerby. I don't mind your knowing. I don't mind anyone knowing. Why should I? The name Black is a label—only a label. I affixed it in a mood of mordant irony. I called myself by the name which my enemies would give me. You know what 'Black' is? Blackmail—that's what it is. One of these newspaper fellows—a rascal who calls himself 'Vigilant'—has been tilting at me for some time. I know it, but why should I care?

"He might call me a blackmailer, but am I a blackmailer? Not on your life. I know things. Knowledge is power; and, having considerable knowledge, I have considerable power. Because I know things, people are good to me." He hesitated, staring into Morgan's eyes. "You perceive that I trust you."

"Are you not taking a risk," asked Morgan, "with me?"

Black nodded

"Of course I am, but I stake much on my knowledge of human nature. I am not sure that I should announce from the housetops the facts which I have just now laid before you, but if you choose to betray me, it is you who would suffer, not I.

"Bear this in mind, my young friend," he went on, with a sudden change of manner. "All the time that you are dealing with me, I have got you"—he clenched his fist—"like that."

He rose from the table. The strange interview was apparently ended.

"You would like," suggested Black, "to rejoin my wife? She is, I expect, awaiting you in the drawing-room."

As the two men crossed the hall, Colonel Anerley, escorted by a servant, passed out to the front door. He turned with a gesture of leave-taking.

"Good-night, Black; good-night, Mr. Morgan!"

And he disappeared.

Something told Morgan that this departure of Colonel Anerley was momentous, that he would have occasion to remember it.

He did.

INSPECTOR BATSWING.

MELLERBY BLACK ascended to the first floor and entered a small room furnished as a study. A large fireplace, leather-covered chairs, ashtrays, a tantalus, an odour of good tobacco, contributed to an atmosphere of comfort; but Mellerby Black noticed none of these things. He did not even switch on the electrics. He crossed the floor, in the mellow light of the fire, and advanced to the panelling on the far side of the room.

The panelling swung back upon hinges like a door; and behind it was revealed the green enamelled front of a large safe with a combination lock. Black spun the dials and the heavy steel construction on its oiled hinges came open in its turn.

He stepped into the safe and closed the door behind him. That door, which appeared to belong to a safe, was only the entrance to another room. The inner room had none of the comforts of the study which he had just left. From floor to ceiling on every side was a system of shelving, and every inch of the shelving was occupied by book files. The files were labelled in series "A to Z," "A1 to Z1," and so on.

In addition, the room had one table, one chair, and a telephone. Nothing more. There were no windows, and no fireplace. An electric radiator, a fan, and a single pendant which hung over the table, supplied the purposes of lighting, heat, and ventilation.

Mellerby sat down at the table, pulled over the telephone, and gave a number.

"That you, Donnetti? I want you to look into a case for me. You are ready? Yes? Surname, Morgan; Christian names, Charles George Cranham Buckingham Giles. Address, 5a, Mecklenburg Square, a third-floor flat. Small private income; no occupation. Has been in trouble. It is now 9.15. Let me have your report, if possible, in an hour.

"Eh, what's that? The police? Inspector Batswing, you say? What did he want? Does he know anything? Give me a report as to him, please, at the same time."

He hung up the receiver, and returned downstairs in time to say good-bye to Morgan. The young man—who was cultivating the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Mellerby Black for purposes of his own—had thought it better to leave before his welcome was exhausted.

It is true that his precaution appeared unnecessary. To Adela Black he was a new experience. Behind his careless fooling she detected an intrepid personality, and the fact piqued her curiosity. It was this personality which she desired to cultivate, and which Morgan refused to reveal.

She would have kept him for I don't know how long; but, as I have said, Morgan was a man of discretion, and preferred to make his adieux while there was some hope of a renewed invitation.

As to this he need not have worried, for both Mrs. Black and her husband, for different reasons, expressed a desire to see him again. When he went out from the blue door, he was pledged to return for luncheon on the morrow.

It was perhaps as well that Mellerby Black could not see the light of triumph in his eyes.

He had walked only a short distance before he heard a footstep behind him; and, turning, was accosted by a broad-shouldered man, who, despite the warmth and splendour of the night, wore a dusty bowler hat, and carried an umbrella.

"Excuse me, sir," said this individual, "I should like a word with you."

Morgan smiled, and thrust his hands into the pockets of his seedy jacket.

"You know," he said, in his flippant way, "that's extremely nice. I am most completely at your service. What kind of word would you like?"

The man in the bowler hat elected to become angry at this.

"Now then," he expostulated; "now then, we know what we know!"

Morgan resumed his pilgrimage to nowhere, and the other man fell into step beside him.

"There," said Morgan, "you have slobbered a bibful. I should be the last to deny such a statement. Have you got any more like that?"

The other man placed a hand upon Morgan's arm.

"Wait a moment," he panted, "this isn't a race! It's a hot night. What's the hurry?"

He took off his bowler hat and ran his handkerchief round the lining.

"I am Detective-inspector Batswing," he grunted. "Scotland Yard, so now you know."

"My name," said the young man politely, "is Morgan. So now *you* know!"

"That's all right," said the detective.

He walked in silence for a few moments, evidently turning over in his mind the young man's remarks.

Morgan shoved his fingers into his waistcoat pocket.

"Look here, we may as well be friends. Have a cigar. I have just had a couple given to me. Quite smokable, I assure you—Laranagas. I should like to have your considered opinion of them."

The detective bit the end from his weed, and spat the butt noisily into the gutter.

"At Mr. Black's, I suppose!"

"It was Mr. Black," confessed Morgan, "who gave me the cigars."

"And what were you doing at Mr. Black's?"

Morgan held a match to the detective's cigar. The flame burnt steadily and solid, as if it had been cut out in brass.

"Oh, come now," he said, "the fact that you are a detective doesn't give you the right to cross-question me in the street, you know."

"Listen to what is being said in there," breathed Morgan to his armed companion, "and you will get an earful."

"Honest men," said the detective, "have no secrets."

Morgan chuckled.

"That's a new one on me, inspector. I always understood that there was a skeleton in every cupboard."

"None in mine," said the inspector stoutly; "none in mine. What about yourself, Mister——"

"Morgan," explained the young man. "Morgan is my name. Charles George Cranham Buckingham Giles Morgan."

The inspector gasped.

"Good gosh! Are you twins, or what?"

"That," said Morgan huffily, "is my name."

This elaborate Christian name was perhaps the only thing in his make-up about which he was really sensitive.

"Just one more question," said Inspector Batswing, "just one more question, and then I have done with you."

He had the air of a counsel for the prosecution.

"Carry on," Morgan invited.

"The question," said Inspector Batswing, "is this. You have just been along to Cotesmore Mansions. Don't you attempt to deny it. I saw you come out. I should be much obliged if you would tell me how much money you paid to Mr. Mellerby Black?"

"That," said Morgan, "is an easy question to answer. I did not pay Mr. Black anything."

"Then," said the inspector, with an air of triumph, "how much did he pay you?"

Morgan shook his head.

"Wrong again, I am afraid, my dear inspector. I neither paid nor received anything—except, that is, that Mrs. Black was obliging enough to give me an excellent dinner."

The inspector suddenly became bullying.

"Now, look here, you had better come clean. The Blacks don't consort with the likes of you for any good purpose. You say that Mr. Black gave you those cigars. Well, I ask you, does it seem likely? I have a good mind, young fellow-me-lad, to give you the once over."

Morgan took a quick glance over his shoulder. A hundred yards behind, and travelling in the same direction as themselves, was a quietly-dressed stranger. He had been at about the same distance five minutes earlier; and this, despite the fact that Morgan and his companion had twice turned corners. The young man deliberately increased the inspector's anger.

"You confounded busies," he said, "are always poking your noses into other people's business, but it will pay you to keep your hands off me."

"Confound you," said the inspector, "I'll pull you—I'll pull you for loitering with intention. If you've got a gun on you, I'll pull you for that."

"You won't pull me for anything," declared Morgan. "I'll wish you good-night, Inspector Batswing."

Whether he was enraged at the words which Morgan had spoken, or whether it was at the sarcastic inflection which the young man contrived to give to his singular name, "Batswing," the Inspector lost his temper, and seized Morgan by the collar.

An instant later he was sprawling on his back in the roadway, and Morgan was running like a stag into the darkness.

COLONEL ANERLEY'S NIECE.

That a bachelor in the prime of life, and a man of the world, should stay out all night, is not, perhaps, reason for alarm; but when the bachelor is as much a creature of habit as Colonel Anerley, such a lapse is very alarming indeed.

Christine Anerley, the colonel's niece, who controlled for him the domestic machinery of his flat in Berkeley Square, had no sooner discovered that the colonel's bed had not been slept in, when she decided to send for the police.

Colonel Anerley's habits were inflexible—one could set a watch by him. At nine he had breakfast; at half-past ten he descended upon the City and attended to business. At one o'clock he lunched at his club—always the same club, the same table, the same seat, and the same waiter.

After lunch he retired to the smoking-room with a copy of the "Financial Times," and remained asleep until three. Another descent upon the City, and at six o'clock he returned home and prepared himself to take dinner.

Except for week-ends, when another and equally rigid programme was followed, and except for certain fixed holidays, the colonel had complied with the self-imposed regulations for almost every day of the twenty odd years during which Christine had known him.

This being so, she had no doubt whatever that the colonel had met with some sort of accident. He had left her on the previous evening, just before seven, for the purpose of dining with friends; but had not mentioned who the friends were. As Christine knew little of his affairs—for the colonel was a reticent man—she was unable to suggest any useful line of investigation.

In response to her telephone message, a certain Sergeant Havers—a man in plain clothes—had arrived from Scotland Yard; and, although he had considered her trouble with courteous attention, it was quite clear to her that he anticipated a commonplace explanation of the colonel's absence. At the same time, he made a suggestion which the girl had been trying to put into effect.

"If I might suggest it," he said, "I should have a glance at the colonel's papers, Miss Anerley. It is quite possible that you may find an invitation to dinner or the like. If you could do that, then it would only be a question of a telephone message to clear the whole thing up."

The girl had long known that the key of her jewel-case would unlock the colonel's desk. She had made the discovery as a child; and the colonel, who had laughed about the coincidence at the time, had probably long since forgotten it.

She felt very like a criminal in thus intruding upon her uncle's secrets, and only her acute anxiety drove her to scrutinise his papers. How it was that the ten-years-old diary came to be upon the desk; and how it was that, carelessly taking the small book in her hands, she opened it at the page which contained what was virtually a confession, the girl never afterwards understood.

The probability is that the colonel himself had been looking at the same page of the same diary the previous night. As it afterwards transpired he had reason to do so. That would account for the book falling open where it did.

A few words thrust themselves upon the girl's attention; and then, almost despite herself, she read on to the end. There must be many such stories hidden away in old diaries. Certainly the crime of which Colonel Anerley had been guilty was not a new one. The chaos of the war, a business government, the retired colonel receiving Cabinet rank His knowledge of certain enactments affecting the world's markets; and, lastly, the one damning fact, his exploiting that knowledge to lay the foundation of a considerable fortune.

The story was more in the nature of a confession than a regular entry in the diary. Possibly for the repose of his soul, the colonel had found it necessary to relate in some form the crime of which he had been guilty, and so had set it down there in a place where, as he had every right to believe, it would be seen by no other eye during his lifetime.

She read the small, careful writing twice from beginning to end before she really understood, and then her cheeks burned in a vicarious shame at the discovery which she had made.

After all, this thing could have no connection with the colonel's disappearance. Here, unnecessarily, she had laid bare an old wound. What she read there told her that the man had suffered; and now, if he knew of her discovery, he would suffer again.

The colonel's servant—a man who had served with him in South Africa—tapped upon the door, and entered with the information that a lady wished to see her.

By an instinctive gesture, she had hidden the hand which held the diary behind her chair. Hardly knowing what she did, she told the servant to show the lady in; and she was still sitting in front of the writing-desk when Mrs. Black came into the room.

So absorbing, indeed, were the thoughts of Christine Anerley at her discovery, that the realisation that her visitor was already in the room came to her as a sort of shock.

"I beg your pardon," she said, rising; "I——"

Adela Black was dressed in tailor-made garments, which emphasised her straight body, and the square set of her shoulders.

"My poor child," she said, pointing at the diary which Christine had allowed to

"Put the screws on," snarled Calhoun to the cringing blackmailer. "Make them choke up the information we require."

drop on to her knees, "you have discovered something."

Her voice expressed no sympathy; in fact, it was incapable of expressing sympathy—that emotion having been omitted from Adela Black's mental make-up.

Christine turned white, and then red.

"I don't understand you," she stammered.

Her appearance—as she sat there in that masculine room—brown hair, brown eyes, slim, wistful, was enough to bring sympathy to a heart of stone. But Mrs. Black had need of her limited sympathies for her own troubles; and she went on with calculated cruelty.

"We were afraid," she said, "we—my husband and I—were afraid that you might have discovered—what you have discovered. That is why he sent me round here to you. If you had not made the discovery yourself, I should have told you; we thought that you ought to know."

Christine rose, and dropped the diary upon the desk-top.

"How many people," she cried, "know of this dreadful thing?"

Mrs. Black held up a slender and carefully manicured hand.

"Only three, my dear child. My husband and myself, and you. Do not be afraid, we shall not betray your secret. We have many secrets. It is perfectly safe with us. We are your friends."

"But," said Christine, "pardon me; I do not know you. You were announced, I think, as Mrs. Black. I don't remember meeting either you or your husband."

Adela Black smiled, her cold and glittering smile.

"You are going to meet us both," she said, "at luncheon to-day."

"I am afraid," replied the girl awkwardly, "that that is impossible. You see, I am worried. Colonel Anerley has not been home; he was away all night. I am in communication with the police. News may come through at any moment. I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me."

To herself she said:

"How in the world does this woman think that I can keep a luncheon appointment with all this trouble hanging over my head?"

Adela Black knew what she was thinking. This trick of reading people's minds had been acquired by her during long experience of a wicked world.

"You understand, don't you," she said sweetly, "that we are your friends? You would not wish an—er—estrangement? After all, we are hiding something which perhaps we ought to reveal."

Poor little Christine turned from the hard-faced, composed woman to that incriminating volume which lay upon the desk. She was quick-witted enough to read the threat which was behind the woman's statement. It amounted to this:

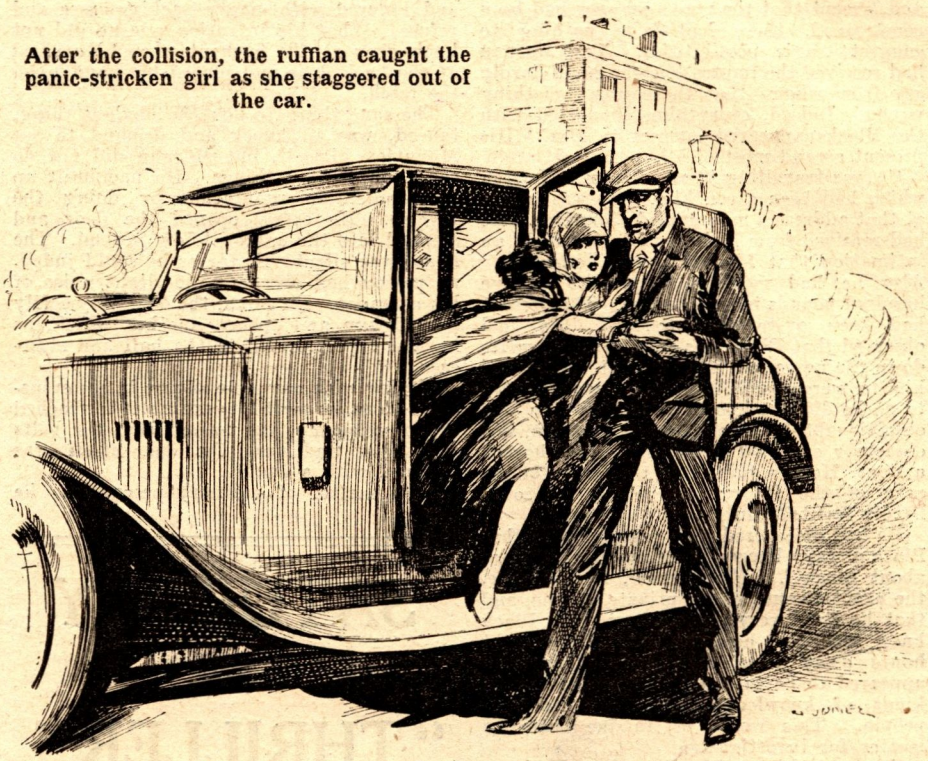
"If you don't do as you are told, we shall betray you."

She quite understood.

"I don't know why you wish me to take lunch with you," she said wretchedly; "but, yes, I will come."

"You know," said Mrs. Black, "that is very wise of you. We will expect you, then, at one o'clock. Cotesmore Mansions, Knightsbridge, No. 17, at one o'clock; don't forget. Good-bye, dear Miss Anerley."

Christine pulled down the top of the desk, and reeled into her bed-room. Possibly among those familiar and pleasant surroundings she could think the thing out; understand the meaning of these tragic events which heaped up one upon another.



After the collision, the ruffian caught the panic-stricken girl as she staggered out of the car.

Long before Christine had recovered her usual self-possession, Mrs. Black had informed her husband as to the interview. He accepted her statement with a careless nod.

"She will come," he said. "Good, I expected that! I don't know that it is a wise move to get her here; but, as you may know, it is not altogether in my hands. If her uncle is traced here, it would be better for us to pose as friends of Anerley and his niece.

"The girl understands the situation? She does? This is as well. We may want her to endorse our statements."

"Of course," the lady pointed out, "our new friend with the manifold Christian names saw Colonel Anerley here last evening."

"What about him?"

"Suppose he gives you away?"

Her husband tapped his breast pocket and winked knowingly.

"Morgan's all right," he said; which meant, as she clearly understood: "Morgan's all wrong."

"I have got that young man's case-history in my pocket," he went on. "I doubt if we shall see him to-day. He had a little trouble last night with the police. Exactly the kind of man I want; I shall make use of him.

"But," he added, looking his wife squarely in the eyes, "no tricks, Adela. He is a very nice young man, but I will not be made a fool of; understand that."

The woman raised her shoulders. She would have given a display of ill-temper, but at that moment a servant tapped, and opened the door of the study, where the two people were speaking.

"Mr. Morgan!" he announced.

WHITE BOY.

MORGAN travelled on the Underground between Knightsbridge and Liverpool Street. So deep was he in thought that he hardly noticed the passing of the stations.

The trifle of disguise which he had used in visiting Cotesmore Mansions, in order to avoid the attention of Inspector Batswing, had consisted mainly of a suit of clothes considerably superior to the one which he had worn on his first visit. Excellent as the suit was, however, it could not confer upon Morgan an air of respectability. He had a way of wearing his clothes which was not stylish. He was never interested in clothes. The idea of folding a pair of trousers was anathema to him.

Just at present his mind was busy with affairs which to him were very much more important. To start with, and to go on with, at the luncheon which he had just enjoyed, he had met Christine Anerley, and the brown eyes of Christine, so intrepid and yet so filled with trouble, haunted him. She had the effect upon the susceptible young man of a small child weeping. He wanted to pick her up in his arms and caress her. This want was so intense at times as to be almost a pain. He had begun to suspect that Christine's troubles were very real. Already the early editions of the evening papers had the news of the disappearance of her uncle—Colonel Anerley—and Morgan had a fear that the disappearance might not be unconnected with tragedy.

"Early last afternoon," so went the newspaper report, "Colonel the Right Honourable Charles Anerley, D.S.O., K.B.E., a London financier and a director of the Southern Bank, left his house in Berkeley Square to take dinner in the West End. On his way, he called at the house of a friend, Mr. Mellerby Black, of Knightsbridge, and thereafter he was recognised crossing Hyde Park by a police-constable, with whom he was acquainted. He spent the night in a well-known hotel in that neighbourhood, where he was recognised by a waiter, and where he signed the visitors' book. He is believed to have been seen in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park Corner. After that he vanished. There is no apparent reason for his disappearance. His health was good and, so far as is known, he had no financial worries or other troubles. The matter is of special significance as Colonel Anerley is reputed to be a man of extraordinarily methodical habits."

That was that!

He himself was a witness to the fact that the colonel had visited Cotesmore Mansions,

and, except that the man's manner had been constrained, there had been nothing to suggest tragic possibilities. Yet Morgan had received the impression—he could hardly say from whom—that there was something wrong. Indeed, everything connected with the Blacks appeared suspect to him. His present errand most of all.

He was travelling to an address in Leyton which had been given him. He was to see at that address a man named Mountjoy. He had received from Mellerby Black merely an intimation that Mountjoy was "offensive." Also he had received a present of one hundred pounds in small notes. The present had been quite unconditional. He had observed that Black was careful not to write down the name and address, but had caused him to memorise it. What he was expected to do he did not know. Since the man was objectionable to Black then, he, Morgan, was obviously expected to attempt some hostile action. He was going into the thing for the sake of the information which he could hardly fail to gain.

He had discovered with astonishment that Black already knew a great number of things about himself. Black knew, for instance, the exact amount of his private income, and that he lived very much beyond it. Black knew, also, that he spent many of the night hours away from his home. The man appeared to be in a position to acquire all kinds of knowledge about all kinds of people. This would be, in due course, a matter for investigation.

Even as to Inspector Batswing, Mellerby Black had betrayed unexpected knowledge.

"By the way," he had said at parting, "if you run against Batswing and he is troublesome, ask him to speak to me upon the telephone."

Morgan had not been surprised to discover Black's knowledge of his affair with Inspector Batswing. He had expected that.

"And suppose," he had returned, "that Batswing refuses to telephone?"

"In that case," Black had replied, "mention to him the words 'White Boy.' I think you will find those words act like a charm."

All these things were occupying Morgan's mind as the train started and stopped, started and stopped, on the way to Leyton.

In addition he was puzzling about the matter of the photographs.

After luncheon Black had taken him to his study upon the first floor. Lying upon the study table, Morgan had noticed a heap of photographs; and, being naturally curious about Black's affairs, he had turned the photographs over.

They were of all kinds—studio portraits, snapshots and unmounted enlargements, which obviously had been made from groups in which the subject figured. They had all been of one man.

What fixed the incident in Morgan's mind was that Black had appeared rather disturbed at the young man's discovery. He had whipped the photographs into a drawer and carefully locked the drawer upon them, dropping the key into his pocket.

"Don't know too much," he muttered. "Don't know too much; it is not good for you."

That, of course, had been a threat. But Morgan had been brought up on threats. It provoked only a smile.

When, after a tedious journey, he found himself at Brooke Street, Leyton, a short thoroughfare, which led from the Red Hart public-house to Leyton Flats, he acted with characteristic impetuosity and disregard of consequences. Finding that the house itself was one of a terrace, and that the front was heavily curtained and devoid of life, he passed round the house to an entrance from a narrow alley in the rear. From that entrance he crossed a back-yard, untended and littered with empty packing-cases and refuse. What his intention was he did not know even at the moment when he arrived at the back door and placed his hand upon the latch.

The sane thing to do: the obvious thing, indeed, was to knock and demand to see Mountjoy himself, but Morgan did not do sane and obvious things. He had built up a considerable reputation by doing the reverse. He softly opened the door and stepped into the narrow lobby beyond. The house was silent. So far as he could judge, no person had observed the slight noise of his entrance. He closed the door very softly behind him and opened another which, as he had expected, led to the hall and staircase.

Moving with complete silence in his crêpe-soled shoes, he went forward until he reached the front door. He noticed that the bolts were shot and that the door itself was fastened with a chain.

As a matter of ordinary precaution, he carefully drew back the bolts, released the chain, and set the door open by a few inches.

"Just in case," he said to himself, "Mr. Mountjoy should not be pleased to see me!"

He had already noticed that, from a closed door upon his left, a door which probably led to the best room, there came a continuous and subdued murmur of heavy voices.

He took off his hat and placed his ear against the panels of the door. Two men were talking together; or, rather, one was talking with some fluency, and the other was making noises indicative of assent.

"——pulled the job you got to share out with Mountjoy's precious friend. Well, that's a fine thing, I must say. When I've done my stuff I like to get the proceeds—not go fifty-fifty with someone I ain't never seen. Take't from me, Scarface, Mountjoy is playing us good and proper. I don't know much, but I wouldn't mind laying a level fiver that there ain't no man up above. Mountjoy thinks these things out himself."

Here the other man put in a remark.

"The jobs went off nice and easy."

"Of course they did, but what were they? Anybody could pull off jobs like them! We don't want Mountjoy and his precious friend to think out our stuff for us. What I say is—hold out on him! Do a bit on the Q.T. We can do it. You and I can divvy and nobody won't know nothing."

Here Morgan became conscious that he was not alone. He turned slowly and found himself looking into the barrel of an automatic pistol.

With instant presence of mind he pressed his finger to his lips and pointed to the door. After that he was careful to leave his hands in a position where the newcomer, who was probably Mountjoy himself, could observe that they were both empty. He did not want to die just at present, and Mountjoy had not the appearance of a man who would be hindered by scruples.

Anxious to impart, for purposes of his own, the knowledge which he had gained, he advanced towards the pistol. As he did so, Mountjoy receded carefully, keeping a clear six feet between himself and Morgan.

"Friend of Black," whispered Morgan, as soon as he could do so without fear that his voice would be heard by the men in the room.

Mountjoy hesitated, and then beckoned the young man to follow him through the door at the end of the passage and into the lobby beyond.

There were undoubtedly reasons why Mountjoy did not want his confederates to meet a friend of Mr. Black, or even to hear the name "Mr. Black," but he did not for a moment relax his hostile vigilance.

He pushed the door into place and prevented it from banging by keeping his thumb round the edge of it. With his other hand he pressed the muzzle of the automatic into Morgan's waistcoat.

"Now," he rasped, "come clean, or I'll settle yer!"

"I'm from Black," Morgan repeated. "He thought there was something funny going on down here, and he sent me to look around."

"Then," said the other, "you can tell Mr. Black that he is wrong. And the next time——"

Morgan stopped the man's remarks by a gesture of caution.

"It is you who are wrong, Mountjoy. Go and put your ear against that door—go quietly, and you will get an earful."

Mountjoy hesitated.

"And what about you?" he said.

"I," said Morgan; "I am a friend of Mr. Black. That is good enough for you, or should be!"

Mountjoy hesitated again. Clearly, he did not like to let Morgan go; and, equally clearly, he was anxious to verify the young man's statement as to what was going on behind that closed door.

"If you are playing me up," he said vindictively, "I will get yer, if I swing for it."

He was in stockinged feet; and now, with silent movement, hardly credible considering his unwieldly bulk, he passed up the narrow passage and bent, as Morgan had done, listening to the murmured conversation coming from the closed room.

Morgan waited.

He could have made his get-away, and so escaped a situation which had potentialities not pleasant to contemplate. But he staked his safety on the probability that Scarface and his unnamed friend were continuing the same seditious conversation.

That such was the case he knew directly Mountjoy had begun to listen. The man's face turned red, and a large artery upon his forehead stuck out like whipcord. It was obvious that he was becoming extremely angry.

So, for perhaps two minutes, he remained immobile, listening at the door panel; and then, crashing the door open, he began to speak very unpleasantly to someone within the room—the someone, no doubt, being Scarface's eloquent friend.

Much of what he said was unprintable; all of it was picturesque and insulting. For a moment argument and recrimination went on at white heat, and then, with startling suddenness, Mountjoy threw up his pistol. There was an explosion within the room. Mountjoy's twitching fingers exploded his own weapon, hitting one, and then he crumpled up, falling through the doorway.

Morgan knew, without troubling to verify his knowledge, that Mountjoy was a dead man.

Within five seconds he was in the back-yard, running as hard as he could towards

the outlet between the houses. He found that he was trembling.

"Egad," he said, "my nerve is not quite so good as I thought it was."

And then:

"I wonder what old Black will have to say to this?"

Scarface and his friend—the friend who probably had murdered Mountjoy—must have made their get-away from the front entrance and passed out towards the High Street, for Morgan saw nothing of them. He himself retreated as rapidly as he dared in the direction of the flats, made a detour, and walked as far as Stratford.

He was looking for a railway station from which he might return to London, when a motor-bicycle stopped close beside him, and the man who had ridden the motor-bicycle seized him from behind by his coat collar.

"Got you!" said a voice in his ear.

He turned to find that his captor was Inspector Batswing.

"Got it from headquarters," said the inspector triumphantly, "that you might be down this way. Bit of luck finding you, all the same. My man lost you at Liverpool Street. Are you coming along quietly, or are you going to start any rough stuff? Because, if so——"

Morgan shook his head.

"No, inspector, I am a man of good behaviour."

He knew when he was beaten. Inspector Batswing had only to raise a finger and half a dozen uniformed constables would come to his assistance.

For a moment Morgan considered the possibility of repeating his previous exploit, hurling Batswing into the gutter and attempting to run for it, but Batswing had also considered this possibility, and was watching his prisoner very closely.

It was then that Morgan remembered Mallerby Black's advice.

"No, inspector," he repeated, "I am going to cause no trouble. I would ask you to have a word on the telephone with a friend of mine, and then I am completely at your service."

The inspector laughed and beckoned to the uniformed man on point duty.

"You can do all the telephoning you like when you get to the station. I have got other things to attend to."

"But just a minute," said Morgan quickly, seeing that the inspector's subordinate was nearing them. "My friend said that if you hesitated to telephone him, I was to mention 'White Boy.'"

The effect upon Inspector Batswing was instantaneous.

"What?" he said. "What—what was that you said?"

Morgan let him have it again—"White Boy."

"I——" the inspector began to speak, and then thought better of it. "Who is your friend?" he managed to articulate.

"I think," Morgan said to him, "that if you telephoned him he will tell you that himself."

The inspector released his fierce grasp upon Morgan and reached for his motor-bicycle.

"All right," he said to the policeman who approached. "All right, don't want you now."

Within two minutes, leaving the motor-bicycle propped up against the kerb, Inspector Batswing was in a telephone booth and asking for the number which Morgan had dictated. What was said at the other end of the wire the young man never knew, but he saw the beads of perspiration come out upon the inspector's forehead when at length, with trembling hand, he dropped the receiver back upon its bracket.

He turned to Morgan with a question.

"Who was that? For the love of Heaven, tell me, who was that?"

"You ought to know," said Morgan. "You have been watching his house, to my knowledge, for several days past."

"You don't mean," questioned the inspector, "that that was Mellerby Black?"

Morgan nodded.

"I do."

"My heaven!"

The inspector reeled away, and Morgan realised that he was free.

THE DISAPPEARANCES.

THE tragedy which Morgan had witnessed at Brooke Street, and his own astonishing escape from the police, caused the young man to decide that he was being committed farther than he cared about.

He preferred to work independently; but the thing was too big—he could see that already—and he was too near to it.

He wanted to exchange confidences with one who appeared to be upon the same lay as himself; and, to this end, he betook himself to Scotland Yard by a route so circuitous as to be almost a spiral.

He asked for Detective-inspector Batswing with considerable misgiving.

He felt moderately safe from arrest, so far as Batswing himself was concerned; but what description Batswing had circulated, or what charges he had made in the period which elapsed before that very terrifying telephone conversation, Morgan did not know. He was taking the risk with his eyes open.

He was told by the policeman on duty that Inspector Batswing was not in his office, and it was only by chance that the young man came into contact with Batswing's assistant.

"I am afraid," Morgan said diffidently, "that you cannot help me. You see, I wanted Inspector Batswing himself; it is on a rather personal matter." He had decided to exchange confidences with the detective.

The policeman in uniform, who appeared to be the inspector's assistant, looked at Morgan with shrewd appraisement.

"I don't think," he said, "that Inspector Batswing had many secrets from me; and, to tell you the truth, I am interested just at present in any information concerning his movements during the last day or so."

Morgan considered this for quite a long time, and then:

"Do you know," he asked, "where Inspector Batswing is now?"

It was a shot in the dark, but it manifestly found the target.

"To tell you the truth," said the inspector's subordinate, "I don't, and I am worried."

In an unconscious condition Christine Anerley was assisted along the landing-stage, and taken aboard the crooks' launch.

"Perhaps," said Morgan slowly, "you have reason to be?"

Moved by one of his queer impulses, he placed his hand upon the policeman's shoulder, and spoke to him as one man to another.

"Look here, you're no fool, I am sure of that. You have perhaps sized me up, just as I have sized you up. You know that you can trust me. I assure you, anyhow, that you can trust me to the limit; and I am quite willing to take the risk of trusting you.

"I may be able to help. I know something. I know more than you people of the Yard have discovered. I invite your confidence."

The constable turned this over in his mind.

"All right," he said at length, "it's bang against regulations, and it may be that I shall get it hot from the inspector for doing it, but I am going to tell you something.

"Last evening, about six o'clock, the inspector came in, and I could see from the beginning that he was upset. He brought a bottle of whisky into his office—a thing which he has never done before—and he set to work on that bottle of whisky in a way which opened my eyes. He was talking, too. Lor'! I am glad nobody but myself could hear the things that he said.

"'Look here, George,' he said after a bit—he always called me George; friends we are, in that sort of way. 'Look here, George, I am up against it. I have been rumbled, see, for a big thing. They think they've got me, but they haven't. Someone who knows something is playing it off against me.

"'Up till now I funked it, but I am not going to funk it any more. I am going to straighten the thing out this night. It'll be the ruin of me, but it will be the ruin of others as well.'"

The constable looked appealingly at Morgan, as if asking excuse for his eloquence.

"He is a decent sort, is Inspector Batswing—I'd do a lot for him. Well, sir, he went on in that way for some time, and then picked up his hat and umbrella. You know what he is, I dare say, if you know him at all. He never does anything without his hat and umbrella.

"'I am going out,' he said, 'and I want you to tail me. I am going to see a man, and what I say won't please him at all. I want you to tail me, and see that I come to no harm, that's all.'

"Well, of course, I could not do otherwise than fall in with the scheme. I didn't know what was in the wind, and I was not going to ask; but, as soon as I was off duty, I changed into plain clothes and followed him along to Knightsbridge."

Morgan nodded.

"To Cotesmore Mansions?"

The man nodded agreement.

"I thought you knew something," he said.

"Well, yes," he continued, "I followed him along there. He went into Cotesmore Mansions—No. 17 it was—and he stayed there I don't know how long—quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, perhaps.

"Then he came out again, and gave me the office, and turned back towards headquarters. After that he started a pub crawl. Never known him to do such a thing before, sir.

"I don't know how many houses he went into—half a dozen, I dare say—and every time I was waiting about outside. I had not any instructions, you understand, to do more than tail him. All I was there for, as I understood it, was to see that he came to no harm.

"I am not sure, sir, that I didn't fail.

"The last place—the Golden Crown, up towards Sloane Square—he went in, and he didn't come out again. After a quarter of an hour I made inquiries. He had slipped out by the back way."

The constable sank into his chair with a gesture of dejection.

"That's all," he said. "I have not seen him since. I don't know where he is no more than Adam. I have been to his lodging. He is a bachelor, sir—lives with some people down in Clapham. He has not been home all night. Nobody at the Yard has heard anything of him. I am worried; I don't mind admitting that I don't like the look of it. He would never have given me the slip of his own free will. There's something behind this, and I shan't be content until I find out what it is."

Morgan had listened in silence. But for the fact that his was a personality which invited confidence, he knew that he would never have been permitted to learn so much; and, now that he had been told what he had been told, he had little information to give in return.

"I am afraid," he said, "that, despite my promises, I cannot at present do anything to help you. I would like, however, to ask you a question. 'White Boy'—does that mean anything to you?"

The constable turned and pointed to a photograph of a coasting steamer which hung upon the wall.

"That's the White Boy," he said. "Batswing was on her before he joined the Force. What do you know about that?"

"I don't know anything," was Morgan's reply. "I am moving in the dark. I hope to know something before I am done. At present I can only tell you that your confidences are perfectly safe with me. Wait a minute, though."

He came to a decision.

"I can tell you this: That the fact which was known against Batswing, and for which his enemies were endeavouring to blackmail him, is in some way connected with that steamer. I leave you to make of that what you can."

He descended to the Thames Embankment, and, with the same precautions against observation which he had observed previously, began to retrace his steps towards Bloomsbury.

As he went he caught sight of a placard issued by one of the newspapers: "Another sensational disappearance in the City."

He bought a paper and scanned the short paragraph with interest. Bertram Clifford, a stockbroker living at Loughton, had disappeared between his home and his attendance at a public dinner, where he was expected to occupy the chair. He had reappeared, like Colonel Anerley, at an hotel where he had spent the night; and, thereafter, again like Anerley, he had vanished from the face of the earth.

He was a man of irregular habits; and, as it appeared—reading between the lines—of questionable reputation. Therefore his disappearance had at first been assumed to have a sordid explanation. It was not until four days had passed that his people had thought it necessary to communicate with the police.

His description, an account of his habits, and a statement that no reason for his disappearance was known, was set down just as in the case of Colonel Anerley.

In addition, the enterprising newspaper which Morgan had purchased reproduced an excellent photograph of the missing man.

On seeing the photograph Morgan could hardly restrain an exclamation of surprise. He had seen that photograph earlier in the same day; it had lain upon Mellerby Black's table.

"VIGILANT—THE NEWS HOUND."

SOMEWHAT to Morgan's surprise, and much to his gratification, on his returning to the Knightsbridge residence of Mellerby Black, after his rather astonishing experience with Inspector Batswing, he had found himself accepted as a member of the household. He was told merely that such and such a room had been allotted to him.

The only further words which implied any suggestion of his employment came from Mellerby Black himself.

"When you run short of money," said Black, with one of those quick glances from his dark, inquisitive eyes, "let me know."

Morgan had returned there for the purpose of making a kind of report about the affair

at Leyton, but the affair at Leyton was dismissed very casually. Morgan surmised, rightly, as he afterwards discovered, that Mellerby Black had learned from some other source the crucial fact of Mountjoy's death, and that Black literally feared to discuss details.

The young man realised that he had been very fortunate, first in obtaining an entree to Black's residence; and, secondly, in obtaining establishment there.

His triumph in the fact was increased by the discovery that Christine Anerley was also a guest of the Blacks'. She was a little thing, with glorious brown eyes and tawny Eton-cropped hair. Every word that she spoke, every gesture that she made, hinted to the sensitive and observant young man that she was in some way "up against it."

And Morgan, being what he was, desired, above all things, to help her. To talk with her, and keep on talking until this trouble —which she resolutely hid from the world— could be discussed between them.

"Darn it," he said to himself, "she cannot have, she shall not have, secrets from me." But he discovered, when, later on that day an opportunity occurred for them to talk together, that all his resolution was not sufficient to penetrate the armour of her reserve. Indeed, the girl included himself in the distaste which she obviously felt for the whole of the Blacks' establishment.

Looking for Christine after dinner, on the day of his arrival, he found that she had thrown herself into a deep couch in the drawing-room, and was sitting there in the gloom of the summer evening.

He knew, somehow, as soon as he entered the room, that she was desperately unhappy. He approached her with the audacity which characterised all his actions, and seated himself by her side.

He was running a big risk, and he knew that he was something of a fool thus to court her society. Nevertheless, there are impossibilities, even for an adventurer like Morgan, and one such impossibility was to leave her there unhappy in the darkness, and go on with the intrigue which was developing between himself and Adela Black.

"Look here, Miss Anerley," he began, butting into the affair between them with a total absence of tact, "you are in trouble of some sort—I can see that—and I am prepared to believe that it is connected with these people, whose hospitality we are receiving.

"I want you to try to believe me for a moment, and to believe in me. If I did not realise that you were unusually intelligent, I should not think of asking you, but I credit you with some judgment of human nature. If you know anything about men, you know that I have, as they say, a code. If I say a thing to you in a moment like this, you must believe it. You will be compelled to believe it. Very well. What I say to you is this: I am your friend."

He waited for a reply. There was a long silence. He could see that the girl was twisting her hands together. He did not show impatience. Waiting was his strong point. Knowing his own sincerity, and, desperately anxious as he was that it should be realised, he could not believe that his assertion had failed to convince the girl. He discovered within the next few moments that he was wrong.

"That," said Christine Anerley slowly, and in a voice which expressed nothing, "that sounds good to me. I need a friend, but I am among people who are both unscrupulous and brilliant—I have discovered that much already. I know that you are in their employment; I have heard them talking about you.

"There was even some hint as to a dreadful thing which you had done. I do not know why you should have been sent here to get information from me. I do not understand what information I might have that could be useful to you, but then"—and now Morgan was sure that there were tears in those brown eyes—"there are so many things that I do not understand in this place."

"You are not here," suggested Morgan, "of your own free will?"

"I," said the girl, with the first trace of animation which she had shown since Morgan had accosted her. "I should have thought you would have known the answer to that question. Mellerby Black is holding me here to suit his own purposes."

"Holding you here?"

"Yes. Please leave me, Mr. Morgan, I have said too much already."

Morgan rose to his feet. It was not in his nature to thrust his company upon one who did not want it. He was unable to do so even when he saw that it might confer a benefit.

"I am going, Miss Anerley, but think about me, size me up, if you can. Get me right in your mind. I repeat, I am a friend. You may need friends, and, if you do, then if you turn to me, I shall be happy."

Outside the door he found himself face to face with Adela Black. She was paler than ever, this glittering woman of ice and steel. Her large blue eyes were bright with rage. A bead of blood showed upon one of her lips, where with her sharp teeth she had bitten deep, unconscious of the pain.

"I heard you," she managed to say.

Morgan nodded indifferently.

"No reason why you shouldn't," he said.

Adela Black seized him by the wrist in a grip which hurt. He had not believed that any woman's hand could be so strong. She was so moved, was the ice lady, as to be almost incapable of speech.

"You are *my* man," she rasped. "I suppose you realise that?"

This was a crisis which Morgan had not desired. He had not supposed that the ice lady could take fire so easily. He attempted to handle the situation with the bantering tone which had pleased her before.

"Dear lady," he began.

She stopped him with a gesture wholly feline.

"Enough of that! That's how we began; but things between people like ourselves change; are always changing, rapidly changing, culminating. That kind of talk belongs to the last chapter."

She seized him by the arm and almost dragged him across the hall to the now empty dining-room. There her manner changed completely. Before she had been furiously hostile; now she was all alluring sweetness.

The girl suddenly found herself in the tight embrace of a sinister figure who clapped his hand over her mouth, stifling her cry for help.

She slipped her arm around his neck; her passion, at any rate, was profoundly genuine.

"My darling," she breathed, "how I love you!"

Morgan's arms tightened around her. Was it tactics? Morgan told himself that it *was* tactics, that it was necessary to his plans that this intrigue should continue.

He had not expected that the brown-eyed Christine would rise from her couch and drift across the hall with the intention of going to her room. Probably through the open door of the dining-room she had heard something of the intense words which were spoken by Adela Black; and some impulse—which shows that her liking for Morgan was already stronger than she imagined—made her open the door and stand upon the threshold. Her face turned pale.

Morgan, who happened to be looking in her direction, met the clear, contemptuous stare of her appraising eyes, and hated himself to the bottom of his soul. No word was spoken.

After a long moment Christine turned and disappeared as noiselessly as she had entered.

Adela Black had not heard her, but she

realised that she held in her arms a man who was strangely cold.

She was clever enough to realise that no endearment would affect him, then; but, seeing as she did her own mischance, and the damage which she was doing to her fondest hopes, she could not but continue.

"My dear, what is it?"

Morgan drew a long breath and gently disengaged himself from her arms.

"I don't know. The devil perhaps walked over my grave. Let us smoke a cigarette together. Let us for a moment be sensible."

At the back of the Black's house was a broad balcony, covered by a lean-to of frosted glass. Out on that balcony, reclining in two of the chaises longues which it contained, Morgan and Adela Black smoked and talked.

With the face of Christine limned upon the darkness in front of his eyes, Morgan tried desperately to avoid the dangerous mood which so obviously led to a liaison which he did not desire, either for reasons of expediency, or because it appealed to him. He tried, but one might try with as much success to swim against a cataract. Adela Black read his thoughts with disconcerting readiness.

While this piquant situation was being created on the balcony below, Mellerby Black—in his secret room upon the first floor—was having a crisis of another kind.

He was interviewing a man whose existence Morgan had only suspected, but whose personality was to Black an enduring threat more fierce than that of the police.

Calhoun his name was, a lean fellow, with hairless, yellow face and terrible blue eyes, which expressed only intelligence and an indomitable will.

That he was for the moment using his own personality instead of playing one of the hundred character parts which he assumed with such incredible ease, was merely a coincidence.

So accustomed was this queer man Calhoun to the use of disguise, that even Black was astonished when he saw him as he actually was.

"Calhoun—The Killer," that was his monniker in the underworld of London and America.

Two years before, in an evil hour, Mellerby Black had fallen in with Calhoun during one of his impersonations, and had made the incredible mistake of attempting to subject "The Killer" to the subtle blackmail in which Mellerby Black specialised.

Calhoun had not only snapped his fingers at Black's threats, but, realising the tremendous abilities of Black for docketing and arranging information, and his extraordinary flare for divining chinks in the armour of those who are respected by the world, he had turned upon and exploited Mellerby Black to his own ends.

His was the stronger, the more ruthless personality, and the two men had immediately found themselves in the relation of master and servant.

Calhoun ordered, and Black obeyed. Black was always the tool. If either of them needed to come into the limelight, that unenviable position was fulfilled by Black. Calhoun, as was his custom, worked in the dark, and never allowed a word of evidence to exist which might be used against him.

He was giving one of his concise orders at this moment. The man, Vigilant, had published an article in the morning's "Daily Record" relating to the disappearance of certain well-known men, and he had advanced a theory so near to the truth that the two men had come together to discuss the danger which threatened them.

"It seems to me," said Calhoun in his sneering fashion, "that you, Black, have lost your nerve about this fellow. Had it been anybody else on earth you would have set your precious card indexes to work, and turned out something against him—something which might be used to keep him quiet.

"Just because he uses a nom de guerre he appears to intimidate you. Find out who he is, and leave me to deal with him. You will say, perhaps, that you don't know exactly how to set about it; the answer to that is easy.

"You don't know Vigilant, it is true, but you know his editor, or you know something about his editor, which amounts to the same thing. You know, I am quite sure, at least one director of the firm which runs the paper. Put the screws on; make them choke up the information which we require.

"It is not a long job; I'll sit here and smoke a cigar while you do it. Come on, man, get to work, and let us find out what your card indexes are good for."

Black pulled down one or two of his dossiers from their shelves, made some notes on a piece of paper, and got to work with the telephone. He was confident of success; this systematized scandal and gossip, which he was for ever accumulating, testing, and cross-indexing, seemed to give him a hold on almost every important person in London.

Within a few minutes he was talking with the director of the firm which published Vigilant's newspaper; and, after a few persuasive insinuations, he got what he wanted. He replaced the receiver upon the telephone bracket with a shaking hand.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he said. "We are in the cart now, and no mistake!"

Calhoun smiled his evil smile, and watched the smoke of his cigar curling up towards the ceiling.

"Well," he said, "what's the trouble?"

"Only this," Black told him, "and nothing but this: Our friend Morgan and this fellow Vigilant are one and the same man!"

Mellerby Black and Calhoun looked at each other in consternation.

"But, good gosh!" said Black. "He knows everything—we are done for!"

Calhoun smiled.

"The man knows something," he admitted, "but it is not we who are lost—it is Morgan himself."

Mellerby Black held up his hand.

"No killing. I won't have any killing here!"

Calhoun looked at him with astonishment.

The disguise completed, the crooks made cautious preparation to remove the drugged girl from the hotel.

"You," he said, "to tell me what you will have and what you won't have."

"You won't have killing? You'll have what I say. Supposing it suited my purpose here and now to bump you off?"

He tapped his finger-nails upon his front teeth—a queer mannerism with which he was afflicted—and looked at the quaking Mellerby with an expression wholly fiendish.

"What is to stop me? Nobody knows of this room. My presence in the house is not suspected. Your dead body might lie here for weeks, and when it was discovered no one would connect the affair with me. What is to stop me?

"I don't kill you," he went on, "because you are useful. But Morgan is a danger—and dangers must be removed. I will kill Morgan, and I will do it when and where I select. I assure you, Mellerby Black, that I shall not ask your advice. Where is Morgan now?"

"Downstairs, somewhere."

"Good! Well, now, I'll tell you what to do. Send Morgan on another errand like the little trip to Brooke Street."

The reference to Brooke Street caused a second explosion from Black.

"Brooke Street! Why, at Brooke Street Morgan killed a man. He killed Mountjoy. We can shop him for that."

"No, you can't. He will tell the truth and get away with it. It may surprise you to know, incidentally, that Morgan did not kill Mountjoy. I know who killed Mountjoy. Just for once I know more than you."

The "Killer" leaned back in his chair, pressing the tips of his fingers together in reflection.

"Let me see. What would be the best venue? Can't use Brooke Street again. What about my place in Soho? I am thinking of leaving it, so that no inconvenience would be caused.

"I know——"

Calhoun banged his fist upon the table and burst out laughing.

". . . send him after me. Give him my address and tell him to get me. That's a good one. That's a prize joke."

THE BOMB.

SLOVAK HOUSE, the address which Mellerby Black had given Morgan, was a high, narrow, brick-fronted structure, the ground floor of which was occupied by an establishment devoted to pâtisseries et bonbons, while its several upper floors were occupied, one by a dramatic agent, and the remainder by private individuals.

Morgan, to whom the name of the man whom he was to seek was not as unfamiliar as Black may have supposed, hesitated for some time before entering the building.

He stood looking reflectively into the confectioner's window, and just when he had made a move as if to enter the building and climb the stairs, checked himself and turned irresolutely away.

Reflected in the plate-glass window in front of him, he had seen a man who was standing upon the far side of the road and was apparently watching himself.

Having walked some distance along Compton Street, he crossed to the other side, and came back so that he, and the man who had been watching him, should meet.

The shadower was looking at the menu card of a restaurant, and Morgan, halting beside him, became to all appearances interested in the same bill of fare.

When at length he moved away, a tightly-folded fragment of paper was gripped between his fingers, and the other man, who had handed him the note, suddenly lost interest in himself and disappeared.

Once more Morgan came over to the confectioners, and there, with the greatest precaution against being observed, opened out the paper and read it carefully.

"Mellerby Black is acquainted with your identity."

That was all. The note was not even initialed, but it did not need to be. Morgan had recognised the man who had followed him.

So Black was acquainted with his identity. That was interesting. Morgan now realised that the commission Black had given him was, in all probability, a trap. To what lengths the man was prepared to go, Morgan had not decided, but it seemed to him likely that the sky was the limit.

He thought things over, standing there in front of the confectioners, and smiling his whimsical lop-sided smile, then, after having exchanged a few words with the confectioner, he climbed the stairs to the second floor.

He had been instructed to find a man named Calhoun, who was, like Mountjoy, "offensive" to Black, and this Calhoun was to be found at the room of one Wilhelm von Mülke.

He reckoned that his previous commission had been a bona-fide one—he was equally certain that this commission was nothing of the sort.

The name of Calhoun, when uttered in Morgan's hearing, had always been coupled with innuendo, nobody appearing to know exactly what the man Calhoun was good for or bad for, but they appeared agreed that, at any rate, he was dangerous.

On the assumption that he was indeed dangerous, Morgan ascended those uncarpeted stairs as discreetly as at Brooke Street, Leyton, he had made his way into the passage before hearing the conversation which had ended in tragedy.

At each landing he turned and scrutinised the space behind him. He had no desire to receive a bullet in the back. He liked to have all his enemies in front of him where he could see them.

Von Mülke's door was one of several upon a dark, narrow landing. How there was room in the restricted width of the building for all these tenements, Morgan could only decide by supposing that its upper floors overlapped buildings on either side.

Slipping a mask across his eyes, he opened Von Mülke's door without a formal knock and putting his hand upon the style near the hinges, pushed gently until it had swung right back.

In front of him was part of an ugly room covered with linoleum and furnished with a deal table and windsor chairs. On two of

the windsor chairs which came within scope of his vision, men were seated. Morgan knew neither of them, but their looks were not prepossessing. They appeared to be waiting. for something. Morgan conjectured that he was that something.

He displayed for their benefit a large metallic object which he was holding in his right hand.

"This," he said slowly and distinctly, "is a Mills bomb. I have taken out the pin, and I am holding the lever in place, as you see, by means of my fingers. If anything should happen to me—if, for instance, I should chance to knock my head—then, obviously, I should be obliged to release this lever. I do not suppose it would kill everybody here, but he would be a lucky man who escaped unhurt. I am now about to enter and pass the time of day with Mr. Calhoun."

He walked forward until he stood at the edge of the deal table.

An individual, who had been posted behind the door, came sheepishly from his place and sat down beside his confederates.

Morgan looked round. There were five men altogether. In addition to Calhoun, upon whom Morgan fixed without hesitation as being the leader, there were Calhoun's servant—the man Mappin, called the "Knifer"—Black's agent, Donetti, another of Calhoun's men nicknamed "Scarface," and still another, whose identity Morgan never discovered.

Mappin was holding by its blade a long knife and looking expectantly at his patron for permission to use it. He lacked the imagination to fear the threat of the bomb, and would no doubt have thrown the knife and taken his chance in the explosion which followed.

The others remained inactive, and waited, like Mappin himself, for Calhoun to give them the lead.

"I am Mr. Calhoun," said the Killer. "What may I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Morgan smiled.

"You might take your wig off," he said.

Calhoun's smile did not alter. He wore it like a mask.

"Or I might not."

"Just as you please," said the young man with a wave of the hand. "If you are sensitive upon the matter, we will not insist on your doing so."

He looked round.

"You know, Calhoun, I am very pleased at this opportunity of seeing yourself and your friends. May I say friends? I nearly said confederates; but friends sounds so much nicer."

"I have heard a lot about you and have always wondered what you were like, but then, of course, that is a thing which nobody knows. That is your pose, eh? The man who is never two days the same?

"I may be wrong," he continued, "I may be dreadfully wrong, Calhoun, but I do not think that you will ever deceive me. Your eyes, you know, are quite distinctive. I have known two men with eyes like yours; both dead now. Went to the Chair, as they put it across the Atlantic. Not acquainted with each other, but both belonging to your type. If we are going to have the pleasure of your company on this side for very long, I expect that you will hang. Henceforth, whenever I meet a man with coloured spectacles, I shall suspect that he is trying to conceal eyes like yours."

He turned slightly to face the man on Calhoun's left.

"And this fellow here, who caresses his knife so earnestly, he will be your infamous servant, whose name is always coupled with yours.

"What an interesting meeting this is! Calhoun and his servant and a bunch of cheap killer-crooks assembled to help him. You did me considerable honour, Calhoun, to think five men would be necessary. I should have thought that you and your fellow could have done all that was required."

"You know, of course," he continued, toying with the Mills bomb so carelessly that at least one of the crooks present more than once drew a long breath of apprehension, "you know that Mellerby Black is acquainted with my identity."

Calhoun nodded.

"You are the person who calls himself Vigilant."

"That is so," Morgan agreed. "Vigilant, of the 'Daily Record.' And to-morrow," he went on, "I shall have a nice little article for my paper about your courteous reception."

He hesitated.

"By the way," he questioned, "who is Von Mülke? I should like to view him.

"What? He does not come on in this act—that is a pity. Don't say that he has disappeared. Don't tell me that he has been invited to one of Mellerby Black's celebrated parties and then gone out and walked off the edge of the earth, as Mellerby Black's visitors so often do?

"There is a mystery there, Calhoun, a mystery to which I am giving a lot of thought. I am a good guesser, and if you do not take early steps to prevent me wondering about this riddle I shall guess the answer. Then where will you be?"

He turned his back on the five crooks and walked towards the door.

"Where will you be?" he chuckled over his shoulder.

Calhoun was the only one of the five who did not give way to any manifestation of rage.

"That young man," he said slowly, "is hot stuff. I shall have to take steps to deal with him, very special steps, because I perceive that he is dangerous. That bomb of his, that was a very unexpected factor in the situation. It was because he knew that we had rumbled him that he brought that thing along.

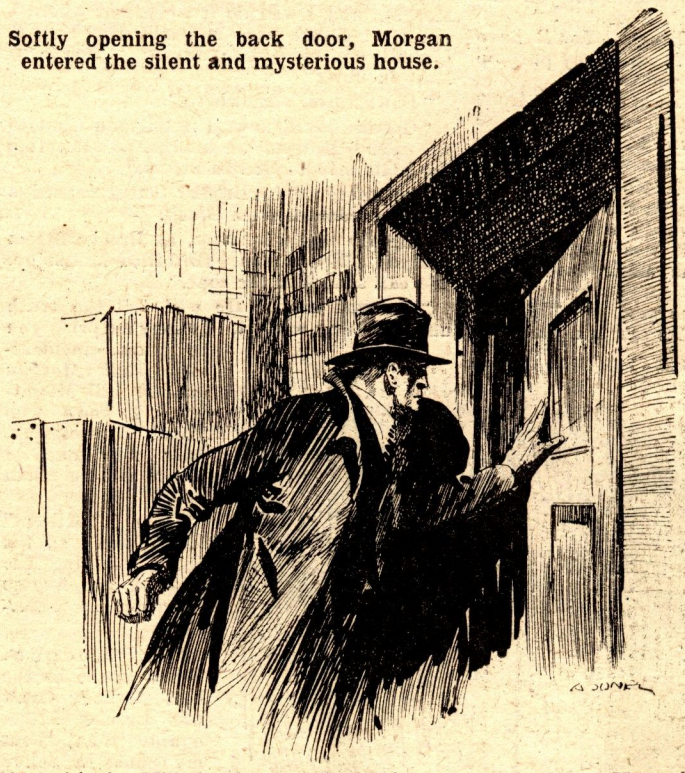
"What did he know? Obviously, the man who informed Black also informed Morgan himself, and he has only had an hour to do it in. They move quickly, these fellows on the 'Daily Record.' I will say that for them."

He got up, kicked open the door of his bed-room and disappeared.

His servant, Mappin, immediately turned on the remaining three men like a hostile watchdog.

"You can get out, you three," he snarled, showing his yellow teeth. "The master's going to rest, and he won't want you blethering about here. You get out and clear off. When we want you again, we'll let you know."

Softly opening the back door, Morgan entered the silent and mysterious house.



Scarface was the only one who showed any resentment of this cavalier treatment, and on him Mappin turned with the knife gripped between his fingers and his huge head sunk between his shoulders, staring fiercely out of his little bloodshot eyes.

"Oh, Scarface," he said, as earnestly as if in prayer, "I should like to stick you. Give me just a shadow of an excuse to stick you, that is all I want. So easy, just one swift movement, and—phut!—no more."

It is not surprising that Scarface declined to oblige.

He was the last to descend the stairs. Not knowing why he did so, he stopped and looked into the window of the confectioner's shop. His look became fixed, and an expression of grotesque astonishment came into the man's face. He walked into the shop and pointed with shaking forefinger at a number of large, egg-shaped objects heaped upon a shelf and priced at two shillings and sixpence each.

"What," he said stupidly, "what are those?"

The little Frenchman, who was behind the counter, spread his hands in an inimitable gesture.

"That? The Meels bomb—it is good, eh? Only cardboard covered with paint; but it look—how does one say?—dangereux. Oui trés dangereux. And yet——"

He opened one of the bombs and a heap of chocolates tumbled out upon the counter.

"Monsieur would like one?" he questioned.

Scarface replied in a language which was neither French nor English to the effect that he would not.

At an emergency meeting between Calhoun and Black which took place several hours after Morgan got away from Slovak House, Calhoun was at pains to excuse his failure. The man was in some ways passionless, but egotism he possessed to an astonishing degree.

He told Black as much as he thought fit of the incident of the bomb, omitting to mention the humiliating fact that it had been filled with chocolates.

"Can't be helped," Calhoun's apologia continued. "Morgan would be a lot better dead; but at the same time, he hasn't any knowledge which is going to be dangerous to us." He leaned back in his chair and, with his characteristic gesture, tapped his fingernails upon his teeth. "What does Morgan know, after all? He suspects that some of these people who disappear may do so because they have proved themselves objectionable to us, but we are reasonably safe for all that. Safe, that is, unless——"

"Unless what?" questioned Black.

"Unless Morgan can discover a motive. He has probably dropped upon the fact that both Anerley and Clifford have left considerable sums of money to almost unknown charities. There is nothing in that, unless young Morgan can link up the charities with ourselves; and, so far as I can see, he isn't likely to succeed in doing so."

Mellerby Black rubbed his chin reflectively. He was not so sure. "If that confounded girl," he murmured to himself, "if that confounded girl had not seen Brabazon with me."

Calhoun took his feet from the table and

allowed himself to drop forward in his chair so that his parchment-like face, with its extraordinarily pale eyes, was only a foot or so from Black. "What's this? Christine met you with Brabazon?"

Mellerby Black shifted uncomfortably. He seemed to be attempting to avert his face away from the glance of Calhoun, and to be unable to do so.

"You made me have her here," he mumbled.

"She did that?" insisted Calhoun.

Black nodded.

"It could not be helped. Not my fault. I told Brabazon not to come here under any circumstances. He disobeyed me, and Christine saw him."

Calhoun's thin-lipped mouth was rigid, his iron eyes, the eyes of a killer, were screwed up in an effort of concentration. "And she knows," he said, "that Brabazon is the principal of the Home for Inebriates?"

"I am afraid so," agreed Mellerby Black, "and I am afraid that nothing will stop her talking. We are in the cart, Calhoun."

Calhoun smiled.

"There is something," he said, with a strange inflection, "which will prevent Christine Anerley from being indiscreet, and that something is——" He made a gesture in the air with his bony hands as if wiping something out.

Black paled. He had become a hard man with these years of chicanery, but he had a certain liking for Christine; in addition, he had an extreme distaste for running risks, and ever since, in an unlucky hour for him, he had attempted to make Calhoun a victim to his own peculiar variety of blackmail, he had been compelled to take more risks than he cared about. "Is that necessary," he questioned.

"If it were not necessary, I would not suggest it."

Calhoun simply did not listen to Black's feeble arguments against the desperate step which he had decided upon. "We cannot do anything here," he said, "you had better kick the girl out."

"Suppose she goes home," said Black. "Morgan watching her, he would find it easier to look after her at home than he does now that she is here."

Calhoun nodded to show that he had heard.

"I know all that, but I will see that she does not go home, and if once I can get her to an hotel, I will make the usual arrangements without any difficulty."

"Do you mean," said Black with astonishment, "that you can get the girl away from an hotel?"

Calhoun laughed.

"Quite easily—Mrs. Black will have to help us, that is all."

ABDUCTION.

CHRISTINE ANERLEY moved into the Sumurun Hotel after lunch upon the following day.

On finding that the Blacks had withdrawn their opposition to her proposed departure, she had packed and travelled in a taxi-cab to the flat in Berkeley Square.

A policeman was talking to Colonel Anerley's manservant in the hall. The servant recognised Christine and came forward.

"Excuse me, Miss Christine," he said, "but if you were thinking of returning to your flat, I am afraid you will find it unfit to live in just at present, there has been a burglary or something, we can't quite understand it. The place has been turned upside down. If I were you I should visit some friends or go to an hotel."

This advice the girl had decided to take. A glance at the once luxuriously furnished flat, had persuaded her that it would need considerable expenditure of time and money before she could stay in it even for a night. Wanton damage had been done to almost every article in every room. To judge by appearances, some destructive person with a sharp knife had methodically slashed upholstery and bedclothes, distributing the ruined material about the floors.

Not having any friends upon whom she cared to descend with her belongings, Christine had sought the servant's advice as to an hotel and caused herself to be driven to the place where she now was.

Christine decided that it was not going to be too bad. The charges were not heavy, and the first floor room which had been assigned to her possessed a balcony which looked out upon spacious gardens.

She had moved about her room for the best part of an hour, placing her passessions in drawers and wardrobe; and, immediately before descending to take a cup of tea, she obeyed an impulse and walked out upon the balcony.

The minute she emerged from the glazed door which gave access thereto, she perceived with a start of fear that she was within arms' length of a strange man with terrible eyes. It was Calhoun, the Killer.

Assisted by a porter, Calhoun carried his victim down the stairs, and out of the hotel.

She had never met Calhoun, but his appearance was sufficiently terrifying to provoke an exclamation of fear.

That exclamation was never uttered.

The man's sinewy arm passed around her waist, and his free hand was clapped over her mouth. With this purchase he literally lifted the girl back into her room and deposited her, half fainting, in an arm-chair.

Another man came from the direction of the balcony and advanced to a point immediately behind the arm-chair in which the girl was seated.

She felt the pin-prick of an hypodermic syringe upon her arm. For five seconds the sting of it continued and then she felt as if an invisible hand had seized a part of her brain and was slowly constricting it.

Calhoun's grip relaxed to give the girl a chance to breathe. She drew a deep breath for the purpose of uttering a scream, and then found that the effort was beyond her.

Calhoun released her altogether, and still she remained sitting in the chair, looking straight before her with glassy eyes.

The Killer lifted one eyelid with professional dexterity and touched the eye. The girl did not flinch.

"Wonderful stuff," commented the Killer, with an air almost of congratulation, "wonderful stuff, Miss Anerley, this curare, paralyses the motary functions of the brain without affecting the sensory parts. Very useful to people in our position."

Another person entered from the balcony. It was Adela Black. She seated herself in a chair exactly beside the one occupied by the paralysed Christine, and Calhoun, receiving a make-up box from his man, began to cover her face with cocoa butter.

"Your hair," he said to this other person, whom, because of her position Christine could not turn to see, "will have to be coloured, Mrs. Black. Fortunately for us it is very easy to dye this light flaxen hair to any hue that we require. For the rest, your face is thinner than that of Miss Anerley, and your complexion is not so good. We can alter all these things. Miss Anerley is not well known in the hotel, and if you follow my instructions, you will have no difficulty in getting away with the impersonation. If Morgan sees you, of course, you are for it, but that is a risk which we must take; we will attend to Morgan himself in due course."

These remarks were broken by most rapid and expert work with the make-up set.

Although Christine could not turn her head even to observe who it was that sat beside her, she realised that for some reason, Adela Black was about to attempt an impersonation of herself, and that fact, together with the horrifying appearance of the Killer, filled her with fear.

"I expect I can do it," said Adela Black coolly. "If Morgan turns up, I shall have to dodge him, otherwise the thing will not be difficult.

"But," she continued. "What about this little fool here? How are you going to get her out of the hotel?"

Calhoun chuckled, at the same time adding another dexterous touch to improve the growing resemblance between his subject and his model.

"Perfectly easy," he boasted.

"In the next room there is one of those wheeling chairs which are used for confirmed invalids. I arrived almost immediately after Miss Anerley, and in that chair I have brought my fellow, Mappin, explaining that he was my brother and that he was unable to walk because of spinal trouble. We had some difficulty in getting the room next to this one, but a judicious use of palm oil coupled with our insistence that the invalid must be above the ground floor because the air was better, left us in the end exactly where we wanted to be."

"When you, Mrs. Black, have walked downstairs, taken a cup of tea, exchanged a word with the management, and disappeared in a taxi-cab, we shall place Miss Anerley in the invalid chair, rig her up in the clothes Mappin wore, and which almost completely cover the face; and then, with great care, so as not to give pain to the 'invalid,' we will carry her down and out."

He chuckled.

"Down and out is a most appropriate expression."

Even Adela Black, hard as she was, looked at the Killer with amazement.

"I believe," she said, "that you like doing this sort of thing."

Calhoun laughed.

"Why not? It is interesting, you cannot deny that; also it is a necessity. It is the only way of avoiding trouble with a big T.

"I do not think," he said after a moment, "that we shall need to strip Miss Anerley, we can take other clothes of hers from her luggage. You had better have her wrist watch, that is rather characteristic, and here is that nice little rope of pearls which she wears round her neck. We will make you a present of these, Mrs. Black, for luck. Rather useful, but all the same, I recommend you not to keep them. Where you will change I leave to you, but I am confident that you will do it efficiently."

"You may count on that," said Adela Black. "After all, as you say, the game is not without necessity."

"I think," said Calhoun, and this was high praise from him, "that you are a really able woman."

Adela Black rose to her feet and walked backwards and forwards about the room trying to recapture from memory the gait and gestures of Christine. Her hair had been darkened by means of powder, her features had been raised here and there, the shape of her brows had been altered, and Calhoun's extraordinary skill in making up, coupled with the exchange of clothes, combined to create an almost perfect duplication of Christine's appearance. There was a slight difference in height, it is true, and this could hardly be disguised, but apart from that, there was almost no likelihood that any of the staff of the hotel would perceive that the lady who presently emerged from Room 202 was not the one to whom the keys had been handed an hour before.

Calhoun raised the insensible Christine in his arms.

He made the exposed journey across the balustrade as rapidly as possible. Mappin, displaying his yellow fangs in fiendish glee at the success of the enterprise, followed with the make-up case, and with a bundle of Adela's belongings under his arm.

They waited for several minutes while Calhoun reconnoitred the gardens beyond the balcony to make sure that his movements had not been observed, then they placed Christine in the spinal chair and began to dress her in a man's overcoat and a soft hat.

Before he was satisfied with the result, Calhoun found it necessary to add a touch or two of make-up to the face of the inanimate girl, and this he did as carelessly as if she had been indeed the waxen figure which she seemed.

With the hat pulled down over her brows, a big muffler wrapped round the lower part of her face, and the waterproof flap of the invalid chair drawn across her legs, Christine had now completely lost her own identity.

There would be little difficulty in passing her off as the supposed invalid who, a little while earlier, had been carried upstairs.

Mappin concealed himself in the wardrobe, and Calhoun rang the bell for a servant.

"I am afraid," he said courteously, to the man who answered his ring, "that my poor brother "—he indicated the figure in the chair —"is going to be a lot of trouble to you people. Perhaps we might as well start by expressing in a tangible form our appreciation of the fact."

He handed the man a Treasury note, and began to wheel the invalid chair towards the door.

"I shall need your assistance," he said, "only in descending the stairs. If you will walk in front, I think we can manage it between us quite easily. My brother is not a heavy man, and the chair itself weighs nothing. This way, if you don't mind."

Calhoun had avoided the use of the lift on the pretext that his brother's nerves would not permit it. The truth was that he dreaded the few moments of scrutiny at close quarters which is inevitable in such a confined space.

Holding the chair with his back turned to the occupant, the servant descended the short flight of stairs and watched Calhoun steer the chair across the vestibule through the swing doors.

"You are all right now, my dear fellow." Calhoun placed his hand upon the shoulder of the supposed patient. "I am just going to take you a short motor ride to give you an appetite for tea. I must have an open cab so that you can enjoy the sunshine."

His voice was vibrant with brotherly affection The cab containing the invalid chair and the solicitous Calhoun was driven away without anybody in the Hotel having the least suspicion that an abduction had taken place.

THE "SEA-WAIF."

MORGAN, because of his position on the "Daily Record," had a certain amount of pull with the Yard; thus it was that when he called at the Waterloo Pier Station of the River Police, it was Divisional-detective-inspector Cummins who received him.

Cummins had been a sailor, and, although because of his clean-shaven face, and his open-air life, he looked younger than he was, yet his face had the appearance of having been battered by experience, and his eyes the grim frown which comes of watch after watch spent looking into the teeth of a "Nor'-Easter."

He was not talkative, this man who controlled the River Police, and as Morgan decidedly was talkative, it fell to that young man to do the talking. Nevertheless, Morgan realised that time was valuable, and he stated his business in as few words as possible.

"It's about these disappearances," he said. "You've read about them, I expect. Colonel Anerley, Bertram Clifford, and Inspector Batswing. I have been following up the case, partly because my editor has instructed me to do so, and partly because—well, for reasons of my own.

"I have found out things. It is quite likely that by fortunate circumstances I have been able to discover matters unknown, even to the police. I have no doubt, however, that the question which I am going to ask you now has already been asked by your colleagues at Scotland Yard. It is this:

"Can you help us to trace any of the missing men?"

Inspector Cummins nodded. He had expected that question.

"You suspect, then, that the missing men are dead?"

"That is so, inspector. Two of these men each spent his last night—that we know of—at an hotel where he had never stayed before. Neither of them had luggage, from which we may infer that when they went out in the morning they did not expect to remain away from home. Each of them left the hotel after breakfast and disappeared."

Cummins nodded several times as if to remind Morgan that these facts were common property.

"I am giving you a résumé of the matter," Morgan apologised, "because, if you have the circumstances in mind, your assistance will be doubly useful.

"You realise, of course—as every thinking person must have realised—that there is too much similarity about these disappearances for them to be independent. They must have a common factor, and, in my opinion, that common factor is a man.

"I have even a theory—a wild one, I admit, but one which I should like to back with good money—that the man behind these disappearances is an individual known as Calhoun. The fact that Calhoun tried to arrange a different sort of disappearance for me is an argument in favour of my theory."

"But," objected the inspector, "each of these two men, so far as we know, spent that last night and morning quite alone. If they had wished to communicate with the police, or anybody else, they had every opportunity to do so. We have no reason to suppose that either of them was under compulsion to behave as he did."

Morgan listened with a smile.

"Yes," he said, "I have thought that out for myself; and yet, both these independent persons behaved exactly in the same way immediately before their disappearances. How do you account for that?"

Inspector Cummins beat a tattoo upon his desk-top for a long minute.

"I can't account for it. Can you?"

"We may wash out," Morgan continued oracularly, "the possibility that these two individuals deliberately imitated each other. We will also wash out co-incidence. What remains?"

There was a silence, which Morgan ended by stating that he had a theory.

"Theories," said the inspector with amusement, "appear to be your strong suit, Mr. Morgan."

"You noticed that," returned the young man; "well, I am going to offer you some more of my theories. To start with, these men who have disappeared, all three of them are dead—murdered. Two of them were murdered for monetary gain; and the other one, Batswing, because he knew too much.

"They tell us that Colonel Anerley had breakfast at the Corot Hotel on the morning of the sixteenth of this month. If my theories are worth anything, Colonel Anerley was at that moment a dead man."

The inspector looked at Morgan with sharp attention.

"And the same thing, I suppose, in your opinion, applies both to Clifford and Batswing?"

"The same thing," agreed Morgan, "applies to both of them."

"Yet," the inspector pointed out, "two of them were recognised by acquaintances, and each of them signed his name in the visitor's book; their signatures have been confirmed as genuine."

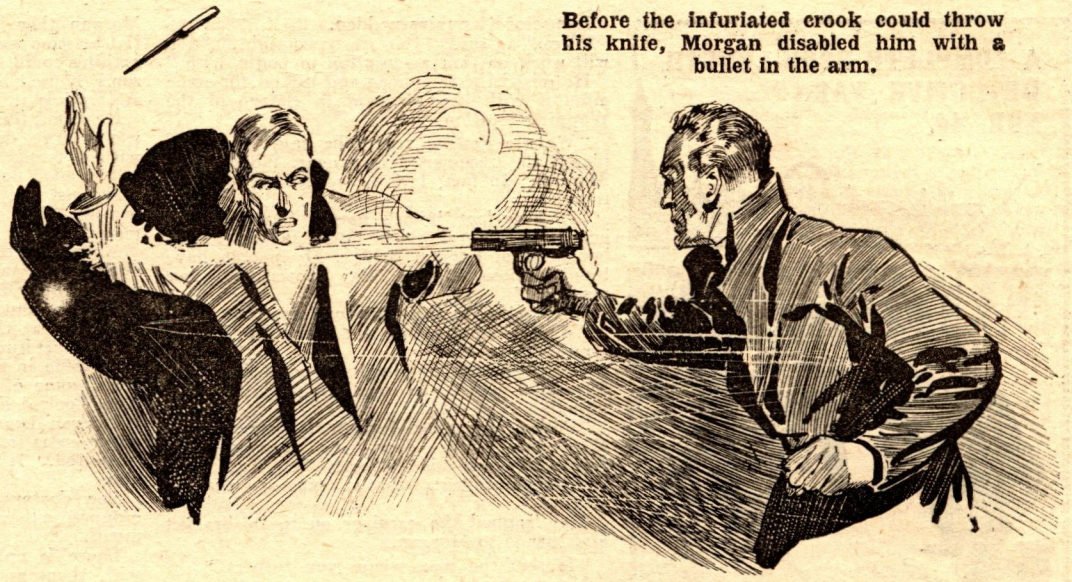
Morgan lighted a cigarette. This amateur detective work appealed to his sense of the theatrical.

"They were recognised," he said, "by acquaintances. Mark that, by 'acquaintances' not by friends. Not one of them was recognised by a person who was intimate with him.

"Colonel Anerley was recognised, as he crossed Hyde Park, by a policeman, with whom he occasionally exchanged a few remarks. He was recognised in the hotel by a waiter who once—several years before—had been employed at one of the Colonel's clubs. They were not people who knew Colonel Anerley well. A similar criticism can be applied in the other cases.

"Then, as for the matter of the signatures, a skilled forger is able, occasionally, to sign a man's name so that the man himself would admit it to be his own signature; and these signatures have not yet been scrutinized by an expert. So far as I know, they have not been photographed. If my theory is good, they will be found to be false. I have already advised the Yard of my supposition."

"What you are suggesting to me," said Inspector Cummins, "is that these three men were impersonated during the last night of which we have any record. Presumably



Before the infuriated crook could throw his knife, Morgan disabled him with a bullet in the arm.

you are suggesting that the purpose of such an impersonation was to provide an alibi for the persons who destroyed them." Morgan agreed.

"That is so, inspector. It's a wild-cat theory, I admit; but, mind you, I have had an advantage in seeing something of their enemies. I have attempted to put myself in the position of a would-be criminal; and, working back from those coincidences —of which I have spoken—I evolved the impersonation theory as the only one which would meet the case.

"It implies, as you can see for yourself, that the men are dead—murdered. I am afraid there is no getting away from that. If they were impersonated, they are murdered. I am working on that hypothesis now."

Inspector Cummins, with his elbows propped up upon his desk-top, continued to scrutinise the young man's face, with those shrewd, kindly eyes of a man who has followed the sea.

"You have come," he said, "to the old question of disposal. If those men were murdered, how were their bodies disposed of? And you come to me, because one theory —which would occur just as much to an amateur detective, as to one of ourselves—is that they may have been dropped into the river. You are going to ask me if my people have taken from the river any person resembling one of the three men who have disappeared."

Here the inspector reached for a sheaf of papers filed together; each of them being a printed form, and each giving a full description of some unfortunate found dead upon the river. It was all there in black and white; sex, height, weight, colouring of hair and eyes; and special marks which might lead to identification.

The average number of bodies taken from the river Thames in a single year exceeds a hundred, and the forms were numerous.

"There they all are," he said, offering the file to Morgan, "the most recent is on the top of the file. If you have the descriptions of the missing men, you can scrutinise the dockets for yourself, and see whether there is any resemblance.

"I may tell you," he added, "that this has already been done by my people; but, for your own satisfaction, I would rather it was done again by you."

Morgan took out his pocket-book. Of Anerley and of Clifford he had only the vague description furnished by photographs, and by the knowledge of intimate friends.

But of Batswing he had a complete identification paper. He started by sorting out the printed forms into two heaps, one of which could not possibly refer to Inspector Batswing, but the first heap he scrutinised with great care, only relegating it to the second heap when he was absolutely convinced that it was impossible that the police record, and the record in his own notebook should refer to the same men.

Thus with painstaking care he read each one from beginning to end, until at length a long moment before deciding that it was his hand; and over that one he hesitated for a long moment before deciding that it was worth consideration.

"I am afraid," he said at length, "that my scrutiny has been as futile as that of your assistants; but, inspector, there is just this resemblance between the description of Inspector Batswing, and the description of an unknown.

"Inspector Batswing had a rose tottooed upon his left forearm. This unfortunate man, who is described here, was tattooed upon both forearms; and, in addition, the hour of his death fits in with my theories.

"He was taken from the river on the morning of the eighteenth, and medical evidence was to the effect that he had been dead for eight hours."

He hesitated.

"I don't know whether you think that that is good enough to follow up?"

He placed both the printed form and his own notebook in front of the inspector. Inspector Cummins gave them the once-over.

"I see," he pointed out, "that this man whom we found had fair hair, while the hair of Inspector Batswing is described as being dark. Otherwise, and except for the difference in the description of the tattooing, I will allow that both descriptions might apply to the same man."

He stood up, and pressed the bell which projected from the surface of his desk.

"The mortuary is right here, and I see by the supplementary form that the body has not yet been removed. You had better come along and see the poor fellow yourself. It will not be a nice sight, but I don't think you will mind that."

The two men followed a uniformed constable, of the River Police, to a narrow door which stood between two louvred windows. Inside, at regular intervals up the wall, were broad slabs made of thick slate.

On one of these slabs, and covered by a sheet, was the body of a man. Morgan uncovered the face of the dead with a sense of disappointment. There was little or no resemblance.

As he remembered Batswing, the man had had heavy brows, and rather long dark hair. This dead man in the mortuary had little or no hair upon his face, and the hair of his head was flaxen.

"I am afraid," he said slowly, "that this is going to be no use to us."

He rolled the sheet back so as to expose one of the tattooed forearms.

"Of course," he said, rather helplessly, many men of a certain class are tattooed upon the forearms."

Inspector Cummins agreed.

"That is so."

"Inspector Batswing, if I remember rightly, is described as being decorated with a rose. This design, whatever it is——"

He stopped.

"What is it, by the way? I never saw such a confusion in my life. What's it supposed to be?"

He stepped back and switched on the electric light. Outside was the sunshine of a summer evening, but inside the mortuary the light was dim.

With the additional help of the electrics both men again scrutinised the exposed forearm of the unknown. At almost the same moment they uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Both had perceived that the confusion of tattooed marks before them included the design of a rose!

"We will send for a photograph," murmured Inspector Cummins, "there is something here which must be looked into at once."

They returned to the station office, and while the photograph was being telephoned for, Inspector Cummins—who was now more excited than Morgan himself—began to carry the young man's arguments a step further.

"So," he said, "if appearances are to be believed, poor Batswing was murdered and thrown into the river. We have proof of his murder in the fact that someone had used considerable trouble and skill to alter his appearance; bleaching his hair, shaving off his eyebrows, and confusing the tattoo marks.

"We will go back, if you are agreeable, to these printed forms, and do our best to find if any of them could refer to Anerley or Clifford."

This time it was Inspector Cummins, himself, who performed the work of elimination; and now, having in mind the possibility of physical differences intentionally created, he contrived to pick out several other forms, any of which might apply either to Anerley or to Clifford.

"These cases," he said, "have been taken away, and I don't know whether we could refer to them. In any event, a scrutiny might tell us little.

"Here, you see, we had one with platinum dentures. Do you think it would be too painful to Miss Anerley and Mrs. Clifford, if we telephoned these ladies and made inquiries?"

Answering his own question in the affirmative, with some reluctance the inspector gave orders for the telephone calls to be put through, and passed on to another factor of the situation.

"I see," he said, "that in addition to the body which we suspect to be that of Batswing, three other persons were found in the same part of the river; that is, immediately above or below London Bridge, at dates which are compatible with your theory being correct.

"Now, assuming, Mr. Morgan, that your theory is correct, and that these three unfortunate men were all deposited in the river, we have to ask ourselves how it was that they got there. Were they thrown from a bridge, or a wharf? Or were they dropped from a boat?

"A bridge I think we may wash out as an impossibility. A river-side wharf is probable; so, too, is a motor-launch."

"I think," suggested Morgan, "that for reasons of my own, with which I have not acquainted you, I should like the theory of the motor-launch to be followed up.

"I may as well tell you," he explained, "that an address which I have come upon, belonging to some friend or accomplice of the suspected persons, is a place in Teddington. Assuming that the house in question backs upon the river, and that the man possesses a motor-launch, it would be comparatively easy for him to exploit these facts to the advantage of his employers."

Inspector Cummins nodded.

"Yes," he said, "you are quite right. "We will work on that assumption to begin with."

He seized the telephone and talked for some minutes with the sergeant in charge of the Wapping Station.

"We are getting near," he said, as he replaced the receiver, "very near, indeed, Mr. Morgan. In fact, I think we are on to something.

"A forty-foot launch named Sea-Waif has been seen several times lately in the neighbourhood of London Bridge. My people have been curious as to the reason for her presence."

He reached to the telephone again.

"Wait a minute; we will have the Thames Conservators."

The inspector obtained the additional information which he required within a few seconds.

"Police speaking—forty-foot launch—Sea-Waif—to whom does she belong?—Mr. Brabazon— and his address?—The Weir, Teddington—Excellent, that's exactly what I wanted."

He dropped the receiver on to its bracket and turned to Morgan.

"Is that the man whom you suspect?"

Morgan nodded.

"I think so, I am not sure. I saw only part of his name and address, which I have told you about, but what I did see agreed with the one which has been given you."

Inspector Cummins stood up.

"We are on to something, Mr. Morgan. We are on to something big. You had better stand by, we shall want you. You have been very useful already. It'll be a scoop for your paper; and, by Jove, you deserve it!"

A uniformed policeman tapped upon the door and entered with two typewritten slips. The first was a communication over the telephone from Mrs. Clifford, stating that her husband had not possessed artificial teeth: and the second referred to the call which had been put through to Christine Anerley.

Inspector Cummins whistled with apprehension when he had read it through.

"Miss Anerley," he said slowly, "disappeared from her hotel at four-thirty this afternoon, and all trace of her has been lost."

DOCTOR BRANDT.

"DEATH appeared to have occurred about twelve hours previously!"

This phrase persisted in Morgan's mind as if he saw it printed in front of him. Christine had disappeared at four-thirty, and he knew, beyond any question, that unless a miracle occurred to save her; she, too, was destined to be taken from the river, to pass in due course to the mortuary.

Asking for a 'phone call to be put through to summon the assistance of Sergeant Havers, Morgan rushed out to the Embankment and hailed a taxicab.

"Teddington," he ordered, "and do it as quickly as you can."

After that he lay back upon the cushions of the cab, consumed by fierce impatience at every traffic block which occasioned the loss of a few precious minutes.

He was taking a risk, and he knew it. Because the Sea-Waif had been concerned in the other disappearances, or appeared to have been so, there was no reason why the Sea-Waif, or the premises of its owner, should be used again. Indeed, there were clearly reasons against this.

The affair was, in many ways, different. Obviously, something had taken place which caused the disappearance of the girl to be vital to the plans of Black, and, if Morgan's suspicions were justified, of Calhoun, also.

Morgan was unarmed, and had no idea of what steps he should take to deal with the situation which would arise when he came to Teddington. If, when he had called at the house of Mr. Brabazon, he was told that Mr. Brabazon was not at home, then it appeared he would have no alternative but to await events, seeking, if necessary, the help of the local police.

But, in the mood of fierce anger which beset Morgan then, such passivity was impossible. If Christine was not at Brabazon's house, then nothing could save her. If she was in Brabazon's house, he would get her out, or die attempting it.

He found the place without any difficulty. It was a large, detached and well-kept residence, with a tennis lawn at the side, and a carefully-tended flower-garden in front.

Against the door was a small brass plate bearing the inscription: "D. Brabazon," and, underneath it, a second name: "Dr. Brandt."

Morgan pressed the bell button, and the door was answered by a parlourmaid in cap and apron. The young man asked for Mr. Brabazon, and was shown into a kind of waiting-room, at the left of the hall.

The furniture was good but formal, and on a table in the centre was a litter of magazines, some of which were out of date. The place looked like the ante-room to a surgery.

Morgan began to divine that Dr. Brandt might come into the picture more than he had suspected. It was Dr. Brandt who received him.

The doctor was a pale man, with close-cropped yellow hair, blue eyes, and a smiling mouth.

There is no question that most men carry with them an aura, which to one who can perceive it, is a certain index to character. Morgan's intuition had done much to give him his standing in his profession of a journalist, but now it failed him. He received no impression whatever about Dr. Brandt. The man was well-bred and courteous, and listened attentively to what Morgan had to say; but, of personality, he betrayed nothing.

Morgan put all his cards upon the table. It was, he imagined, the only way to deal with the situation. He told Dr. Brandt exactly how the movements of the Sea-Waif had become suspicious, and inquired whether there was any possibility that Christine Anerley was at that address.

The doctor listened attentively, and, when Morgan had finished, dashed the young man's hopes by a slow negative movement of the head.

"You know," he questioned, "you know, I suppose, what this establishment is?"

Morgan replied that he did not know.

The doctor toyed with his spectacles.

"Ha, that makes things a little difficult! This place, Mr. Morgan, is a home for a—ah—inebriates. People who are slaves to alcohol are sent here by their friends, and are subjected to a—ah—measure of restraint. There is a fiction, you will understand, that the restraint does not exist. That being so, you will, I beg of you, do nothing to wound the feelings of my patients.

"I say 'my' patients," the doctor went on, "because Mr. Brabazon, although nominally in charge of the establishment, is a kind of sleeping partner."

The doctor placed his spectacles upon his nose, as if, by their use, he could more clearly observe Morgan's reception of his statement.

"It is, in short, a commercial concern. An organised charity, certainly. We receive here persons who could not afford to pay an adequate fee; and, in order to support them, we are obliged to accept donations. We publish a balance-sheet. If you are interested, I shall be pleased to show it to you."

Morgan waved the balance-sheet aside; he was becoming impatient. If Christine were not here, then he would be compelled to seek elsewhere; but first, he was accepting nobody's assurance of the fact. He was determined to find out for himself.

"Naturally," said the doctor, with immediate consideration, "you are impatient. You must forgive my selfishness in troubling you with details of the organisation. My excuse is that, without understanding something of these details, you might cause a scene offensive to my patients.

"I don't want that to happen, Mr. Morgan. I am most anxious that that should not happen. You will agree, I am sure, that I am receiving your representations with sympathy, and in return I want you to do what you can to spare the feelings of these unfortunate people."

He stood up and placed his hand upon the door-handle.

"In the circumstances, I am not going to ask you to believe me when I say that Miss Anerley is certainly not here; and that I know nothing about the movements of the launch. I am going to ask you to look into these things for yourself; which, I am sure, is what you would prefer to do."

He hesitated.

"Would you prefer, Mr. Morgan, that I escorted you on your tour of inspection, or would you prefer to make your inspection unassisted? Believe me, you are perfectly welcome to do just as you please."

"For the moment," Morgan told him, "I will accept your escort, since you are so kind. Will you be good enough to start at the top of the house; we will then inspect every room in turn, and work downwards."

"There are other patients," the doctor warned him, "other patients, at present in the grounds, and those you will doubtless wish to see. As regards the house itself, I hope that it will be possible for you to enter every room, We shall see."

Morgan made no comment upon this statement, but he was resolved to see every room, at whatever cost to the feelings of the doctor and his patients.

At the top of the house were the servants' bed-rooms; on the next floor were half a dozen rooms devoted to the use of the patients. They were clean, airy, and well furnished; model rooms for the kind of establishment which this was represented to be.

In one of them, a sitting-room, Morgan encountered a young man, whom the doctor formally introduced. Morgan did not need medical knowledge to observe that this young man had been an addict to some kind of drug, and that he was convalescent.

On the next, the first floor, the doctor had a bed-room and a sitting-room; similar accommodation was reserved for Brabazon, and, at the end of the corridor, was a large room equipped as a surgery.

Morgan's attention was attracted by a couch, having neither head nor sides, and raised on legs nearly four feet high. Hanging from the sides of the couch were long straps, and, seeing his interest, Dr. Brandt went out of his way to explain that patients on admission, were occasionally violent, and that in order to treat them usefully, a measure of restriction was necessary.

"Very unpleasant," said the doctor, with a shrug of his shoulders.; "unpleasant a—ah—for all parties; but what would you?"

Morgan lifted the lid of a mahogany case which lay upon a bench at the side of the room.

"You have recourse to surgery," he said, seeing the knives, scapels and forceps which the case contained.

"Taxidermy," explained Dr. Brandt. "A hobby of my own, Mr. Morgan. You will observe, also, the dyes which I use in setting up my specimens."

He passed on, unhurriedly, to the ground floor. This Morgan scrutinised as carefully as the remainder of the building. Then, when he had satisfied himself that the ground floor, like the rest of the house, with the possible exception of the surgery, held nothing to excite suspicion, he hurried on to the open front dormitory which had been built between the house and the river. There, under a glazed lean-to roof, were half a dozen beds, and in several of these Dr. Brandt's patients were asleep.

"Cot cases," the doctor explained with a smile.

On the lawn were deck-chairs, and many of these were occupied.

The inmates of the institution looked what they were represented to be, and their appearance was creditable to Dr. Brandt's efforts.

Morgan was already sure of one thing; Dr. Brandt was performing an excellent work. He was running his inebriates home with efficiency.

Morgan walked carelessly across the lawn, and through the garden. He looked into the face of every patient whom he came to, and sought everywhere for some possible hiding-place which might have been used as a temporary prison for the doomed girl.

All the time he was struggling with the conviction that he had made a bad mistake. But for the two facts, first that this home was the institution named in Colonel Anerley's will; and second, that the Sea-Waif—the launch belonging to the establishment—had been connected up with the disappearances, he would have been inclined to decide against further investigation, and get the Yard over the telephone in the hope of further developments.

As it was, he persisted in his search, and carried it through with meticulous care. He looked even at the faces of those persons who occupied the beds under the covered way.

Two were women, and the third an old man. The older of the two women was reading, and returned his scrutiny with a hostile stare. The younger was asleep.

Morgan looked at this young woman with some astonishment that she should be the inmate of an inebriates home. Her face expressed nothing; she was like a doll. She was sleeping heavily, breathing so roughly, that it could almost be said that she snored. She was the last of Brandt's patients whom Morgan saw before passing out to the landing-stage.

Except for the parlour-maid, and for a cook—whom he found in the kitchen busy in the preparation of the evening meal—Brandt seemed to be alone in his control of the establishment.

Suddenly, Brandt found himself looking down the bore of an automatic in the steady grip of his pilot.

Morgan could understand that Dr. Brandt would be quite capable of carrying on his work unaided. There was a look in his eyes which betokened inflexibility. Morgan could not read the man's character with any certitude, but he could read that much.

Against the landing-stage, which was built upon piles sunk into the river, and protected by fenders and pylons, there was a small dinghy, and the notorious Sea-Waif itself.

He went on board the Sea-Waif and spoke to the mechanic, who was cleaning the engine. During all his researches Dr. Brandt had remained beside him. The doctor stood now upon the landing-stage with his feet wide apart, and his hands locked behind his coat-tails.

He was looking indifferently into the distance. It was obvious that he regarded Morgan's investigations as a boring incident which only his politeness obliged him to tolerate.

Morgan gave the man a cigarette. The man turned, wiping his hands upon a lump of cotton-waste, and took the cigarette without raising his eyes.

Morgan was conscious of a low brow and a powerful jaw. Here was a type with which he was well acquainted. A type more in keeping with the suspicions which he had entertained regarding the house of Brabazon.

"How's she going?" questioned Morgan conversationally.

"Aw' right!"

The man took a light from the match which Morgan offered him, and turned to pick up an oil-skin coat which lay beside him. A storm was threatening. Already a few drops of rain had fallen; but the oil-skin coat was surely unnecessary. Was it possible that the garment was used as a help to disguise?

Morgan noticed that the cleaning which the man was doing, appeared rather aimless, and his suspicions increased.

"Been out lately?"

The man shot another glance from under his low brows, but so brief that the young man hardly saw his eyes.

"Now and then!" said the man.

"Ever go down river?" questioned Morgan. "A friend of mine has a launch something like this, which is lying opposite the Houses of Parliament. The Osprey, she is called. Do you know her?"

The man shook his head.

"Can't say that I do," he muttered.

Seeing that the Osprey had been invented by Morgan a few seconds earlier, this was not surprising.

"Perhaps," suggested the young man, "you never get along as far as Westminster Bridge?"

As he said this he turned swiftly. What should have put it into his head that a warning glance passed between Dr. Brandt and the mechanic? He decided that he might have been wrong. Doctor Brandt was tapping his finger-nails upon his front teeth. Where had he seen that gesture before?

"We get about," said the mechanic gruffly, "quite a bit, up stream, and down stream. And now, if you don't mind, sir, I am rather busy."

Morgan tried some further questions, but without useful result. He had to leave the Sea-Waif, having searched the vessel from stem to stern, with the uncomfortable feeling that the craft was suspicious; and with the equally uncomfortable knowledge that for the moment he could do nothing to clear up his suspicion, one way or the other.

THE GET-AWAY.

As Dr. Brandt escorted Morgan to the front door of the house, the young man apologised very warmly for his intrusion, and the doctor was kind enough to assure him that it did not matter in the least.

They reached the front door at the moment when it was being opened to admit Mellerby Black and his wife.

Black, himself, looked at the young man ambiguously out of his penetrating little eyes, and mumbled a greeting.

"Come down to pay Dr. Brandt a visit, eh? That's exactly what we are doing. No good subscribing to an institution unless you visit it."

Morgan agreed, and returned to the cab which he had kept waiting.

As soon as he was out of the door, Black turned to Dr. Brandt with fierce questioning.

"What's he doing here? Why did you let him go?"

Brandt explained the nature of Morgan's errand, without excitement, and added:

"He is satisfied that the place is above suspicion. In those circumstances it would be silly to do anything to spoil a good impression."

Mellerby Black was as near contemptuous in addressing the doctor as he had ever dared to be.

"Impression, me grandmother, they're on to us! We are rumbled. We are wanted, if you'd like to know, for murder. Now laugh that off."

Dr. Brandt tapped his teeth with that curious gesture of reflection.

"What you are telling me," he said icily, "is that the police are after you, and that, like the idiot that you are, you have led them down here."

Black, in his panic, returned insult for insult.

"They didn't want any leading," he said savagely, "they know all about you, and all about me; they know everything. Brabazon has squealed. Squealed to save his dirty hide. I have come to do you a good turn. The time has come for a get-away, and I am here to help you make it."

"When I need your help," said the doctor, "I'll ask for it."

"The launch," insisted Black. "The Sea-Waif, she's the only chance we've got."

"That thing," said the doctor with contempt. "She's all right for the river, but"—a flash of lightning flickered through the room, and a peal of thunder gave point to his next words—"you don't suggest putting out to sea in a forty-foot launch on a night like this?"

It became clear that that was exactly what Mellerby Black did suggest. He was clever enough to know exactly where he stood in connection with the disappearances of Colonel Anerley and the others. Already dangling before his panic-stricken eyes, he saw the hangman's rope, and with that menace before him he was ready to dare anything.

The people on the lawn outside had been driven into the house by the sudden storm, and many of them were listening to this conversation between the two men.

One of the patients, an obvious dypsomaniac, sidled up to Dr. Brandt and asked a question. The doctor simply did not hear, but when the question had been repeated three times, his brain took it in, and he clutched his patient by the throat, shaking him as if by so doing he could make more distinct the man's mumbled complaint.

"What did he mean?" the man was saying.

Brandt shook him again.

"What did who mean, you fool?"

"That gentleman who was here just now."

"Mean by what?"

"By asking me how long the girl had been here?"

Brandt showed the first sign of excitement.

"What girl? The young girl under the lean-to?"

The patient smiled.

"Yes, that's the one."

"You see," said Black, "he *knows*. He's on to us. If we don't get away now, we shall never do it."

Here Adela Black put a word in.

"I think, you know," she said smoothly, "that there is something in what my husband says."

The doctor gave her instant attention.

"And what are you doing here?" he questioned. "How are you in this?"

The mouth of the ice lady locked in a cruel line; her hands clenched.

"You've got little Christine here," she bit off.

Brandt smiled.

"Well!"

"I want to see," said Adela Black, "that she goes the same way as the others."

Brandt smiled understandingly.

Adela Black was satisfied. She was, perhaps, the cruellest of them all. She knew of the passion which Brandt cherished for herself, and would exploit that to destroy her rival. Into her twisted mind had come the theory that, but for Christine, she—Adela—might have had the love of Morgan. She may, or may not, have been right in this, but her thwarted passion expressed itself in murderous rage against Christine.

The heavy clouds were bringing on a premature darkness when the party of escaping criminals assembled aboard their motor-launch. In the bows the helmsman, in oilskins and sou'wester, was waiting for the word to "let go"; while Christine Anerley had been assisted down to the landing-stage.

The girl had been so far drugged that she did not know what she was doing. Once in the cabin she relaxed into a cushioned chair, and became at once half-asleep.

The last man on board was one of the patients whom Morgan had scrutinised earlier in the afternoon. A well-dressed man, with a powerful face and grizzled hair, he bore no resemblance to Calhoun's servant, Mappin—the man known as the "Knifer"—but this was a testimonial to Calhoun's power of make-up.

With a constant tattoo of raindrops beating upon the roof and windows of the cabin, the Sea-Waif slid away from her moorings, and turned out into the river, heading upstream towards London—towards the estuary, the open sea, freedom.

The darkness increased and lights began to glitter from private houses on both sides of the river, but the Sea-Waif showed no light—her errand was secret, and the fewer who noted her passing, the more content her passengers would be.

Black had already recovered from his panic, and, swinging to the other extreme, had begun to chuckle at the success of their escape. If he had known that Morgan had dismissed his taxicab a hundred yards from the Inebriates' Home, and that, then, after putting through a telephone call, the young man had returned in the direction of a boathouse—only a short distance along the river—he might have found reason to remain quiet.

It was under Hammersmith Bridge that the thing happened. Dr. Brandt noticed that a small, dark-painted launch was cutting across the river, obliquely, towards them.

He used a speaking-tube to summon the pilot.

"If you can't give that launch the slip, you had better run her down."

The pilot returned a husky word.

"All right, boss."

And the chase continued.

Brandt looked from his own craft to the unknown with astonishment. He could already see that the launch which pursued was one of those in use by the river police; and he was very surprised to find that the Sea-Waif was not gaining upon her. It should have been easy, for the Sea-Waif was a fast boat.

"What is that mechanic doing," he grumbled. "Curse the man, can't he get more out of the engine than this?"

He had hardly spoken when he realised that the launch's engine had been reversed. The police launch crunched into the side of the Sea-Waif, and the sergeant and the four men which it contained leapt aboard.

A bullet crashed through the front window of the saloon; and, turning, Brandt found himself looking into the face of the pilot. It was Morgan. He had thrown off his sou'wester; and now, with the automatic which he had taken from Brandt's man—whom he impersonated—he covered the approach of the raiding-party.

The bullet by which he had smashed the window was intended for a warning. The crooks knew by the look upon his face that the next bullet would be fired to kill.

Mappin drew that dreadful knife, in the use of which he took such ghoulish pleasure, and aimed to throw it at the police. Morgan disabled him with a bullet in the arm.

Adela Black snatched up the weapon and sprang at Christine. Her hatred knew no limits. She was prepared even to sacrifice her life to gratify it.

Morgan had her covered, but even now he simply could not shoot. It was Dr. Brandt who seized the infuriated woman by her shoulder and pulled her back.

Before a further ten seconds had passed,

(*Continued on page* 708.)

THE KILLING OF CHANG WU!

Problem No. 25 of

BAFFLERS!

The Popular Detective Story Game.

THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 25—there will be another next week. Briefly, you are told the story of a crime and given ALL the clues necessary for its solution. Be your own detective. Read the problem through very carefully, giving consideration to every detail, then try to answer the questions at the end.

Award yourself marks as indicated after comparing your answers with those given on Page 707. These answers are printed upside-down so that they may not catch your eye before you have had a chance to test your skill. Remember, it is the sense of your solution, not its exact wording, that counts.

ON the afternoon of August 9th, 1928, Martin Brandon, an eminent private detective of international fame, received a note:

"Come to see me immediately. My life is threatened. CHANG WU."

A dramatic enough communication, even for a detective to receive. The printed address at the head of the notepaper was that of a large city building in which suites of offices were let out to business firms, and in the directory, Brandon found that Chang Wu was described as a merchant. As the detective had an appointment with one of his clients at five-thirty in his consulting-room, and as the time of receiving the note was close upon five-fifteen, he was prevented from leaving immediately. Instead, he 'phoned Chang Wu.

"Is that Chang Wu?" he asked crisply.

"Yes," came a lisping reply.

"I am Martin Brandon. I have your note and I will come along as soon as possible. I should arrive somewhere about six o'clock," answered the detective.

"Martin Brandon," came the lisping tones somewhat haltingly; "the detective?"

"Yes—yes. You sent me a note, and——"

"Ah, yes—very well! I will await you. Good-bye."

There came a click and Martin Brandon was cut off from the other end.

Not a minute later his telephone bell rang sharply, and when he answered it, a drawling voice asked:

"Is that Martin Blandon?"

"Yes. Who is that?"

"My name is Chang Wu. I wrote you a note. You come to me at once?"

Brandon did not answer the query. Instead he asked sharply:

"Where are you 'phoning from?"

"A telephone kiosk where I can see all round me," came the cautious reply. "You hurry—my life is in danger."

Click! Again Martin Brandon was cut off.

Brandon was very thoughtful as he and his assistant, Jimmy Fulworth, rode citywards just before six o'clock in a taxi. He was wondering who had spoken at Wu's office.

As they entered the square in which the office building stood, Brandon saw a Chinese in European clothes entering the hall, and he drew Fulworth's attention to him. When they gained the hall itself, it was in time to see a Chinaman entering the lift at the far end of the hall, close the gates and press the button—for it was a self-acting lift, requiring no attendant.

Both detectives plainly saw his features as he rose from sight. They waited at the gates as the lift ascended, for Brandon saw that Chang Wu's offices were on the fourth floor.

Suddenly the lift stopped.

"That's stopped at the third floor, Jimmy. It can't be our client. What's he waiting for?"

For the lift remained at the third floor, but there came no clashing of the gates denoting that its occupant was leaving it. After a few moments, Jimmy pressed the button and the lift came gliding down again. When it came level with them they saw the Chinese was still there—but instead of standing erect, he was huddled in a corner, with a gaping hole in his forehead.

Bidding his assistant to summon the attendant at the entrance of the hall and then to call the police, Brandon sped up the stairs noiselessly. He was in time to observe two Chinese disappearing through some fire escape doors at the end of a corridor on the third floor—the floor on which the murder had apparently taken place.

Brandon raced to the fire escape, but there was no sign of the Chinamen. He retraced his steps to the lift well. Opposite the gates was a door, on which were the letters:

M. CONDUROUS,
MERCHANT.

He tried the door—it was locked. A footstep from above caused him to look up, and he saw a young Chinaman descending the stairs towards him, drawing on a pair of expensive gloves. Brandon at once questioned him, and was told that the newcomer was the son of Chang Wu, the merchant.

"Is your father in his office?" asked Brandon.

"No. He had an appointment——"

"He won't keep it," interrupted the detective. "He is downstairs, shot through the head, stone dead. Do you suspect anybody?"

The young Chinese looked scared and shook his head. He identified the dead man a few moments later as his father. Whilst he was talking to Brandon, a man came slowly down the stairs, nodded to him, and, after a glance at the murdered man, uttered his horror and concern in broken English. Then, with every show of wishing to get away from the presence of death, he passed along.

"Who was that man?" asked Brandon.

"M. Condurous," was the reply.

Brandon remembered the locked door of a few moments before; but, what was more important, he had recognised Condurous as Kelly the Killer, a notorious criminal, in disguise. What was he doing there? Had he had any hand in the killing?

"Had your father any enemies?" he asked of the son.

"Only one—a man named Kelly, who swore out in China to get my father."

Up in the dead man's office, Brandon found two notes in a desk used by Chang Wu. One, dated in Hong-Kong over twelve months back, read:

"I'll get you for double-crossing me." The other merely contained that day's date and one, hyphenated word: "To-day."

Before the police arrived, Brandon was in possession of many facts. Chang Wu, threatened for his life, had written him a note asking him to visit his office. Someone in the office had answered the telephone, purporting to be Chang Wu. The son protested that it had been his father who had answered the telephone. Yet Chang Wu, apparently, had telephoned Brandon almost immediately he had replaced the receiver, saying that he was speaking from a telephone kiosk.

The first note, dated over a year back, was supposed to have been written by Kelly the Killer. So was the second, containing the one word, "To-day." Yet Brandon had detected that the writing of the second, although cleverly a copy of that of the first, was not the same. Who had written it?

Kelly was there in the building, in his office on the third floor, when the murder took place on that floor presumably. When his door had been tried by Brandon a few moment afterwards, it was locked. Yet Kelly had passed out not a minute after that. Why was Kelly here, and why was he in disguise?

Also, on the third floor Brandon had been in time to see two Chinamen disappearing by means of the fire escape, which strongly pointed to the fact that they were highly desirous of not being seen.

Brandon went to the finger-print department of Scotland Yard late that night and was informed that Kelly's finger-prints were discovered on the first note, but not on the second, dated for that day. Only one set of finger-prints were found on that, and they did not correspond with those of the dead man. Whose were those finger-prints? Had Kelly had any hand in the writing and sending of that second warning?

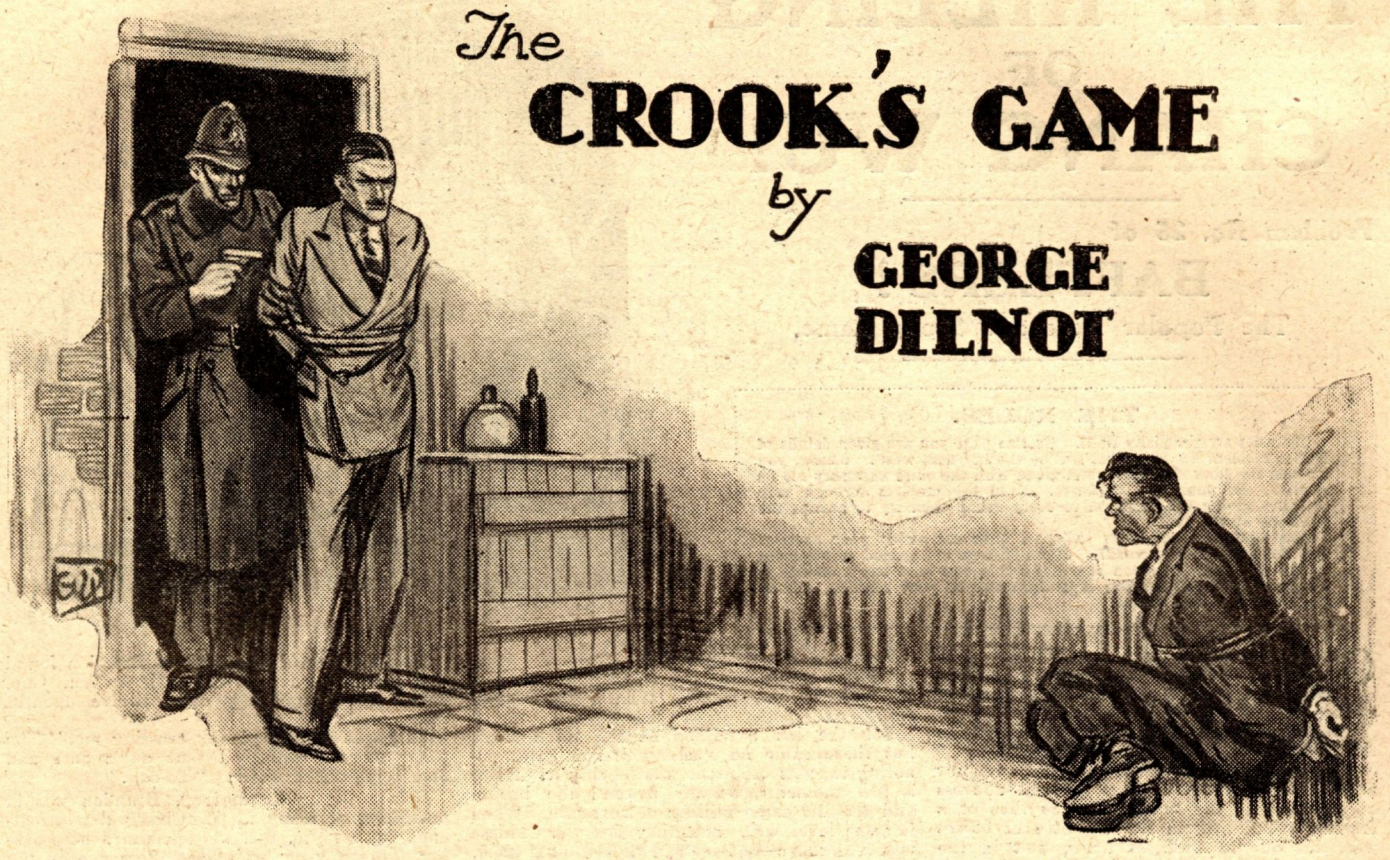
That night a warrant was issued by the police for Kelly's arrest. That night also, Brandon obtained entrance to the dead man's offices and took a number of letters and papers from the son's desk. These he took to the finger-print department, who discovered that there were, on those papers, together with other prints, identical prints to those discovered on the second warning.

Whose were they? (Marks 3).

Who killed Chang Wu? (Marks 4).

What was the explanation of the crime? (Marks 3).

START READING OUR POWERFUL SERIAL OF CRIME AND DETECTION TO-DAY.



The CROOK'S GAME

by

GEORGE DILNOT

THE OPENING CHAPTERS RE-TOLD.

WHEN Mr. Earl Millard and his very charming daughter, Shirley, came to London and took a palatial suite of rooms at the Regal Hotel, they presented the encouraging appearance of rich Americans eager to give themselves a good time. It was known only to Scotland Yard that this gentleman had served a term of imprisonment in an American penitentiary.

Millard left prison a reformed character, and succeeded in going straight for a considerable time. At a time when he was doing exceptionally well in America, an old and regenerate friend, Mr. Solomon Stern, otherwise known as "The Cat," discovered the ex-convict, and blackmailed him under the threat of exposure. Unable to endure the attention of The Cat any longer, Millard decided to leave the States and find refuge in London, only to learn that Solomon Stern was at his heels.

Detective-inspector Strickland, visiting a night club off Piccadilly, finds among the guests Millard and Stern. Suspecting trouble, Strickland warns Earl Millard that there must be no shooting in this country.

The next morning The Cat is found murdered on Westminster Bridge. Strickland, in company with Divisional-detective-inspector Drake of Cannon Row Police Station, make immediately for the Regal Hotel to question Millard. The ex-convict is out. The detectives determine to search the suite of rooms, but this they are denied by Millard's daughter, Shirley, who holds them off with an automatic.

(Now continue the story)

THE LETTER.

"ONE of the unladylike accomplishments which I have not forgotten is to shoot, and to shoot straight. If you choose to be silly don't forget that I have warned you," said Miss Millard.

Strickland's first impulse was to fling himself upon the frigidly alert girl. Indeed, he made a half movement to do so. It was not the instant leap of the pistol to a level that held him back. Drake's hand was on his arm, and there was a humorous twinkle in the older man's eyes. Strickland's puzzled frown disappeared, and he broke into laughter. Drake, too, was chuckling to himself. Shirley regarded the amused police officers with surprise, but the hand that held the pistol was very steady.

"Good-night, Miss Millard," said Strickland. "We shall see you again."

"That kid," said Drake, once they were safely out of bearing and on their way down the broad hotel staircase, "will think that we're drunk."

"As long as she doesn't believe that we were scared of her popgun, I don't care what she thinks," declared Strickland. "I'd like to know what's at the back of her mind. Fancy her calling our bluff in that way."

"Fancy such an old soldier as you making the break that you did," retorted Drake. "I thought that you had taken leave of your senses when you made a move to take that gun away from her. All very well to have searched the place if we could have got away with it and no fuss. But if there had been trouble we wouldn't have had a leg to stand on. I'm too close to a pension to do illegal things nowadays. You'll have to find another way of getting into that joint, my boy."

"Yes." Strickland looked at his watch. "We can get a search warrant—and by the time we've sworn it out and got back, if there's a thing in the place that's likely to be of any use in the case I'll undertake to eat it. The British law seems made to protect crooks. Never mind. They'll blame us anyway. The C.I.D. man is wrong when he makes any move and wrong when he doesn't. Good Old Scotland Yard."

He lit a cigarette thoughtfully.

"Well, there's always a way round," he reflected aloud. "Wonder if Shang's made a getaway, or if he's coming back?"

There was no intention in the mind of either of leaving any loophole. They had very good reason for supposing that Buck Shang had committed murder. Somehow he had to be found and held until they were satisfied one way or the other. Before they left the hotel they had a further word with the manager, and Strickland spoke peremptorily into the telephone.

Among the things that he had done on his arrival at Cannon Row was the precaution of sending out summonses to certain of his satellites from their homes in the suburbs. No C.I.D. man works single-handed when it can be avoided, and Strickland knew that every one of the half a dozen men he had sent for would be needed. He had not drawn on Drake's staff, since they would be largely occupied with the domestic crime affairs of the division. But before dawn it was certain that the whole of the elaborate machinery maintained by Scotland Yard for the detection of crime would have to be set in motion.

Within half an hour three men were at the hotel. Shirley, sitting up in bed, wet-eyed and with her hands clapsed about her knees, a bundle of timorous nerves with all her boldness of front gone, would have been interested to hear the swift explanations and instructions that were given to them.

It is seldom that a detective resorts to false beards or grease paint, but there are other and much more effective forms of disguise. Thus it was that two burly sergeants found themselves filling the uniforms of retainers of the Regal Hotel, made available for them by the obliging manager. A third officer, a spruce, alert, well-dressed young second-class sergeant, was given no change of attire. He was to adopt any pose from hotel guest to clerk that circumstances might dictate.

Two ends were to be served by this measure. No movement that Shirley might take outside of the privacy of her apartment but would be known to one or the other of these men. And if Shang should come back to the hotel it would be strange if he ever got out again save for a journey to Cannon Row.

With the consciousness that all precautions that suggested themselves had been devised, Strickland and Drake, leaving their subordinates to await what might happen, took their departure.

At Scotland Yard Strickland found others of his staff, and he shifted the belongings of the dead man over from Cannon Row to the room which he shared with four other first-class detective-inspectors for detailed examination. Meanwhile, the few officers who had been sent out by Drake, on the forlorn hope of picking up some trail at Westminster Bridge, had returned. All but one man had failed. He had tracked down a printer's machine minder, who, on his belated homeward way, had, from the other side of the bridge, seen a car stop. He was tired and incurious, and the body of the car had shielded the operations of the inmates from him. But he was perfectly clear that it was a Buick saloon car with a left-hand drive.

"There's something to bite on, laddie," said Drake. "There can't be a lot of those cars in London."

Strickland needed no prompting as to the importance of the clue. He hunched his shoulders over his desk and wrote furiously. Within ten minutes the tape machines in two hundred London police stations were chattering instructions that were to cause some momentary inconvenience to every person who drove a car with a left-hand steering-wheel during the next twenty-four hours. It was too early as yet to get in touch with the representatives of the Buick firm in London, or to make inquiries at the motor registration departments of the London or Middlesex County Councils. Strickland made a mental note to have these things attended to. And with the description of the car went a scientifically constructed description of Buck Shang himself. "Detain wherever found, and communicate with Detective-Inspector Strickland at Scotland Yard."

"Well," yawned Drake, "I'm willing enough to help you, Frank, but I don't see that there is anything else I can do just now. This is your pigeon. Looks open and shut against Shang. I've a receiving case on at the Old Bailey at ten o'clock. Just time to snatch a nap and have a bath."

"Right you are, Stiffy," agreed his friend. "Toddle along and get your beauty sleep."

Strickland bent over his work, and his colleague slipped silently out of the door. The Yard man checked the articles in front of him by a list compiled by those who had searched the body. Methodically and carefully he went through the items:

"One gold watch with fob and seal, two pearl studs, one two-bladed pearl handled penknife, one card-case, one cheque book, two letters without envelopes—ah!"

The first letter was an illiterate scrawl in huge letters on cheap note-paper.

"Dear Kid,—I write these lines hoping all is well with you dear boy things is very bad with me and I never see you now. I am still at the old place but dear things is very tight with me and the landlady is an old beast. Five pounds would put me right dear and what is 5 pounds to you. I am longing to see you dear because I know you would put me right if you knew what a life I'm having since you went away through my fault dear boy and I see how rotten I was to you dear. I'm longing to see you again dear. Please come soon and bring the money my old landlady is simply awful. If you can't come send the money, dear. Thousands of kisses from Yours Affectionate As Always, L.

"P.S.—Write or come soon I badly want to see you dear."

Strickland turned to the other note. This was on a half sheet of note-paper, undated and unsigned:

"Sir,—I have considered the matter that has been discussed between us, and have decided to comply with your demands. I realise that it is useless to address further appeals to you. My messenger with the amount agreed upon will be at the spot indicated by you at one o'clock in the morning."

"Ah," commented the inspector for the second time. "I wonder if this gentleman has left a trade-mark."

Holding the letters delicately by their edges he traversed the deserted corridors to the Finger Print Department. It was still too early for any of the experts attached to that branch to have commenced the day's work, but he knew where to lay his hands on the materials he required. Gingerly he sifted powdered graphite on to the surface of the letters, and fanned it away. Two or three blurred finger-marks stood out on the missive from the woman, but he was only in small degree interested in that. What pleased him better were the marks of four fingers on the second letter—marks lying at right angles to the paper where the left hand of the writer had apparently rested while he compiled the message.

He went back to his room humming softly to himself, and sent a sergeant to the Criminal Record Office to rake out the file which gave a full recital of the Cat's career so far as it was known to the Yard, and to the Aliens Department for the record of Buck Shang. There was little need for him to refer to the former, for it was his particular business to deal with cosmopolitan rogues, and he had devoted special attention to the Cat of late at the request of the assistant commissioner. Still it was well for him to refresh his mind. There were the addresses of two or three people who had suffered from the attentions of that rascal, and they would have to be looked up. As for Shang there proved to be rather less in the record than he already knew.

He sat thoughtfully at his desk, a pencil between his fingers scribbling mechanically the questions every detective must ask himself on every crime, and which he had engraved on his memory years ago. "Who, what, where, with what, why, how, when?" Some of these were answered in the circumstances of the crime itself. There were others to which replies suggested themselves vaguely.

One of the constables attached to the telegraph and telephone room blundered hastily through the door. Strickland swore fiercely.

"Why, in blazes don't you knock before you come in? What do you think you are doing, my lad?"

"Sorry, sir," apologised the officer. "I was in a hurry. I was told to rush this to you."

The detective-inspector snatched the slip and frowned as he read.

"Station Officer, Wapping, to Strickland C.I. Dept., C.O. Man description corresponding to Shang taken from river below Tower Bridge by patrol boat. Murder. Death apparently due to blow some blunt instrument. No paper or other clue to identification on body."

"This," said Strickland aloud, "has just about torn it."

"I beg your pardon, sir." He had forgotten the constable.

"You still here? There's nothing more for you, my lad. I'll 'phone through to Wapping. Next time you see that door shut you knock."

But barely had the door closed behind the messenger when it was opened again. The grizzled head of old Winter, the chief constable of the Criminal Investigation Department, appeared in the opening. Like the old war-horse that he was, the scent of battle had drawn him to his desk at Scotland Yard hours before he was officially due. Behind him followed Weir Menzies, one of the Big Four—in other words an area detective superintendent, who was responsible for the detective supervision of a quarter of London.

The Solution of this week's 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

On page 705.

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

The son killed Chang-Wu, his father.

A receiver, fitted with a silencer, was found among his possessions, and it had been recently discharged. His finger-prints were taken, and they tallied with those found on the correspondence and the second warning.

Although the evidence against Kelly was so strong at first sight, Brandon was impressed by the presence of the Chinese on the third floor, making every effort to escape, and the mystery of the telephone call. Obviously the second one had been genuine, because the merchant was only just entering the building when Jimmy and Brandon arrived. Therefore, the son presumably had answered before, and he evidently had been surprised to learn his father had sought the protection of a detective. Another thing Brandon worked on was the faked writing of the second note.

He asked himself why those two Chinese were there—and the answer could only take one form, that they were there either to murder the merchant, OR ELSE TO SEE THAT IT WAS DONE! The nature of the murder savoured of the Oriental.

The next question to answer was why they were there to murder or to see that it was committed? Again, only one answer formed itself—they were members of a tong, or Chinese secret society, which had sentenced Chang-Wu to death for some offence against the rules.

Had the son been entirely innocent he would not have spoken as he had over the telephone, neither would he have lied to Brandon when he met him on the stairs. Thus Brandon commenced to suspect the son, although there seemed no reason why he should have killed his father, unless he himself had been ordered by the tong to carry out the sentence.

The subsequent roping in of Kelly—only to be released again—supplied the confirmation of Brandon's deductions.

Kelly had been in partnership with Chang-Wu in China in some nefarious undertaking. When things had become too hot for them, Chang had squeaked, and Kelly had gone in for two years. A year previously he sent the first note. He discovered, through his own investigations, that Chang had been sentenced to death by his tong, and when Chang came to England with his son, Kelly followed, setting up as the Greek merchant with the full intention of involving Chang in a business gamble that would ruin him, and fill his—Kelly's—pockets.

Kelly soon established the fact that the son was constantly watched by two Chinese wherever he went, and he guessed that they were emissaries of the tong, sent to kill him if he did not kill his father. Kelly was working hard to bring about his coup before the murder, in which he was unsuccessful. Had he intended to commit the crime, surely he would not have made his presence so obvious, because he must have known that suspicion would fall, at once, on himself.

He also was a heavy and well-built man, somewhat younger, and perhaps, less rugged than Winter. To strangers, neither man either in appearance or conversation would have appeared notably endowed with those qualities of pertinacity and subtlety which the archives of Scotland Yard for many years back showed that they possessed.

"Thought we'd find you here, Strickland," growled Winter. He invariably spoke in a sort of growl—a habit that meant nothing. "Yes, sir. I'm here. I'm here with two murders on my hands and not at all happy about it!"

"How come? *Two* murders?" Menzies lifted his eyebrows. The chief constable, who never allowed anything to startle him, jingled a bunch of keys in his pocket and waited.

Strickland thrust the message from the river police-station into the superintendent's hand, and the two senior officers perused it together. Menzies returned it without comment.

"This Shang—you thought that he was the murderer of the Cat?" asked Winter deep in his throat.

"I'll admit that I had thoughts in that direction," said Strickland. "He certainly had a grudge against him. In fact, if I hadn't been handy he'd have shot the Cat last night. He was the obvious murderer, but this has tangled all that up. It isn't likely that he shot the other and then got knocked on the head and chucked in the river himself."

"The case which is most difficult to solve," observed Winter, "is the case in which there are no queer points. Commonplace, straightforward circumstances will deceive more often than an *outré* business."

"H'm," Strickland looked as if he was not quite certain. He was sure that the chief constable had something at the back of his mind.

"I don't know if this is exactly in your line," went on Winter doubtfully. "On the other hand we don't know who else can tackle it. There's two chief inspectors down with influenza, one away in America, another down on the Staffordshire poisoning case, and the other will have his hands full on the long firm business. Mr. Menzies is practically running two areas at the moment, but he'll no doubt give you all the help that he can. The question is do you think that you can handle it?"

There is an unwritten law in London that big murder cases should be handled by chief detective-inspectors, acting under the nominal instructions of one of the Big Four. Strickland had, of course, taken part in murder investigations, but had never had charge of anything exceptional in that way—and murder is the most difficult proposition that can face a detective. Formulas of one sort or another can be laid down for the detection of almost any crime but murder. That is a category apart.

Yet it is mainly in connection with murder cases that Scotland Yard comes into the limelight. Its administrators hate to confess defeat in the blaze of publicity, and ill betide the man who, from ill luck or stupidity, bungles a case. The chief constable's hesitation was no reflection of Strickland's capacity in general. He was merely dubious of the other's confidence in bringing the case to a successful issue.

"If you want me to choose," said Strickland smoothly, "I'd like to take hold of this affair."

Someone knocked again at the door and Menzies stepped outside. The chief constable nodded approbation.

"Right, Strickland! You go ahead."

Menzies returned, a pair of ferocious horn-rimmed spectacles on his nose and a piece of paper in his hand.

"Have you seen the body of the Cat?" he asked quietly.

"No. Not yet," returned Strickland. "There has been so much to do. I thought that could wait till this morning."

"Well," said Menzies, "the body has been stolen from the mortuary, and no one knows how or why."

(Why should anyone steal a dead body? Follow this strange mystery in next week's instalment of this gripping serial of crime and detective work—The Crook's Game.)

UNIDENTIFIED!

(Continued from page 704.)

the raid was successfully completed. The passengers of the launch, with the exception of Christine, were handcuffed together and watched by the police.

Dr. Brandt, when he heard Mellerby Black charged with murder and warned in the usual way, and was informed that he, Mrs. Black, and the man, Mappin, would be charged as accessories, turned to Morgan with an appealing gesture.

"Mr. Morgan," he said, "I am sure that in these circumstances you will speak for me. You, at least, know what I am. An ordinary asylum doctor, pursuing a peaceful avocation, I had no idea that these people were engaged upon anything but a voyage of pleasure.

Morgan looked him in the face; his eyes were grim and his mouth was hard.

"Will I?" he said between his teeth. "Will I, heck! You're the worst of the lot of them. "You're Calhoun, Calhoun the Killer!"

Morgan was holding Christine in his arms.

"My dear," he said, careless of those who looked on and forgetful that the girl was hardly in a condition to hear him. "My dear, I took a terrible risk when I tied up the pilot on Brandt's launch and dropped him in the boathouse. And when I 'phoned the river police at Barnes, I could not be sure that even then the brutes had not murdered you.

"I had recognised Dr. Brandt, and I rather thought that his man, Mappin, might be available. I did not know how many of his supposed patients might be members of the gang. It was a suspense such as I hope never to endure again. I knew that they would try to kill you. The only thing which kept me going was the memory that all Calhoun's victims had died by drowning. I knew they had cut your hair, plucked your eyebrows, and the rest of it, and I took the risk that they would do with you as they had done with the others, leaving you to be found drowned—a woman who could not be identified. Thank Heaven I was right!"

Later on, when he came to be questioned by the police, he was able to give them all the facts of the three major crimes.

"You see," he told the police, "Mellerby Black was a man who collected information and used it against people. I should say that he suffered from class-hatred of the worst kind. It delighted him to pull down people who were proud and respected.

"He said himself that he never practised blackmail; and, strictly speaking, he never did. His policy was to reveal what he knew, and inform his victim that he intended to keep his knowledge secret. After that, the victim could not do less than befriend him, financially or otherwise.

"When Calhoun came into it, he devised a scheme by which larger sums of money could be obtained, with less risk. He used Mellerby Black's special information, first to force his victim to bequeath money to a charity which was only a cloak for his own personality, and then to decoy his victims to some place where he could effect a change of personality.

"In the case of which I was a witness, he induced Colonel Anerley to visit Black's house, made him a prisoner, and, using his own powers of character acting, took on the colonel's identity.

"After that, as you know, he showed himself in various places, and even stayed overnight at a hotel, thus providing himself and his confederates with a useful alibi.

"Colonel Anerley's appearance was altered. This was easy to Calhoun—with his knowledge of make-up and his penchant for face surgery. After that, the colonel was drugged and thrown into the river. Who was to connect the dead man taken from the Thames with the man who, according to the police records, was at that very moment having his breakfast in an hotel?

"How could the disappearance of Colonel Anerley be linked up with the actions of men who were careful to provide themselves with a cast-iron alibi from a moment preceding his recorded disappearance until several days afterwards?

"The thing was easy, tragically easy. Inspector Patswing knew. Probably because he was told. Black must have thought that he had Batswing under his thumb. Well, the man kicked. They could see he was going to give them away, and that was how they added another crime to the list."

Adela Black escaped with a long period of imprisonment. The man, Mappin, against whom, strangely enough, it was impossible to prove anything but a secondary complicity got away with two years' penal servitude.

Mellerby Black and Calhoun were hanged upon the same day.

"No," said Morgan to his young wife, when talking about the thing a long time afterwards, "it was not the biggest scoop of my career."

And then, in response to Christine's look of surprise, he continued:

"You were!"

THE END.

(Another grand, book-length novel, "The Scarlet Scarab," by L. C. Douthwaite, appears in next week's issue of The THRILLER. *See special announcement on page 704.)*

Printed and published every Saturday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.

August 10th 1929. N/R