The Thriller
The Paper with a Thousand Thrills

The Scarlet Scarab
A Long Complete Mystery Novel
By L.C. Douthwaite

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EVERY SATURDAY.
AUGUST 17th, 1929.
"Sign," snarled the Scarlet Scarab, thrusting forward his gun. Then, even as Trevor wrote, there came the sounds of shots and a furious scuffle at the door.

Chapter 1

CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

A steady forty m.p.h., the road broad and clear ahead, Johnny Travers, with a sharp intake of breath, pointed to something which, silhouetted blackly against the grey stormy sky, swung dreadfully from the branch of the bedraggled tree that overhung the road.

"For the love of Pete!" he gasped in a voice which not all his self-control could make completely steady. "What's that?"

Ginger Jackson, that imperturbable expugniser, whose attention for the last few hundred yards had been directed to just that same phenomenon, said calmly:

"Looks to me like a corpse, sir."

Steadied by the other's coolness, Johnny slowed, and, as the car drew up to that sinister pendant, stepped into the road, followed by Ginger.

"If you're not a good guesser, Ginger," he said quietly, "we've run into the beastliest practical joke that was ever played." He stared keenly for a moment, his face tense. "But, somehow I think it's pretty grim earnest," he added.

He was right; if that which swayed with such awesome detachment above them had been suspended from but a few inches further along the branch, the heels would have struck the face of any passing car-driver not especially alert for danger.

Standing as they were, except that the feet were strapped together, in that dim uncertain light, they could distinguish little more than when, from the car, the dangling thing had first attracted their attention.

"Can you reach to cut 'im down, sir?" Ginger demanded.

Knife in hand, and stretched to his utmost extent, Johnny failed to reach the rope. But as his hands descended, the burnt tan of his face had faded to something grey and damp and fearful.

"It's no joke, believe me, Ginger," he said shortly.
He manœuvred the car to a convenient position. Then, knife in hand, he stood up in the driving-seat.

The rope was toughly-fibred, but he sawed through it last. The hanged man bent grotesquely and horribly from the middle as Ginger staggered beneath the drooping weight. Johnny jumped from the driving-seat and helped him lay the body on to the roadside border.

"Professional job, by the look of it," Ginger remarked, and pointed to the hands, which were strapped firmly behind the back, to the ankles, similarly confined, and to the head, which was encased in a white hood that was fastened with a slip-knot about the neck.

Without a word, Johnny turned to the car for his torch; switched its light upon the lifeless heap at his feet. And when, after a long moment, he turned to Ginger, there was in his face a stark and terrible bewilderment.

"But—but—you’re right, Ginger!" he said unsteadily. "It is an expert’s job. They’re all Government issues—the regular things—the straps and the white cap!"

Ginger did not speak for a moment. At that time he did not realise his companion spoke from expert knowledge.

"I ’aven’t ’eard no talk about making executions public, sir," he said. "Old-caster’s the place they ‘old the neck-tie parties in these parts, not out in the open."

He paused, and as Johnny did not speak:

"But hadn’t we best make sure he is dead, sir?" he suggested.

Johnny gestured towards the white-capped head, which lolled at a grotesque angle from the shoulders.

"Haven’t I told you it’s an expert’s job?" he said shortly. "He’s not choked, as would have been the case if he’d just been swung; he’s been hanged in the regulation way—through a drop. That’s why the neck’s broken."

He handed the torch to Ginger, and kneeling, cut the cord that kept the white bag in place; drew it over the head to expose the face, while with a steady hand Ginger shone the light.

The face of a hanged man is never an
attractive sight, but the countenance revealed by that white searching gleam was of a horror indescribable. A middle-aged face, grey and heavy, the eyes sunken and putting above it a wiping multiplicity of cheek pouches beneath the little grey-blue bulging eyes; the bulbous nose with innumerable purple veins like rivers marked upon a man's forehead narrow and the big square head.

"Well-to-do bloke, by the look of him," Ginger pronounced, and Johnny nodded. Accustomed to being to emergency, his first horror had become submerged into an almost professional detachment.

"Can you drive a car, Ginger?" he asked shortly.

"I don't know, sir; I've never tried," the other said promptly, and Johnny smiled, in spite of the grim situation.

"Then need around while I shoot back to Torcoombe," Johnny instructed, and climbed into the car.

The sergeant on duty at the Combeshire village, a portly, well-fed man of fifty, was at first inclined to incredulity.

"Trying to pull my leg or something?" he said sourly.

Johnny pointed to his sodden clothing.

"When this rain has stopped," the sergeant warned him, "the only person you're to open out to is whoever's up in charge of the investigation. It's in the chief constable's hands now, of course, but when he'll do the job himself or turn it over to Scotland Yard's for him to decide.

The sergeant rose ponderously.

"I'll come," he said under protest. Adding: "But heaven help yer if you're tryin' to be funny."

His truculence disappeared, however, when with Ginger doing sentry-go through the rain, Johnny climbed into the car to a standstill at that stiffened figure on the roadside grass.

"Have you made an examination?" he demanded tersely, and as Johnny shook his head, turned intriguingly to Ginger.

"I'm afraid the little man decided... "

"...do you know, or I'm not clued in—me not knowin' a clow when I see one?"

The sergeant went down on his knees beside the body, Johnny shining a torch. After a rather shrinking inspection of the lolling countenance he unfastened the closely-cropped hair; a man of five feet ten of sheer bone and muscle.

"Come right in," Johnny said, and the visitor advanced into the room.

Detective-inspector Oates of Scotland Yard,

Johnny nodded pleasantly.

"I thought the best course to call in the Yard," he said. "Take a chair and have a drink."

"I'll have coffee," said the inspector, "if it's all the same to you."

When the waiter had served the order, the Scotland Yard man turned to Johnny:

"You know, of course, what I've come about?" he said shortly, and Johnny nodded.

"Yes," he said. "The chap we found last night. I guess you're on the case."

"The chief constable of Combeshire telephoned the Yard late last night," stated the detective. "The chief-superintendent was in the large, and I was lucky enough to catch a train within the hour. This morning I've seen Sergeant Barnes, who's told me the story as he knows it. Also I've examined the body.

As if expectant that Johnny would break in with a question, he paused, but Johnny did not immediately respond.

"You haven't waited much time," he said at last. "Have you faced anything worthwhile?"

The detective ignored this. His manner was not so much hostile as of one who, before opening out, requires to be sure of his ground.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'd like to hear something about yourself."

Momentarily Johnny's eyes narrowed. The tone was not one he particularly appreciated.

"Just what about us," he asked, "do you want to know?"

Oates made a rather impatient gesture, as of one brushing aside irrelevancies. Unobtrusively but unmistakably he had been performing some little gymnastics of his own and Johnny knew that there was not a detail in the appearance or manner either of himself or Ginger the detective could not minutely have described. What was less certain, however, was the impression registered. In matters that concerned his job the man had the ideal poker-face.

"I came on Thursday last," Johnny said, "after six years' absence. I wired to town for Jackson, here, to meet me. He was with my battalion in France. We are sticking together for a bit for old times' sake."

"In what part of Canada were you?" the inspector asked. "And what were you doing there?"

If there was any hesitation in the reply, it was so slight as almost to be unnoticeable.

"West and north—mainly, as a sergeant in the North-West Mounted Police," said Johnny. "Now I am—a—a gentleman at large."

The detective, eyeing him directly, jerked curtly:

"What brought you to England?"

"I came into some money and had to come back to look after it," said Johnny. "Do you know a lawyer named Raymond, of Bedford Row?"

For a split second an expression flashed across the face of the detective which, trained observer as he was, intrigued Johnny considerably—a razor-edge alertness that was gone instantaneously with its coming.

"I've heard of him," he said. "Few people in London haven't He's one of the best-known solicitors practising. Why—do you know him?"

"Never seen him in my life," Johnny responded. "Nevertheless, anything you want to know about me he'll tell you, he said afterwards.

The detective let this pass by turning directly to Ginger.

"And you?" he said curtly, and the red-haired one flushed.

"Ask at the National Sportin' Club," he was told. "They'll tell you that ten years ago, before 'is 'ands went on the blink, Ginger Jackson was welterweight champion of Europe."

The detective looked at him steadily.

"What are you doing now—in this part of the country?" he asked.

A couple of nights ago I seconded Larry Doolin on against Charlie Parkin of Exeter. It was the mornin' after the scrap I was sent for by Mr. Travers 'ere," Ginger explained.

He glanced truculently at the detective, and the first time he met the latter's expression, lightened. Something like a smile crossed his face.

Then, rather to Johnny's surprise, Oates was taking stock of his hosts, and Johnny knew of his legacy of a subtle examination which, however casual and desultory on the surface, was one which covered the subject with a thoroughness that seemed prodigious.

"Something of this must have appeared on his face, for, after a quick, searching look at him, the inspector once more broke into a smile."

"You understand, I hope," he said, "that it's necessary I should have these particulars? It's not that I'm doubting you at all—or either of you. It's just that to question you happens to be part of my job."
"Lumme, sir!" he whispered hoarsely. "It isn't the same bloke!"

For he had seen, in the man before him, an exact replica of the square-set, alert five-feet-ten of that wire-bound strength; the same short-clipped greying hair; the same square-cut blue serge suit and highly-polished square-toed boots, as in their visitor who so recently had gone. Even, on the little finger of the sinewy left hand, was the fellow of a flat-topped monogram signet ring which he had noticed on the corresponding finger of their recent visitor.

And then, gradually, and though it was so subtle and minute, he saw the difference.

For though the mouths of both principal and replicas were wide and tight-lipped, in the one who had gone had been nothing certain which is the real McKie—you or the other chap."

For answer the detective withdrew from his pocket the warrant card, which was official guarantee of his status.

"And now," he said, as Johnny handed it back, "tell me all about it."

Intent, but unmoved, he listened to the tale of Johnny's career and prospects, of his relations with Ginger, their discovery of the previous night, and, finally, of their recent interview with the counterfeit detective. Nor, except occasionally to interject a question, did Oates make any comment until the tale was at an end, and by then his grim slit of a mouth was very grim indeed.

"Who the devil was this other bloke?" queried Ginger.
“Of course, I’ve done what I could by phone,” he added lugubriously, “but there isn’t an earthly chance of catching him. He’ll come to ground somewhere about a thousand miles from anywhere, lay doggo until dark, and then make for his usual hangout.”

“Hard luck!” Johnny murmured sympathetically; he, too, would have appreciated a few moments alone with the pseudo "Oates.”

The detective, however, was paying no attention.

“That fortune you were telling me about,” he said abruptly. “Am I to understand it’s in actual cash?”

Surprised at the query, Johnny nodded.

“The next best thing, anyway,” he said, “so far as easy negotiation’s concerned. It’s in United States Bearer Bonds, all waiting for me to pick up the moment I produce legal proofs of identity.”

“To what amount?” Oates asked sharply.

“Just under three hundred thousand dollars,” Johnny told him.

Oates was silent. When at last he looked up his face was granite hard.

“Ever heard of the Scarlet Scarab?” he demanded with apparent inconsequence. “Only,” said Johnny, handing over a box of cigarettes, “from that Drury Street press announcement that was pinned on to the body we found last night,” he said. “And what’s a scarab, anyway?”

To his surprise, he noticed that the fingers of the detective, as they grasped for a cigarette, trembled a little. The long time before a reply came to his question.

“The Sacred Beetle of the ancient Egyptians,” Oates said at last. “Here the symbol has been adopted as the sign-manual of the gang who not only are going to be all out for that money of yours, but who, in addition, hanged Sir Julian Dore.” He paused, looking directly into John’s startled eyes. “And who,” he added quietly, “if I’m not mistaken, will soon have selected a tree for yourself.”

If Johnny did not immediately reply it was only that his thoughts were in other places—thing that felt like an icy hand closing about his throat, had taken his breath away.

“Me?” he repeated dazedly at last. “What in Sam Hill would they want to hang me for?”

“Money,” Oates said quietly. “They’ll get that first, and, as they have a constitutional objection to the continued existence of any person who is in a position to cause them inconvenience, hang you afterwards.”

“In the same way,” said Oates, ticking off the names on his fingers, “they robbed and hanged James Appleton, the carpet millionaire of Kilderminster; Francois Adoniram; Martin Goodenough, who’d just drawn first-prize-money in a foreign State lottery; Gordon Lopez, the retired moneylender; and, finally, Sir Julian Dore.”

Johnny, in his uncontrollable impulse, the Yorkshireman jumped to his feet, eyes blazing, hands working convulsively.

“I’d give ten years of my life just for one little minute to have the Scarlet Scarab here,” he said, and his fingers clenched with a force that squeezed the knuckles white as paper.

Designedly, Johnny spoke calmly.

“Nasty piece of work, is he?” he suggested.

The detective, with a strong effort, controlled himself, and sat down.

“Listen, Mr. Travers,” he said quietly. “I’ve had twenty years in the Force. In that time I’ve dealt with every kind of crook, every type of criminal—thieves, blackmailers, fire-bugs, murderers. In every case but one there’s been some point—the saturation point in wickedness, if you like to put it that way—beyond which they wouldn’t go; there was in each some spark, however dim and flickering, of elementary decency.”

He paused, his face strained and tense, in the grip of an overwhelming emotion.

“And the exception?” Johnny inquired, and, in his seat by the window, Ginger leaned forward for the answer.

“The—devil—who calls himself the Scarlet Scarab,” said Oates, “is the only criminal in my experience who, in essence, is the very negation of good; loving evil as much as for its own sake, as for the sake of the outrage, the horror, the blood it brings him profit.”

There was a depth of feeling in the

MAKE NO MISTAKE!

THIS PAPER IS

NOT

"THE SHOCKER"

NOR

"THE HORROR"

IT'S

"THE THRILLER!"

wholly unbelievable, that in a society so highly organised as in Great Britain, policed by a force that is the world’s admiration, such a state of affairs could go unchecked.

“How long has this been going on?” he looked up to ask.

“Two years,” Oates said with curt brevity.

“And you—Scotland Yard, I mean,” Johnny demanded, “are all up in the air?”

“Have you seen the telegraph about the nostrils, made a savage gesture. “Not a thing have we learnt about either him or his gang,” he said curtly as before. “For eighteen months, under my own nose, we’ve had a whole squad of men engaged, day and night, month after month, on nothing but that one case, and we’re as far from even beginning to trace him now as we were to know who he is, where he is, or anything about him.”

He ceased speaking, and in the silence which followed there came to Johnny Travers the germ of an idea which was the conviction that in the as yet unformulated scheme, lay all that deadly peril the atmosphere of which from early morning had encompassed him.

Johnny stretched himself in advance by the strength and sincerity of the detective’s hand-clasp at parting.

“It’s very irregular, Mr. Travers,” the inspector said gravely, and Johnny smiled.

“I’d never know,” he pointed out, “after your eighteen months of orthodox methods!”

“And—“the detective’s voice was a warning in itself—“I hardly need point—dangerous.”

Johnny raised his eyebrows.

“For me?” he questioned.

“For both of you,” Oates confirmed gravely.

Johnny glanced at Ginger, who grunted.

“If it’s going to be dangerous for Mr. Travers an’ me,” that fiery-haired warrior remarked, “I’ll never再说 something like that to you again and you just tell me what it’s going to be for that Scarlet Arab bloke. I never did like foreigners, anyway.”

THE NEXT VICTIM.

I n spite of the development of mechanical transport, there remain to-day, and within comparatively short distances of London, certain areas which, on account of so utterly dreary and inhospitable that the curlew’s dismal note seems the only apparent sound to break the brooding silence; the only sign of life within that desolation.

At the eastern centre of this cooking waste, set like the hub of a half-wheel, the spokes representing various uncertain and hardly defined paths to the road half a mile away, stood what once was a house of size and comparative importance.

Rumour had it that the builder was a Kentish smuggler who, finding the Romney Marshes unhealthy for his personal safety, had invested his savings in the erection of this new headquarters. It was also said that in the architecture of that dismal
edifice were many subletties, and while this strange house was backed by the sea, it was defended on all other sides by an almost impenetrable marsh.

Then, one dark winter night, the old man's own lieutenant had sold the pass and led the hated Revenue men down a path as treacherous as himself. The old smuggler was too game to allow himself to be taken without showing fight, and because of the casualties in the subsequent resistance, he was very promptly and efficiently "turned off" from Tyburn Tree.

So grim a reputation had this dark house begotten from those days, that now, within an area of ten square miles, there were not some 300 people who had not traced the tortuous paths to approach within a mile of it.

Nor did this gaunt old pile stand alone in its inglorious past. Some two hundred yards from it, still in a frigid region, rose a small and utterly abandoned cottage. Now, forlorn and deserted, it was said that once it had been a kind of supplementary retreat of the smugglers.

Silence, grim and ominous, seemed to brood over the whole place, and nowhere would it be thought possible to find a more entirely deserted and deserted habitation.

Yet not so deserted was it. Unseen, unknown, was felt by that superstitious area who, though no sound of them but themselves were aware of it, could and did approach that rotting front-door both in confidence and in darkness.

It was upon a night of intense blackness when, in a room which, in spite of the marsh, was well below ground-floor level, the Crimson Scabir faced his assembled Council of Twenty—the inner administrative force of that terrible freemasonry of infancy.

The apartment was long and narrow, as was the table about which they sat. The walls were of a blackness so intense that it was as though the room had been burnt out of living wood. Apart from the table itself as black as bog-oak could make it, and the chairs, of the same dead wood, the only appointments were the three lights, which hung equidistant over the table. So somberly did these burn through their smoked-glass bulbs set beneath coal-black shades, that the illumination was in itself only an accentuation of the prevailing gloom.

Upon each side of the table sat, motionless as statues, men, figures, and over the head of each was drawn a hood, blank except for the slits cut into it for eyes and mouth.

At the bottom of the table sat, bolt upright, and yet, in spite of the consoling robe, somehow dominant, another figure similarly attired. There was that in his attitude and, when he spoke, in his voice, an air of authority which, however, did not convey the impression of being quite of his own force, but only, as it were, in support of the small, hunched figure who, from his position at the head of the table, dominated and held in subjection that whole grotesque assembly.

And yet, if the English was somewhat clipped and stilted, the voice of this hunched figure when he spoke was strangely soft and musical. Never once was his power shown by a harsh note or threatening movement; no more than would a ringmaster find it necessary to threaten a troupe of performing dogs, did he insist upon his own dominion. And yet, surrounding him was an atmosphere of such force,
Down in the cellar of the crook's house they discovered the motor which operated the mysterious secret panels.

A cackling voice from the door called out gloatingly:

"Hand him over to Number Nought!"

OUTED!

M R. RAYMOND, Johnny's solicitor, had engaged a flat for him in Jermyn Street, and the day following the inquest upon Sir Julian Dore, at which the usual verdict of "Murder by some person or persons unknown," was returned, there Johnny installed himself with that ex-champion weightlifter and present expert trainer, Ginger Byram, as confidential valet and general utility-man. Somehow Johnny felt that before very long he would need Ginger, and need him badly.

He spent three days renewing acquaintance with as many local haunts as yet remained in the London that now was so strange to him, in restocking his wardrobe, and in making one or two other arrangements not quite so simple. It was not, however, until the evening of his fourth day in residence that anything occurred to confirm the suspicions that Oates had so very definitely incalculated.

It was just after half-past five when his telephone bell rang. A cultured, well-modulated voice came over the wire as Johnny lifted the receiver to his ear.

"That Mr. Raymond's office speaking," came the answer. "Mr. Raymond wishes me to ask if it will be convenient for you to receive him at this evening?"

Johnny did a little quick thinking.

"Mr. Raymond there?" he inquired at last, and there was a hiatus before the answer came.

"He is just on the point of leaving to keep an appointment, sir."

"Tell him I'd like to speak to him," Johnny said shortly.

There was an interval of a couple of minutes before the voice came again.

"Mr. Raymond wishes me to ask you to excuse him, sir, as already he is late for his appointment, it said courteously but with decision.

"Tell him," Johnny said thoughtfully, "that I'll be in at seven," and rang off. . . . . . . .

 Barely had the last stroke of that hour died away from the little silver clock on the mantel when the bell of the bell from his front door rang.

"I will answer it, Ginger," Johnny instructed. And then he added definitely: "Now you make yourself scarce as a frog's tail-feathers.

The plump, medium-sized man who, a moment later, was ushered in by Johnny, had the assured and kindly bearing of the London professional man of undoubted standing—morning-coated, platinum-watch-chained, clipped-moustached, with brown, examining eyes and fresh complexion, and the hand he held out in greeting was white and adequately manicured. In clothes and bearing he was as impeccably correct as he was in voice and gesture.

As the mountain, as represented by you, Mr. Travers," he said pleasantly, "has not so far come to Mohammed, myself as an unworthy representative has seized gladly upon the excuse to visit the mountain—ever the time selected was perhaps, be a little inconveniently near to dinner."

"Glad to see you, sir," Johnny assured him. "I don't dine until eight, anyway. But, while we're on the subject, what about a culinary?"

The solicitor's good-natured face lightened.

"My answer is what, at this hour, I make a practice of replying to such a suggestion," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I shall be delighted."

While Johnny, who rather fancied himself the art, shook a couple of "Browns," his visitor's kindly gaze travelled about the room.

"You live here alone, Mr. Travers?" he inquired in mild surprise.

"There's a woman comes to clean in the early morning," Johnny replied above the rattle of ice in the shaker, and the other raised carefully-styled eyebrows.

"But she's not your solo staff?" he suggested.

"I've a man, of course," Johnny said, carefully measuring the drinks into glasses he had fetched from the kitchenette himself.

"Out, I presume?" said his visitor.

"For the evening," Johnny confirmed, handing over the brimming glass, the contents of which the other sipped gratefully.

"And now, Mr. Travers," he remarked briskly, waving aside Johnny's silent suggestion of a re-fill, "to business!"

"Good enough!" said Johnny with a smile. "Our respective needs, Mr. Travers?"

"Brent," said Johnny, as the other became afflicted with one of those unaccountable lapses of recollection to which every one is liable.

"Brent," went on the solicitor, "appeared to be most anxious that, when his benefaction became yours, you should be able to enter into possession with the least possible delay or formality. Thus—and if I may be allowed to say so—due in some small measure to the legal spade-work I myself had been able to do, your arrival in this country, all that remains to be completed before I am legally justified in passing those very valuable bearer bonds into your possession, is the method by yourself of legal proof of identity."

Johnny, who had listened intently to this lucid and gracefully delivered exposition, nodded quietly.
“I have ‘em all,” he remarked easily, and went over to a small Sheraton bureau in the window. “Right here,” he confirmed, taking a bundle of papers from a drawer.

The solicitor held out his hand.

“May I see, please?” he suggested, and without hesitation Johnny handed them over.

Humming cheerfully to himself, the solicitor examined carefully each document in turn. Then, from the same pocket as which, after folding them severally into their original creases, he placed them, he produced a stub of his own, stamped, closely-printed, and typed, and with a space left at the foot for signature.

“Just sign on the dotted line, Mr. Travers, please,” he cried gaily; “and then—”

“And then?” Johnny said, his face inscrutable.

With a glance from beneath lowered lids the other spread his hands benevolently.

“Why then,” he explained, in the same cheery voice as before, “everything will be all in order.”

“In order for whom?” Johnny inquired, and raised his visitor’s eyes four-square.

And as their glances locked, slowly at first, but a split-second later, as swiftly as a breeze disturbs the placidity of a lake surface, the other’s expression changed. All the bonhomie and frankness drained from it, leaving it hard and implacable.

“What exactly do you mean?” he demanded, and his voice rang with a curious metallic coldness.

Johnny’s eyes did not flinch. Nor did he attempt to evade the issue.

“In order for whom?” he repeated clearly. And then more slowly still: “For myself, or—the Scarlet Scarab.”

Not infrequently in recent years half a split-second’s advantage in pulling a gun had been the exact margin between Johnny’s continued existence and an abrupt exit to eternity, so that he had come to consider himself something of an expert. In comparison with the immemorial figure who faced him, however, he discovered himself a slothful amateur.

One moment the man’s hand was empty: an infinitesimal fraction of a heartbeat later it held a small, but extremely efficient automatic.

“Put ‘em right up, Mr. Travers,” the other said conversationally, and Johnny, to whom experience had taught exact knowledge as to when an opponent meant business, raised his hands above his head.

“I wonder,” he said meditatively as he did so, “to which particular member of your gang of sneak-thieves and plug-uglies has been assigned the role of impersonating me at Mr. Raymond’s office?”

Not much, he had thought, would have power to disturb the hard-boiled criminality of the man’s face. But the other’s reception of this that first brought home the paralleled strength of the hold the Scarlet Scarab had attained over his followers.

The crook’s eyes glinted with the light of欺诈; momentarily the slim white forefinger touched on the trigger of the automatic.

“But for what immediately faces you,” he began thickly, “I’d—”

He broke off, pushed the paper across to Johnny’s side of the table, backed a few paces, and with the automatic pointed directly at Johnny, said harshly:

“Sign!”

Johnny looked at him curiously.

“Strange how a man’s early training stays with him,” he remarked pleasantly. “Which was your counter? Before you gave up shop-walking for theft, I mean. Ribbons or baby-linen?”

The other looked at him acidly.

“Are you going to sign?” he said slowly, and Johnny nodded.

“I am,” he said, and, as he lowered his hand to take up the pen, saw how his visitor’s eyes lighted, as if from within, “not?” Johnny added, jabbed the uninked pen into the paper, drew it savagely across the page, leaving a jagged tear on the sheet. “And that’s that,” he supplemented.

The man smiled, exposing teeth as white and pointed as those of a wolf. Then he nodded:

“That, as you say, is that,” he confirmed pleasantly, and pressed the trigger of his pistol.

But it was no swift, merciful bullet that issued from that vicious blue rim of steel—a bullet would have been easy and merciful in comparison. Instead, there jetted forth a thin, incredibly compressed rod of vapour, luminously white, which, impinging against Johnny’s face, burst immediately into a cloud which, with the first sharply indrawn breath of astonishment, seized his throat with the sensation of Hercelean fingers equipped with white-hot spikes; a cloud which dived deeply into his lungs, bursting and consuming them; shot upward to his brain, jagged and tore it.

The roof fell down, the walls closed in, the floor rose up.

He was in icy black darkness, through which vivid lightning stabbed speaker of crimson flame.

He knew no more.

Peering cautiously from the main entrance to the flats, Ginger saw, twenty yards down the street, a high-power car drawn up against the kerb. The driver, high collar drawn up and wide-brimmed hat pressed down, was slumping over the wheel so that, to those on the pavement, no portion of his face was visible.

Ginger turned and, crossing the vestibule, disappeared through a small door that communicated with those dim back premises which, to the average flat-dweller, remain ever an unexplored mystery. So far from the normal, however, was the ex-welterweight champion, that he had not been resident twenty-four hours beneath his master’s roof before knowing every door and outlet of those rear rooms as he knew “the palm of me ’and.” Among other facts he had gathered was that, across the tiny yard, a door led to a lane which, at right-angles, communicated with Jermyn Street.

When at last he emerged it was well to the rear of the car, and by that time it was in the stained and faded overalls, and carrying the tool-bag of a motor-mechanic. At this dinner-hour Jermyn Street was unusually clear of traffic, and as he quietly approached the car, concealed in Ginger’s right hand was a freshly-sharpened knife.

Two minutes later, one of the studs of the new back tyre, severed cleanly, was in his hand, and he was crossing the road.

A few yards to the left of the flat entrance ran a narrow passage between two shops, and from this concealment, standing with his motor-cycle, which he had hidden there, Ginger watched. If, as he had admitted to Johnny, he knew nothing of driving a car, about a motor-cycle he had nothing to learn.

Quite suddenly the blind of Johnny’s sitting-room window was lowered. A palm of man ached over the car crawled slowly to the door; a man climbed down and disappeared.

Five minutes later, with no attempt at concealment, two men emerged from the small wakefulness, and valedictory comments upon the weight and general unwieldiness of the large feather mattress which, between them, they bundled roughly into the tonneau. Then, while one of them was behind the car, the better-dressed of the two climbed beside the chauffeur, and the car drove off.

“The dirty dogs!” Ginger muttered savagely, and before the retreating car had covered thirty yards, was astride his cycle and following.

Through all the clatter of traffic of the Haymarket, Trafalgar Square, and the Strand, he contrived to keep in touch. In Fleet Street, however, the congestion cleared, and through the City the roads were comparatively free.

Slowly the crook pressed the trigger, but the bullet Trevor expected never came. Instead, a cloud of vapour enveloped his head and gasping he staggered back and collapsed.
THE EDITOR GREETS YOU!

OUR brilliant serial, "The Crook Game," is now well away on its road to success. It has caught on with even more popularity than our other serials, which themselves have been voted the finest selection ever published in a weekly paper.

Letters have been pouring in, all loud in their praise, and I am glad to see, their appreciation of Mr. Dilnot's fine detective technique. There are few people who have a better knowledge of Scotland Yard and its methods and the artifice of the criminal than Mr. Dilnot.

Last week I gave you some idea of the splendid programme in store for you, and among the famous authors I mentioned as early contributors was Sydney Horler. All mystery fiction enthusiasts know Mr. Horler's gripping stories and enthralling books, and now I have secured a really fine piece of work from him, which will appear in a fortnight's time. It is written in a style that Mr. Horler alone knows how to handle, and I can assure you that it is a yarn that must certainly not be missed.

You will, of course, be looking forward to another brilliant yarn by Leslie Charteris next week. The mystery that he weaves round the House on the Moor is intriguing in the extreme, and the yarn begins with a stroke by that atmosphere that Mr. Charteris specialises in. Don't fail to read the latest exploits of Simon Templar and his merry men.

Yours sincerely,

THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to "The Thriller" Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.A.
The gibe passed unnoticed; in spite of his smallness of stature his tormentor was a bigger man than the pseudo-solicitor.

"Here, then!" he exclaimed loudly, and the three hooded figures, with those terrible pistols, stepped forward. The Scarlet Scarrab indicated those weapons with a gesture.

"You have had a taste of—that?" he questioned, and again his voice was of a silken softness.

"You didn't have an able to bring the here, otherwise," Johnny said contemptuously.

The other shook his head.

"One of these weapons is convenient to hand," he said, and glanced at the wrist which protruded from his gown.

"You have just three-e minutes in which to make up your mind," he added.

"And I refer you to mentioned."

"Then will arise," the other said softly, "the——a fortune——necessity of applying pressure to at least one of those triggers. A deplorable contempts it is sincerely to be hoped may be avoided. Particularly," he added with silken significance, "as the mixture they contain is slightly more potent than that which you were so unfortunate to experience in your flat.

And even while I have been speaking time has not stood still. One minute."

Johnny hesitated—which was outside his habit. The idea of consent under duress was unpleasant—but not so unpleasant as a further experience of that choking, gripping gas, the effects of which were still apparent in the swift waves of giddiness and nausea which from time to time seized him, and a certain vagueness of thought and action. A second application, and of increased strength, would just about finish him.

"Two minutes!" The soft sibilance of the voice was inexorable.

Johnny took a step forward.

"Give me a further sixty seconds to read what I’m to sign," he said shortly, and, mockingly, the slight hooded figure bowed.

"Glady," he said, and thrust the paper across the table. And, glancing quickly through the typewritten lines, Johnny discovered it to be a full discharge, to his solicitor, Mr. Raymond, in return for his handing over the Beveron Bonds that were his legacy.

"A document," the Scarlet Scarrab explained pleasantly, which, for their own protection, they had carried upon their person while engaged in the task of the night when handing over the proceeds of an estate to a legatee, and without which we should be——seriously handicapped.

It was as he laid aside the pen after having scrawled his signature, that interruption came. There was a shout from outside, the sudden scuffling of feet; a cry, followed by a shot, and still another.

One of the hooded figures dashed to the door, flung it open, and as quickly closed it. With the opening the sounds of battle increased to a fury of thuds and hoarse cries, in which, with a quick throb of exultation, Johnny was able to recognise the growing joy of Ginger in battle. Johnny thought, also, that he could distinguish, but not be fully conscious of, the less audible accents of Detective-inspector Oates.

For a fractional second the Scarlet Scarrab seemed as if even in that incredibly brief period he was aware of the room was plunged in darkness, Johnny was aware of the attitude of less fear than of expectancy. Simultaneously with that sudden extinction of the light came, from the side of the room, a dull, hollow crash. There was a rush of cold air; Johnny felt a spatter of rain upon his cheeks.

The torches enabled him to see what he had escaped. Like the lid of a suspended box, one part of the wall, some six feet square, had flapped down and outward. From the ceiling, and through the opening thus left, dangled a heavy knotted rope. Craning downward, Johnny was aware of water lapping against the side of the house; listening intently, he heard the throb of a retreating motor-boat. A glance at the table told him that the paper had disappeared.

"Who is that?" Oates gasped anxiously, as they listened to the fast-fading sound of the engine.

"The Scarlet Scarrab," Johnny said regretfully, and Oates cursed quietly to himself.

"The first time in two years I've been within distance, and the blighter gets away," he said with a cry as, without warning, but with a noise like the slamming of an enormous door, the flap swung suddenly back, closing the wall as tightly as if no opening had ever been. Simultaneously the light went up.

Johnny had sunk faintly down upon the mattress. At the moment he was conscious only with the miracle of his own escape. Apart from that, he had had almost all that even his steel-wire constitution could stand.

"How did you get here, anyway?" he asked uncertainly, and Oates gestured toward Ginger.

"He trailed them on his motor-cycle," he said laconically, "and when he'd run them to ground, phoned the Yard."

"We'd have been 'ere before," Ginger said regretfully, "if 'alf way down Limehouse Causeway, my engine hadn't gone back on me."

The detective turned to him in surprise.

"Then how did you trace them?" he demanded quickly.

"Outside the flat, sir, I'd cut a stuid out of their back tyre. That 'elped me to track 'em through the mud of the road," Ginger said modestly. "Easy enough with no other traffic, and the surface like paste."

A knock at the door, and the sergeant came in.

"Another" roped in, sir," he reported. "A chap in the cellar, tinkering with the electric-light switch."

Oates thought for a moment.

"Stay right here, sergeant, and report what happens," he said, and, followed by Johnny and Ginger, clattered down the hollow-sounding stairs. In the passage at the bottom, lined up against the wall, in their grotesque cloaks, hoods thrust back from their faces, were half a dozen scowling hand-cuffed members of the gang. Ignoring these, Oates traversed the full length of the passage, and clattered down the cellar stairs. In a small alcove at the bottom was installed an electric plant; modern, elaborate, and meticulously maintained. To the right of this was a switch. "I'll bet that's what the chap was monkeying with," Oates said confidently, pressed down the lever, waited a few moments, and pulled it up again.

"Now let's go upstairs," he said, and they followed him to the top floor.

"Anything happened?" he inquired of the sergeant.

"The light went out, sir, and so did half the wall," the latter replied unemotionally.

"Then, a minute later, the wall came back, and so did the light."

TROUBLE.

The private office of Mr. Hilary Raymond, sole surviving partner in the old-established firm of Raymond, Hepplewhite & Raymond, was exactly what the room of a family solicitor should be. Large and airy, mellowed polished mahogany furniture, thick Turkey carpet, steel engravings, deep leather chairs and, upon a shelf which ran along three of the walls, desk-boxes, the names upon which had figured largely in British history.
Tall, and of middle age, with slightly silvered hair and steady kindly eyes, the lawyer, an excellent specimen of the family solicitor of standing, was "this morning, seated at a table in the principal office.

He cast a quick, comprehensive glance at a photograph which lay beside him before rising to greet the visitor who, at that moment, entered his office.

"Mr. Raymond," he said heartily, "I've got the discharge with me right now. It was prepared," he explained, "by O'Hagan & Rice, your Winnipeg agents, who advised me of your request by telegram.

Mr. Raymond returned his smile with one not less friendly.

"In the circumstances, a wise—if somewhat unusual—provision," he said quietly, "was devised. And, leaning back in his chair, glanced at the first of the documents in his hand. And as he did so his eyes hardened. Quickly, then, he turned from one to the other of these documents, glancing each closely and intently.

"Just a moment," he said as last, laid the documents on the desk, and pressed the bell at his side. "You must have been something of an expert in planning your scheme."

"What are you pressing that bell for?" he asked, and his voice rung harshly.

"What, but to send my clerk for the Bonds?" the lawyer said, regarding him with mild surprise.

With a little sigh of relief, the visitor sank once more into his chair—only to spring up again. "In answer to that ring, the door opened to disclose—Inspector Oates.

For a moment the two regarded each other in silence. Oates smiling grimly, the visitor white-faced and tense. Then, in a flash, his hand dived for his arm-pit, and had it not been for that encumbering hand, he would have fought his way to the street. As it was, in face of the automatic that menaced him, he ceased struggling for the trigger-guard with a finger too tightly bound to reach it, and dropped the weapon to the floor.

"Arthur, the Actord," Oates said in wonderment. "Well, well, well! And who'd have thought of Arthur being mixed up with the Scarlet Scabar?"

Without removing his eyes from the crook, he called:

"Come right in, Mr. Travers, and take a look at your twin-brother!"

Johnny came into the room and ranged himself beside the crook, and only then was Mr. Raymond able to realize the exact truth that Arthur had put into his performance. Clothes, hair, features—reproduced with breath-taking similarity. Both might have been poured from the same mold.

"Aren't you the little artist, Arthur?" Oates observed admiringly. "In make-up, anyway, if not in the conduct of your plot."

"Stop your kid!" Mr. Travers said, "there's nothing there—but Limehouse, I mean. Just one of their funk..."

Astride his motor-bike, Ginger waited. Suddenly he started as two men came from Trevor's house struggling beneath the weight of a large feather mattress.
"But I have an appointment," he said quickly.
"I'm sorry, sir," said Goodwin, "but Mr. Raymond is not here."

"When will he be here?" Johnny demanded, and the old clerk looked at him, he thought, a trifle strangely.
"I don't know, sir," he said, and now, quite definitely, there was a quaver in his voice.
Johnny looked at him intently. There was something here that needed explanation, and that explanation he intended to have, and at once.

"Mr. Goodwin," he said gravely, "it doesn't need anything more than your manner to tell me you're worried to death, and I want you to come right through with what's troubling you."

He felt genuine sympathy for the old man's distress, and quite a lot of that showed in his tone. THAT old man was touched was evident; that the professional reticence of a lifetime was proof against his urge to unburden himself was more apparent still.

"I think, sir," he said slowly at last, "the best thing you can do is to apply at his house. Number 362, Lancaster Place, is the address, sir. I'm quite sure Miss Raymond will see you."

"You bet your sweet life she will," Johnny said, and was out in the street, and, ten minutes later, in Holborn, hailing a taxi.

His ring was answered by a butler of the old school, who gazed at him with an anticipation which reverted to disappointment as he realised the caller was a stranger.

"Miss Raymond can see no one, sir," he said firmly.

"Hold hard a minute," Johnny said quietly, the door was about to close, and involuntarily the butler hesitated. Johnny took a card from his case, and upon it scribbled a few words.

"Give that to your mistress, please," he said.

When, through huge horn-rimmed spectacles, the butler read what the card bore him, his manner changed instantly to a deeper respect, and he opened the door wide.

"Step into the morning-room, sir," he said quietly, ushering Johnny into a small, cozy apartment that ran off from the hall, closed the door quietly behind him, and disappeared.

Five minutes later the door opened and the girl came in. And:

"Gosh!" said Johnny silently to his immortal soul. And again: "Gosh!"

Her figure was of such perfection he found it difficult to judge as to her exact height; all he knew was that it was just right to the rest of her. Her hair, of the colour of a newly-minted penny, had stolen the sunlight with which fr him the day was crowned. Her eyes, wide-set and deep-sea blue looked, now, with deepest anxiety from between jet-fringed lashes that were in exquisite contrast with the unaccustomed pallor of a face that curved in lovely line from broad white brow to rounded chin.

Her mouth was generous and sweet, drooping a little now, though with a tiny tilt to the corners which spoke, normally, of a sense of humour. Her nose was small and straight, with the finely-chiselled nostrils of the thoroughbred. There was grace in her every line and movement, and in nothing so much was this displayed as in the self-command she had established over her anxiety.

"Y-Y-Y have news of my father," she asked with a little catch in her golden voice.

He looked at her gravely, heart contracting, but pulse leaping.

"No," he said gravely, "I've come for news of him."

"How did you know?" she asked quickly.

"I don't," he said. "I only know there's something wrong, not what it is." She seemed to hesitate to confide in this stranger, and he said: "He may have mentioned to you what happened in his office the other day," and with his words her face went paler yet.

For a long moment her blue, troubled eyes searched his own; appraising him, analysing. Then, quite suddenly, she seemed to make her decision.

"My father has disappeared," she said quietly, but the break in her voice more obvious.

"Disappeared!" he repeated blankly, and paused, his thoughts racing. "When was that?" he demanded quickly. "And in what circumstances?"

She pointed to a chair.

"Won't you sit down," she said. "I-I think I should like to talk to you."

Amazingly, and with a swift clutching at his heart, he realised that she was glad to have him there; that she was alone and needed counsel.
"I'm afraid Brooks was what you might call a little tardy, sir," he said.

"How do you mean, tardy?" Johnny jerked out, and the butcher glanced at him keenly.

"The master was at the car door, sir, while Brooks was still climbing out of his sedan chair. The master said, sort of sharp-like, 'All right, Brooks. Straight to Brutoon Street.' Then he closed the door behind him and they drove off."

Dimly, but with increasing certainty, the voice of the landlady had taken root in Johnny's mind and was becoming a permanent feature of his waking dreams. "Tell me, Harris," he said, and now his tone was almost confidential, "did you happen to catch a glimpse of Brooks' face?"

"No, sir," the landlady answered without thought.

"I don't know that I actually noticed him. He's a feature by feature, sir," he said uncertainly. "I couldn't very well, because his back was to me."

"Besides, he was all muffled up."

Johnny's eyes narrowed.

"All muffled up, was he?" he said slowly, and fixed Harris with his eye. "I suppose it was hissed car?"

"Yes, sir," the landlady answered.

The butler stared, his mouth half open.

"So far as I could see, it was, sir," he protested; "and as it stood outside the door every day for the last five years, it looked, as you might say, like the palm of my hand."

Johnny went to the door, opened it, and looked out into the street. The space between the door and railings was considerable, and the pavement wide.

"Was the light on in the hall when the car arrived?" he questioned over his shoulder, and the butcher shook his head.

"No, sir."

"What, not at eight o'clock in the evening?" Johnny demanded in surprise, and Harris broke in.

"The light system of the whole house went wrong only about a quarter of an hour before," she explained.

"But it's all right now?" Johnny asked.

"Yes, sir. It came on again as suddenly as it failed," said Harris.

"What time did it come on again?"

Johnny inquired.

"Just after the master's gone, sir—about a quarter to eight." He added, almost in his face that Johnny turned.

"Where is the garage?" he asked.

"Down the first turning from here," the girl said, and the landlady added, "It's a little breach in her voice. All the time he had been questioning Harris, Johnny had seen how tensely she had been following.

"Take me there, please," he said quietly. The landlady nodded, motioned to Harris, who disappeared through a baize door, to reappear a moment later with a key. In the meanwhile she had slipped quickly into coat and hat. And hurried down the steps, she said anxiously:

"What have you in your mind, Mr. Travers?"

"Trouble," said Johnny, and hurried after her.

The rumble of the garage door along its grooves echoed hollowly. Passing for an instant on the threshold, Johnny thought he detected a muffled sound from within. With faint hesitance, Terry Raymond pointed dazedly.

"But—but—" she gasped. "There's the car!"

This confirming his suddenly-arrived-at theory, Johnny nodded.

"It's not so much the car I'm thinking of," he said, "as what's likely to be inside it. And sliding across the concrete floor, wrenched open the car door."

For a moment he stood motionless. Then, with a swift dive into the tonneau, he gently lifted out the crumpled-up figure and laid it on the floor. Terry, gazing horrified into the rigid features, cried:

"It's Brooks!"

Johnny was on his knees now, removing the gag that was tied tightly across the driver's mouth with his hands. His hands went round the neck of the man to encounter, at the base of the skull, a formidable lump.

"Sandbagged," he pronounced. "Deliberately expert, too. And, to make sure he didn't come round in time to give trouble, they bound and gagged him.

With his penknife he cut the cords about wrists and ankles, while Terry, grapping in his hand. Five minutes later, indubitably feeling the back of his head, Brooks was sitting up. "Tell us what happened," Johnny insisted.

"Appened!" "Appened!" he repeated. Then, as if struck by some incredibly painful thought, he glanced quickly to the car, and sighed relief as he saw it still there.

"Truth, I thought it was that way for them," he said.

"Tell us exactly what happened," Johnny repeated.

The chauffeur spread his hands.

"Easy," he said. "I was bending over the bonnet and the roof fell on the back of my head. The next I knew I was lying here, with you bending over me."

"You didn't see anyone at all?" Johnny questioned.

Brooks took another pull from the flask. "No one," he said, "not millions of stars and several gas explosions."

They saw him safely to his lodgings close by, and returned to Lancaster Place. On the way:

"What do you make of it?" Terry queried, her voice desperate with apprehension. "What possibly can have happened?"

Johnny did not know how to reply. He could not tell her that her father had been kidnapped in precisely similar fashion to those others upon whom, subsequently, the Scarlet Scharab had wreaked their lust both for money and immunities. But though he did not reply, he felt his effort was not too convincing.

"And now," he said at last, "I'm going to report the whole affair to Scotland Yard. You can rely upon everything being done under the highest guise, and you'll be, etc."

"That man you put on to watch?" Johnny suggested.

"There's a chance that he followed when Raymond was abducted, and then ran away from his contacts. Actually he is here, or rather of him, at that moment. The telephone rang, and when Oates turned from answering his face was grey."

"Clarke, the faithful watchman, came to himself in the middle of Hampstead Heath at seven o'clock this morning, and was
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"A little," Johnny said, and stepped forward. "What's your trouble?"

"You are," said the driver, and struck.

He missed, but in avoiding the blow, Johnny stepped back into the two who, lurking on the off-side of the car, ran forward. Even with the hot scurry of what immediately followed he saw that, like the driver, they were masked.

As long as it lasted, the pace was brisk and action rapid. Ginger, stepping forward, hit the chauffeur so hard on the point of the jaw that he felt the bone crunch from the impact.

The man, lifted clean off his feet, shot into the roadway, and there lay.

Johnny, equally willing and only a little less expert, had time to wheel before the long, thin man into whom Ginger's victim cannoned, had completely recovered his balance. A beautifully timed straight left prevented him from doing so, and he, too, was down. By this time Ginger was ready to give attention to the third of the trio, a formidable broad-chested ruffian armed with eighteen inches of lead-piping.

Wisely, Ginger backed, and as the man lunged forward, Johnny tripped him. As he floundered Ginger's fist shot out, and given bare knuckles and a split second of time to set himself, Ginger never had to hit the same man twice.

Then, calmly and un hurriedly, from the tonneau of the car stepped a figure, and, immediately following, a second one. In the hands of each was a long-barrelled automatic, over their heads black silken hoods. The voice of the first came, soft, sib l lent, and, to Johnny, loathsome familiar.

"Greatly as I deplore this almost photographic resemblance to the films," he said, "I must ask you to raise your hands—right above the head, please. Otherwise—the pistol-barrel moved ever so slightly.

The two pairs of hands went down. It was apparent that these theatrically-garbed figures meant business.

"Good," the spokesman murmured. His glance travelled to the man of whom Johnny had disposed, and now was beginning to stir uncessarily.

"Get up, you!" he ordered, his voice contemptuous, lacking the man shuffled unsteadily to his feet.

"There are handcuffs in the car—and cord," the hooded man said. "Get them—now," he went on in his sibilent voice, turning to Johnny. "They're scared and would wage a battle about their heads, shutting out sight; their legs tightly bound with cords. Helpless, they were half-carried, half-pulled, into the house. After a brief delay there was a further widening of the intimated forms, by which Johnny judged that the two foundered ruffians had been salvaged. An instant later he was conscious of someone climbing to the driving-seat, and of another form wedging beside him. From first to last the whole episode had not occupied three minutes.

The driver, turned sharply to his right, turned sharply an angle of the Square, and then to the left. A few seconds later the roar of traffic proclaimed that they were in New Oxford Street. From this place that they turned to the right they knew they were heading towards Newgate Street and the City.

"Confirmed, Ginger," he said. "We're down, gagged, helpless as he was, it was to Johnny as if the deprivation of sight rendered hearing all the more acute. Several times he thought he heard, in the quieter places, the not quite drowned and
A thin rope ladder slithered down the wall, then, peering up through the gloom of their prison, they saw a face at the high barred window.

rather individual throb of another car behind. He hoped from his heart he was not mistaken.

It came to him, too, that this same circumstance was not lost upon his captors. Several times when the beat sounded more distinctly than usual, the man beside him stirred, as if uneasy, in his seat; more than once he felt an arm graze past his own, as if his neighbour had turned to glance from the rear window of the car.

"It's a police-car," his neighbour said at last, and the voice, calm, detached, was that of the Scarlet Scareb.

"Can we out-distance them?" came a voice from the opposite seat.

"No," Johnny's neighbour replied levelly. "It's one of their best cars.

Even as he spoke a harsher staccato note impinged upon the roar of their engine, and Johnny's neighbour turned somewhat hastily in his seat. As he did so came that harsh note again.

"They're shooting at our tyres," he said quickly, and his voice fell. "A pity, because now someone may get hurt. Especially, he added softly, "as I increased the charge."

Johnny felt him lean forward as if groping beneath the seat. What did the man mean anyway, with his "increased charge"? Johnny wondered uneasily.

He heard a box drawn out, and the man straightened himself. Leaning as far sideways as possible, the trained sensitiveness of the fingers of Johnny's manacled hands could follow the curve of his neighbour's arm down to what he held—and dark as it was, and without the other's knowledge, one touch of that cold, serrated surface and he had literally to bite off the cry that rose to his lips.

It was a Mills' bomb!

All of the reckless, hopeless enterprises in which Johnny Travers ever engaged, his attempt to snatch at that diabolical instrument of death was the maddest—and the nearest to success. Actually his fingers had more than half closed round it before the one who held it realised what was hap pening, and, with a desperate plunge forward, levered it away. Inert and helpless, a cold ring of steel boring into his forehead, Johnny was forced back into the corner.

In this short space the detonation of shots from the pursuing car had continued, and momentarily Johnny expected to feel the seat lurch from under him with the collapse of a tyre. But in the dark, and from the jolting car, marksmanship was a matter more of chance than of skill. All that happened was that the man next to him seemed, now, to be kneeling on the seat for understanding.

"Instruct Karl to slow down a little," he ordered, "and, at my word, to accelerate. It's quite No.1's fuse, and the time must be judged by the speed."

The car slowed gradually, the arm that was touching Johnny's side travelled upwards—jerked.

"Go!" the voice shouted, and the car bounded forward.

Behind the obscuring scarf Johnny counted off the seconds. As he reached "four" shattering blows from the throb of the engine came the explosion.

"He passed by some yards," he heard the Scarlet Scareb say judicially. "Slow down again, Karl."

"The driver obeyed. Again the jerk of the arm, the sharp command, followed by the quick lurch forward. This time Johnny's count was accurate; the explosion came just as he reached "five".

A few short seconds' delay, and he felt the man slide back into his seat.

"Most gratifying!" he said lightly, but with an undercurrent of exultation. "Dare I believe? I'm spared. Blew it, as the English say, 'sky-high.'"

And with that announcement Johnny's last hope fled. He had walked into the trap, only to have the door slammed and locked behind him.

After what seemed like an hour, the car drew to a halt, and the prisoners were bundled inconsequently into the road. Johnny heard the car drive slowly away as another car came to a halt, and into this they were hustled. The next moment they had taken the road again.

Three times was this process of changing cars repeated. And, leaning back in his corner, Johnny marvelled at the simple ingenuity of the device for throwing off pursuit. His answer was plain. The Scarlet Scareb had gone for so long immune!

At last they turned to the right to a road where their progress was slow and laboured, the wheels sinking deeply into the yielding surface. The car drew to a standstill.

"Someone loosened Johnny's straps, a firm grip closed upon his arm. That was "My man," the familiar purring voice instructed, and he was guided up shallow steps and across a tiled floor. The steps behind him halted. A heavy door closed, and the smell of damp assailed his nostrils.

On again, down hollow-sounding passages, and up several flights of stairs. A door clanged open, and with it came a sharp, stifled exclamation—"wonder, fear, incredulity," which brought the blood thudding into his ears.

Came a quick click as his handcuffs were removed. While he yet stumbled with the knees of the scarf that confined his eyes, the door clanged hollowly. The scarf came free. He looked about him confusedly—the light was so dim that, excepting he was in a small, cell-like room, he could distinguish little. But it did not need sight to tell him who, too, was there.

Suddenly, overhead, a lamp glowed into sudden brilliance.

On a truckle-bed in the corner, wide-eyed, pale, fearful, was Terry.

For a moment neither spoke. With Johnny's back to the, surrounding rage struggled for mastery; the danger in which she stood left him momentarily bereft.

Then, suddenly, words came:

"If—how do you come to be here?" he gasped. She did not immediately reply. Motion less, her eyes were fixed upon him, as if still dazed, or overcome by a sudden understanding.

"For the matter of that, how do you?" she asked in a low voice.

"I was brought here," he said, "at the mouth of a gun," and saw her hands close convulsively. Then, from some unplumbed well of courage, she smiled.

"So was I," she said. "I was having tea with friends in St. John's Wood. Apart from a couple of months we were alone in the house—in her own small room, with French windows overlooking the lawn, at one side of which is a potting-shed. Suddenly, after three days left alone, room, from out of this shed came two men—covered in black gowns and with hoods over their faces."

She shuddered. After allowing her a moment for recovery.

"Carry on, please!" Johnny said gently, and she made a gesture of hopelessness.

"They just took me out at the point of the pistol—to the lane at the back where there was an open gateway. With a little cry of abandonment that went to Johnny's heart like a knife-stab she burst into tears, that burst choked the words, "I don't know how he did it—hurt me and brought me here."

And then the announcement Johnny's last hope fled. He had walked into the trap, only to have the door slammed and locked behind him.

"They stood him up in a shed at the back of the house, and then they tortured him, she moaned. "Another man, very big, with a huge jaw, jumped on to the running-board, but they hit him on the head and he fell into the road."

"Those would be the detectives detailed for your protection," Johnny said confidently, and to divert her mind, tuned to the cx-puglist.

"This is my friend, Ginger Jackson," he said.

"Proud to meet you, miss," Ginger said admiringly. Not all the peril in which they stood had power to disarrange this usual order of nature. "How do you?" he added as an afterthought.

"Very frightened," said Terry, and to this there did not seem to be adequate reassurance.

The door opened, and two hooded figures with pistols at the alert stood on either side of the door to allow the Scarlet Scareb to pass. Behind him came two others, who carried a large chest, which they de posed in the middle of the room before going silently away again.

The sentries at the door drew aside to permit the entry of two others. Between them, bound and manacled, was a prisoner at whom Johnny gazed speechlessly, breath lessly, unbelievingly.

"My man," the prisoner gasped, and staggered a little between the men who held him.

With a short, bitter cry, Terry sprang to her feet.

"Father!" she shrieked, and with a supreme effort the solicitor made a gesture to quieten her agony.

His face, grey and lined, was covered with a stubble of beard; he was collarless and dishevelled, but his dignity held.

Unmoved, the Scarlet Scareb turned to him, indicated Terry.
"You see?" he said quietly.
"That you have added to your infamy?"

the solicitor said scornfully.

"But surely that did not need this further demonstration?" the Scarlet Scabrat returned with self-satisfied irony.

"You have proved it," Mr. Raymond said quietly, "to the lowest depths of which humanity is capable."

But the Scarlet Scabrat, a quiet chuckle, illimitably sinister, coming from beneath his hood, shook his head. "If you continue in your refusal to write that quite harmless but, to me, very necessary letter, and to sign an equally essential authorisation to your bankers, the probability is that you will be furnished with even more convincing proofs of professional untrustworthiness."

he stated sibilently.

Mr. Raymond turned to Johnny.

"Since you, also, are in the hands of these criminals, Mr. Travers," he said courteously — "a circumstance which, I believe me, I most sincerely deplore—you must know that what is referred to by this, the chief and most unconscionable of them all, is an official letter of instruction to my head clerk that, having been called unexpectedly away on business, he is to withdraw your securities from the strong-room of my bankers, and to deliver them to the bearer."

Slowly, significantly, the Scarlet Scabrat nodded.

"Most admirably and conceivably put," he said with approval. "And if you would act in the best interests of your—or, friends, Mr. Travers, it would most strongly suggest that the conditions imposed should be carried out without delay."

"No?" The lawyer's voice was strong and taut as steel wire. "Those bonds are my professional trust, and that trust nothing ever will induce me to betray."

"Nothing?" T h e Scarlet Scabrat's voice was silk-like in its delicacy. "Nothing at all, Mr. Raymond?" he repeated.

"Nothing whatever," the lawyer repeated more definitely even than before.

"We shall see." Still that same smooth texture of tone, but now, underlining it, something of menace that chilled Johnny like an ice-cold shower.

"We shall see," the Scarlet Scabrat repeated, "exactly how far—or—professional pride is proof against parental affection."

As he had been speaking, other figures had filed silently into the cell, and the figures behind where Johnny and Ginger were standing. Suddenly, without warning, the arms of each were seized, and, thus rendered defenceless, their hands and feet were manacled.

"Purely as a precautionary measure, gentlemen," the silken voice of the Scarlet Scabrat explained. "One has always, of course, to allow the enthusiasm—and chivalry—of youth! With that word "chivalry," again Johnny was conscious of that chill at his heart.

It would, of course, be easy to check that misplaced enthusiasm by the scaring bullet or the clanging of the handcuffs, the haunting voice added, "but—as a matter of psychological interest, I confess to a certain curiosity as to your reaction to such—demonstrations in person."

He made a sign, and one of the hooded figures threw open the box on the floor. In it was something, at the sight of which, to Johnny, it was as though every drop of blood within him froze to ice. Years ago

he had attended an exhibition of medieval instruments of torture, and he recognised in the contraption of boards and wedges now disclosed, the most terrible of all the inventions by which man has wrought agony to his brother—the "Boot," by means of which, slowly, cumulatively, inexorably, the leg of the victim is crushed to unrecognisable pulp.

"For the moment," the soft voice of the Scarlet Scabrat explained, "I propose merely to give an example of the results which may be attained," and even as he spoke Terry was seized. The boards were adjusted to her slender leg, and the extreme edge of the first of the eight wedges placed, ever so lightly, into position. But, even then, though her courage remained steadfast, Johnny, lying there, struggling impotently, saw beads of sheer agony dim the whiteness of her forehead. Then, after only a second or two, the Scarlet Scabrat gestured again, the wedge was withdrawn, and the Boot replaced in its chest.

"One hour!" that inhuman, malevolent figure observed calmly to Mr. Raymond, and stopped at the sight of the latter's expression.

Carefully judging time and distance, the crook hurled the bomb directly beneath the bennet of the police car.

In face of the outrage to the daughter, who was the one hope and object of his existence, no longer was this the solid family lawyer of London City; he was a primitive man; eyes glinting with the sheer elemental rage that possessed him; lips drawn back; hands convulsively clenching and unclenching.

"If ever," he said, and the words came hoarsely from his throat, "I have a chance to deal with you—"

But, his first impression of awe quickly faded, the Scarlet Scabrat broke lightly in upon his words.

"An idle anticipation, it is to be feared, considering my own intentions as to your ultimate disposal," he said. He glanced at the watch upon his wrist. "In the meanwhile, you have one complete hour for reflection. At the expiration of that time you will be invited to write that letter and to sign that authorisation. If you are the loving and dutiful parent, which your—pardon me—somewhat excited appearance at this moment would lead one to suspect, then you will be wise—and humane—to bow to what, sooner or later, is inevitable."

He scanned the lawyer's face curiously through the slits in his hood, his eyes gleaming with the same green light that once before Johnny had seen there.

"If not," he went on, in the same pseudo-pleasant tone as before—"why, then, you will be invited to witness what I am convinced you will regard as a really authentic representation of the—er—more elementary relaxations of our ancestors."

He bowed mockingly. The hooded figures closed about the by-now almost fainting lawyer, who, after a long lingering look at Terry, was hustled to the door.

"Don't give way, my child," he said faintly. "At whatever cost you shall not be allowed to suffer."

There was a hush, father," the girl said proudly, as the door closed behind him.

TO BE HANGED BY THE NECK

A panel of the door slid back; in the space thus left, and shown up quite distinctly by the light in the corridor outside, appeared a man's face, flat and

loose, with blue pendulous chin and bristling close-cropped hair. And as the tiny reddened eyes rested upon each of the inmates in turn, the loose-lipped mouth broke into a grin.

"Three!" he said gloomily. "Three—and all good 'uns,' and there was something in the tone, gloating, like a starving gluton before the banquet, and almost that same note in Johnny that was sheer horror.

The wide face turned directly towards him, the pig-eyes hovered for a moment before the simple face, and the snarled words: "You—sixes and a eight!"

The giggling voice remarked, and to Johnny it was as if a contractor had made an estimate, checked it, and found it correct. "Right! Two sixes an' a eight!"

Johnny, a little high-pitched, gloating laugh, the shutter snapped to, and they were alone.

Terry, her face pressed tightly into her
Supping, Dancing and DEATH

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climbed the ladder. There was just the chance he might fight his way through. In any case, he had a pretty grim conviction that something sudden and unpleasant was likely to happen to one or two of those who tried to stop him, and he'd rather be shot than hanged, anyway.

He worked his way through the window; grooped for the ladder with which to descend the breastwork, and he found it attached securely to the stumps of the bars. Discarding foothold, he slid rapidly down. It was as his feet touched the ground that something descended with devastating force upon his head.

The first glimmerings of dawn were beginning to permeate through the unbarred window when, dimly and gropingly, he returned to consciousness. His head was throbbing with a pain that was like molten fire through his brain. He endeavored to sit up, but it took a good thirty minutes before, at last, he was able to do so.

He sat, striving desperately to focus the events of the previous night, and as gradually memory returned, he became seized by a great exaltation.

The chances were that Terry and Ginger had won. That, after all, was all that mattered; it was additional satisfaction that the financial reward for Ginger’s help had been paid in advance. He’d have loved to have let the man down.

What most nearly concerned him was the identity of the mysterious rescuer. Whatever it was, he concluded, the business had been admirably arranged.

The door opened, and there came into the cell two of the cowled figures. Behind, in a suit of rusty black, waddled the flabby-faced figure who had looked at through the panel of the door. There was about him an air of gauging which yet contrived to maintain a look of gloom, as one swindled out of some part of his just rights, but exulting in what were left. In his hand he carried strips, for which, with a sudden cold chill, Johnny had no difficulty in recognizing the purpose.

Next came the Scarlet Scabir himself, and from the suave refinement of cruelty of a few short hours ago he had relapsed into a cold fury of malignancy which, combined with the grumbling chuckles of the rusty-clad figure, brought into the atmosphere of the cell an element that was pure nightmare—distorted, monstrous.

“There is a certain apology due to you, Mr. Travers,” the Scarlet Scabir said, in a tone he seemed to have difficulty in keeping within his own control. Hitherto it has been the rule of our society to grant to those from whom they exact The Penalty adequate time for preparation. Now, however—” his voice vibrated with a paroxysm of rage—”are obliged to depart from that custom. Only twice within the life of our organisation has escape been effected—both within the last six hours. This is a more serious violation of some kind of retribution as sop to his pride, his voice took on something of its old purring—“renders necessary what might appear to be our somewhat indecent haste. Otherwise there maybe—serious interference.”

“What you mean,” Johnny said shortly, “is that at any moment your murder-gang may drive the police upon you, upon information supplied by Jackson.”

The other bowed, and even through the concealing cloak Johnny could see how his whole bent shape had with an agonized rush. “A misfortune,” the Scarlet Scabir said, choking down his rage, “against which already we have provided by the establishment of another headquarters. Nevertheless, the necessity for haste is urgent. For,” he added, “unfortunately for yourself, neither the man you refer to, nor your—lady companion, are the only—departures from our circle.”

He made a motion with his head, and the squat man stepped forward, his chargir replaced by gloating, ghoulish anticipation. “Just put your ‘ands behind yer back, please,” he said, with fulsome amiability.

“Not for you—Harwood, dismissed executioner,” Johnny said, and hit out. Weak as he was, his head one red-hot pain, he inflicted making a fight for it.

There was no fight. His arm was seized in a lock from which attempt to release himself was torture. In their hands, with that ju-jiu held as foundation, he was helpless. Chuckling, the creature strapped his hands behind him.

“Lead on!” the Scarlet Scabir instructed,

As the ‘plane swooped down upon the house, they heard the rush of the bomb; and the next moment the gang’s headquarters went up with a roar.

The pressure, when it came, was not to the neck at all, but to his legs, which he found in a clutching, frenzied grip which yet, somehow, brought with it a sudden flood of reassurance. Within an inch of the obscuring hood a voice familiar, warm and encouraging, whispered:

“Steady, sir, and for the love of Mike don’t speak!”

A moment later and Johnny’s feet touched ground; the bonds about his wrists were cut, an open knife thrust into his hand.

Quickly severing the string that kept the hood in place, Johnny looked about him dazedly. From above the light streamed down to illuminate the platform upon which Ginger and himself were standing. A hand grasping the severed end of rope, the former was jerking it convulsively.

“Cut your legs free, sir,” he whispered urgently. “That Arwood may look down at any second—loving ‘e trade as ‘e does.”

As Johnny stooped to obey, he saw that between the end of the platform and the farther wall was a space some eighteen inches wide. It was only a second before...
The straps were severed, and by this time Ginger was at the edge, his legs swinging free.

"Follow me, sir," he said, lowered himself, and dropped. Johnny followed, to land safely on the hard earth below.

In a moment Ginger had produced a torch, and Johnny saw, dug from the earthen wall, an opening some five feet square.

It must have been three hundred yards before a glimmer of light appeared ahead, and as they progressed this strengthened until Johnny saw that the illumination came from overhead, throwing into relief the stone steps with which the passage terminated.

These they scrambled up into a wide panelled room, devoid of furniture. Ginger dashed to the door, and they were on a landing, at the far end of which a broad-silled window overlooked what Johnny discovered later was open country.

They passed down a flight of wide, shallow stairs to a hall in which there were a table and some chairs, and the remains of a fire in the big, open grate.

A heavy door faced them, and this Ginger wrenched open, and they were out in the chilly morning air.

"To the right, sir," Ginger panted, and after twenty yards or so scrambled over a low wall.

"Follow me, sir," Ginger cried urgently, and ran confidently down what evidently was a clearly-defined path.

And then, at last, they reached the road. A bulky shape separated itself from the uncertain light.

"Who's that?" a peremptory voice demanded, and there was a glint of a pistol-barrel.

"It's all right, sergeant," Ginger said breathlessly. "Eve's Mr. Travers, all right, sir!" said dumbly.

"That's splendid!" the bulky plain-clothes man replied. He turned to Johnny. "Feel fit enough to be in at the finish, sir?" he asked. "Or maybe you've all had the excitement that's good for you."

"Miss Raymond?" Johnny demanded quickly. "Yes, about to. And found his heart leaping for the answer.

"On her way back to London, with her father, sir," the sergeant said reassuringly. "And, in reply to his look of astonishment. "Oh, yes, sir he got away all right—before she did, as a matter of fact. It was Mr. Raymond, sir, who phoned the Yard."

"Then," said Johnny fervently, "I'm with you to the last throw of the hat."

"Chief-Inspector Oates has disposed his forces, as you might say, with extreme strategic skill," the sergeant observed.

"The paths through the marsh, sir, radiate from the house like spokes from a wheel, and he's men on each, converging on the building. This one, which he left clear for you, is mine. And if you're ready, sir, we'll start—so not to be late at the rendezvous."

"What's on the other side of the house?" Johnny inquired.

"Sea, sir," Ginger broke in to explain. "Soon as Scotland Yard got word they sent a couple of forty-knot speed-boats down the Thames an', as you might say, round the corner. Nothin' won't get past them, sir,

believe me," he added fervently. "What's that?"

From somewhere behind the building from which Johnny had so miraculously escaped, came a low, tense humming. Even as they watched there arose against the now fast-lightening sky a black shape, which, ascending in rapid sweeping spirals, higher and higher, soon was engulfed completely in the lowering element.

The sergeant, with a hoarse exclamation, stopped dead in his tracks.

"An aeroplane!" he said. "And piloted by a complete lunatic, to be sure. The only thing," he added despondently, "we haven't provided against!"

Nevertheless, and at their best speed, they followed the path which winding through the marsh. As they drew nearer to the building there hoarse shouts, one or two staggering shots, and, only a moment later, from one of the upper windows, a spearpoint flash. The bullet whistled above Johnny's head to lose itself in the distance beyond.

It looks as if they'd all retreated to the house, sir, the sergeant diagnosed.

The hum of the aeroplane's propeller, which for some moments had been dulled by height and distance, grew suddenly more distinct. Watching, they saw it reappear from the concealing clouds, dropping in a graceful sweeping arc until, to their amazed straining eyes, it was immediately above the building. And then, from it, issued a strange swish-whish, which, as it fell, developed cumulatively in violence.

"For the love of—" shudderingly commented Ginger.

The remainder was blotted out by a deafening, shattering detonation; it was as if the whole world was filled with cataclysmic sound which, even as it faded, seemed to descend from the horizon as though reluctant to leave the havoc it had wrought.

"Bom! 'is own 'eadquarters!" Ginger said faintly. "Is own blinkin' gang!"

It was true. The flight had been too low, too immediately overhead, for doubt as to what had been the objective; too low, also, for any fear of missing. For, before their eyes, one section of the building, had seemed, in an inextricable mingling of leaping, soaring and gliding, flying brick and stones, and swirling dust, to leap to the sky.

The empty space of the one completed, they saw, dumb with horror and amazement, that not yet was the devilish work completed.

Five times was the process repeated, until that ill-omened house, with all that it contained, stood, but for one wing that yet was only half demolished, a stark and smoking heap of rubble.

Up in the arc of light continued, and then for the sixth time the plane turned.

"'E's making a proper job of it, any- way," Ginger muttered in the ears of his placed companion.

More swiftly still, this last time, the Scarlet Scareb descended. It was at the lowest point, and immediately above that shattered house, when came the crowning horror of that night of terror.

At the exact instant when should have come the descending bomb, no bomb came. This seemed impossible, and hence of delay.

One instant, the curve of its flight beginning infinitely to reach upwards, there was that swooping plane— the next—a shattering explosion, a leap of flames as if driven from mid-air, and, for whirring fragments of debris—not all of which were of wood or metal—nothing left but a black configuration of smoke against

(More on page 732.)
DO NOT MISS READING THIS GRIPPING SERIAL OF CRIME AND DETECTION.

The CROOKS 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 Patrol suite of rooms at the Regal Hotel, they presented the encouraging appearance of two 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 Buck Shang, but no trace of him can be found.

Detective-Inspector Strickland is given charge of the case, and he finds two strange letters addressed to 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.

Later The Cat is found murdered on Westminster Bridge. Suspicion at once falls on Millard, otherwise known as Buck Shang, but no trace of him can be found.

Detective-Inspector Strickland is given charge of the case, and he finds two strange letters addressed to 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.

(A now continue the story.)

A VISITOR.

As the day advanced the full resources of Scotland Yard became available. Strickland, guided here and there by a hint from the astute Weir Menzies, who for all his dour exterior could be as enthusiastic as a schoolboy in a case of this kind, flung man after man in a wide cast for some scent that might offer possibilities.

Any person who might conceivably have had association with the Cat was sought in every corner of London and questioned. The cables were fired, with inquiries to New York and to Denver, asking for information as to other friends or enemies of his who might be in London. The moratury keeper was interviewed, and was certain that he had safely locked up the body, and he was confirmed by the constables who had handed it over to him. How the place had come to be unlocked he could not explain.

The girl of the flame-coloured gown whose Strickland had seen face to face with the Cat, was located and brought to headquarters in more sober raiment. She frankly admitted that she had been friendly with the dead man. She had been acquainted with him for about a month, and he had been generous with his money, and promised that he would get her a situation with some of his swell friends if she would hold her tongue and do as he said, and there was very little about him. They had had supper together about midnight, and he had left her shortly afterwards on the plea of an urgent appointment. She had nothing in their records that corresponded with the prints on the unsigned letter found on his body. It was a result which Strickland had expected. The records of Scotland Yard are confined to criminals, and it was in the highest degree improbable that the writer of the letter was a person who had ever been convicted. After fixing and photographing the prints, the sheet of note-paper had been searched, but with no result. The writer was an unknown person.

Strickland is talking the case over with his chief and Weir Menzies, one of the Big Four, when another message comes through to the effect that the body of The Cat had been stolen from the mortuary.

I believe you have seen before, 'We are in charge of the business which you have probably come about.'

The murder of my father," said the chief, "is the first serious blow that has come to Strickland.

"Yes," said Mr. Solomon Stern, "we have told him about it. They want me to make sure that it is he. But I know it is. He never came back last night."

"I suppose you know the reason," asked Strickland gravely. "There may be a mistake, although I fear that is unlikely. But mistakes have happened. It is possible that it may be someone who resembles your father. You are the only one who can set all doubt at rest."

"I will do so, of course," she said wearily. "But it is only a formality. I know that it is my father."

"No," said Mr. Solomon Stern. "I cannot grasp it yet. I don't believe that he knew anyone in London, and I don't think he would wish him harm. I have come here to find out what you are doing—what you have done."

When one has had a lifetime of experience in crime, with all the telling of the game, there is acquired a sort of sixth sense, an almost intuitive perception to which an adequate explanation cannot be given. Strickland caught it in Menzies' eye. But the superintendent had an agility of observation and of mind that was quite beyond the game. This girl had some reason that drew her to Scotland Yard which she had as yet neither expressed nor hinted at. What it was he could not guess. But he knew that it could be the very thing that had gained it would be more difficult with two men in the room than with one. He had his suspicions—his investigations were to be put on to Strickland. With a muttered apology he rose and left the room.

"We've scarcely had time to turn round yet," murmured Strickland. "We're hoping to pick up some clue. Perhaps you can help us."

"A clue," said Miss Millard. "She allowed her contempt to become obvious. "The police always talk about clues."

"That's true. It's our trade, you see. May I ask you some questions?" He did not wait for a reply, but taking her arm he said, "Tell me, what can you tell me about your father?"

"Not much that will help, I am afraid. He had just retired from business in Denver. We were over here on a vacation trip."

Strickland sat a little more stiffly in his chair, and his brows drew closer together. He hesitated for a moment, and then to speak to her gave her, "I am going to talk to you frankly as I knew her. She was a girl who, although she would have been a fine young woman, would have imagined that the antecedents of Buck Shang could be kept in the background. She must have been a very fine young woman."

"I saw you hear your father speak of a man called Stern, or of the Cat, or of Moses, who was asked and was never asked again."

"I don't know," she answered. "I was looking narrowly for any change of expression, any hint that he had penetrated her guard, if there was one."

"I may have done," she said steadily.

"Who is there who will get any benefit from your father's death?"

"Shook her head."

"No one but myself. So far as I know, I am his only relative."
"Ghosts" of the Talkies

Secrets of Voice-Doubling

The full facts about this new art in the film industry are told in this week's PICTORIAL WEEKLY. The stars you see are not always the stars you hear!

What, then, happens behind the scenes—how is this clever illusion worked? You can learn the secret only in the specially illustrated article which appears exclusively in Tuesday's issue. There is still time, too, for you to begin reading our amazing new serial dealing with the stars in the Big Shot in New York. It is entitled THE BIG SHOT and is written by FRANK L. PACKARD America's Edgar Wallace. Make sure you get this week's PICTORIAL WEEKLY On Sale Tues., Aug. 13. Order NOW.

PICTORIAL WEEKLY 17-8-29

The THRILLER

"He was rich?"

"Some millions of dollars, I believe," she returned incredulously. "Say about a million and a half pounds in British money."

"You inherit it all?"

"As far as I know."

His fingers played a fierce tattoo on Menzies' desk, and a pause ensued. In a little he rose and stood over her. There is a subtle advantage in looking down upon the person one is questioning, as he had discovered many years before.

"This is not the only murder that has happened during the last twenty-four hours," he said. "You wouldn't know, of course, that the Cat—Stork—was killed almost within a stone's throw of this place."

"I am interested only in discovering who killed my father," she said. He remarked, and self-pitying admiration.

"You didn't know that the Cat had an acquaintance with your father?"

"No."

"He wondered how far she would go."

"Nor—he drewled the question slowly—"he your father tried to kill him not twelve hours ago?"

This time he had roused her. She sprang angrily to her feet.

"That is a lie," she declared.

"Please don't get excited, Miss Millard," he said mildly, "Sit down. Sit down, I tell you." He raised the tone of his question, and she hesitated, and then with a gesture of disdain resumed her seat.

"Now while I'm talking, I wonder," he said, almost as if talking to himself. "Why have you come here with a tissue of lies and evasions to dodge straight questions? For a woman of some common sense you are the most clumsy liar that I ever heard. Suppose we get a little at the truth."

Her face whitened. Her hands gripped tightly on the arms of the chair, but she turned a scornful glance at him.

"Is it the habit of the London police to be offensive? Why should I care here if I wanted to, Mr. Strickland?"

"I don't know," he confessed. "But I propose to find out. I don't know a lot of things. But you take it, then, if you will, that I took a risk at the Regal Hotel when you held my colleague and myself off at the point of a revolver. And I know you had to."

"What happened last night? I had a long conversation with your father—I must have been one of the last persons to see him alive. He told me his plans, and told me about reserve. When you said that you didn't know the Cat you lied. It is impossible that you should not have known."

"Yet you come here and try to persuade me that he was a respectable business man of an age I can't understand, and that you have to explain, my dear lady. What am I to make of it?"

"He told you that he had been a crook—that he had been behind bars."

The detective nodded.

She spread her hands hopelessly.

"Can't you realize why I should wish nothing of this to be known? He had suffered enough. Now that he is dead, why should all these things come through again in your British press? What good would it do?"

Somehow neither her words nor her tone carried with the man. He made a gesture of incredulity.

"That's not your real reason, Miss Millard. There must be—"

"You needn't believe me," she flared in sudden passion. "I have been sneered at and belittled by the underworld. People I have known all my life. Me! A crook's daughter—a daughter of the underworld. Do you think that I want to go through that all again? And for what? Tell me, Mr. Detective, I would sooner shoot myself."

She buried her face in her hands, and broke into a passion of sobs.

THE HAMMERSMITH HOUSE

After nineteen hours of fierce mental struggle, and some hours of physical struggle, Strickland had confessed himself baffled. He had gone as far as he could see, neglected no point, overlooked no avenue through which a gleam of light might possibly shine. From there he had discovered four people who might have killed the Cat, but so far there was only the slenderest thread of suspicion against each. No one of these persons knew that they were under surveillance, or that their immediate antecedents were being made the subject of closer investigation. Strickland did not believe that any one of them was concerned with the crime. As for the mystery of Buck's death, he was utterly hopeless. Revenge, robbery—these theories were by the score; but theories evolved from the actual facts were perilous things and usually led to blind alleys.

The evening papers were full of the two murders, although they had, so far, not connected them. The public point of view they were delirious crimes. The news had resulted in the usual trickle of letters and visits of the kind from people who held wild suspicions on trivial grounds of perfectly innocent persons. All these stories had to be dredged in case they held some stratum of truth.

At twelve o'clock that night Veir Menzies came to him. "He give it a rest, man," he suggested. "Get your second wind. You can't expect all the luck in the first twenty-four hours. No good beating the air. Go home."

"I believe I will agree, Strickland. He had his fair share of success in his profession, and he knew that he was well in line for the next chief inspectorship that should fall vacant. Unless he made some bad break, success or failure in the present case could not affect his ultimate promotion. Men had failed out before, and he could do so again. Put he that he consuming zeal, which is an asset of the good detective, that drove him on, that was the pursuit of an object. Besides, the t. andarandis did not like failure."

He slipped across the way to the Underground station and then, altering his mind, for he felt a craving for fresh air, resolved to walk to Victoria, and thence to take a late train to Balham, where he had his apartments. His was the evening label of the day, and he was in the shadow of Westminster Abbey before some intuitive sense warned him that he was being followed.

Now, it was not an easy thing for an inexpert person to trail another—"keep observation is the way they phrase it at the Yard—"and the detective turned his head. He had no idea, who or what his shadower might be, but he tried certain tricks, known to many crooks and every detective, and that suspense last. He took a side turning and halted in a dark doorway. A man shambled hurriedly past. The detective, on the alert for anything, clenched his free hand. But the captive was passive. He slipped around Strickland, I wasn't after no harm," he whined.

The detective peered at his face.

"I wonder if I know you, my lad. Come under the light. He followed, and fags himself to a lamp-post and inspected him narrowly. Seemed to me I've run across you somewhere before. Following me? I've been looking for you following me? Don't stand there gaping like a stufed fish. What's the funny business? It's made me think you mean business, with a shake.

"Come on. Out with it."

"Mr. Drake knows me," mumbled the man.

"I've no doubt of that," answered the inspector. "So that's why you were looking for a chance to have a quiet word with you, went on the other side of the road."

"I was only looking for a chance to have a quiet word with you, went on the other side of the road."

"I could tell you something, I could. I've put Mr. Drake on to a chance of, or two in my time."

"Remembrance came to Strickland, and he released his hold.

"I get you now," he said. "You're Blowy Bill." The detective did not talk much about informants, but, nevertheless, every plain-clothes officer has his little circle of spies in the camp of the underworld. Some work for pay, some to gratify a natural man-hunting instinct. But, as a class, they are not savoury people, and not even their own, and so he was caught in the meshes of the law. "Set a thief to catch a thief," is a motto that is—unofficially—employed by the Scotland Yard, although they seldom trust a "nark" farther than the range of their eyesight.

Blowy Bill rubbed his shoulder aggrievedly.

"That's me, guy'nor," he admitted. "I've been this side this morning. Bridge business."

He looked cautiously round and dropped his voice to a whisper. "I know of a bloke who's in that. Crooked as a cock-screw, Jacky the Duke, they call him. Footman he used to be at Lord Southond's place. I know a pal of his—see? They've got a joint Hammersom way."

Somehow, although Strickland was not a man to place implicit reliance on any story told by so shady a hanger-on of the underworld, he had the impression that this was no audacious attempt to wring a few shillings out of him by some cock-and-ander of the ilk."

"Try to sell me a gold watch next, eh?"

"I'm giving you the, straight grins, guy'nor."

"I know the joint. Some of 'em will be there now. I can give you the address. If it ain't the goods, there's no call for a last, he,

So it was that Strickland found himself contemplating a big, gloomy house in a quiet side street in Hammersmith with a little irresolution.

Not a gleam of light came from the house, and over it seemed a deep sense of brooding—mysterious, sinister.

(What will Strickland find in this mysterious house? Is he on the trail of the gimp? Don't miss next week's thrilling developments of "The Crook's Game.")"
CAN YOU SOLVE THIS SEASIDE MYSTERY?

THE SEAVILLE MURDER PROBLEM

Problem No. 26 of BAFFLERS!
The Popular Detective Story Game.

Brentwood," that popular boarding establishment, standing in a commanding position on the trout at Seaville, was owned and run with entire success by Mrs. Trent.

Hitherto its record had been unblemished and of the highest repute, therefore it came as a double blow to the good lady when, one sunny morning, she took her favourite lodger, Mr. Bletchington, his morning cup of tea at eight thirty a.m. and found the gentleman stretched out on his bed, dead, and with a gaping wound in his neck.

Terribly agitated, she called in the police.

Detective-inspector Manning, who was put on the case, questioned her carefully, eliciting the following information.

It appeared that Mr. Bletchington was a bachelor and had resided at this hotel for two years. He had always seemed content and satisfied until quite recently. She gathered that he had been considerably worried over his nephew, who had run rather loose and was always pestering him for money. Also two men who were staying in the house had seemed to cause him considerable agitation.

The nephew, they learned, was indeed a rotter, was heavily in debt, and had let his uncle down several times. He was a crafty looking fellow, Mrs. Trent said, with slanting eyes and an habitual furtive expression. He had been staying the last three nights at Brentwood, and she had taken an instant dislike to him. Now he was nowhere to be found.

The other two men were Mr. Merton, who, they learned, was a trade a master-builder in a small way, and a young man named Rayner, who ran a prospering hairdressing establishment. Merton, the detective noticed, had one of his thick-set, work-soiled hands bandaged, but Mrs. Trent said he had cut it some time before.

Detective Manning next examined the scene of the crime. Mr. Bletchington’s throat had been cut in jagged slashes, and the detective was surprised to find the weapon, a blood-stained razor, under the bed. He noticed that the rivet securing the blade to the handle, was broken, and the blade was chipped. There were no finger-prints on it, and the handle had the appearance of having been wiped. It was found, however, that it was the property of Rayner, and accordingly the young barber was held, pending investigation, as was also the man Merton.

An examination of the body by the police surgeon showed that the deceased had been dead some four hours. Drawers and the dead man’s suit-cases had been ransacked, and a portfolio lay open and empty at the foot of the bed. Yet every-

thing that might have revealed finger-prints had the same streaked appearance of having been wiped. Presently, placing his hand under the pillow of the dead man’s bed, the detective brought to light a polished crocodile leather note-case. Eagerly the detective again looked for finger-prints, and to his surprise and relief, noticed a clear mark on a corner of the surface. This was carefully photographed. A further examination of the case brought to light a crumpled letter. “If you do not let me have these papers at once, you will suffer. I will crush you.” The letter was unsigned. The writing was in fine spidery capitals, lightly printed with a pen on a square of thin note-paper.

A search was made everywhere for the papers referred to, and inquiries were made, but not a sign of them could be found. Who had written the letter?

Meanwhile a warrant was issued for the arrest of the nephew for inquiries. He was taken as he left the express train at Victoria Station, which did the sixty miles from Seaville without stopping, and arrested in town at eight-thirty a.m.

It was then found that the prisoner, whose name was John Merrick had a considerable sum of money on him amounting to nearly twenty pounds. Also, when his finger-prints were taken, it was found that they corresponded with those on the note-case. He swore, however, that he knew nothing about the murder.

Mrs. Trent said that the murdered man had always kept his note-case under his pillow, and that he had always kept it well stocked. It was thought that the nephew probably knew this.

Further inquiries were made regarding Mr. Bletchington, and then it came out that the favourite guest of Brentwood was not all that people imagined him to be. Evidence was discovered, not in the house, but from an outside source, which showed that he had lived almost entirely on blackmailing various people, and both Merton and Rayner were found to be two of his victims, although they refused to admit it. With the reason why they had come to the hotel, they protested that they were merely on holiday.

A search of their bed-rooms brought one or two interesting facts to light. Their rooms were both on the next floor, immediately above those occupied by the dead man and the nephew. In Rayner’s room was found a revolver, but it had not been used. In Merton’s room was a thick carpet, and the detective was interested in several dark, dirty smudges on this under the bed and under the mat in front of the washing-stand.

Here the evidence of another guest proved useful. He said that at about two-thirty in the night, he had heard a sound below and, looking from his room, had seen Rayner standing at the top of the stairs, his revolver in his hand. On finding himself observed, Rayner had attempted to hide the gun and had slipped back into his room. A few moments later the guest had heard the soft closing of a door on the floor below, and again had looked from his door, half expecting to see Rayner creep up the stairs, but no one appeared. At the same time as he had opened the door, he had noticed the light go up in Merton’s room, and then, as he had stepped into the passage, go out. He had decided that, perhaps it was merely a scare and decided that Merton had also heard a sound downstairs, and then thinking, as he himself thought, that there was probably nothing in it, he had returned to bed. Witness then went back into his room.

Rayner, Merton and Bletchington’s nephew, the three suspected men, all protested.

How do you explain the crime? Who killed Mr. Bletchington?

THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 26—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 732. 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.

...
The THRILLER

“The Scarlet Scarab.”

(Continued from page 728.)

A new-awakened sky. Then, silence, and a sense of menace incomparably described.

On the littered terrace of the smouldering heap a group of figures—quaking, panic-stricken—was being shepherded by half a dozen troopers. Through the night-fog, which, in blind terror, they had fled from that disruption, others were being led by policemen. Johnny looked round for Oates.

We were officially told that he was in the far corner of the terrace, bending over something on the ground. Johnny hurried over to him. There three were who lay there and white from the falling debris. The other, upon whom they were concentrating their attention, was alive—yet.

And, glancing at that rotund, respectable figure and the drawn, gaunt face, somehow which had yet contrived to remain ruddy, Johnny, starting back a pace, gave a cry of sheer amazement.

"For the love of heaven!" he breathed. "Harris?"

The dying man, looking up to recognise him, faintly smiled.

"But Number Two as well, sir," he said.

"One of the oldest members of the society, sir—second only to the Scarlet Scarab himself. The voice was faint, but clear; it was as though the words were being dispensed with advantage, the last hoarded remnants of his vitality.

"You! Mr. Raymond’s butler, second in command, sir. He left me here. I could hardly—"

He broke off. For to him this was the last incredible thing. Again that fleeting smile came to the face of the dying man.

"If you would consult the papers, sir, you might find, sir," he said, and paused. "Though not so loyal as to my master and mistress, sir," he added simply. "That is why I could not stand aside and see them, you might find, sir, I interfered with. I felt it my duty to release my master from his confinement. Johnny could only gasp at the amazing news. It was, of course, but the truth. A master-crock and a devoted-family servant enshrined in one personality! Not even then could he realise the unbelievable twists to which the crookedness was capable.

"The Scarlet Scarab, sir," the old butler-crook’s voice went faintly on, "was, if I may say so, extremely annoyed. No such a leak could be considered a liberty, sir. But unknown to the Scarlet Scarab, sir, I’d purchased the Old Dower House some time ago, and I’d discovered a secret passage through which the smugglers used to bring their goods from the sea. I found out, sir, that it ran within ten yards of the pit in which his face contracted with a spasm of pain which may not have been wholly physical.

"I did not always hold with these execrations, sir, thinking it a wrong to be going a little far, as you might say. And so, as soon as they commenced asking questions about Mr. Raymond, sir, I made the little crook of a corner case.

"The second hole, sir—the one from the roof of the tunnel to just inside the wall of the yard outside where you were confined. It was finished only just in time," he faltered. "I regret I was interrupted in my efforts of rescue before you, too, could escape, sir."

The butler fell back; a shadow crossed the still face, as the reflection of a cloud across a sunlit field; a film spread over the eyes. So died Obed Harris, perfect crook and perfect butler.

"The only thing I can’t understand," Johnny remarked to Oates as they drove back to London. "Is how the Scarlet Scarab came to blow himself up. In France I’ve seen hundreds of aeroplanes come down, but I’ve never seen one go off like a bomb."

From him, the Great One produced a note-book. Opening it, he displayed a full page of closely-written shorthand, at the foot of which was scrawled a signature.

"We got this from Harris before you came up," he said. "There wasn’t time for longhand; we thought he was going every moment. It seems that the—"

He had always said privately that, if the worst came to the worst, and they were raided, he’d see there was no one left to give evidence against him. For a long time the old chap thought he was talking off to the top. Then one day he found, in a secret pocket in the hangar, these bombs—and guessed what they were for. Though you may not think it, old Harris was one of the experts on explosives for the Ministry of Munitions during the war, and he made up his mind, if ever the time came for the gang to go West, the king-pin—the Scarlet Scarab himself—should go with them. So he made one of those bombs so that the second it was released from the plane it went off."

They were speeding through the West End now, and Oates turned directly to Johnny.

"Where shall I drop you, Mr. Travers?" he inquired; and Johnny looked at him in mystification.

"Where do you think?" he asked.

But it was Ginger, from the back seat, who hazarded the reply.


THE END.

(Next week’s splendid long story will be a further gripping adventure of the Peerless Private Kings by the popular Little Charlie. Order your copy of THE THRILLER in advance.)

The Solution of this week’s ‘BAFFLER’ PROBLEM

(On page 731.)