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THE YELLOW CLAW

By Sax Rohmer

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

T W I C E A M O N T H

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Vol. 5.

OCTOBER 5, 1916.

No. 1.

The Yellow Claw *By* *Sax Rohmer*

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY OF THE CIVET FURS.

HENRY LEROUX wrote busily on. The light of the table lamp, softened and enriched by its mosaic shade, gave an appearance of added opulence to the already handsome appointments of the room. The little table clock ticked merrily from half past eleven to a quarter to twelve.

Into the cozy, bookish atmosphere of the novelist's study penetrated the muffled chime of Big Ben; it chimed the three-quarters. But, with his mind

centered upon his work, Leroux wrote on ceaselessly.

An odd figure of a man was this popular novelist, with patchy and untidy hair which lessened the otherwise striking contour of his brow. A neglected and unpicturesque figure, in a baggy, neutral-colored dressing gown; a figure more fitted to a garret than to this spacious, luxurious workroom, with the soft light playing upon rank after rank of rare and costly editions, deepening the tones in the Persian carpet, making red morocco more red, purifying the vellum and regilding the gold of the choice bindings, caressing

lovingly the busts and statuettes surmounting the bookshelves, and twinkling upon the scantily covered crown of Henry Leroux. The doorbell rang.

Leroux, heedless of external matters, pursued his work. But the doorbell rang again and continued to ring.

"Soames! Soames!" Leroux raised his voice irascibly, continuing to write the while. "Where the devil are you! Can't you hear the doorbell?"

Soames did not reveal himself; and to the ringing of the bell was added the unmistakable rattling of a letter box.

"Soames!" Leroux put down his pen and stood up. "Darn it! He's out! I have no memory!"

He retied the girdle of his dressing gown, which had become unfastened, and opened the study door. Opposite, across the entrance lobby, was the outer door; and in the light from the lobby lamp he perceived two laughing eyes peering in under the upraised flap of the letter box. The ringing ceased.

"Are you *very* angry with me for interrupting you?" cried a girl's voice.

"My dear Miss Cumberly!" said Leroux, without irritation. "On the contrary—er—I am delighted to see you—or, rather, to hear you. There is nobody at home, you know."

"I do know," replied the girl firmly, "and I know something else, also. Father assures me that you simply starve yourself when Mrs. Leroux is away! So I have brought down an omelet!"

"Omelet!" muttered Leroux, advancing toward the door. "You have—er—brought an omelet! I understand—yes; you have brought an omelet? Er—that is very good of you."

He hesitated when about to open the outer door, raising his hands to his disheveled hair and unshaven chin. The flap of the letter box dropped; and the girl outside could be heard stifling her laughter.

"You must think me—er—very

rude," began Leroux; "I mean—not to open the door. But—"

"I quite understand," concluded the voice of the unseen one. "You are a most untidy object! And I shall tell Mira *directly* she returns that she has no right to leave you alone like this! Now I am going to hurry back upstairs; so you may appear safely. Don't let the omelet get cold. Good night!"

"No, certainly I shall not!" cried Leroux. "So good of you—I—er—do like omelet. . . . Good night!"

Calmly he returned to his writing table, where, in the pursuit of the elusive character whose exploits he was chronicling and who had brought him fame and wealth, he forgot in the same moment Helen Cumberly and the omelet.

The table clock ticked merrily on; *scratch—scratch—splutter—scratch*—went Henry Leroux's pen; for this up-to-date littérateur, essayist by inclination, creator of "Martin Zeda, Criminal Scientist," by popular clamor, was yet old-fashioned enough, and sufficient of an enthusiast, to pen his work, while lesser men dictated.

So, amid that classic company, smiling or frowning upon him from the oaken shelves, where Petronius Arbiter, exquisite, rubbed shoulders with Balzac, plebeian; where Omar Khayyám leaned confidentially toward Philostratus; where Mark Twain, standing squarely beside Thomas Carlyle, glared across the room at George Meredith, Henry Leroux pursued the amazing career of "Martin Zeda."

It wanted but five minutes to the hour of midnight, when again the doorbell clamored in the silence.

Leroux wrote steadily on. The bell continued to ring, and, furthermore, the ringer could be heard beating upon the outer door.

"Soames!" cried Leroux irritably. "Soames! Why the deuce don't you go to the door?"

Leroux stood up, dashing his pen upon the table.

"I shall have to sack that man!" he cried. "He takes too many liberties—stopping out until this hour of the night!"

He pulled open the study door, crossed the hallway, and opened the door beyond.

In, out of the darkness—for the stair lights had been extinguished—staggered a woman; a woman whose pale face exhibited, despite the ravages of sorrow or illness, signs of quite unusual beauty. Her eyes were wide opened, and terror-stricken, the pupils contracted almost to vanishing point. She wore a magnificent cloak of civet fur wrapped tightly about her, and, as Leroux opened the door, she tottered past him into the lobby, glancing back over her shoulder.

With his upraised hands plunged pathetically into the mop of his hair, Leroux turned and stared at the intruder. She groped as if a darkness had descended, clutched at the sides of the study doorway, and then, unsteadily, entered—and sank down upon the big chesterfield in utter exhaustion.

Leroux, rubbing his chin perplexedly, walked in after her. He scarcely had his foot upon the study carpet, ere the woman started up tremulously, and shot out from the enveloping furs a bare arm and a pointing, quivering finger.

"Close the door!" she cried hoarsely. "Close the door! . . . He has . . . followed me!"

The disturbed novelist, as a man in a dream, turned, retraced his steps, and closed the outer door of the flat. Then, rubbing his chin more vigorously than ever, and only desisting from this exercise to fumble in his disheveled hair, he walked back into the study, whose Athenian calm had thus mysteriously been violated.

Two minutes to midnight; the most respectable flat in respectable Westminster; a lonely and very abstracted novelist—and a pale-faced, beautiful woman, enveloped in costly furs, sitting staring with fearful eyes straight before her. This was such a scene as his sense of the proprieties and of the probabilities could never have permitted Henry Leroux to create.

His visitor kept moistening her dry lips and swallowing emotionally.

Standing at a discreet distance from her:

"Madam," began Leroux nervously.

She waved her hand, enjoining him to silence, and at the same time intimating that she would explain herself directly speech became possible. While she sought to recover her composure, Leroux, gradually forcing himself out of the dreamlike state, studied her with a sort of anxious curiosity.

It now became apparent to him that his visitor was no more than twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, but illness or trouble, or both together, had seared and marred her beauty. Amid the auburn masses of her hair gleamed streaks, not of gray, but of purest white. The low brow was faintly wrinkled, and the big—unnaturally big—eyes were purple shaded; while two heavy lines traced their way from the corner of the nostrils to the corner of the mouth—of the drooping mouth with the bloodless lips.

Her pallor became more strange and interesting the longer he studied it; for, underlying the skin was a yellow tinge which he found inexplicable, but which he linked in his mind with the contracted pupils of her eyes, seeking vainly for a common cause.

He had a hazy impression that his visitor, beneath her furs, was most inadequately clothed; and, seeking confirmation of this, his gaze strayed downward to where one little, slippered foot peeped out from the civet furs.

Leroux suppressed a gasp. He had caught a glimpse of a bare ankle!

He crossed to his writing table, and seated himself, glancing sideways at this living mystery. Suddenly she began, in a voice tremulous and scarcely audible:

"Mr. Leroux, at a great—at a very great personal risk, I have come to-night. What I have to ask of you—to entreat of you—will . . . will . . ."

Two bare arms emerged from the fur, and she began clutching at her throat and bosom as though choking—dying.

Leroux leaped up and would have run to her; but, forcing a ghastly smile, she waved him away again.

"It is all right," she muttered, swallowing noisily.

But frightful spasms of pain convulsed her, contorting her pale face.

"Some brandy——" cried Leroux anxiously.

"If you please," whispered the visitor.

She dropped her arms and fell back upon the chesterfield, insensible.

CHAPTER II.

MIDNIGHT AND MR. KING.

LEROUX clutched at the corner of the writing table to steady himself and stood there looking at the deathly face. Under the most favorable circumstances, he was no man of action, although in common with the rest of his kind he prided himself upon the possession of that presence of mind which he lacked. It was a situation which could not have alarmed "Martin Zeda," but it alarmed immeasurably, nay, struck inert with horror, Martin Zeda's creator.

Then, in upon Leroux's mental turmoil, a sensible idea intruded itself.

"Doctor Cumberly!" he muttered. "I hope to Heaven he is in!"

Without touching the recumbent

form upon the chesterfield, without seeking to learn, without daring to learn, if she lived or had died, Leroux, the *tempo* of his life changed to a breathless gallop, rushed out of the study, across the entrance hall, and, throwing wide the flat door, leaped up the stair to the flat above—that of his old friend, Doctor Cumberly.

The patter of the slippers feet grew faint upon the stair; then, as Leroux reached the landing above, became inaudible altogether.

In Leroux's study, the table clock ticked merrily on, seeming to hasten its ticking as the hand crept around closer and closer to midnight. The mosaic shade of the lamp mingled reds and blues and greens upon the white ceiling above and poured golden light upon the pages of manuscript strewn about beneath it. This was a typical work-room of a literary man having the ear of the public—typical in every respect, save for the fur-clad figure outstretched upon the settee.

And now the peeping light indiscreetly penetrated to the hem of a silken garment revealed by some disarrangement of the civet fur. To the eye of an experienced observer, had such an observer been present in Henry Leroux's study, this billow of silk and lace behind the sheltering fur must have proclaimed itself the edge of a night robe, just as the ankle beneath had proclaimed itself to Henry Leroux's shocked susceptibilities to be innocent of stocking.

Thirty seconds were wanted to complete the cycle of the day, when one of the listless hands thrown across the back of the chesterfield opened and closed spasmodically. The fur at the bosom of the midnight visitor began rapidly to rise and fall.

Then, with a choking cry, the woman struggled upright; her hair, hastily dressed, burst free of its bindings and

poured in gleaming cascade down about her shoulders.

Clutching with one hand at her cloak in order to keep it wrapped about her, and holding the other blindly before her, she rose, and, with that same odd, groping movement, began to approach the writing table. The pupils of her eyes were mere pin points now; she shuddered convulsively, and her skin was dewed with perspiration. Her breath came in agonized gasps.

"Heavens!—I . . . am dying . . . and I cannot—tell him!" she breathed.

Feverishly, weakly, she took up a pen, and upon a quarto page, already half filled with Leroux's small, neat, illegible writing, began to scrawl a message, bending down, one hand upon the table, and with her whole body shaking.

Some three or four wavering lines she had written, when intimately—for the flat of Henry Leroux, in Palace Mansions, lay within sight of the clock face—Big Ben began to chime midnight.

The writer started back and dropped a great blot of ink upon the paper; then, realizing the cause of the disturbance, forced herself to continue her task.

The chime being completed: *One!* boomed the clock; *two!* . . . *three!* . . . *four!* . . .

The light in the entrance hall went out!

Five! boomed Big Ben; *six!* . . . *seven!* . . .

A hand, of old ivory hue, a long, yellow, clawish hand, with part of a sinewy forearm, crept in from the black lobby through the study doorway and touched the electric switch!

Eight! . . .

The study was plunged in darkness!

Uttering a sob—a cry of agony and horror that came from her very soul—the woman stood upright and turned to

face toward the door, clutching the sheet of paper in one rigid hand.

Through the leaded panes of the window above the writing table swept a silvern beam of moonlight. It poured searchingly upon the fur-clad figure swaying by the table; cutting through the darkness of the room like some huge scimitar, to end in a pallid pool about the woman's shadow on the center of the Persian carpet.

Coincident with her sobbing cry—*Nine!* boomed Big Ben; *ten!* . . .

Two hands—with outstretched, crooked, clutching fingers—leaped from the darkness into the light of the moonbeam.

"Heavens! Oh, heavens!" came a frenzied, rasping shriek—"Mr. King!"

Straight at the bare throat leaped the yellow hands; a gurgling cry rose—fell—and died away.

Gently, noiselessly, the lady of the civet fur sank upon the carpet by the table; as she fell, a dim, black figure bent over her. The tearing of paper told of the note being snatched from her frozen grip; but never for a moment did the face or the form of her assailant encroach upon the moonbeam.

Batlike, this second and terrible visitant avoided the light.

The deed had occupied so brief a time that but one note of the great bell had accompanied it.

Twelve! rang out the final stroke from the clock tower. A low, eerie whistle, minor, rising in three irregular notes, and falling in weird, unusual cadence to silence again, came from somewhere outside the room.

Then darkness—stillness—with the moon a witness of one more ghastly crime.

Presently, confused and intermingled voices from above proclaimed the return of Leroux with the doctor. They were talking in an excited key, the voice of Leroux, especially, sounding almost hysterical. They created such

a disturbance that they attracted the attention of Mr. John Exel, M. P., occupant of the flat below, who at that very moment had returned from the House, and was about to insert the key in the lock of his door. He looked up the stairway, but, all being in darkness, was unable to detect anything. Therefore he called out:

"Is that you, Leroux? Is anything the matter?"

"Matter, Exel!" cried Leroux. "There's the deuce of a business! For mercy's sake, come up!"

His curiosity greatly excited, Mr. Exel mounted the stairs, entering the lobby of Leroux's flat immediately behind the owner and Doctor Cumberly—who, like Leroux, was arrayed in a dressing gown; for he had been in bed when summoned by his friend.

"You are all in the dark here," muttered Doctor Cumberly, fumbling for the switch.

"Some one has turned the light out!" whispered Leroux nervously. "I left it on."

Doctor Cumberly pressed the switch, turning up the lobby light as Exel entered from the landing. Then Leroux, entering the study first of the three, switched on the light there also.

One glance he threw about the room, then started back like a man physically stricken.

"Cumberly!" he gasped. "Cumberly!" And he pointed to the furry heap by the writing table.

"You said she lay on the chesterfield," muttered Cumberly.

"I left her there. . . ."

Doctor Cumberly crossed the room and dropped upon his knees. He turned the white face toward the light, gently parted the civet fur, and pressed his ear to the silken covering of the breast. He started slightly and looked into the glazing eyes.

Replacing the fur which he had disarranged, the physician stood up and

fixed a keen gaze upon the face of Henry Leroux. The latter swallowed noisily, moistening his parched lips.

"Is she . . ." he muttered; "is she——"

"Heaven's mercy, Leroux!" whispered Mr. Exel. "What does this mean?"

"The woman is dead," said Doctor Cumberly.

In common with all medical men, Doctor Cumberly was a physiognomist; he was a great physician and a proportionately great physiognomist. Therefore, when he looked into Henry Leroux's eyes, he saw there, and recognized, horror and consternation. With no further evidence than that furnished by his own powers of perception, he knew that the mystery of this woman's death was as inexplicable to Henry Leroux as it was inexplicable to himself.

He was a masterful man, with the gray eyes of a diplomat, and he knew Leroux as did few men. He laid both hands upon the novelist's shoulders.

"Brace up, old chap!" he said. "You will want all your wits about you."

"I left her," began Leroux hesitatingly—"I left——"

"We know all about where you left her, Leroux," interrupted Cumberly; "but what we want to get at is this: what occurred between the time you left her, and the time of our return?"

Exel, who had walked across to the table, and, with a horror-stricken face, was gingerly examining the victim, now exclaimed:

"Why! Leroux! She is—she is . . . undressed!"

Leroux clutched at his disheveled hair with both hands.

"My dear Exel!" he cried. "My dear, good man! Why do you use that tone? You say 'She is undressed!' as though I were responsible for the poor soul's condition!"

"On the contrary, Leroux!" retorted Exel, standing very upright, and star-

ing through his monocle, "on the contrary, *you* misconstrue *me!* I did not intend to imply—to insinuate——"

"My dear Exel!" broke in Doctor Cumberly. "Leroux is perfectly well aware that you intended nothing unkindly. But the poor chap, quite naturally, is distraught at the moment. You *must* understand that, man!"

"I understand; and I am sorry," said Exel, casting a sidelong glance at the body. "Of course, it is a delicate subject. No doubt Leroux can explain."

"Damn your explanation!" shrieked Leroux hysterically. "I *cannot* explain! If I could explain, I——"

"Leroux!" said Cumberly, placing his arm paternally about the shaking man. "You are such a nervous subject. *Do* make an effort, old fellow. Pull yourself together. Exel does not know the circumstances——"

"I am curious to learn them," said the M. P. icily.

Leroux was about to launch some angry retort, but Cumberly forced him into the chesterfield, and, crossing to a bureau, poured out a stiff peg of brandy from a decanter which stood there. Leroux sank upon the chesterfield, rubbing his fingers up and down his palms with a curious nervous movement, and glancing at the dead woman and at Exel alternately in a mechanical, regular fashion, pathetic to behold.

Mr. Exel, tapping his boot with the head of his inverted cane, was staring fixedly at the doctor.

"Here you are, Leroux," said Cumberly; "drink this up, and let us arrange our facts in decent order before we start to——"

"Phone for the police?" concluded Exel, his gaze upon the last speaker.

Leroux drank the brandy at a gulp and put down the glass upon a little Persian coffee table with a hand which he had somehow contrived to steady.

"You are keen on the official forn,

Exel?" he said, with a wry smile. "Please accept my apology for my recent—er—outburst, but picture this thing happening in your place!"

"I cannot," declared Exel bluntly.

"You lack imagination," said Cumberly. "Take a whisky and soda, and help me to search the flat."

"Search the flat!"

The physician raised a forefinger forensically.

"Since you, Exel, if not actually in the building, must certainly have been within sight of the street entrance at the moment of the crime, and since Leroux and I descended the stair and met you on the landing, it is reasonable to suppose that the assassin can only be in one place—*here!*"

"*Here!*" cried Exel and Leroux together.

"Did you see any one leave the lower hall as you entered?"

"No one; emphatically, there was no one there!"

"Then I am right."

"Good heavens!" whispered Exel, glancing about him, with a new and keen apprehensiveness.

"Take your drink," concluded Cumberly, "and join me in my search."

"Thanks," replied Exel, nervously proffering a cigar case; "but I won't drink."

"As you wish," said the doctor, who thus, in his masterful way, acted the host; "and I won't smoke. But do you light up."

"Later," muttered Exel; "later. Let us search, first."

Leroux stood up; Cumberly forced him back.

"Stay where you are, Leroux; it is elementary strategy to operate from a fixed base. This study shall be the base. Ready, Exel?"

Exel nodded, and the search commenced. Leroux sat rigidly upon the settee, his hands resting upon his knees, watching and listening. Save for the

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squarely in the middle of the room, fixed his eyes upon the still form lying in the shadow of the writing table.

"You will have been called in, doctor," he said, faking the proffered tumbler, "at the time of the crime?"

"Exactly!" replied Cumberly. "Mr. Leroux ran up to my flat and summoned me to see the woman."

"What time would that be?"

"Big Ben had just struck the final stroke of twelve when I came out onto the landing."

"Mr. Leroux would be waiting there for you?"

"He stood in my entrance lobby while I slipped on my dressing gown, and we came down together."

"I was entering from the street," interrupted Exel, "as they were descending from above——"

"You can enter from the street, sir, in a moment," said Dunbar, holding up his hand. "One witness at a time, if you please."

Exel shrugged his shoulders and turned slightly, leaning his elbow upon the mantelpiece and flicking off the ash from his cigar.

"I take it you were in bed?" questioned Dunbar, turning again to the doctor.

"I had been in bed about a quarter of an hour when I was aroused by the ringing of the doorbell. This ringing struck me as so urgent that I ran out in my pajamas, and found there Mr. Leroux, in a very disturbed state——"

"What did he say? Give his own words as nearly as you remember them."

Leroux, who had been standing, sank slowly back into the armchair, with his eyes upon Doctor Cumberly as the latter replied:

"He said: 'Cumberly! Cumberly! For Heaven's sake, come down at once; there is a strange woman in my flat, apparently in a dying condition!'"

"What did you do?"

"I ran into my bedroom and slipped on my dressing gown, leaving Mr. Leroux in the entrance hall. Then, with the clock chiming the last stroke of midnight, we came out together and I closed my door behind me. There was no light on the stair; but our conversation—Mr. Leroux was speaking in a very high-pitched voice——"

"What was he saying?"

"He was explaining to me how some woman, unknown to him, had interrupted his work a few minutes before by ringing his doorbell."

Inspector Dunbar held up his hand.

"I won't ask you to repeat what he said, doctor; Mr. Leroux presently can give me his own words."

"We had descended to this floor, then," resumed Cumberly, "when Mr. Exel, entering below, called up to us, asking if anything was the matter. Leroux replied: 'Matter, Exel! There's the deuce of a business! For mercy's sake, come up!'"

"Well?"

"Mr. Exel thereupon joined us at the door of this flat."

"Was it open?"

"Yes. Mr. Leroux had rushed up to me, leaving the door open behind him. The light was out, both in the lobby and in the study, a fact upon which I commented at the time. It was all the more curious as Mr. Leroux had left both lights on!"

"Did he say so?"

"He did. The circumstances surprised him to a marked degree. We came in and I turned up the light in the lobby. Then Leroux, entering the study, turned up the light there, too. I entered next, followed by Mr. Exel—and we saw the body lying where you see it now."

"Who saw it first?"

"Mr. Leroux; he drew my attention to it, saying that he had left her lying on the chesterfield and *not* upon the floor."

"You examined her?"

"I did. She was dead, but still warm. She exhibited signs of recent illness, and of being addicted to some drug habit; probably morphine. This, beyond doubt, contributed to her death, but the direct cause was asphyxiation. She had been strangled!"

"Heavens!" groaned Leroux, dropping his face into his hands.

"You found marks on her throat?"

"The marks were very slight. No great pressure was required in her weak condition."

"You did not move the body?"

"Certainly not; a more complete examination must be made, of course. But I extracted a piece of torn paper from her clenched right hand."

Inspector Dunbar lowered his tufted brows.

"I'm not glad to know you did that," he said. "It should have been left."

"It was done on the spur of the moment, but without altering the position of the hand or arm. The paper lies upon the table, yonder."

Inspector Dunbar took a long drink. Thus far he had made no attempt to examine the victim. Pulling out a bulging note case from the inside pocket of his blue serge coat, he unscrewed a fountain pen, carefully tested the nib upon his thumb nail, and made three or four brief entries. Then, stretching out one long arm, he laid the wallet and the pen beside his glass upon the top of a bookcase, without otherwise changing his position, and, glancing aside at Exel, said:

"Now, Mr. Exel, what help can you give us?"

"I have little to add to Doctor Cumberly's account," answered Exel off-handedly. "The whole thing seemed to me——"

"What it seemed," interrupted Dunbar, "does not interest Scotland Yard, Mr. Exel, and won't interest the jury."

Leroux glanced up for a moment,

then set his teeth hard, so that his jaw muscles stood out prominently under the pallid skin.

"What do you want to know, then?" asked Exel.

"I will be wanting to know," said Dunbar, "where you were coming from, to-night?"

"From the House of Commons."

"You came direct?"

"I left Sir Brian Malpas at the corner of Victoria Street at four minutes to twelve by Big Ben, and walked straight home, actually entering here, from the street, as the clock was chiming the last stroke of midnight."

"Then you would have walked up the street from an easterly direction?"

"Certainly."

"Did you meet any one or anything?"

"A taxicab, empty—for the hood was lowered—passed me as I turned the corner. There was no other vehicle in the street, and no person."

"You don't know from which door the cab came?"

"As I turned the corner," replied Exel, "I heard the man starting his engine, although when I actually saw the cab, it was in motion; but, judging by the sound to which I refer, the cab had been stationary, if not at the door of Palace Mansions, certainly at that of the next block—St. Andrew's Mansions."

"Did you hear, or see anything else?"

"I saw nothing whatever. But just as I approached the street door, I heard a peculiar whistle, apparently proceeding from the gardens in the center of the square. I attached no importance to it at the time."

"What kind of whistle?"

"I have forgotten the actual notes, but the effect was very odd in some way."

"In what way?"

"An impression of this sort is not entirely reliable, inspector; but it struck me as Oriental."

"Ah!" said Dunbar, and reached out the long arm for his notebook.

"Can I be of any further assistance?" said Exel, glancing at his watch.

"You had entered the hallway and were about to enter your own flat when the voices of Doctor Cumberland and Mr. Leroux attracted your attention?"

"I actually had the key in my hand," replied Exel.

"Did you actually have the key in the lock?"

"Let me think," mused Exel, and he took out a bunch of keys and dangled them reflectively before his eyes. "No! I was fumbling for the right key when I heard the voices above me."

"But were you facing your door?"

"No," averred Exel, perceiving the drift of the inspector's inquiries; "I was facing the stairway the whole time, and although it was in darkness, there is a street lamp immediately outside on the pavement, and I can swear, positively, that no one descended; that there was no one in the hall, nor on the stair, except Mr. Leroux and Doctor Cumberland."

"Ah!" said Dunbar again, and made further entries in his book. "I need not trouble you further, sir. Good night!"

Exel, despite his earlier attitude of boredom, now ignored this official dismissal, and, tossing the stump of his cigar into the grate, lighted a cigarette, and, with both hands thrust deep in his pockets, stood leaning back against the mantelpiece. The detective turned to Leroux.

"Have a brandy and soda?" suggested Doctor Cumberland, his eyes turned upon the pathetic face of the novelist.

But Leroux shook his head wearily.

"Go ahead, inspector!" he said. "I am anxious to tell you all I know. Heaven knows I am anxious to tell you."

A sound was heard of a key being inserted in the lock of a door.

Four pairs of curious eyes were turned toward the entrance lobby, when the door opened, and a sleek man of medium height, clean shaven, but with his hair cut low upon the cheek bones, so as to give the impression of short side whiskers, entered in a manner at once furtive and servile.

He wore a black overcoat and a bowler hat. Reclosing the door, he turned, perceived the group in the study, and fell back as though some one had struck him a fierce blow.

Abject terror was written upon his features, and, for a moment, the idea of flight appeared to suggest itself urgently to him; but finally he took a step forward toward the study.

"Who's this?" snapped Dunbar, without removing his leonine eyes from the newcomer.

"It is Soames," came the weary voice of Leroux.

"Butler?"

"Yes."

"Where's he been?"

"I don't know. He remained out without my permission."

"He did, eh?"

Inspector Dunbar thrust forth a long finger at the shrinking form in the doorway.

"Mr. Soames," he said, "you will be going to your own room and waiting there until I ring for you."

"Yes, sir," said Soames, holding his hat in both hands, and speaking huskily.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir."

He crossed the lobby and disappeared.

"There is no other way out, is there?" inquired the detective, glancing at Doctor Cumberland.

"There is no other way," was the reply; "but surely you don't suspect——"

"I would suspect the Archbishop of Westminster," snapped Dunbar, "if he came in like that! Now, sir"—he turned to Leroux—"you were alone here to-night?"

"Quite alone, inspector. The truth is, I fear that my servants take liberties in the absence of my wife."

"In the absence of your wife? Where is your wife?"

"She is in Paris."

"Is she a Frenchwoman?"

"No! Oh, no! But my wife is a painter, you understand, and—er—I met her in Paris—er— Must you insist upon these—domestic particulars, inspector?"

"If Mr. Exel is anxious to turn in," replied the inspector, "after his no doubt exhausting duties at the House, and if Doctor Cumberly——"

"I have no secrets from Cumberly!" interjected Leroux. "The doctor has known me almost from boyhood, but—er"—turning to the politician—"don't you know, Exel—no offense, no offense——"

"My dear Leroux," responded Exel hastily, "I am the offender! Permit me to wish you all good night."

He crossed the study, and, at the door, paused and turned.

"Rely upon me, Leroux," he said, "to help in any way within my power."

He crossed the lobby, opened the outer door, and departed.

"Now, Mr. Leroux," resumed Dunbar, "about this matter of your wife's absence."

CHAPTER IV.

A WINDOW OPENED.

WHILE Henry Leroux collected his thoughts, Doctor Cumberly glanced across at the writing table where lay the fragment of paper which had been clutched in the dead woman's hand, then turned his head again toward the inspector, staring at him curiously. Since Dunbar had not yet attempted even a glance at the strange message, he wondered what had prompted the present line of inquiry.

"My wife," began Leroux, "shared a studio in Paris, at the time that I met

her, with an American lady—a very talented portrait painter—er—a Miss Denise Ryland. You may know her name? But, of course, you don't, no! Well, my wife is, herself, quite clever with her brush; in fact, she has exhibited more than once at the Paris Salon. We agreed at—er—the time of our—of our—engagement, that she should be free to visit her old artistic friends in Paris at any time. You understand? There was to be no let or hindrance. . . . Is this really necessary, inspector?"

"Pray go on, Mr. Leroux."

"Well, you understand, it was a give-and-take arrangement; because I am afraid that I, myself, demand certain—sacrifices from my wife—and—er—I did not feel entitled to—interfere——"

"You see, inspector," interrupted Doctor Cumberly, "they are a bohemian pair, and bohemians, inevitably, bore one another at times! This little arrangement was intended as a safety valve. Whenever ennui attacked Mrs. Leroux, she was at liberty to depart for a week to her own friends in Paris, leaving Leroux to the bachelor's existence which is really his proper state; to go unshaven and unshorn, to dine upon bread and cheese and onions, to work until all hours of the morning, and generally to enjoy himself!"

"Does she usually stay long?" inquired Dunbar.

"Not more than a week, as a rule," answered Leroux.

"You must excuse me," continued the detective, "if I seem to pry into intimate matters; but on these occasions, how does Mrs. Leroux get on for money?"

"I have opened a credit for her," explained the novelist wearily, "at the Credit Lyonnais, in Paris."

Dunbar scribbled busily in his notebook.

"Does she take her maid with her?" he jerked suddenly.

"She has no maid at the moment," replied Leroux; "she has been without one for twelve months or more now."

"When did you last hear from her?"

"Three days ago."

"Did you answer the letter?"

"Yes; my answer was among the mail which Soames took to the post to-night."

"You said, though, if I remember rightly, that he was out without permission?"

Leroux ran his fingers through his hair.

"I meant that he should only have been absent five minutes or so; while he remained out for more than an hour."

Inspector Dunbar nodded comprehendingly, tapping his teeth with the head of the fountain pen.

"And the other servants?"

"There are only two: a cook and a maid. I released them for the evening—glad to get rid of them—wanted to work."

"They are late?"

"They take liberties because I am easy-going."

"I see," said Dunbar. "So that you were quite alone this evening, when"—he nodded in the direction of the writing table—"your visitor came?"

"Quite alone."

"Was her arrival the first interruption?"

"No—er—not exactly. Miss Cumberly—"

"My daughter," explained Doctor Cumberly, "knowing that Mr. Leroux, at these times, was very neglectful in regard to meals, prepared him an omelet, and brought it down in a chafing dish."

"How long did she remain?" asked the inspector of Leroux.

"I—er—did not exactly open the

door. We chatted, through—er—through the letter box, and she left the omelet outside on the landing."

"What time would that be?"

"It was a quarter to twelve," declared Cumberly. "I had been supping with some friends, and returned to find Helen, my daughter, engaged in preparing the omelet. I congratulated her upon the happy thought, knowing that Leroux was probably starving himself."

"I see. The omelet, though, seems to be upset here on the floor?" said the inspector.

Cumberly briefly explained how it came to be there, Leroux punctuating his friend's story with affirmative nods.

"Then the door of the flat was open all the time?" cried Dunbar.

"Yes," replied Cumberly; "but while Exel and I searched the other rooms—and our search was exhaustive—Mr. Leroux remained here in the study, and in full view of the lobby—as you see for yourself."

"No living thing," said Leroux monotonously, "left this flat from the time that the three of us, Exel, Cumberly, and I, entered, up to the time that Miss Cumberly came, and, with the doctor, went out again."

"H'm!" said the inspector, making notes. "It appears so, certainly. I will ask you, then, for your own account, Mr. Leroux, of the arrival of the woman in the civet furs. Pay special attention"—he pointed with his fountain pen—"to the *time* at which the various incidents occurred."

Leroux, growing calmer as he proceeded with the strange story, complied with the inspector's request. He had practically completed his account when the doorbell rang.

"It's the servants," said Doctor Cumberly. "Soames will open the door."

But Soames did not appear.

The ringing being repeated:

"I told him to remain in his room,"

said Dunbar, "until I rang for him, I remember——"

"I will open the door," said Cumberly.

"And tell the servants to stay in the kitchen," snapped Dunbar.

Doctor Cumberly opened the door, admitting the cook and housemaid.

"There has been an unfortunate accident," he said, "but not to your master; you need not be afraid. But be good enough to remain in the kitchen for the present."

Peeping in furtively as they passed, the two women crossed the lobby and went to their own quarters.

"Mr. Soames next," muttered Dunbar; and glancing at Cumberly as he returned from the lobby, "Will you ring for him?" he requested.

Doctor Cumberly nodded, and pressed a bell beside the mantelpiece. An interval followed, in which the inspector made notes and Cumberly stood looking at Leroux, who was beating his palms upon his knees, and staring unseeingly before him.

Cumberly rang again; and, in response to the second ring, the housemaid appeared at the door.

"I rang for Soames," said Doctor Cumberly.

"He is not in, sir," answered the girl.

Inspector Dunbar started as though he had been bitten.

"What!" he cried. "Not in?"

"No, sir," said the girl, with wide-open, frightened eyes.

Dunbar turned to Cumberly.

"You said there was no other way out!"

"There *is* no other way, to my knowledge."

"Where's his room?"

Cumberly led the way to a room at the end of a short corridor, and Inspector Dunbar, entering, and turning up the light, glanced about the little apartment. It was a very neat servants' bedroom; with comfortable, quite

simple furniture; but the chest of drawers had been hastily ransacked, and the contents of a trunk—or some of its contents—lay strewn about the floor.

"He has packed his grip!" came Leroux's voice from the doorway. "It's gone!"

The window was wide open. Dunbar sprang forward and leaned out over the ledge, looking to right and left, above and below.

A sort of square courtyard was beneath, and, for the convenience of tradesmen, a hand lift was constructed outside the kitchens of the three flats comprising the house; i. e., Mr. Exel's, ground floor, Henry Leroux's, second floor, and Doctor Cumberly's, top. It worked in a skeleton shaft which passed close to the left of Soames' window.

For an active man, this was a good-enough ladder, and the inspector withdrew his head, shrugging his square shoulders irritably.

"My fault entirely!" he muttered, biting his wiry mustache. "I should have come and seen for myself if there was another way out."

Leroux, in a new flutter of excitement, now craned from the window.

"It might be possible to climb down the shaft," he cried, after a brief survey, "but not if one were carrying a heavy grip, such as that which he has taken!"

"H'm!" said Dunbar. "You are a writing gentleman, I understand, and yet it does not occur to you that he could have lowered the bag on a cord, if he wanted to avoid the noise of dropping it!"

"Yes—er—of course!" muttered Leroux. "But really—but really—oh, good heavens! I am bewildered! What in Heaven's name does it all mean!"

"It means trouble," replied Dunbar grimly; "bad trouble."

They returned to the study, and Inspector Dunbar, for the first time since

his arrival, walked across and examined the fragmentary message, raising his eyebrows when he discovered that it was written upon the same paper as Leroux's manuscripts. He glanced, too, at the pen lying on a page of "Martin Zeda" near the lamp, and at the inky splash which told how hastily the pen had been dropped.

Then—his brows drawn together—he stooped to the body of the murdered woman. Partially raising the fur cloak, he suppressed a gasp of astonishment.

"Why, she only wears a silk night-dress, and a pair of suède slippers!"

He glanced back over his shoulder.

"I had noted that," said Cumberly. "The whole business is utterly extraordinary."

"Extraordinary is no word for it!" growled the inspector, pursuing his examination. "Marks of pressure at the throat—yes; and generally unhealthy appearance."

"Due to the drug habit," interjected Doctor Cumberly.

"What drug?"

"I should not like to say out of hand; possible morphine."

"No jewelry," continued the detective musingly; "wedding ring—not a new one. Finger nails well cared for, but recently neglected. Hair dyed to hide gray patches; dye wanted renewing. Shoes, French. Night robe, silk; good lace; probably French, also. Faint perfume—don't know what it is—apparently proceeding from civet fur. Furs, magnificent; very costly."

He slightly moved the table lamp in order to direct its light upon the white face. The bloodless lips were parted and the detective bent, closely peering at the teeth thus revealed.

"Her teeth are oddly discolored, doctor," he said, taking out a magnifying glass and examining them closely. "They had been recently scaled, too; so that she was not in the habit of neglecting them."

Doctor Cumberly nodded.

"The drug habit, again," he said guardedly; "a proper examination will establish the full facts."

The inspector added brief notes to those already made, ere he rose from beside the body. Then:

"You are absolutely certain," he said deliberately, facing Leroux, "that you had never set eyes on this woman prior to her coming here, to-night?"

"I can swear it!" said Leroux.

"Good!" replied the detective, and closed his notebook with a snap. "Usual formalities will have to be gone through, but I don't think I need trouble you, gentlemen, any further to-night."

CHAPTER V.

DOCTORS DIFFER.

DOCTOR CUMBERLY walked slowly upstairs to his own flat, a picture etched indelibly upon his mind, of Henry Leroux, with a face of despair, sitting below in his dining room and listening to the ominous sounds proceeding from the study, where the police were now busily engaged. In the lobby he met his daughter Helen, who was waiting for him in a state of nervous suspense.

"Father!" she began, while rebuke died upon the doctor's lips. "Tell me quickly what has happened."

Perceiving that an explanation was unavoidable, Doctor Cumberly outlined the story of the night's gruesome happenings, while Big Ben began to chime the hour of one.

Helen, eager-eyed, and with her charming face rather pale, hung upon every word of the narrative.

"And now," concluded her father, "you must go to bed. I insist."

"But father!" cried the girl. "There is something——"

She hesitated uneasily.

"Well, Helen, go on," said the doctor.

"I am afraid you will refuse."

"At least give me the opportunity."

"Well—in the glimpse, the half glimpse, which I had of her, I seemed——"

Doctor Cumberly rested his hands upon his daughter's shoulders characteristically, looking into the troubled gray eyes.

"You don't mean——" he began.

"I thought I recognized her!" whispered the girl.

"Good heavens! Can it be possible?"

"I have been trying, ever since, to recall where we had met, but without result. It might mean so much——"

Doctor Cumberly regarded her fixedly.

"It might mean so much to—Mr. Leroux. But I suppose you will say it is impossible?"

"It is impossible," said Doctor Cumberly firmly; "dismiss the idea, Helen."

"But father," pleaded the girl, placing her hands over his own, "consider what is at stake."

"I am anxious that you should not become involved in this morbid business."

"But you surely know me better than to expect me to faint or become hysterical, or anything silly like that! I was certainly shocked when I came down to-night, because—well, it was all so frightfully unexpected."

Doctor Cumberly shook his head. Helen put her arms about his neck and raised her eyes to his.

"You have no right to refuse," she said softly; "don't you see that?"

Doctor Cumberly frowned. Then:

"You are right, Helen," he agreed. "I should know your pluck well enough. But if Inspector Dunbar is gone, the police may refuse to admit us."

"Then let us hurry!" cried Helen. "I am afraid they will take away——"

Side by side they descended to Henry Leroux's flat, ringing the bell, which, an hour earlier, the lady of the civet furs had rung.

2A DS

A sergeant in uniform opened the door.

"Is Detective Inspector Dunbar here?" inquired the physician.

"Yes, sir."

"Say that Doctor Cumberly wishes to speak to him. And"—as the man was about to depart—"request him not to arouse Mr. Leroux."

Almost immediately the inspector appeared, a look of surprise upon his face, which increased on perceiving the girl beside her father.

"This is my daughter, inspector," explained Cumberly; "she is a contributor to the *Planet*, and to various magazines, and in this journalistic capacity meets many people in many walks of life. She thinks she may be of use to you in preparing your case."

Dunbar bowed rather awkwardly.

"Glad to meet you, Miss Cumberly," came the inevitable formula. "Entirely at your service."

"I had an idea, inspector," said the girl, laying her hand confidentially upon Dunbar's arm, "that I recognized, when I entered Mr. Leroux's study, to-night"—Dunbar nodded—"that I recognized—the—the victim!"

"Good!" said the inspector, rubbing his palms briskly together. His tawny eyes sparkled. "And you would wish to see her again before we take her away. Very plucky of you, Miss Cumberly! But then, you are a doctor's daughter."

They entered, and the inspector closed the door behind them.

"Don't arouse poor Leroux," whispered Cumberly to the detective. "I left him on a couch in the dining room."

"He is still there," replied Dunbar; "poor chap! It is——"

He met Helen's glance, and broke off shortly.

In the study, two uniformed constables, and an officer in plain clothes, were apparently engaged in making an

inventory—or such was the impression conveyed. The clock ticked merrily on; its ticking a desecration, where all else was hushed in deference to the grim visitor. The body of the murdered woman had been laid upon the chesterfield, and a little, dark, bearded man was conducting an elaborate examination; when, seeing the trio enter, he hastily threw the coat of civet fur over the body, and stood up, facing the intruders.

"It's all right, doctor," said the inspector; "and we shan't detain you a moment." He glanced over his shoulder. "Mr. Hilton, M. R. C. S.," he said, indicating the dark man—"Doctor Cumberly and Miss Cumberly."

The divisional surgeon bowed to Helen and eagerly grasped the hand of the celebrated physician.

"I am fortunate in being able to ask your opinion," he began.

Doctor Cumberly nodded shortly, and, with upraised hand, cut him short.

"I shall willingly give you any assistance in my power," he said; "but my daughter has voluntarily committed herself to a rather painful ordeal, and I am anxious to get it over."

He stooped and raised the fur from the ghastly face.

Helen, her hand resting upon her father's shoulder, ventured one rapid glance, and then looked away, shuddering slightly. Doctor Cumberly replaced the coat and gazed anxiously at his daughter. But Helen, with admirable courage, having closed her eyes for a moment, reopened them, and smiled at her father's anxiety. She was pale, but perfectly composed.

"Well, Miss Cumberly?" inquired the inspector eagerly; while all in the room watched this slim girl in her charming dishabille, this dainty figure so utterly out of place in that scene of morbid crime.

She raised her gray eyes to the detective.

"I still believe that I have seen the face somewhere before. But I shall have to reflect a while—I meet so many folks, you know, in a casual way—before I can commit myself to any statement."

In the leonine eyes looking into hers gleamed the light of admiration and approval. The canny Scotsman admired this girl for her beauty, as a matter of course, for her courage, because courage was a quality standing high in his estimation, but, above all, for her admirable discretion.

"Very proper, Miss Cumberly," he said; "very proper and wise on your part. I don't wish to hurry you in any way, but"—he hesitated, glancing at the man in plain clothes, who had now resumed a careful perusal of a newspaper—"but her name doesn't happen to be Vernon——"

"Vernon!" cried the girl, her eyes lighting up at sound of the name. "Mrs. Vernon! It is! It is! She was pointed out to me at the last arts ball—where she appeared in a most monstrous Chinese costume——"

"Chinese?" inquired Dunbar, producing the bulky notebook.

"Yes. Oh, poor, poor soul!"

"You know nothing further about her, Miss Cumberly?"

"Nothing, inspector. She was merely pointed out to me as one of the strangest figures in the hall. Her husband, I understand, is an art expert who is——"

"He *was!*" said Dunbar, closing the book sharply. "He died this afternoon; and a paragraph announcing his death appears in the newspaper which we found in the victim's fur coat!"

"But how——"

"It was the only paragraph on the half page folded outward which was in any sense *personal*. I am greatly indebted to you, Miss Cumberly; every hour wasted on a case like this means

a fresh plait in the rope around the neck of the wrong man!"

Helen Cumberly grew slowly quite pallid.

"Good night," she said; and, bowing to the detective and to the surgeon, she prepared to depart.

Mr. Hilton touched Doctor Cumberly's arm, as he, too, was about to retire.

"May I hope," he whispered, "that you will return and give me the benefit of your opinion in making out my report?"

Doctor Cumberly glanced at his daughter; and, seeing her to be perfectly composed, "For the moment, I have formed no opinion, Mr. Hilton," he said quietly, "not having had an opportunity to conduct a proper examination."

Hilton bent and whispered confidentially in the other's ear:

"She was drugged!"

The innuendo underlying the words struck Doctor Cumberly forcibly, and he started back with his brows drawn together in a frown.

"Do you mean that she was addicted to the use of drugs," he asked sharply, "or that the drugging took place to-night?"

"The drugging *did* take place to-night!" whispered the other. "An injection was made in the left shoulder with a hypodermic syringe; the mark is quite fresh."

Doctor Cumberly glared at his fellow practitioner angrily.

"Are there no other marks of injection?" he asked.

"On the left forearm, yes. Obviously self-administered. Oh, I don't deny the habit! But my point is this: the injection in the shoulder was *not* self-administered."

"Come, Helen," said Cumberly, taking his daughter's arm; for she had drawn near, during the colloquy, "you must get to bed."

His face was very stern when he turned again to Mr. Hilton.

"I shall return in a few minutes," he said, and escorted his daughter from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

AT SCOTLAND YARD.

MATTERS of vital importance to some people whom already we have met, and to others whom thus far we have not met, were transacted in a lofty and rather bleak-looking room at Scotland Yard between the hours of nine and ten a. m.; that is, later in the morning of the fateful day whose advent we have heard acclaimed from the Tower of Westminster.

The room, which was lighted by a large French window opening upon a balcony, commanded an excellent view of the Thames Embankment. The floor was polished to a degree of brightness almost painful. The distempered walls, save for a severe and solitary etching of a former commissioner, were nude in all their unloveliness. A heavy deal table—upon which rested a blotting pad, a pewter inkpot, several newspapers, and two pens—together with three deal chairs, built rather as monuments of durability than as examples of art, constituted the only furniture, if we except an electric lamp with a green glass shade, above the table.

This was the room of Detective Inspector Dunbar; and Detective Inspector Dunbar, at the hour of our entrance, will be found seated in the chair, placed behind the table, his elbows resting upon the blotting pad.

At ten minutes past nine, exactly, the door opened, and a thickset, florid man, buttoned up in a fawn-colored raincoat, and wearing a bowler hat of obsolete build, entered. He possessed a black mustache, a breezy, bustling manner, and humorous, blue eyes; furthermore, when he took off his hat, he revealed the possession of a head of very bristly,

upstanding, black hair. This was Detective Sergeant Sowerby, and the same who was engaged in examining a newspaper in the study of Henry Leroux when Doctor Cumberly and his daughter had paid their second visit to that scene of an unhappy soul's dismissal.

"Well?" said Dunbar, glancing up at his subordinate inquiringly.

"I have done all the cab depots," reported Sergeant Sowerby, "and a good many of the private owners; but so far the man seen by Mr. Exel has not turned up."

"The word will be passed round now, though," said Dunbar, "and we shall probably have him here during the day."

"I hope so," said the other good-humoredly, seating himself upon one of the two chairs ranged beside the wall. "If he doesn't show up——"

"Well?" jerked Dunbar. "If he doesn't?"

"It will look very black against Leroux."

Dunbar drummed upon the blotting pad with the fingers of his left hand.

"It beats anything of the kind that has ever come my way," he confessed. "You get pretty cautious at weighing people up, in this business; but I certainly don't think—mind you, I go no further—but I certainly don't think Mr. Henry Leroux would willingly kill a fly; yet there is circumstantial evidence enough to hang him."

Sergeant Sowerby nodded, gazing speculatively at the floor.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "why the girl—Miss Cumberly—hesitated about telling us the woman's name?"

"I am not wondering about that at all," replied Dunbar bluntly. "She must meet thousands in the same way. The wonder to me is that she remembered at all. I am open to bet half a crown that *you* couldn't remember the name of every woman you happened to have pointed out to you at an arts ball?"

"Maybe not," agreed Sowerby; "she's a smart girl, I'll allow. I see you have last night's papers there?"

"I have," replied Dunbar; "and I'm wondering——"

"If there's any connection?"

"Well," continued the inspector, "it looks, on the face of it, as though the news of her husband's death had something to do with Mrs. Vernon's presence at Leroux's flat. It's not a natural thing for a woman, on the evening of her husband's death, to rush straight away to another man's place."

"It's strange we couldn't find her clothes."

"It's not strange at all! You're simply obsessed with the idea that this was a love intrigue! Think, man! The most abandoned woman wouldn't run to keep an appointment with a lover at a time like that! And, remember, she had the news in her pocket! She came to that flat dressed—or undressed—just as we found her; I'm sure of it. And a point like that sometimes means the difference between hanging and acquittal."

Sergeant Sowerby digested these words, composing his jovial countenance in an expression of unnatural profundity. Then:

"*The* point, to my mind," he said, "is the one raised by Mr. Hilton. By gum! Didn't Doctor Cumberly tell him off!"

"Doctor Cumberly," replied Dunbar, "is entitled to his opinion, that the injection in the woman's shoulder was at least eight hours old; while Mr. Hilton is equally entitled to maintain that it was less than *one* hour old. Neither of them can hope to prove his case."

"If either of them could?"

"It might make a difference to the evidence—but I'm not sure."

"What time is your appointment?"

"Ten o'clock," replied Dunbar. "I am meeting Mr. Debnam—the late Mr. Vernon's solicitor. There is something in it. Damme! I am sure of it!"

"Something in what?"

"The fact that Mr. Vernon died yesterday evening, and that his wife was murdered at midnight."

"What have you told the press?"

"As little as possible, but you will see that the early editions will all be screaming for the arrest of Soames."

"I shouldn't wonder. He would be a useful man to have; but he's probably out of London now."

"I think not. He's more likely to wait for instructions from his principal."

"His principal?"

"Certainly. You don't think Soames did the murder, do you?"

"No; but he's obviously an accessory."

"I'm not so sure even of that."

"Then why did he bolt?"

"Because he had a guilty conscience."

"Yes," agreed Sowerby; "it does turn out that way sometimes. At any rate, Stringer is after him, but he's got next to nothing to go upon. Has any reply been received from Mrs. Leroux in Paris?"

"No," answered Dunbar, frowning thoughtfully. "Her husband's wire would reach her first thing this morning; I am expecting to hear of a reply at any moment."

"They're a funny couple, altogether," said Sowerby. "I can't imagine myself standing for Mrs. Sowerby spending her week-ends in Paris. Asking for trouble, I call it!"

"It does seem a daft arrangement," agreed Dunbar; "but then, as you say, they're a funny couple."

"I never saw such a bundle of nerves in all my life!"

"Leroux?"

Sowerby nodded.

"I suppose," he said, "it's the artistic temperament! If Mrs. Leroux has got it, too, I don't wonder that they get fed up with one another's company."

"That's about the secret of it. And now, I shall be glad, Sowerby, if you will be after that taxi man again. Report at one o'clock. I shall be here."

"By the way," said Sowerby, with his hand on the doorknob, "who the blazes is Mr. King?"

Inspector Dunbar looked up.

"Mr. King," he replied slowly, "is the solution of the mystery."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN IN THE LIMOUSINE.

THE house of the late Horace Vernon was a modern villa of prosperous appearance; but, on this sunny September morning, a palpable atmosphere of gloom seemed to overlie it. This made itself perceptible even to the toughened and unimpressionable nerves of Inspector Dunbar. As he mounted the five steps leading up to the door, glancing meanwhile at the lowered blinds at the windows, he wondered if, failing these evidences and his own private knowledge of the facts, he should have recognized that the hand of tragedy had placed its mark upon this house. But when the door was opened by a white-faced servant, he told himself that he should, for a veritable miasma of death seemed to come out to meet him, to envelop him.

Within, proceeded a subdued activity: somber figures moved upon the staircase; and Inspector Dunbar, having presented his card, presently found himself in a well-appointed library.

At the table, whereon were spread a number of documents, sat a lean, clean-shaven, sallow-faced man, wearing gold-rimmed pince-nez; a man whose demeanor of businesslike gloom was most admirably adapted to that place and occasion. This was Mr. Debnam, the solicitor. He gravely waved the detective to an armchair, adjusted his pince-nez, and coughed, introductorily.

"Your communication, inspector," he

began—he had the kind of voice which seems to be buried in sawdust packing—“was brought to me this morning, and has disturbed me immeasurably, unspeakably.”

“You have been to view the body, sir?”

“One of my clerks, who knew Mrs. Vernon, has just returned to this house to report that he has identified her.”

“I should have preferred you to have gone yourself, sir,” began Dunbar, taking out his notebook.

“My state of health, inspector,” said the solicitor, “renders it undesirable that I should submit myself to an ordeal so unnecessary—so wholly unnecessary.”

“Very good!” muttered Dunbar, making an entry in his book; “your clerk, then, whom I can see in a moment, identifies the murdered woman as Mrs. Vernon. What was her Christian name?”

“Iris—Iris Mary Vernon.”

Inspector Dunbar made a note of the fact.

“And now,” he said, “you will have read the copy of that portion of my report which I submitted to you this morning—acting upon information supplied by Miss Helen Cumberly?”

“Yes, yes, inspector, I have read it—but, by the way, I do not know Miss Cumberly.”

“Miss Cumberly,” explained the detective, “is the daughter of Doctor Cumberly, a Harley Street physician. She lives with her father in the flat above that of Mr. Leroux. She saw the body by accident—and recognized it as that of a lady who had been named to her at the last arts ball.”

“Ah!” said Debnam. “Yes—I see—at the arts ball, inspector. This is a mysterious and a very ghastly case.”

“It is, indeed, sir,” agreed Dunbar. “Can you throw any light upon the presence of Mrs. Vernon at Mr. Le-

roux’s flat on the very night of her husband’s death?”

“I can—and I cannot,” answered the solicitor, leaning back in the chair and again adjusting his pince-nez, in the manner of a man having important matters—and gloomy, very gloomy, matters—to communicate.

“Good!” said the inspector, and prepared to listen.

“You see,” continued Debnam, “the late Mrs. Vernon was not actually residing with her husband at the date of his death.”

“Indeed!”

“Ostensibly”—the solicitor shook a lean forefinger at his vis-à-vis—“ostensibly, inspector, she was visiting her sister in Scotland.”

Inspector Dunbar sat up very straight, his brows drawn down over the tawny eyes.

“These visits were of frequent occurrence, and usually of about a week’s duration. Mr. Vernon, my late client, a man—I’ll not deny it—of inconstant affections—you understand me, inspector?—did not greatly concern himself with his wife’s movements. She belonged to a smart, bohemian set, and—to use a popular figure of speech—burned the candle at both ends; late dances, night clubs, bridge parties, and other feverish pursuits, possibly taken up as a result of the—shall I say, cooling?—of her husband’s affections.”

“There was another woman in the case?”

“I fear so, inspector; in fact, I am sure of it: but to return to Mrs. Vernon. My client provided her with ample funds; and I, myself, have expressed to him astonishment respecting her expenditures in Scotland. I understand that her sister was in comparatively poor circumstances, and I went so far as to point out to Mr. Vernon that one hundred pounds was—shall I say, an excessive?—outlay upon a

week's sojourn in Auchterander, Perth."

"A hundred pounds!"

"One hundred pounds!"

"Was it queried by Mr. Vernon?"

"Not at all."

"Was Mr. Vernon personally acquainted with this sister in Perth?"

"He was not, inspector. Mrs. Vernon, at the time of her marriage, did not enjoy that social status to which my late client elevated her. For many years she held no open communication with any member of her family, but latterly, as I have explained, she acquired the habit of recuperating—recuperating from the effects of her febrile pleasures—at this obscure place in Scotland. And Mr. Vernon, his interest in her movements having considerably—shall I say, abated?—offered no objection: even suffered it gladly, counting the cost but little against—"

"Freedom?" suggested Dunbar, scribbling in his notebook.

"Rather crudely expressed, perhaps," said the solicitor, peering over the top of his glasses, "but you have the idea. I come now to my client's awakening. Four days ago, he learned the truth; he learned that he was being deceived!"

"Deceived!"

"Mrs. Vernon, thoroughly exhausted with irregular living, announced that she was about to resort once more to the healing breezes of the heatherland." Mr. Debnam was thoroughly warming to his discourse and thoroughly enjoying his own dusty phrases.

"Interrupting you for a moment," said the inspector, "at what intervals did these visits take place?"

"At remarkably regular intervals, inspector: something like six times a year."

"For how long had Mrs. Vernon made a custom of these visits?"

"Roughly, for two years."

"Thank you. Will you go on, sir?"

"She requested Mr. Vernon, then, on the last occasion, to give her a check for eighty pounds; and this he did unquestioningly. On Thursday, the second of September, she left for Scotland."

"Did she take her maid?"

"Her maid always received a holiday on these occasions; Mrs. Vernon wired her respecting the date of her return."

"Did any one actually see her off?"

"No, not that I am aware of, inspector."

"To put the whole thing quite bluntly, Mr. Debnam," said Dunbar, fixing his tawny eyes upon the solicitor, "Mr. Vernon was thoroughly glad to get rid of her for a week?"

Mr. Debnam shifted uneasily in his chair; the truculent directness of the detective was displeasing to his tortuous mind. However:

"I fear you have hit upon the truth," he confessed, "and I must admit that we have no legal evidence of her leaving for Scotland on this, or on any other occasion. Letters were received from Perth, and letters sent to Auchterander from London were answered. But the truth, the painful truth, came to light unexpectedly, dramatically, on Monday last."

"Four days ago?"

"Exactly; three days before the death of my client." Mr. Debnam wagged his finger at the inspector again. "I maintain," he said, "that this painful discovery, which I am about to mention, precipitated my client's end; although it is a fact that there was—hereditary heart trouble. But I admit that his neglect of his wife—to give it no harsher name—contributed to the catastrophe."

He paused to give dramatic point to the revelation.

"Walking homeward at a late hour on Monday evening from a flat in Victoria Street—the flat of—shall I em-

ploy the term, a particular friend?—Mr. Vernon was horrified—horrified beyond measure, to perceive, in a large and well-appointed car—a limousine—his wife!”

“The inside lights of the car were on, then?”

“No; but the light from a street lamp shone directly into the car. A temporary block in the traffic compelled the driver of the car, whom my client described to me as an Asiatic—to pull up for a moment. There, within a few yards of her husband, Mrs. Vernon reclined in the car—or, rather, in the arms of a male companion!”

“What!”

“Positively!” Mr. Debnam was sedately enjoying himself. “Positively, my dear inspector, in the arms of a man of extremely dark complexion. Mr. Vernon was unable to perceive more than this, for the man had his back toward him. But the light shone fully upon the face of Mrs. Vernon, who appeared pale and exhausted. She wore a conspicuous motor coat of civet fur, and it was this which first attracted Mr. Vernon’s attention. The blow was a very severe one to a man in my client’s state of health; and although I cannot claim that his own conscience was clear, this open violation of the marriage vows outraged the husband—outraged him. In fact, he was so perturbed, that he stood there shaking, quivering, unable to speak or act, and the car drove away before he had recovered sufficient presence of mind to note the number.”

“In which direction did the car proceed?”

“Toward Victoria Station.”

“Any other particulars?”

“Not regarding the car, its driver, or its occupants; but early on the following morning, Mr. Vernon, very much shaken, called upon me and instructed me to dispatch an agent to Perth immediately. My agent’s report reached

me at practically the same time as the news of my client’s death.”

“And his report was?”

“His report, inspector, telegraphic, of course, was this: that no sister of Mrs. Vernon resided at the address; that the place was a cottage occupied by a certain Mrs. Fry and her husband; that the husband was of no occupation, and had no visible means of support”—he ticked off the points on the long forefinger—“that the Frys lived better than any of their neighbors; and—most important of all—that Mrs. Fry’s maiden name, which my agent discovered by recourse to the parish register of marriages—was Ann Fairchild.”

“What of that?”

“Ann Fairchild was a former maid of Mrs. Vernon!”

“In short, it amounts to this, then: Mrs. Vernon, during these various absences, never went to Scotland at all? It was a conspiracy?”

“Exactly—exactly, inspector! I wired, instructing my agent to extort, from the woman Fry, the address to which she forwarded letters received by her for Mrs. Vernon. The lady’s death, news of which will now have reached him, will no doubt be a lever, enabling my representative to obtain the desired information.”

“When do you expect to hear from him?”

“At any moment. Failing a full confession by the Frys, you will, of course, know how to act, inspector?”

“Damme!” cried Dunbar. “Can your man be relied upon to watch them? They mustn’t slip away! Shall I instruct Perth to arrest the couple?”

“I wired my agent this morning, inspector, to communicate with the local police respecting the Frys.”

Inspector Dunbar tapped his small, widely separated teeth with the end of his fountain pen.

“I have had one priceless witness slip

through my fingers," he muttered. "I'll hand in my resignation if the Frys go!"

"To whom do you refer?"

Inspector Dunbar rose.

"It is a point with which I need not trouble you, sir," he said. "It was not included in the extract of report sent to you. This is going to be the biggest case of my professional career, or my name is not Robert Dunbar!"

Closing his notebook, he thrust it into his pocket, and replaced his fountain pen in the little leather wallet.

"Of course," said the solicitor, rising in turn, and adjusting the troublesome pince-nez, "there was some intrigue with Leroux? So much is evident."

"You will be thinking that, eh?"

"My dear inspector"—Mr. Debnam, the wily, was seeking information—"my dear inspector, Leroux's own wife was absent in Paris—quite a safe distance; and Mrs. Vernon—now proven to be a woman conducting a love intrigue—is found dead under most compromising circumstances—*most* compromising circumstances—in his flat! His servants, even, are got safely out of the way for the evening."

"Quite so," said Dunbar shortly, "quite so, Mr. Debnam." He opened the door. "Might I see the late Mrs. Vernon's maid?"

"She is at her home. As I told you, Mrs. Vernon habitually released her for the period of these absences."

The notebook reappeared.

"The young woman's address?"

"You can get it from the house-keeper. Is there anything else you wish to know?"

"Nothing beyond that, thank you."

Three minutes later, Inspector Dunbar had written in his book: "Clarice Goodstone, care of Mrs. Herne, No. 134a Robert Street, Hampstead Road, N. W."

He departed from the house whereat Death the Gleaner had twice knocked with his scythe.

CHAPTER VIII.

CABMAN TWO.

RETURNING to Scotland Yard, Inspector Dunbar walked straight up to his own room. There he found Sowerby, very red-faced and humid, and a taximan who sat stolidly surveying the Embankment from the window.

"Hello!" cried Dunbar. "He's turned up, then?"

"No, he hasn't," replied Sowerby, with a mild irritation. "But we know where to find him, and he ought to lose his license."

The taximan turned hurriedly. He wore a muffler so tightly packed between his neck and the collar of his uniform jacket, that it appeared materially to impair his respiration. His face possessed a bluish tinge, suggestive of asphyxia, and his watery eyes protruded remarkably; his breathing was noisily audible.

"No, chuck it, mister!" he exclaimed. "I'm only tellin' you 'cause it ain't my line to play tricks on the police. You'll find my name in the books downstairs more'n any other driver in London! I reckon I've brought enough umbrellas, cameras, walkin' sticks, hopera cloaks, watches, and sichlike in 'ere, to set up a blarsted pawnbroker's!"

"That's all right, my lad!" said Dunbar, holding up his hand to silence the voluble speaker. "There's going to be no license losing. You did not hear that you were wanted before?"

The watery eyes of the cabman protruded painfully; he respired like a horse.

"*Me, guvnor!*" he exclaimed. "Gor-bli'me! I ain't the bloke! I was drivin' back from takin' the Honorable 'Erbert 'Arding 'ome—same as I does almost every night, when the 'Ouse is a-sittin'—when I see old Tom Brian drawin' away from the door o' Palace Mansion, why, I——"

Again Dunbar held up his hand.

"No doubt you mean well," he said; "but damme! begin at the beginning! Who are you, and what have you come to tell us?"

"Oo are I? 'Ere's oo I ham!" wheezed the cabman, proffering a greasy license. "Richard 'Amper, No. 3 Breams Mews, Dulwich Village."

"That's all right," said Dunbar, thrusting back the proffered document. "And last night you had taken Mr. Harding, the member of Parliament, to his residence in——"

"In Peers' Chambers, Westminster—that's it, guvnor! Comin' back, I 'ave to pass along the north side o' the square, an' just a'ead o' me, I see old Tom Brian a-pullin' round the Johnny 'Orner—'im comin' from Palace Mansions."

"Mr. Exel only mentioned seeing *one* cab," muttered Dunbar, glancing keenly aside at Sowerby.

"Wotcher say, guvnor?" asked the cabman.

"I say—did you see a gentleman approaching from the corner?" asked Dunbar.

"Yus," declared the man; "I see 'im, but 'e 'adn't got as far as the Johnny 'Orner. As I passed outside old Tom Brian, wot's changin' 'is gear, I see a bloke blowin' along on the pavement—a bloke in a 'igh 'at, an' wearin' a heye-glass."

"At this time, then," pursued Dunbar, "you had actually passed the other cab, and the gentleman on the pavement had not come up with it?"

"'E couldn't see it, guvnor! I'm tellin' you 'e 'adn't got to the Johnny 'Orner!"

"I see," muttered Sowerby. "It's possible that Mr. Exel took no notice of the first cab—especially as it did not come out of the square."

"Wotcher say, guvnor?" queried the cabman again, turning his bleared eyes upon Sergeant Sowerby.

"He said," interrupted Dunbar, "was Brian's cab empty?"

"Course it was," rapped Mr. Hamper, "'e'd just dropped 'is fare at Palace Mansions."

"How do you know?" snapped Dunbar suddenly, fixing his fierce eyes upon the face of the speaker.

The cabman glared in beery truculence.

"I got me blarsted senses, ain't I?" he inquired. "There's only two lots o' flats on that side o' the Square—Palace Mansions, an' St. Andrew's Mansions."

"Well?"

"St. Andrew's Mansions," continued Hamper, "is all away!"

"All away?"

"All away! I know, 'cause I used to have a reg'lar fare there. 'E's in Egyp'; flat shut up. Top floor's to let. Bottom floor's two old unmarried maiden ladies what always travels by bus. *So does all their blarsted friends an' relations. Where can old Tom Brian 'ave been comin' from, if it wasn't Palace Mansions?"

"H'm!" said Dunbar. "You are a loss to the detective service, my lad! And how do you account for the fact that Brian has not got to hear of the inquiry?"

Hamper bent to Dunbar and whispered beerily in his ear: "P'r'aps 'e don't want to 'ear, guvnor!"

"Oh! Why not?"

"Well, 'e knows there's something up there!"

"Therefore it's his plain duty to assist the police."

"Same as what I does?" cried Hamper, raising his eyebrows. "Course it is! But 'ow d'you know 'e ain't been got at?"

"Our friend, here, evidently has one up against Mr. Tom Brian!" muttered Dunbar aside to Sowerby.

"Wotcher say, guvnor?" inquired the cabman, looking from one to the other.

"I say, no doubt you can save us the

trouble of looking out Brian's license, and give us his private address?" replied Dunbar.

"Course I can. 'E lives hat num'er 36 Forth Street, Brixton, and 'e's out o' the big Brixton depot."

"Oh!" said Dunbar dryly. "Does he owe you anything?"

"Wotcher say, guvnor?"

"I say, it's very good of you to take all this trouble and whatever it has cost you in time, we shall be pleased to put right."

Mr. Hamper spat in his right palm, and rubbed his hands together appreciatively.

"Make it five bob!" he said.

"Wait downstairs," directed Dunbar, pressing a bell push beside the door. "I'll get it put through for you."

"Righto!" rumbled the cabman, and went lurching from the room as a constable in uniform appeared at the door. "Good mornin', guvnor. Good mornin'!"

The cabman having departed, leaving in his wake a fragrant odor of four-penny ale:

"Here you are, Sowerby!" cried Dunbar. "We are moving at last! This is the address of the late Mrs. Vernon's maid. See her; feel your ground carefully, of course; get to know what clothes Mrs. Vernon took with her on her periodical visits to Scotland."

"What clothes?"

"That's the idea; it is important. I don't think the girl was in her mistress' confidence, but I leave it to you to find out. If circumstances point to my surmise being inaccurate—you know how to act."

"Just let me glance over your notes, bearing on the matter," said Sowerby, "and I'll be off."

Dunbar handed him the bulging notebook, and Sergeant Sowerby lowered his inadequate eyebrows thoughtfully, while he scanned the evidence of Mr. Debnam. Then, returning the book to

his superior, and adjusting the peculiar bowler firmly upon his head, he set out.

Dunbar glanced through some papers—apparently reports—which lay upon the table, penciled comments upon two of them, and then, consulting his notebook once more in order to refresh his memory, started off for Forth Street, Brixton.

Forth Street, Brixton, is a depressing thoroughfare. It contains small, cheap flats, and a number of frowzy-looking houses which give one the impression of having run to seed. A hostelry of sad aspect occupies a commanding position midway along the street, but inspires the traveler not with cheer, but with lugubrious reflections upon the horrors of inebriety. The odors, unpleasantly mingled, of fried bacon and paraffin oil, are wafted to the wayfarer from the porches of these family residences.

No. 36 proved to be such a villa, and Inspector Dunbar contemplated it from a distance thoughtfully. As he stood by the door of the public house, gazing across the street, a tired-looking woman, lean and anxious-eyed, a poor, dried-up bean pod of a woman, appeared from the door of No. 36, carrying a basket. She walked along in the direction of the neighboring high-road, and Dunbar casually followed her.

For some ten minutes he studied her activities, noting that she went from shop to shop until her basket was laden with provisions of all sorts. When she entered a wine-and-spirit merchant's, the detective entered close behind her, for the place was also a post office. While he purchased a penny stamp and fumbled in his pocket for an imaginary letter, he observed, with interest, that the woman had purchased, and was loading into the hospitable basket, a bottle of whisky, a bottle of rum, and a bottle of gin.

He left the shop ahead of her, sure, now, of his ground, always provided that the woman proved to be Mrs.

Brian. Dunbar walked along Forth Street slowly enough to enable the woman to overtake him. At the door of No. 36, he glanced up at the number questioningly, and turned in the gate as she was about to enter.

He raised his hat.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Brian?"

Momentarily, a hard look came into the tired eyes, but Dunbar's gentleness of manner and voice, together with the kindly expression upon his face, turned the scales favorably.

"I am Mrs. Brian," she said; "yes. Did you want to see me?"

"On a matter of some importance. May I come in?"

She nodded and led the way into the house; the door was not closed.

In a living room whereon was written a pathetic history—a history of decline from easy circumstances and respectability to poverty and utter disregard of appearances—she confronted him, setting down her basket on a table from which the remains of a fish breakfast were not yet removed.

"Is your husband in?" inquired Dunbar, with a subtle change of manner.

"He's lying down."

The hard look was creeping again into the woman's eyes.

"Will you please awake him, and tell him that I have called in regard to his license?"

He thrust a card into her hand:

"DETECTIVE INSPECTOR DUNBAR,
C. I. D. NEW SCOTLAND YARD, S. W."

Remember that you will only have to wait two weeks for the next installment of this great serial. The next DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE will be out October 20th.



WOMAN PREFERS PRISON, AND HUSBAND

RATHER than be separated from her husband, Ida Hadley, of Muskogee, Oklahoma, acquitted of the murder of Sheriff Jake Giles, of Beaumont, voluntarily accepted a sentence of ten years in the penitentiary for attempted jail breaking.

Paul Hadley was convicted of being an accessory to the murder of Giles, and given a life sentence. Mrs. Hadley actually shot Giles, but the jury acquitted her on the ground of insanity. The Hadleys were taken to the penitentiary at McAlester together.

Giles was shot and killed on a railroad train near here several weeks ago when taking Hadley to Texas to answer the charges following the latter's arrest in Kansas City. Mrs. Hadley had permission to accompany her husband.

Mrs. Hadley raved like a madwoman when the verdict was read. Shrieking and screaming, she threw herself upon her husband and fought the officers who strove to tear her from him. Four officers carried her to a police patrol, and she was taken back to her cell.

Her husband received the verdict calmly. "I am not guilty; I know nothing of a plot to kill Giles, yet I am satisfied," he said. "Had they taken me back to Texas, they would have killed me, anyway. I'm glad they gave me life, and I'm glad they acquitted Ida."

Two -- Not of A Kind

by Ladd Plumley

WHEN Jenifer Melvin Cobb's clerk discharged himself, the time was two-thirty; when Jenifer's bloody shirt was removed, and a doctor administered a heart stimulant, the time was four-ten. In this hour and forty minutes, if Cobb learned nothing, there is no hope that he will ever learn anything.

"We've got 'em coming like crows to cornfields in May!" Cobb merrily gloated. "Big mail. Saturday, but I can't let you off this afternoon."

The clerk's face showed that he was not as enthusiastic as his employer concerning the mail. He braved a muttered remonstrance.

"What's that?" snapped Cobb. "What do I pay you for?"

The clerk, who had been about to leave the private office, turned and presented to his employer an angry face. "I've decided, Mr. Cobb," he said, "that I'll be looking for another job. It isn't altogether the long hours, and no Saturday afternoons. I'll put it hard from the shoulder—I don't like the business."

"Suffering Moses!" exclaimed Cobb. "If you don't like your job, you can dig out, of course. But you haven't the right to spout anything against the business. What's in your mind? Speak up. Chuck your grouch! Don't stand there with your mouth open like a calf choking on an apple. Chuck it—and,

if you want, get out. It's easy to dig up clerks. There're plenty of strap hangers waiting to drop into your seat."

"These lots you're selling," grumbled the clerk. "There's a fellow who's from the east—Long Island—he's put me wise about that land—the last is the worst—the Clearwater addition. The fellow chucked it that there isn't any real land there. All bogs. He says you'd have to scoop cellars with a spoon. He says——"

"That'll do," jerked in Cobb. "Do the advertisements state that they're not swampy? Those lots are just as they're represented. There's no come-back. The Clearwater addition is inside of a circle that takes thirty miles around the center of the biggest city on the globe. Who says those lots aren't the biggest bargain you can find between old New York and the Pacific coast?"

"I do!" snapped back the clerk, his jaw suddenly seeming to grow a squareness that before had not been noticeable. "And it isn't only the Clearwater addition—it's everything. I get out. See! Nobody ever said I was a softy, and I ain't. But selling acre boglands in scraps, where there ain't nothing but a country road miles and miles away, and selling to women who think they're let into a sixteen-carat proposition! I ain't a softy, but it's got its hooks into me, and here's where I get out!"

The young man behind the mahogany desk flicked specks of imaginary dust from the sleeve of his perfectly dustless coat. Then he leaned back in his chair, and, while he tapped the fingers of one hand on the polished wood before him, he scowled as he critically examined the fingers of his other hand, a hand which showed nails that evidently had more care lavished upon them than had even been lavished on the rest of his person.

"I'll phone Dunham, and you'll get your pay," said Cobb. "But, of course, it's understood that everything that you've learned here as my clerk is strictly confidential—strictly confidential."

"Sure!" replied the other, and without hesitation. "Nobody hands me a pay envelope for missionary stunts. You'll give me a letter, too. Must have a letter. It isn't easy to yank in another job."

"If you do regard the matters of this office as strictly confidential, best kind of a letter," promised Cobb.

"I said I would, and I mean it. I don't believe in slinging mud at the last boss. That ain't my way."

"Leave your house address, and I'll send the letter."

"Not for little Willie boy—not in this office," replied the clerk.

Cobb tapped his fingers on the desk again. "You won't take any chances with me," he said, while his lip curled downward, displaying teeth which had the same care as his hands.

"Seen too much to take chances," replied the other. "Seen a great deal too much."

"Send in the stenographer—I'll dictate a letter now—sign it before five. I'll do more than the letter. I'll tell Dunham to give you three weeks' pay. My affairs are strictly confidential. Savvy!"

"Sure!" again replied the clerk. "It's a go. But I wouldn't have said any-

thing, even if you hadn't offered me the extra."

With this concession for what his code of business ethics would have prevented him from doing, anyhow, the clerk opened the door and passed out, leaving his employer to his pile of correspondence.

"Like salts in hot water, that sort of tootsie baby slush!" exclaimed Cobb, as he began to sort out his letters. "Never told any one this was a bread line or a Salvation Army shop. If you've got a hunch for the good old stuff, and have the brains to pull it, you'd be a fool if you didn't pull it. And I pay good money to my advertising men for saying everything they can say that's good about my deals. Then my bait is gone over by the slickest legal talent I can get. It's up to the fishes to find out what's queer!"

Cobb had just dictated the letter he had promised the clerk, when a visitor was admitted into the private office, although his instructions were to admit no visitors. She, for, due to the peculiarities of his trade, Cobb dealt mostly with those feminine, was one of the women who have school-teacher so plainly written on their faces and persons that it is as if their occupation were carried before them inscribed on a banner. Past middle age, she was as easy a prey for her hopes for an investment of cent per cent on her meager savings as a starving rat is a prey for a poisoned piece of meat. She timidly entered—the office and man were bluffingly imposing—and took an uneasy seat beside the shining mahogany desk. She hardly dared raise her eyes to the frowning face at her side.

"It was really awfully hard work to get in here," she said falteringly. "Seemed as if they'd never, never let me. But the men outside wouldn't talk about my lot—and, I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Cobb—but it's so—so very important."

Cobb had picked up a letter from the heap, and seemed to be studying it attentively. He had learned that visitors could be put where he wanted to put them by pushing in hard the idea that their affairs were of no importance. He rattled the sheet and scowled over the top of it before again blanketing his face.

"Come to the point!" he snapped.

"I was led to believe by one of your agents——"

"What's that?" flared in Cobb.

"I was led to believe that in a year's time——"

"Or five or ten," put in Cobb sharply.

"Anyhow," the woman continued, "the agent and the circular told how the great American property owners had begun by buying land. I took my savings from the bank—years of savings—and bought a lot. The Clearwater extension—it's on the map, over there. And—now—well—we need the money—we need it terribly. I've got to get money somewhere."

"Now," clicked in Cobb's brisk voice, as he lowered the letter before blanketing his face once more. "Hit the pike. What's all this, anyway?"

"My mother—I support her," persisted the school-teacher, while she nervously twisted into a knot the gloves in her lap and untwisted them again. "My mother! She has the most frightful dread of public hospitals. She says she will never go to one—never. She says that——"

"Will you please cut it short?" came again the sharp and intimidating voice, as the letter was crisply rattled and lowered to the desk, where Cobb jotted on the margin a penciled memorandum. "What was it you were saying?" he asked. "Oh, yes, the Clearwater addition. My advice is to hold on to that lot. Don't let it get away from you—don't, I say, let it get away!"

"But I've got to have money for

my mother's operation. The doctors say it is the one chance to save her life, and they say that in her weak condition, and feeling as she does about hospitals, it might kill her to make her go to one. There's nobody I can borrow from, and—well—I thought that under the circumstances you would take the lot back—say, with four per cent interest on the price. That's what the savings bank paid me."

Cobb made a vicious jab at his memorandum. Then he glanced at the woman. The glance was what you might expect from a hawk that had just indulged in a bit of the flesh of a sparrow which had fallen into its claws.

"So that's what you want," he said. "We sell real estate—our concern never buys it—not subdivided."

"But my mother," implored the school-teacher, subduing with difficulty the tears, notwithstanding the training of many years in a soul-racking occupation.

It was as if Cobb had suddenly become deaf. He smiled at his pencil, showing the teeth, which, although so white, suggested the teeth of a steel trap.

"I had agents try to sell," said the woman, getting control of her voice and again continuing. "They couldn't. And I must have money. Couldn't you manage to give me half of what I paid? If the lot is so valuable, you would lose nothing by taking it back for half."

"See here!" gritted out Cobb, jerking himself to his feet so suddenly that the woman was startled into greater timidity. "I'm busy. Given you fifteen minutes of valuable time. We won't buy back your lot—that's final. Pardon me for not showing you to the door—it's Saturday, and I've got a big deal. Keep the lot—hang on to it—don't let it get away." He picked up his memorandum and glared at it. "Oh

—good afternoon! Remember my advice—don't, for any excuse, sell that lot!"

With a final and incoherent plea, the school-teacher made a faltering exit, and somebody closed the door which led into the private office. As Cobb turned to his letters, he blurted out angrily:

"Hang it all, why can't I get clerks who will do a real chuck-out? Push-ins take more time than the snaring of ten suckers. Somewhere I must dig up a cast-iron toe swinger."

Cobb's was a sudden success. He was yet a young man, not married, nor indeed likely to marry. For him marriage offered nothing in exchange for the pretended devotion to a plurality of women except the expected devotion to only one. He had a not-absorbing interest in fancy womankind of the burlesque variety; beyond that he believed a man was a fool to go.

Like most American business men, Cobb could look back to a time, and that quite recently, when he knew what it was to think several times before he spent a half dollar. He had lifted himself into his smeary niche by his sole efforts.

Aside from a taste in lavishness in apparel, and such other tastes as go with a liking of the fancy variety of women, a rough sketch of the fellow has been daubed. It should be added, however, that the inspiration for this brief sketch was supremely selfish. Let us call Cobb a kind of human jackal. For years he had prowled successfully in scenting out carcasses too unsavory for other jackals, and he never hesitated to make a full meal when he could find it. Only carcasses is hardly the correct word. He had been preying on living things, but like the carcasses, in the respect that they were unable to fight away the prowler, and, like the carcasses, in that the eating was too rank for many who would have said

of themselves that they were not squeamish concerning their food.

At three-thirty, behind his mahogany desk, Cobb got a surprise, a big surprise, and one which almost any man, jackal or not, would find most unpleasant. Most of us who are blessed enough to have fathers would be glad to have them turn up, even if not expected. Not so Cobb. We cannot blame him. For the successful—excuse the word—bogland seller felt that he was deeply disgraced by his parental forbear. He should not have felt that way. Certainly the jackal should not feel disgraced if a man-eating tiger happened to be his parent, if that thing were possible. "Hard-jaw Cobb," as his pals called him, was a kind of man-eating tiger. Incidentally, the man-tiger had quite recently served out a sentence in the place where all jackals ought to find themselves. And this father, whom the son had not even written to in some ten years, and whom the son would have walked around the blocks of a whole city so as not to meet face to face, had actually sent into the private office a slip of paper with his name written upon it, and was said, by the boy who brought in the slip, to be waiting outside for an interview.

Jenifer hated his father, but he hated him not because of any record of finger prints which police headquarters might hold, but because he feared him. It was nothing to Jenifer that for the years of his boyhood the father had braved all the dangers of his dread profession to obtain the means to support his boy in comfort. Just as it was nothing to Jenifer that the father had provided for his son's education, leaving the boy with a woman, said to be a cousin, and seeing him on rare occasions only. From the moment that Jenifer knew of the man-eatings, he continued, it is true, to accept support and education, but from that moment the fear had seized him that the elder

Cobb would some time make public his relationship to his son. He never had. Indeed, for seven years, the time of his last sentence, he had not even written to the younger Cobb. The last thing that the son expected, and the greatest evil which he had dreaded was a visit from his father.

"He's a customer," said Jenifer, eying suspiciously the boy who had brought in the message. "Happens to have my name. Suppose I'll have to see him. Show him in."

When face to face, the difference between father and son would have made an absorbing study for a student of heredity. Of course, the clothing was vastly different, proving tastes which were as opposed as possible. The elder Cobb's overshirt coat and too tight trousers, of some solid gray material, were clean and neat, as was his stout flannel shirt, but this might have been the holiday attire of a longshoreman or ironworker. And the blunt, bulldog chin and square cheeks, with low cheek bones, had bequeathed to the son only a hint of their shape, ironness, and brutism.

The visitor did not take the seat which the son offered.

"Suppose we come right down to brass tacks," said Jenifer. "I didn't think you'd honor me with a visit. Came right West, did you? From—yes—New York."

"You're on," growled Cobb, senior.

There were some moments of silence, while the keen eyes of the visitor seemed to take in everything, from his son's immaculate tweed clothing and the heavy gold band around the forefinger of one white hand, to the mahogany of the room's furnishings. At length Jenifer ventured:

"Maybe the time has come when you expect me to pay back a part of—"

"Cut that hand-out stuff!" grunted the other. "Pay back nothing. I'm here on biz. Cold biz."

The son had lifted himself to his feet behind the broad desk. He rested the white hands on the polished surface. "I don't get your meaning. Really, as you must know, there can be no business between us. If it is a matter of money which you feel you ought to have—to reimburse you——"

The other raised a muscular, red hand. His face was filled with such anger that Jenifer's words ended abruptly.

"It's a story," grunted Cobb, senior, sternly. "Get me? A story. It's God's truth. Back in the marshes of Long Island—you know 'em—you were there as a boy. Nobody knows 'em better. Back there, in the tangle, is a lot. You git wet to your knees wading to the stakes. I've been there. The nearest road is miles and miles away. It isn't good for nothing. It's good just to raise taxes. It ain't good for raising nothing but taxes—chickweed wouldn't grow on it. If you chucked in a tenner with it you couldn't unload it on a local land man. That's the shape of the deal you've been setting your smut fly paper to catch your flies with. That's the deal as has pushed you *that*, and *that*, and *that*, and all *these!*"

The blunt, red forefinger had pointed in turn to the tweed coat, the spangled necktie, and the trousers of the man behind the desk, before the finger swept a circle which was intended to include the whole periphery of the son's life.

"Say!" broke in Cobb, junior. "Doesn't it make you feel a little funny to come here and go on the way you've been spouting—when——"

The other savagely interrupted his growl. "You mean when I've just served out a term in the pen—that's what you mean. Huh! How did I git the last? You know. Chanced it at a safe with the dynamite! And a barker in my clothes! If five bulls hadn't cornered me, I'd have made a

clean get-away. But got it through both shoulders! In a prison hospital for three month'. That's a man's game—a man's game. Get me? Yours! Huh! Like lifting the near-gold bracelet of a girl baby what's been left in your lap by its mother. But I ain't here to chuck that little piece. That ain't what brought me. I'm here on biz!"

"If it isn't money, what is it?" asked the son. He added: "And suppose we lock that door, over there. Somebody might come in. We might be interrupted."

The other's face wrinkled into a smile that was so like a threat of the most sinister kind that the son involuntarily drew himself back. "What do you think you're up against?" he asked, pulling the key of the door from his pocket and slipping it back again. "When you was waiting for me to close the door, I locked it. Didn't take a chance, I didn't. As to why I'm here, it's the flimsy, but not the sort you think. As I chucked it, it's a story—a story of a pal and his skirt. Only she ain't exactly a skirt—she's straight—she's on the level. I'll cut it short.

"Here, I gits out first, and the pal sends me with a love message to the girl. She's been slaving and slaving and slaving—in a box factory. Eight year—from the time she was seventeen. Good wages—because she's one of 'em they speeds up and then speeds up again so as to rush the others. Big wages—for a girl. She's been skimping herself—skimping—skimping. When he gits out, she's going to have a nice little flat, all furnished by her lonesome. That's one bug. The other bug is that she'll keep him straight. There's her savings and the pretty flat. Oh, she's dafty, all right! Then, in a paper, she sees one of your eye-grabbing lies. She takes her little pile—all her skimpings, and she buys the lot what I seen and where you couldn't

find bottom with a power oil drill. That's the story—that is! Isn't it nice? How does it feel when you sees one of your flies all stuck up and trying to make a get-away from your smut fly paper? How does it feel, I ask? How?"

"Now, now!" soothed the son, holding up his hand as if to ward off the contempt and even fury that had been condensed into the questions. "Maybe, in a way, you and I might be said to be in the same boat—but my deal is legal—your—"

"Push in your jaw bolts!" blurted the father. "As you're the skunk, you couldn't be expected to see the diff. There is a diff; a diff as big as between a cellmate and the head warden—bigger—as wide as twenty oceans. And I've got it under my skin that I lifted good money to feed and give schooling to a skunk. Say, I had hopes—hopes! But chuck that part. What I'm here for is to make you take out your check book from that swell desk and write a check for the straight skirt. The advertisement? I've seen it—the girl's got it. It says that there might be a one-to-ten shot—that's it—a one-to-ten shot. Says it so slick that you've got three ways and the roof, besides, for a clean get-away—but it says it. Understand, it says it. You'll take a pen in that nice, white hand and write a check that way. It'll be a bookmaker's swing-in—ten for one. Here's her name and what she paid into your smut shell game." He pulled out a bit of paper from his pocket and, stepping to the desk, laid it before the son.

"Not on your life," said Jenifer, surprised by the suggestion. He chanced the sneer. "A holdup by your dear, paternal relative don't go in this shop. Not on your necktie pin!"

The iron-hard face of the other hardened even more. With a growl that was amazingly like the tiger he has been compared to, he leaped forward.

He seized the younger man by the throat, just above the collar, and, with experienced fingers, pushed in the windpipe, so that only a low gurgle told what the blackening face and starting eyeballs indicated. Forcing the younger man to the floor, Cobb pulled out a great, blue cotton handkerchief from his pocket with the right hand, while the other continued to grip savagely the already congested throat. The handkerchief was wound tightly above the son's mouth, and securely knotted behind his head. Then Cobb pulled his man to the chair behind the desk, and pushed him into it.

"Your check book!" he grunted. "Pull out your check book. Don't thrash around, or I'll break your bones like rotten sticks!"

The son hesitated. Some of the nerve of the elder must have been passed down into his blood. But the savagery of the face near his own would have subdued most men. He pulled out a drawer and lifted his check book before him.

"A check to the skirt for ten times her gate money into the shell game—the even hundred above," snarled Cobb.

The check was scrawled, and Cobb, senior, took it in his red hands. Three times he read it aloud, as if gloating over it, and then placed it in his pocket.

"There's no danger you'll chance a trick," he said. "If you do, I'll make a come-back. So you won't stop payment. But I ain't through. Once before I caught you playing a skunk—you weren't more than six. I took it out of your hide. Just as you got it then, you'll git your medicine now. See! They may hear it outside, but the walls and doors are thick."

Cobb, senior, slipped to the coat rack, which held in its ring a sheaf of umbrellas and canes. He strode back, with Jenifer's heavy walking stick in his hand.

Before the other could have expected

the attack, Cobb seized him by the collar with a grip so powerful that the collar was torn from the front button and left the ends projecting upward around the knotted handkerchief. With the strength of an athlete of fifty-five, and muscles of seven years' hardening at severe prison toil, he began wielding the heavy stick, blow after blow, until, as he continued, the tweed coat, from the shoulders to the hips of the shivering man, raised itself into ridges, suggesting that the cloth was thus corrugated by the flesh below.

With the fury of the blows, the cane was gradually broken into slivers, the pieces scattering themselves about the floor, below the men. The red face of the castigator turned to purple, and, as it did, the face of the other grew distorted and livid, mingled perspiration and tears rolling over the shrunken cheeks.

With a growl that was more beast-like than the growls which had been vented while the blows were falling, the safe cracker threw the form of his son into the chair, where it humped itself inertly, the head dropping forward between the gripped and quivering hands.

"I'm going now," said Cobb. "Before Heaven, I give it that I'll never glimpse you again. Swing your cat's-paws outside any chuck-out you want. Say a bughouse did you up. That'll go. You won't give yourself away as the son of a crook that wouldn't stand for your skunk doings—that's sure! And, take it from a feller who was pushed the hand-out of being your dad, a professional cracksman has got more guts than to lift leathers from a box-factory skirt, and a clean get-away handy!"

He stepped to the door, and unlocked it.

"The boss, in there, has got to have a doctor," he said to the girl stenographer, as he passed through the outer office and into the corridor.

Black Star's Subterfuge

By
John Mack Stone (Johnston McCulley)

CHAPTER I.

SUDDEN ILLNESS.

S MIRKS, sarcastic grins, ingratiating smiles—these things had Roger Verbeck endured throughout the afternoon, until it seemed to him that his countenance burned continually because of humiliation, until his face had set with sternness, and he greeted friends and mere acquaintances alike with a cold and distant nod.

The Black Star had done this—that master criminal who had held the city at his mercy for six months or more, who committed crimes notable for their originality and daring.

It was five days now since the Black Star's robbery of the diamond vault of Jones & Co., a robbery in which he had made Roger Verbeck, his man Muggs, and Detective Riley objects of ridicule. In those five days the Black Star had made no open move, and the three men who had sworn to capture him waited for the next blow, hoping that, when it fell, they would at least find some minor clew to follow, some half-hidden trail that would lead them to the quarry.

Verbeck had spent the afternoon in the business section, purchasing supplies, for he had decided to live in the old Verbeck house with Muggs and Detective Riley, while his campaign against the Black Star was being waged. Even those who admired him because of his determination to match wits with

the master criminal, smiled knowingly when he passed. They had read the Black Star's letters to the newspapers, in which he had told how he had hidden in Verbeck's own house, while the police looked for him throughout the city.

And now, at seven o'clock in the evening, Roger Verbeck sat at a table in a corner of a fashionable restaurant, his back to the room, and tried to enjoy his dinner. Detective Riley had gone to police headquarters for a visit. Muggs was purchasing more supplies, and was to get his own dinner and meet Verbeck with the roadster an hour later.

Enjoyment of the meal seemed an impossibility. Verbeck knew those in the restaurant who recognized him were grinning behind his back. He knew the public was watching the duel between himself and the Black Star, ready to ridicule Verbeck if he lost, and as eager to applaud him if he won and sent the master rogue to prison.

The police worked in vain to corral the master crook and his band. Long ago the public had begun to regard the police department as worthless in this particular affair. Moreover, the feud between Roger Verbeck, the young millionaire, and the Black Star, acknowledged clever criminal, was more spectacular. And so Verbeck found himself in a corner. To save himself from humiliation, he must continue his cam-

paigned with the help of only Muggs and Detective Riley until the Black Star passed through prison doors to begin a long sentence.

The smirks and grins that Verbeck had faced this day served only to double his determination to conquer the Black Star. It was a game of wits and strategy, for the Black Star abhorred violence. None knew better than Roger Verbeck that he had been out-generaled in the last affair. But failure had increased his caution and cunning. In their next clash, he felt sure, the Black Star would find that the mettle of his foe was better.

Now Verbeck sipped his demitasse, and in a panel mirror before him observed the approach of the waiter with a finger bowl. He glanced at his watch—within fifteen minutes Muggs would be before the restaurant with the roadster. They would pick up Riley at headquarters and hurry to the old Verbeck house, to begin their vigil. For they slept in the daytime for the greater part, and remained alert at night, ready to answer an alarm if the Black Star committed another crime, eager to get on the scene as soon as possible and try to pick up the trail.

It was known that the Black Star had reorganized his band and established a new headquarters since Roger Verbeck and Muggs had almost destroyed his establishment. And from this new headquarters, Roger Verbeck doubted not, the master crook would conduct a campaign of crime that would terrorize the city. If the new headquarters could be located—

"Pardon me, sir, are you ill?"

Even as the waiter spoke, Verbeck realized that his thoughts were becoming confused, his hands were trembling, and beads of perspiration were standing on his forehead. His stomach revolted. He reached for the glass of water near him, and it was necessary for the waiter to guide it to his lips.

"I guess—I——" he stammered.

"Try to stand, sir. There is a small retiring room directly to your right. If you wish to go there, sir——"

The waiter aided him to stand even as he spoke. He guided Verbeck's faltering steps toward the little retiring room. Half a dozen diners had noted the occurrence. The head waiter hurried across the room.

"Mr. Verbeck had been taken ill suddenly," the waiter said, in a low voice.

Almost instantly the manager was among them.

"Why, it is Mr. Verbeck!" he gasped. "Suddenly ill, you say, George? Get a physician immediately!"

Verbeck was sitting on the divan in the corner of the room, scarcely able to keep from toppling over. He felt himself growing weaker. His eyes closed, and he was unable to open them again. His head fell back. The manager bent forward and stretched him on the couch.

Two men appeared in the doorway, and the manager and head waiter whirled to face them.

"Pardon me," the first said, "but I noticed what happened, and thought I might be of some service. I am a physician—here is my card."

"Look at this man, then," the manager directed. "He became suddenly ill while eating——"

The professional-looking man already was bending over Roger Verbeck. His companion stood to one side.

"Why, it is Mr. Roger Verbeck!" the physician exclaimed. "I know him well, but did not recognize him in the restaurant—his back was toward us."

"Anything serious?" asked the worried manager.

"He is subject to these attacks—a peculiar stomach trouble," the physician explained. "I have treated him many times. Undoubtedly he ate something a bit too rich. No—it is not serious."

But we must get him home. Have one of your men call a taxicab, and let it go into the alley. We can get him through the hallway and kitchen and into the cab. I presume you do not wish to have the other diners disturbed?"

The manager of the restaurant did not—that was what was worrying him. He sent a waiter to call the cab. He watched while the physician mixed a drop of medicine in water and poured the mixture down Verbeck's throat. The manager did not think it peculiar, in that moment of excitement, that the physician carried a vial of medicine in his waistcoat pocket.

"We'll take care of him, sir," the doctor went on. "This is a friend of mine who was dining with me. Do not be alarmed—I assure you, Mr. Verbeck will be himself again within an hour. It really is an advertisement for your place, rather than otherwise—it shows your food is rich."

The physician chuckled and smiled, quite like a professional man taking charge of a situation, and trying to put every one at ease. The manager felt grateful. He walked ahead as the physician and his friend carried Roger Verbeck through the narrow rear hallway and through the kitchen to the back door. He watched as they put him in the cab.

"Drive to Mr. Verbeck's residence as quickly as possible," he heard the physician order the chauffeur. "You know where it is—the old Verbeck mansion? Good!"

Well satisfied, the manager went back to the dining room, glad that it had not been any fault of his food that had made Roger Verbeck ill, glad also that few of the regular diners had noticed the incident.

The cab started through the alley, turned into the first street, and hurried toward a boulevard close by.

"Easy!" the physician said to his

companion, chuckling as he looked at the unconscious Verbeck.

The cab sped along the boulevard. The Verbeck mansion was to the north; the taxi dashed south.

CHAPTER II.

UNEXPECTED SLEEP.

MUGGS would not have recognized a pterodactyl had he met one face to face in the street. Also, he was woefully deficient in theories regarding the fourth dimension. He had, however, taken a post-graduate course in the University of Hard Knocks, where he had specialized in human nature, and hence he knew many things his better-educated brethren did not.

Muggs knew, for instance, that there are smiles and smiles, that they may be read as easily as print, and that, if read correctly, they tell a man's intentions—or a woman's—as openly as spoken words.

So now, when the stranger smiled at him again, Muggs analyzed the smile quickly and efficiently, and noted the one important thing—that the stranger smiled with his lips, but not with his eyes. The eyes were small and gray, and appeared to glitter venomously. Either the glitter of those eyes or the smile on the lips expressed a falsehood, and Muggs decided it was the smile that lied.

Muggs was aware, also, that the stranger had been regarding him intently for ten minutes at least. He had felt the other's eyes upon him. There had been a time in Muggs' career when he had been sensitive enough to feel immediately the near presence of a hostile force, an accomplishment that often had saved him from prison. Though now he walked the straight and narrow path as valet, chauffeur, and comrade in arms to Roger Verbeck, he retained a great deal of his old sensitiveness.

Verbeck had told him to eat before rejoining him, and so Muggs had entered this little restaurant on a side street and ordered a modest meal. He had no more than seated himself when he became aware that he was under surveillance.

Being a man of broad experience, and at present engaged with Verbeck and Detective Riley in matching wits with a clever crook and his followers, Muggs used caution. He did not turn his head quickly to ascertain the identity of the person whose eyes he felt. He sipped his coffee and conveyed a generous bite of pie to his mouth, sat back and wiped his lips, and, without seeming to look up, he searched with his eyes a panel mirror directly before him, in which was reflected the interior of the little restaurant.

It was almost the same minute that Roger Verbeck, in the more fashionable restaurant, looked in a mirror and observed the approach of his waiter with the finger bowl.

Muggs spotted his man! He of the glittering eyes sat at a table near the door and pretended to be eating berries and cake. He was regarding the back of Muggs' head intently—and smiling the lying smile.

"There's one hombre I've never seen before, to the best of my knowledge and belief," Muggs told himself, "yet he seems to be mighty interested in me. A man would think he was layin' to hand me a jolt, the way he acts. It's up to me to hand out the jolt first!"

Muggs picked up his check and reached for his hat. As he turned to walk the length of the restaurant, he saw that the other man had risen also, and was hurrying toward the cashier's cage. Realizing that the stranger was eager to get outside, either to accost or trail him, Muggs did some smiling of his own now; and a wise man could have read many things in that smile, the most important being to hurry from the

vicinity of Mr. Muggs as speedily as possible.

Muggs paid his check and fumbled over the toothpicks, giving the other man ample time to establish himself outside to his satisfaction. Then he threw back his shoulders, shot out his lower jaw belligerently, and headed for the door.

The stranger with the glittering eyes was standing at the curb, a short distance away, just at the rear of a taxicab, and looking up and down the street as if awaiting an automobile. Muggs walked straight toward him.

"Pardon me, but are you an artist?" Muggs demanded, in a peculiar tone.

"I am not. Why do you ask, sir?"

They faced each other squarely. The stranger was well aware now that Muggs knew of the recent espionage, and was about to demand an explanation; and Muggs knew he was aware of it.

"You ain't lookin' for a model of a perfect male human head?" Muggs asked now.

"I am not, sir."

"I thought maybe you was, stranger. The way you bored them eyes of yours into my head back there in the restaurant, I not only suspicioned you was lookin' for a model, but that you'd found your man."

"I—I beg your pardon!" The other simulated astonishment.

"Yeh? Do I infer from that, stranger, that you *ain't* found your man? If for any particular reason you was lookin' for *me*, I'm here with my pedigree. My name's Muggs. I've got one peculiarity, and that is, that when I find a stranger regardin' me too close I always want to plant a fist 'tween his eyes. Ain't that funny?"

"Really, I——"

"And just now," Muggs went on, "I'm engaged in a simple endeavor on the side, as my boss would say, that makes me nervous when a man gets

pesty around me. I'm that nervous right now I could choke a man!"

"I—er—I fail to see——" the other stammered; and he started to walk slowly along the curb, Muggs following.

"It ain't polite to stare at the back of a man's head and grin sickly like at the same time," Muggs continued. "There wasn't anybody near me in there, and so you was lookin' at *me*. I want to know *why*! Now suppose you give me *your* pedigree, so we'll know just where we stand!"

They were opposite the taxicab now, and the chauffeur sprang from his seat and opened the door as if in anticipation of a fare. It appeared to Muggs that the other man would be only too glad to jump into that taxi and hurry away without explaining; and Muggs did not wish that. While the war against the Black Star and his band was in progress, explanations of any peculiar circumstance were necessary.

So now Muggs stepped before the open door of the cab himself, blocking the way, and faced the man who had smiled.

"I'm waitin' for an answer!" Muggs declared.

The stranger bent forward in the gathering dusk and raised a forefinger, as if to begin a protest of this conduct on Muggs' part. The chauffeur stood with his hand on the door, waiting.

"It seems to me——" the stranger began.

And in that second, Muggs realized that he had walked right into a trap. The chauffeur grasped him by the throat and kicked his feet from beneath him. The stranger he faced lunged forward suddenly and threw Muggs off his balance. Muggs was hurled to the interior of the cab neatly; and only one person on the street had witnessed the occurrence.

Like a flash, Muggs had his feet under him again and was crouched against the seat, ready to spring through the

door and throttle the first of his foes he met. It flashed through his mind that he should blame himself much for being caught off guard. And then, before he scarcely realized what was happening, before he could make a move, the man who had watched him in the restaurant had entered the cab and closed the door, and the vehicle was moving away from the curb.

"Easy! Easy, my man!" the stranger warned.

The cab passed beneath the arc light at the corner just then, and Muggs saw steel glitter in the other's hand. It was not the nature of Muggs, however, to allow himself to be captured in this manner without making some effort to disconcert his captors. Moreover, he guessed this man and the chauffeur might belong to the Black Star's band. This might be part of a prearranged plan to injure Roger Verbeck in some way. And all that was necessary to arouse Muggs' ire and fighting blood was to threaten disaster to Verbeck, the man he adored, who had saved him from the waters of the Seine five years before and made him a man.

It took Muggs less than half a second to get his breath and decide that the proper thing to do would be to spring upon the other man and make an effort to overcome him, taking the chance of receiving a bullet in his vitals.

Muggs sprang like a lion, and silently!

In midair he met something new. The other had raised what Muggs had supposed was an automatic pistol fitted with a silencer. Now he pulled the trigger!

No hot lead seared Muggs, no bullet tore its way through his body. But, from the muzzle of the weapon flashed a cloud of pungent vapor, and Muggs, gasping his surprise, drew the vapor deep into his lungs.

The stranger caught Muggs in his arms and lowered him gently to the

floor of the taxi. It seemed to Muggs that he realized fully what was going on, but was unable to do anything about it. He noticed the other man take a handkerchief from his pocket and hold it to his nostrils, and above the handkerchief the eyes glittered venomously as before. Muggs saw all this as they passed under another arc light.

And then dreamless sleep descended upon him!

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW HEADQUARTERS.

MUGGS regained his cunning the instant he regained consciousness. He realized he was stretched on a couch, and that his hands and feet were bound. He made no effort to struggle, and he did not even open his eyes.

For fully a minute he lay motionless, almost without breathing, his ears strained to catch every sound. Once, coming from a distance, he heard the clanging bell of a trolley car. The rattling of vehicles on a busy paved street, the moaning of the wind that had been blowing a gale at the time of his abduction, the low-pitched voices of men in the room, discussing his case—the things he expected to hear—were not discernible.

Still he did not open his eyes, hoping that, if anybody was in the room, they would speak sooner or later and give him some clew to his predicament. He was breathing deeply and regularly now, his brain had cleared, and he knew the effect of the vapor he had inhaled had worn away. And then—

"Why play 'possum, Mr. Muggs? You have been conscious, and your brain has been active, for the better part of five minutes, and I know it!"

The voice was low, deep, striking—the words coming in a peculiar staccato. Muggs remembered that the Black Star

possessed a voice like that. He opened his eyes.

"That is better. Why pretend?"

Opening his eyes was all Muggs did, save gasp, for he did not have to move his body to observe the scene. It was spread before him.

He was on a couch in a corner of a large room. The apartment was lavishly furnished; mahogany table and chairs, tapestries, art rugs were there to delight the eye.

At one end of the table stood a tall figure enveloped in a flowing black robe with a hood that covered the head. The face was hidden by a black mask through which two eyes glittered. On the front of the hood, in flaming jet, was a big star.

"The Black Star!" Muggs gasped, scarcely knowing why he spoke at all, since it seemed so useless.

"You have guessed correctly, Muggs," the Black Star said, chuckling. "Once again you see the Black Star in his headquarters, his workshop. Before, you visited me like a thief in the night, accompanied by Roger Verbeck, the man you style your boss. This time, I have had you brought here."

The Black Star folded his arms and looked at the man on the couch, as if speculating what to do with him. Muggs remained silent, waiting, his brain busy with a thousand thoughts. He knew now that it was a member of the Black Star's band who had watched him in the restaurant, and that the chauffeur had been another. And why had he been abducted and carried to the master criminal's headquarters? Did the Black Star think he could hold Muggs as hostage and force Roger Verbeck to cease his campaign to put the master rogue behind the bars?

"Really, Mr. Muggs, I had hoped for something better from you," the Black Star was saying. "When I gave orders for you to be abducted and carried here, I laughed to myself—I believed the men

who received those orders would have their hands full. It appears, however, that the task was as easy as picking up a child."

"Yeh?" Muggs snarled.

"I knew, you see, that you would be in the business district to-day, since Roger Verbeck was purchasing supplies—stocking up the old Verbeck house well, to be comfortable with you and Detective Riley while conducting his campaign to capture me——"

"And you can bet he'll get you yet!" Muggs loyally exclaimed.

"Do you really think so, Muggs? However, I have *you* now!"

"Well, what's it to be—goin' to shoot me, or what?"

"My dear Muggs! I abhor violence! I am not a thug. Wit, strategy, the game of brains—those are the things! My purpose in bringing you here was not ulterior."

"Talk United States and get it off your chest, quick!" Muggs said.

"Such language! I cannot, for the life of me, understand why a refined gentleman like Roger Verbeck endures your companionship. By having you carried here, I believed I was doing Mr. Verbeck a favor."

"Yeh?"

"He matched his wit against mine, and almost destroyed my organization once. I escaped the silly police, however, and formed my organization anew, also obtained a new headquarters. Has it not been the desire of yourself, Mr. Verbeck and Detective Riley—the trio sworn to capture me—to discover the whereabouts of this new headquarters? Well—here it is, Muggs."

"I can see the headquarters, all right!"

"And please observe the heavy curtain on that side of the room. It covers an open doorway, Muggs. I am going to lift that curtain now and give you a shock. Yes, Muggs, I feel sure it will be quite a shock."

The Black Star walked slowly across the room to the curtain, turned and looked at Muggs again, then swiftly threw the curtain back. With an exclamation, Muggs struggled to get to his feet. In the doorway, sitting bound in a chair, his hands fastened before him—was Roger Verbeck. A handkerchief gagged him.

"You—you got the boss!" Muggs cried. "You——"

"Oh, yes! It proved as easy to capture Roger Verbeck as it did to get you, Muggs, so do not feel too much grieved that you were taken by my men. I merely wanted to make sure of the capture of one of you, to show you the new headquarters, but my men were so successful they caught two of you. Match wits with the Black Star and his band? You poor fools!"

"You—you——" Muggs sputtered in sudden wrath at seeing his beloved master in such an extremity. Rage gathered within him, and he twisted at wrists and ankles in a futile effort to get free. The Black Star stepped forward and pushed against Muggs' breast, and Muggs was toppled over on the couch.

"Take it easy, Muggs," the Black Star advised. "I have no intention of harming Mr. Verbeck, nor yourself. I merely intend keeping both of you here for a short time, letting you witness anything that may transpire, and then you'll be allowed to go. Understand?"

Muggs growled and looked at the floor. Verbeck felt suddenly elated. It would be like the Black Star to take such a chance. He could crow about it afterward—write letters to the papers, and say he had abducted Roger Verbeck and Muggs, and revealed the new headquarters to them, yet could not be located and captured. And it was possible, Verbeck thought, that he might observe or hear something that would give him a clew to the location of the place. He doubted not, that when he

and Muggs were sent away again, they would go unconscious, as they had come.

"This headquarters is a great improvement over the old one," the Black Star said. "I really ought to thank you, Mr. Verbeck, for driving me out of the other. Allow me, Mr. Verbeck, to remove the gag."

He went forward and removed it, and unslashed Verbeck from the chair. Then he helped him hop across the room and caused him to sit down beside Muggs.

"That is much better," he said. "I may mention that it will do you no good to shriek or screech or howl for assistance. The place we are in— Ah!"

A bell had tinkled. Muggs struggled and managed to sit up on the couch beside Verbeck. Both of them remembered about that other headquarters. There bells had tinkled, and members of the Black Star's band of criminals had entered to make reports or receive orders. Gowns and masks—and conversations carried out on blackboards. Yes—there were the blackboards!

"A friend is coming, gentlemen," the Black Star said. "I request that you remain on the couch and keep silent. You cannot tell what may happen if you try to leave the couch."

The Black Star chuckled and disappeared through a small door. Again a bell tinkled. Another door, on the opposite side of the room, opened, and there entered another man clad in black robe and mask, save that no star of jet flamed on the hood of the robe.

He started forward in surprise when he observed Muggs seated upon the couch beside Verbeck, but checked himself and did not speak. Neither did Verbeck speak, for he was busy speculating as to the newcomer's height and weight, watching every movement he made, trying to fasten upon something

that would enable him to recognize the man if they met again elsewhere. Muggs, however, refused to remain silent.

"Good evening," he said. "The boss is out just now. Anything I can do for you? Got a few diamonds or anything like that you've pinched to-day?"

The smaller door opened and the Black Star entered the room. He went immediately to one of the little blackboards on the wall, picked up a piece of chalk, and wrote quickly:

"Muggs! Silence, as I instructed, or——"

Then he turned and exhibited to Muggs a weapon, Verbeck supposed it to be an ordinary revolver, but Muggs, who had passed through an experience that evening, guessed that it held no bullets, but the pungent vapor that had caused his downfall in the taxicab. Muggs became silent. He did not wish to be put to sleep while Roger Verbeck was there and might soon need help.

The Black Star motioned his man to the second blackboard.

"No. 7," the man wrote.

"Countersign?" the Black Star demanded on his board.

"Georgia."

"Report."

The other turned his back and wrote rapidly and at length. Muggs and Verbeck bent forward on the couch and peered across the room. Was it possible, Verbeck wondered, that the Black Star was going to allow them to read the blackboard conversation, and then let them go back to the Verbeck house with whatever information they had acquired?

The message was done; the man stepped back. Verbeck and Muggs read what he had written as the Black Star read it:

"Our man goes on duty to-night. Burglar alarms have been fixed. At two in the morning, policeman on beat always stops in restaurant for coffee, as

was reported before. Should he not, disturbance will be raised at end of block to decoy him away at proper time."

The Black Star motioned for him to erase, then wrote himself:

"What about the gold?"

"Gold received to-day at noon; moved in quickly and secretly. Hundred thousand in usual sacks. Intend keeping it here about week, then shipping it on, part at time."

When Verbeck read that he had difficulty in adhering to his determination to betray no astonishment. Was it possible the master criminal and his band contemplated the theft of a hundred thousand dollars in gold coin? And they were discussing it here before him and Muggs as if they had been discussing the state of the weather!

"Arrangements for moving perfected?" the Black Star wrote now.

"Everything in readiness; cannot fail," the other answered with the chalk. "Two closed autos. Six of us to handle coin. Garbage wagon will block one end of alley; we will guard other end."

Verbeck was getting the details swiftly now, and an exchange of glances with Muggs showed that the latter also was letting every word written on the blackboard beat into his brain, and making a special effort to remember. They were going to move a fortune in gold in two closed autos. One end of the alley would be blocked and the other guarded. Of all the nerve——

"Good!" the Black Star was writing now. "Let it be to-night at the time agreed."

Why, Verbeck even knew the time! Two o'clock in the morning, when the policeman on the beat would either be drinking coffee in a restaurant, else attracted by a fake fight!

All Verbeck had to do now, if allowed to go, or if he escaped in time,

was to get word to Detective Riley and to police headquarters, have the chief ascertain what bank or trust company had a hundred thousand in gold received that day, place police around the building, frustrate the Black Star's plan, and possibly capture the master crook or some of his band! Moreover, there was a chance——

But the Black Star was writing again:

"Observe men on couch. One nearest you is Verbeck—other his man, Muggs. Keep your eyes peeled for them in public."

"O. K.," the other wrote.

The Black Star nodded and waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. The other bowed and backed through the door. A minute of silence, then the tinkling of the bell!

"Ah; he has gone!" the Black Star spoke. "You see, Mr. Verbeck, I have the same arrangement as before. I never see the faces of these men of mine, and they never get a glance at me. We do not hear each other's voices. I gather information, plan the work, divide profits. They are faithful men who work together at my bidding. But they could not testify against me, nor I against them, in case of capture. You see?"

"Yeh?" Muggs cried. "How about the eight we caught before? They saw your face, all right!"

"My dear Muggs! They were bailed out, were they not? And they have left the country, supplied with ample funds, you may be sure. The men working with me now are those who were not caught and did not see my face—and some new ones my partner procured."

"You mean to stand there and tell us," Verbeck said, "that you are going to steal a hundred thousand in gold coin to-night?"

"At precisely two o'clock in the morning, Mr. Verbeck."

"You can't get away with it!" Muggs exclaimed.

"No? Did I not get away with a choice collection of diamonds from the vault of Jones & Co., while you and Verbeck and Detective Riley looked on?"

"Yeh? Well, you'll go too far one of these days! We'll get you, and we'll get you good! And when we do—good night! You'll get more than life!"

"Meaning death, Muggs? When the time comes, my man, I'll know how to die, even if I have to descend to suicide!"

The Black Star turned and paced the length of the room. Verbeck leaned back against the cushions on the couch, and wondered what the Black Star intended doing next. He was willing to let Muggs do the talking, while he strained his ears for some sound, and his eyes for some sight, that would reveal to him the location of the building in which they found themselves. He knew the Black Star never would let him and Muggs leave the place while conscious. Not having knowledge of the vapor gun, Verbeck found himself wondering just how his unconsciousness was to be brought about.

Regarding his own capture, he guessed simply that one of the Black Star's gang was employed in the restaurant. Undoubtedly some opiate had been in his coffee. It might have been placed there by a kitchen employe, or by the waiter. He imagined the rest—that members of the Black Star's band had pretended to help him home, and had taken him to the master crook's headquarters instead.

"Well," Muggs exclaimed, "I suppose you're goin' to keep us tied up here like a couple of bundles of rags until you pull off this stunt to-night, eh? That'll be nice!"

"My dear Muggs! I merely wanted you and Mr. Verbeck to see my new

headquarters. Presently, I am going to have you taken from here and dropped on some corner near the Verbeck house. I am—really."

"I got a picture of you doin' that, after us seein' all this——"

"Only, of course, my dear Muggs, I could not allow you to get a full view of your surroundings. You gentlemen have seen the inside of this room, and that is all—and this room might be in the basement of a factory or the top floor of a hotel for all you know. And when you leave, it must be as you arrived—unconscious. Understand?"

Neither Verbeck nor Muggs replied to that. It was what Verbeck had expected. They would see the interior of this room, but not the exterior of the building. They would regain consciousness again near home. And how could they find the spot again? Why, this room might be in any one of ten thousand buildings in the city!

The bell tinkled again. A short wait, and a gowned and masked man entered.

"No. 10," he wrote on the blackboard.

"Countersign?"

"Jackson."

"Good. You are on time," the Black Star wrote. "You will take these men and drop them within a block or two of the Verbeck place. They must leave this room as they entered it—unconscious."

"O. K.," the other wrote.

He turned from the blackboard. The Black Star, his eyes glittering malevolently through his mask, took a step forward. Muggs struggled to his feet before Verbeck could make a move.

"You squirt that stuff at me again——" he threatened.

The Black Star chuckled as if greatly amused. The other man's hand came into view, and it held the vapor gun. He stepped swiftly toward the

crouching, defiant Muggs, as Verbeck struggled to stand.

"You dare squirt that——" Muggs started to threaten again.

Slowly the weapon in the hand of the gowned and masked man was raised—up and up, until the muzzle covered Muggs' heart! Then, suddenly, the man who menaced Muggs whirled and faced the Black Star, and the weapon he held was turned against the master crook.

"Hands up—you!" he cried; and tore the mask from his face.

Verbeck and Muggs gave cries of relief and joy. Here was no member of the Black Star's organization.

Detective Riley stood before them!

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT RILEY DID.

HIS visit to police headquarters that afternoon had proved highly unpleasant for Detective Riley. It was his first appearance there since the chief had assigned him to live with Roger Verbeck and aid him in getting a clew to the Black Star's whereabouts. Since he had joined forces with Verbeck, Riley had come in for sarcastic sentences in the Black Star's letters to the newspapers; and his comrades at headquarters were not slow to torment him when he appeared that afternoon.

Riley had intended remaining at headquarters until Verbeck picked him up in the roadster about eight o'clock. His tormentors drove him away at five.

He walked slowly up the avenue, got something to eat at his favorite chop house, and then continued his promenade. He knew where Verbeck would dine, and intended to be in front of the café waiting beside the roadster with Muggs when Verbeck emerged.

Acquaintances stopped him frequently to discuss the Black Star and his latest exploit. It was almost seven

o'clock when Riley swung into a side street to hurry toward the café, and at the curb in the distance he saw Verbeck's big roadster.

Muggs, then, must be in the near vicinity, he knew. He quickened his stride. And then he saw Muggs—saw him standing before the open door of a taxicab, evidently in argument with a tall individual who bent forward and shook a forefinger under Muggs' nose. And then——

Detective Riley scarcely could believe his eyes. Experience had taught him, however, to act first and analyze things afterward. Just as he saw Muggs hurled backward into the taxicab, Riley sprinted forward. He was still some fifty feet away when the chauffeur of the cab sent his machine dashing down the street.

Detective Riley did not shout a command to stop, nor draw a weapon and fire into the air. He was too wise for that. It was evident to him that Muggs was being abducted. The fact that there was no commotion in the cab, that a door was not thrown open, and either Muggs or his abductor hurled to the pavement, convinced Riley that Muggs had met with foul play the instant his abductor had followed him into the cab. Who would annoy Muggs, assault him, abduct him? Nobody, Riley decided, except persons allied with the Black Star. Where were they taking Muggs? That, Riley determined to discover.

There was Verbeck's roadster at the curb—one of the most powerful cars in the city—and Detective Riley had operated it before. Now he ran forward and sprang into the seat, and an instant later was making his way down the boulevard, one eye on the street before him, and the other on the taxicab in the distance.

A traffic officer, recognizing him and noting the look on the detective's face, hurried him across a busy cross street,

and Riley sped on. He had gained considerably on the taxicab ahead; he did not try to gain more, but kept his distance. Riley was aware that members of the Black Star's band were familiar with the appearance of Verbeck's roadster, and did not care to follow the taxicab close enough to make its chauffeur suspicious. The sixth sense that all good police officers possess told Riley to trail that other car, to discover where Muggs was being taken, and why.

After a time, the taxi left the broad boulevard, went into a side street, and turned toward the manufacturing district. Here there was less traffic, and Riley dropped behind, knowing he could speed up and overhaul the other car if it turned aside.

Over rough streets, paved with cobblestones, through muddy alleys, the cab led the way. Riley was using great caution now, never sounding his horn, dropping behind as long as he could see the tail light on the car, speeding up whenever it made a turning.

Now they were down near the river, where the street lights were placed far apart, a district teeming with life and industry in the daytime, but almost deserted after nightfall. Here were the city's smaller manufacturing plants, where old factories and abandoned buildings scattered among the ones where machinery hummed during the day.

The taxi made another turning, and again Riley raced the roadster forward to the corner, the powerful engine making scarcely a sound. As he approached the corner, he slowed down; when he reached it, he saw that the taxicab had stopped at the curb half a block away.

Riley drove the roadster across the street, sprang out, and hurried back to the corner. There was scarcely any light on this block, yet enough for him to make out that two men were carry-

ing a third between them from the taxi and through a gate in a factory fence.

The semidarkness was kind to Riley. He slipped from shadow to shadow, came to the fence, and hurried along it, careful to make no noise. At the gate he stopped to peer around the post. The two men were carrying Muggs through a little door in the side of an abandoned factory building.

Riley waited until they had disappeared, then hurried across the inclosure, reaching the corner of the building just in time to escape being seen by the chauffeur as he emerged. The chauffeur hurried out to the car, and Riley let him go. To attack the man might mean that he would fail to subdue him, that an alarm would be given, and all chance to investigate this affair further be lost.

Riley slipped in through the door and found himself in a narrow, dark hallway. He heard no sound. He followed the hall for some distance, until he came to a flight of steps. Down these he hurried, and into another hall. He came to a door beneath which light showed. To the right of the door was another flight of steps that led upward, and there was an open door at the top.

Riley listened for some time, and heard no conversation. He hurried up the steps and through the door, to find himself in a dusty room, half filled with rusty machinery. Light came through the floor. Riley knelt on the dusty boards and peered through a tiny crack.

He gasped at what he saw. Muggs was stretched on a couch in a corner. Before a blackboard stood the Black Star; before another blackboard was the gowned and masked figure of Muggs' abductor. The Black Star was writing:

"Understand? Return in hour and half with taxi to take this man and the other away again. They must be put to sleep first, of course."

The other man nodded and backed

through a door. Detective Riley made no effort to descend the steps and catch him in the lower hall. Before his eyes was the Black Star, the big quarry—and the other man was to return in an hour and a half.

Neither did Riley hurry below and make an effort to capture the master criminal in his lair. He determined to watch developments. He did not know what a few minutes might bring forth. Important clues that would lead to the capture of members of the Black Star's band might be forthcoming. And it appeared that there was no danger at present of Muggs being made the victim of violence, since the abductor was to return and remove him. Also, the Black Star had spoken of another man.

With his eyes glued to the crack in the floor, Riley waited breathlessly, an interested spectator of what transpired. The Black Star spent some minutes walking back and forth across the room, now and then chuckling as he looked at the unconscious Muggs. Then he spoke—and Muggs showed that he had regained consciousness.

From then until the Black Star raised the curtain and showed Roger Verbeck gagged and lashed to a chair, Detective Riley lost not a word or movement of the master crook. But the sight of Verbeck, held a helpless prisoner, almost made Riley lose caution. He was on his feet instantly, ready to slip down the stairs, cover the Black Star with a weapon, release Verbeck and Muggs, and take the master rogue prisoner.

But caution returned to him in time to check such a course. To make a move like that might be to meet with disaster. Riley did not know whether other members of the band were near, ready to answer an alarm from the Black Star. He did not know what would confront him if he threw open the door and faced the Black Star, for the Black Star had proved he had un-

usual methods of protection. And a slip, a mistake, a failure, might result in the capture of the master criminal being further delayed. Riley decided to watch longer, that there was no need for immediate action, since Verbeck and Muggs did not appear to be in peril.

He stooped over the crack again, and there he remained. He heard the bell ring, and saw a gowned-and-masked figure enter and give number and countersign. And then Detective Riley forgot even Roger Verbeck and his predicament momentarily, as he read the blackboard conversation and realized what the Black Star and his band intended doing that night.

Riley had an added need for caution now. He had to rescue Verbeck and Muggs, prevent the theft of the gold, capture the Black Star, and some of his band, if possible. He could slip away and go for help—but while he was gone, Verbeck and Muggs might be moved, and Riley would not know where they had been taken; or the master criminal might leave his headquarters, and the police find an empty nest when they arrived.

Also, Detective Riley, who had known Verbeck's father and adored the son, decided he would rather win the victory with only Verbeck and Muggs to help. He wanted to see Verbeck victorious in his feud with the master criminal. And the Black Star was a man of strategy who would not be captured through violence. Two or three men meeting him at his own game would have a better chance for victory.

There was another angle, too—a noisy attack on the Black Star's headquarters would warn the members of his band and allow them to escape. By working a clever plan of campaign, it was possible to arrest some of the master crook's accomplices.

Riley had the plan. He remembered how Roger Verbeck, on a former occasion, had donned the Black Star's

robe and mask, and played master rogue for a day. Riley decided now that the best plan would be to get into that lower room and make the Black Star prisoner. Then Roger Verbeck could play rogue again, and as the members reported for orders, they could be captured, one at a time.

Riley knew he courted disaster if he stepped into that room and faced the Black Star in the guise of a police officer. He did not doubt that the Black Star, even facing a loaded pistol, might use some trick, and turn the scales in his favor. Had he not, once before, touched a button with his toe and sent Roger Verbeck to the bottom of a pit twelve feet deep?

"If I could get into a gown and mask, and get right beside him without him suspecting me——" Riley mused.

Gown and mask, he doubted not, were to be found some place in the lower hall. But, once inside the room, Riley would have to give number and countersign to throw the Black Star off his guard for an instant—the instant necessary to do the work properly. That was what bothered Riley—the number and countersign.

Then he remembered the man who was to return and take Verbeck and Muggs away. Riley got up from the floor, crept down the stairs, and hid among the shadows in the lower hall near the outside door.

He did not have to wait long. A shadowy form slipped through the gate and took up a position a few paces outside the door. Crouching just inside, Riley waited. The other was waiting, too, looking at his watch now and then, and grumbling. And then, down the street, came a taxicab.

It stopped at the curb. The chauffeur glanced up and down the street, and then darted through the gate and hurried toward the door. The other man stepped forward to meet him.

"You're five minutes late," he said.

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"Want me to catch particular fits from the big boss?"

"Got here as soon as I could. I'm No. 20—countersign Trenton."

"I'm No. 10—countersign Jackson."

"Good. What's the game?"

"We've got this Roger Verbeck and his valet inside. I'm to put 'em to sleep, and we're to take 'em near Verbeck's house and drop 'em there. Stand near the door and be ready to help. I'll get into the robe and mask, and have 'em out here in a jiffy!"

The chauffeur turned his back and glanced at his cab; the other man whirled around and started for the door. Riley had the information he desired now. He knew this man's number and countersign, and how to use them.

The man who had entered the hallway went to a small box against the wall, and took from it robe and mask. As he raised the robe to don it, Detective Riley struck swiftly and with precision—a sharp blow from a blackjack in the approved place just behind the left ear. The Black Star's man went down without a groan.

Riley gagged him with a handkerchief, and bound his hands and feet with some old straps he had carried for that purpose from the room above. Working swiftly, he put on gown and mask, rolled the unconscious man to one side, and fumbled around the box until he found a push button. He pressed the button; a bell tinkled in the distance. Almost immediately there was an answering tinkle, and Riley hurried through the hallway and opened the door of the illuminated room.

His glance rested first on the glittering eyes of the Black Star, then upon Verbeck and Muggs. Whether the Black Star was aware of the deception or not, Riley did not know; but he was forced to turn his back and write his number on the blackboard. The coun-

tersign followed, and the Black Star's orders; and then Riley advanced upon the defiant Muggs, waited until he was in the proper position, and whirled to level his weapon at the Black Star, and to tear off his mask.

He heard the gasps of relief and joy from Verbeck and Muggs, but did not glance toward them again. Riley's eyes were blazing into those of the master criminal, and he was watching for the Black Star to make a move.

CHAPTER V.

BLACK STAR TAKES A TRICK.

SILENCE for a moment, and then Riley spoke in a tense voice, and swiftly:

"Careful! Move hand or foot, and I'll fire! I'm not taking any chances with you, Mr. Black Star!"

A chuckle came from behind the mask, and the peculiar staccato voice of the master criminal answered him.

"Detective Riley, as I live! Very clever of you—very! And threatening, of course. Violence—always violence instead of wit and strategy!"

"Keep those hands up!" Riley commanded. "Don't move an inch! I'd as soon shoot you as not; but I guess we'll take you down to the station instead. And you'll not escape this time, either!"

"Do you really think you have me?" the Black Star asked. "You expect to take me from my own headquarters to a filthy jail?"

"Never mind the talk! Muggs, can you hobble over here beside me, so I can untie your hands and watch this chap at the same time? Then you can release Verbeck, and we'll play the rest of the evening's game in our own fashion."

The Black Star laughed aloud as Muggs stood up and started to hop like a toad to the detective's side. Riley's glance did not waver; he held the auto-

matic steady, and his eyes never left the Black Star's mask.

Muggs stopped beside him. Riley put down his left hand and fumbled until he found Muggs' wrists, and then, still watching the master crook, he began working at the knots.

"You are a very courageous man, Mr. Riley," the Black Star said. "You cannot guess what may happen in a situation like this. Perhaps the floor will fall from under you, as it did with Mr. Verbeck once, and let you down into a pit. You may turn to find half a dozen of my good friends at your back, ready to seize you——"

"Don't worry about me turning! I'm keeping my eyes on you!" Riley snarled. "Try something new."

"Something new—something clever?" the Black Star said, his tone sarcastic. "Let me think! I might extinguish the light, so we could fight it out in the dark—but still, that is not new. You'll notice the room is illuminated by only one lamp, which stands on the table beside me."

"I'm not looking at lamps—I'm watching you!" Riley replied.

The knots were proving difficult to untie with one hand, but Riley kept working at them without looking down. If he could get Muggs' hands free, Muggs could untie his feet and release Verbeck. They could bind and gag the Black Star, Verbeck could don his robe and mask, and they could capture, one by one, such of the band as came to report or receive orders.

"Those are excellent knots," the Black Star observed. "At some future time I'll be glad to teach you how to tie them. Don't you think this comedy has gone quite far enough?"

"If this is your idea of a comedy, you'll be liable to change your mind before long!" Riley said.

"I am interested to know how you got inside, and how you knew what

number and countersign to write. Some of my men must have been careless."

"You'll find one of them in the hall with a broken head!" Riley exclaimed.

"Indeed? Always violent! If you would learn to use wit and strategy instead of——"

The broken sentence, a quick move, a shot, darkness!

The Black Star had taken the chance. On the word, he had sprung to one side, toward the table. Riley's bullet went within six inches of his head. There was a crash as the lamp was dashed to the floor. Twice more flame streaked the darkness and bullets crashed into the wall. Verbeck, helpless, struggled to get to his feet. Muggs mouthed imprecations because his hands were still bound.

Black silence then—not even a man's breathing to be heard! Riley had retreated silently to the door, and stood there straining his ears to catch some slight sound that would tell him where the master criminal was crouching. He did not dare fire at random again; he did not know but what Muggs had moved, and might receive the bullet intended for the Black Star; he was afraid Verbeck had left the couch.

A slight hissing sound—a body crashing to the floor! Riley, holding his breath, wondered what it meant. Was it Verbeck—Muggs? Had the Black Star descended to the violence he scoffed, and used a knife in the dark?

Verbeck, on the couch, wondered, too. His nerves were on edge, waiting for the shot he expected with every heart beat. He heard the hissing again—the sound of another falling body!

Then a moment of silence again. The strain was almost unbearable. Verbeck felt like shrieking, like calling to Riley and Muggs—though he knew neither would answer and betray his position.

A chuckle—a deep, satisfied laugh! On the opposite side of the room a match flickered, and in its flame Ver-

beck beheld the black mask, the flaming jet star on the hood above it.

"Quite melodramatic, Mr. Verbeck, eh?" the Black Star said. "I was forced to take quite a chance that time—Detective Riley might have sent a bullet or two into my body. However, luck was with me again!"

The match flame died out. The Black Star struck another and carried it across the room. He picked up the lamp, put it back on the table.

"Only the chimney broken," he said. "We'll have poor light, but it will serve."

He chuckled again as he touched the flaming match to the wick. The fitful, uncertain light filled the room. Verbeck gave a cry of horror. Muggs was stretched on the floor near the table; Riley lay on his face near the door.

"Do not be alarmed for your friends," the master criminal said. "They have not been assassinated, Mr. Verbeck, but merely put to sleep for a short time. Unless you desire to share their condition, remain where you are, on the couch, until I give you permission to leave."

He hurried across to Riley and took off the robe; he picked up the mask from the floor where Riley had tossed it; he hurried out through the door.

Verbeck started to get up, but fell back on the couch again. He did not know of the vapor gun, and it was a mystery to him what had happened to Muggs and Riley. He didn't want to be rendered unconscious himself, for there was work to be done if he was allowed to go, or could escape.

He wondered how Riley had trailed them and entered the room. And what would happen, now that the detective knew the location of the Black Star's headquarters? Would the master criminal change his mind and hold all three of them prisoners? Would it be impossible to prevent the theft of gold planned for two o'clock in the morning?

The door opened, and the Black Star came into the room again.

"Detective Riley strikes hard," he observed. "However, my man is conscious again now, and will be with us in a few minutes. The pity of it is that he'll be useless after this, as I have seen his face. I must provide for him and send him away, for I cannot break one of our rules. Ah, well—it is all in the game!"

"And the game isn't ended yet!" Verbeck said.

"Angry because I was forced to put your friends asleep, eh?" the Black Star chuckled. "That puzzles you, perhaps. Merely a vapor gun, Mr. Verbeck—though the vapor itself is somewhat of a secret. See?"

He took the vapor gun from beneath his robe, waved it at Verbeck, then returned it. The door opened—there entered a robed and masked man, who staggered as he walked.

"You brought the straps? Good!" the Black Star said. "We'll just make Detective Riley secure first. Easy, now! Don't be rough, simply because he knocked you on the head—it's all in the game."

In a moment Riley was bound and rolled to a corner of the room. Then the Black Star held a handkerchief beneath Muggs' nostrils, and almost immediately Muggs sighed and opened his eyes.

"That's better. Help me get him to the couch," the master criminal ordered his man.

They carried Muggs across the room and put him down beside Verbeck. The Black Star took out his watch and glanced at it.

"Um! Nine-thirty," he said. "But for the sudden and unexpected appearance of Riley, you'd be home by this time, Mr. Verbeck, with this man of yours. You must blame Detective Riley for the delay— Ah, Mr. Muggs! Feeling better now?"

"You—you——" Muggs stammered.

"No violent language, I pray! Attend me closely now, gentlemen. I promised to send you home, and I'll keep my promise. You must go as you came, of course—unconscious. You then will be unable to say where this room is located. With Detective Riley it is different. He evidently trailed somebody to this place—he knows its exact location. I cannot allow him to go free, naturally, after that. I must keep him prisoner for a time. It may be necessary for me to change my headquarters again. Quite a nuisance!"

"If Riley is harmed——" Verbeck began.

"Tut, tut! I repeat, I abhor violence. But let us not waste more time." He turned to the man beside him. "You understand?" he asked. "The cab is waiting, I believe. Take these two men to within a block or so of Mr. Verbeck's residence, and drop them there. You must use the vapor gun, of course."

Without replying, the man Riley had struck stepped forward, drawing the weapon from beneath his robe. Muggs shrank from him. A touch of the trigger, and Roger Verbeck beheld the cloud of vapor, heard Muggs' futile cry of protest, and saw his comrade in arms topple over on the couch as if shot through the heart.

"Very neat," the Black Star said. "Carry him out, and then return for the other."

Muggs was lifted and carried to the door. The Black Star helped take him into the hallway. Verbeck heard a third man called in low tones, and the master criminal returned.

"You see, Mr. Verbeck, it is useless to match wits with me," he said. "A short time ago you thought you had me, eh? And now——"

"The game isn't ended yet!" Verbeck interrupted.

"I believe you said that once before—

I care not how long the game endures, if I take all the tricks. Ah, here is our friend again! It is your turn now, Mr. Verbeck."

The man with the vapor gun stepped swiftly across the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLAZED TRAIL.

VERBECK'S feet were lashed together and his hands tied, but Roger Verbeck refused to despair in the face of even such obstacles as those.

He waited until the masked and robed figure with the vapor gun was within six feet of him, until the gun was thrown up as if to be discharged, and then, holding his breath and half closing his eyes, Verbeck sprang through the air.

It was unexpected, and he crashed against the enemy with such force as to hurl him to the floor. Verbeck regained his balance and sprang nimbly to one side, as the Black Star, growling his anger, started forward. With his lashed wrists held at arms' length before him, Verbeck hopped like a toad across the room, and brought up against the wall beside the nearest blackboard.

His brain was working as well as his muscles. Through Verbeck's mind flashed the thought that his abduction and that of Muggs, their visit to the Black Star's headquarters, their knowledge of the crime planned for that night would be of no value unless he could tell afterward where the headquarters was located. If he inhaled that pungent vapor, he would be able to tell nothing except the appearance of the room's interior.

He backed away as the Black Star and the other man approached him again, with more caution this time. They sprang toward him together, and Verbeck whirled and presented his

back. He threw an elbow back sharply as he felt one of them grasp him by the shoulder, and some one grunted in sudden pain as the elbow struck into the pit of his stomach.

Both men had their hands on him now, trying to bend him backward, with the intention, Verbeck felt sure, of discharging a cloud of vapor into his face, and rendering him unconscious. Then he would be carried to the taxicab like a bag of meal, and, after a time, deposited with Muggs near home, there to regain consciousness and remember that the Black Star held Detective Riley prisoner, and that he did not know where.

He struggled as well as he could with his feet and wrists bound. He grasped the end of the blackboard and bent his head, trying to avoid the cloud of vapor he knew was coming. His hands went into the chalk box—mechanically he grasped half a dozen pieces of crayon and crushed them in his palm.

A sudden wrench, and they bore him backward, working roughly and without speaking. Verbeck saw the vapor gun presented at his face, and caught his breath. The trigger was pressed; vapor filled the air about him.

Verbeck held his breath. He staggered backward, the Black Star still clinging to him. Foot by foot, pretending to grow weaker, he stumbled from the wall and the vapor cloud, fighting himself to keep from taking a breath.

At the same time he turned actor—his eyes fluttered, he grew limp, did everything to give the men who gasped him the idea that the vapor had done its work. It seemed that his lungs would burst. Red streaks flashed before his eyes. And then—carefully, slowly—he let air into his nostrils, hoping that the danger was over.

"That fixed him!"

The Black Star broke a rule and

spoke in the presence of one of his men, but in a low voice not like his own. They let Verbeck slip down to the floor. He continued his acting, but his eyes did not close entirely. He was breathing regularly now, yet carefully and not deeply. And through his half-closed eyes he watched the vapor gun, fearing it would be turned against him again, that he would be caught off guard and inhale the sleep-producing gas.

The Black Star clapped his hands and hurried to the blackboard. Verbeck heard the squeak of the crayon as he wrote, but could not see what was being written without turning his head, and he did not dare do that.

The man who had used the vapor gun bent and took the bonds from Verbeck's wrists and ankles. He caught Verbeck under the arms from behind, and lifted him gently and carried him toward the door. He threw the door open.

They were in the dark, narrow hallway now, and the door was closed behind them. Verbeck's captor was dragging him along, and Verbeck continued to pretend unconsciousness, allowing his dead weight to rest upon the other man's shoulder. They made a turn, and there another man waited.

"Got him?" he whispered.

"Yes—he put up a scrap. Wait until I get this gown and mask off."

The chauffeur held Verbeck, while the other removed the regalia. Then they took him along the narrow corridor toward the door.

Verbeck did not know what instant they would discover he was conscious and use the vapor gun again to better advantage. He remembered the chalk he still held in one fist. A few chalk marks might serve as a trail and point the way to the Black Star's den.

He moved his fingers until he held one of the sticks of crayon in position

for writing. He managed to lurch against the wall—and left a long, white mark.

They made another turn, went up a short flight of steps. Verbeck made more marks. A door was opened, and the cold night air struck them. Outside, Verbeck saw a littered factory yard, with a gate in the distance, and a taxicab waiting before it at the curb.

Verbeck continued his acting as they half carried him across the yard to the gate, and there they propped him against the wall for a moment, while the chauffeur glanced up and down the street, and started the engine. And when they carried him forward again, Verbeck had left on the gatepost and the wall beside it a series of crosses marked with chalk.

They reached the cab. Verbeck managed to break off a small piece of crayon and grind it beneath one heel, leaving a white blotch on the dirty walk. They tossed him inside—and he lurched across the unconscious Muggs and fell against the opposite door. The window was open, and Verbeck managed to fall on the seat in such fashion that the hand holding the chalk was extended a few inches out of the window.

The chauffeur sprang to his seat; the other man entered the cab and closed the door; the vehicle started away.

Now Verbeck's every sense was alert, though he continued to pretend unconsciousness. Born and reared in this city as he was, yet he did not recognize the locality from what he saw through the window of the cab. He could guess what part of the city it was in, but that was all. And there was going to be no time to waste if the Black Star's headquarters was to be raided in time to prevent the gold theft. It was essential that Verbeck be able to lead police to the scene as speedily as possible.

There would be no time to search fifteen or twenty blocks for some certain

abandoned factory building, when possibly there were a score of such buildings within that area. And a search would warn the Black Star. There could be but one way to success—a direct and unexpected descent upon the master crook's den.

Verbeck noticed that the pavement was rough—cobblestones, evidently. He could see little of the buildings he was passing, because of the dark. At the first corner he noticed an empty, one-story store with boarded windows. Beside it was a billboard flaunting a glaring soap advertisement. These things Verbeck remembered.

He counted the blocks until the taxi made the first turn, and there, beneath the arlight on the corner, he dropped a piece of chalk to the street. He was trying to remember the trail, also to mark it.

And, at the same time, his brain was active in quite another direction. He wondered whether he should attempt to overpower this man sitting beside him, and the chauffeur, and make an effort to turn these two of the Black Star's band over to the police. That done, he could call for help and lead the way back to the master criminal's headquarters, possibly capture him at work, and rescue Riley.

But the chances of failure were too great, the percentage was against Verbeck. Suppose he tried it, and failed? Then the vapor gun would come forth again, he would be rendered unconscious in truth, and left near home with Muggs, and, not having marked the trail, would be unable to lead a squad of police to the Black Star's place. It was best, Verbeck decided, to continue his acting and try to remember the trail.

Whenever the taxi turned a corner, Verbeck dropped more chalk. He also was trying to remember the number of blocks between the turns, and he was

gaining some sense of location now. On and on the taxi dashed, until it reached the retail district. Verbeck identified a corner; he was not forced to remember anything more now—he could begin the back trail there.

Again he considered whether to attack the man beside him. But he decided against it again. If he did, and failed, the Black Star would be warned that he had not been unconscious, and escape. If he allowed himself to be put out near home with Muggs, he could hurry to the house, inform the police, and begin the effort to frustrate the Black Star's plans and capture him and some of his band.

The taxi sped along a boulevard, made another turn, and lurched toward the curb. They were within three blocks of the Verbeck place now, and here giant maple trees lined the street, casting great shadows. It was an ideal place to drop unconscious men without being observed.

The taxicab stopped. Verbeck heard the man beside him laugh lightly to himself. And then—

Why hadn't he anticipated it? He might have guessed the Black Star's man would use the vapor gun again before putting him out of the cab with Muggs, for fear they might awake too soon and create a disturbance before the taxi got away! Why hadn't he been on guard, ready to hold his breath again, and act as before?

His senses whirled. Dimly he remembered the chalk trail—the corner from which he was to start—that the possible capture of the Black Star and the immediate rescue of Riley depended on his memory—and there was something about a hundred thousand in gold—

His head fell forward—he seemed to hear a voice in the distance—and then the dreamless sleep came to him as it had come to Muggs!

CHAPTER. VII.

AT BAY.

NEARER and nearer, louder and more insistent came the voice.

"Boss! Boss! Wake up, boss! Aw, boss, can't you wake up?"

Verbeck recognized the voice as that of Muggs, but it seemed he was in darkness. And then, rapidly, things cleared. His head whirled again, but this time consciousness was returning to him instead of leaving.

"Try to sit up, boss! That's the stuff!"

Now Muggs had an arm around his shoulders and was urging him to bend forward. Verbeck sighed and opened his eyes. He was in the darkness, on the ground between sidewalk and curb.

"Why—what——" he gasped.

Memory returned to him with a rush. He struggled to get to his feet, and Muggs aided him, and they staggered toward the walk. The Black Star's headquarters—Riley held prisoner—the chalk trail—the vapor gun! Verbeck remembered all, and was roused to action.

"One moment, Muggs—I'm dizzy," he complained. "Just let us stand here a minute or so, then we'll get busy!"

"When I came to, you were dead to the world, boss. Ain't it the deuce? Where do you suppose them headquarters are, eh? And how are we goin' to get Riley out?"

"Things aren't as bad as they seem, Muggs. I know a thing or two."

"Did they shoot that stuff at you as soon as they put me to sleep?"

"They did, Muggs, but it didn't take effect."

"Wh-what's that, boss?"

"I fought them, Muggs—held my breath. I pretended to be unconscious, and they carried me to the taxi. They didn't put me to sleep until just before we were taken out of the cab. I got caught off guard then."

"Boss! You—you——"

"Exactly, Muggs! I've an idea where the Black Star has his headquarters. Come along—I'm all right now. We've got to hurry to the house!"

Side by side they hurried down the street, went around the corner, and so came to the old Verbeck place. Once inside the gate, they ran at top speed to the front door, unlocked it, hurried inside. Muggs snapped on the lights; Roger Verbeck rushed to the telephone and called police headquarters and asked for the chief.

"Hello! Chief?" he said. "This is Roger Verbeck."

He was fighting to keep the note of excitement from his voice, for Verbeck knew the chief well. Communicate excitement to the chief, and he would want to call out the reserves, make a noise, alarm every crook in the city—and so accomplish nothing.

"Listen well, chief," he said now. "And please do not interrupt—and do exactly as I say. I've been to the Black Star's headquarters. Wait—wait! Keep quiet, chief, and listen. We'll get along better if we take things coolly. Yes—I've been inside the headquarters. He had me knocked out at a restaurant and took me there. He had Muggs abducted and taken there. His intention was to let us see the place, and then send us away unconscious, and give us the laugh because we couldn't find the place again."

"But—but——"

"Wait!" Verbeck commanded. "While we were there, he even let us see orders given his men. They've planned a big trick for to-night. They are going to steal a hundred thousand in gold coin at two o'clock in the morning. It is a shipment that arrived at noon to-day. Understand? Get the wheels in motion down there and find out what bank or trust company received that shipment, and have their place well guarded."

"Yes—yes, I——"

"Wait! Now listen carefully. While we were there, Detective Riley showed up—I don't know how he got there. We had things going our way for a time, but the Black Star turned the tables on us, as usual. He's got Riley there now—a prisoner. . . . Wait, confound you; and listen! I'm home. Muggs and I were dumped here unconscious. Get your fastest machine—I don't know where my roadster is—and come out here with two of your best men. Get here as soon as you can. Only two men, chief—if you bring any more we'll raise a racket and lose out entirely. No questions—hurry!"

Verbeck hung up the receiver before the chief could reply. That he knew, was the way to get quick action out of the head of the city's police department.

"But how are we goin' to find that place, boss?" Muggs demanded.

Verbeck held up a hand for silence. He was pacing back and forth across the room, his brow wrinkled, head bent, cracking his fingers nervously. Two—five—three—eight—— Were those numbers correct? Had Verbeck returned to consciousness with the right numbers photographed on his brain? Two—five—three—eight—and then the corner he knew and had identified!

He'd have to reverse the numbers, of course. From the corner, eight blocks to where the taxicab had made the turn, then three blocks to the next turn—but which direction? Ah, the chalk would tell if it could be found!

In a few words he explained to Muggs what he had done, and that the chances for success were slim. The small pieces of crayon might be gone. They might have to retrace their steps a score of times. And every minute was precious. It was after ten o'clock now. They'd have to find the Black Star's headquarters within a short time to catch him there. Undoubtedly mem-

bers of the band would report at a late hour to get final instructions regarding the theft of the gold. If only several of them could be captured—if Riley could be released before harm befell him! But there'd be no time to waste!

Down the street came the shrieking of a siren!

"Now curse the chief for a fool!" Verbeck cried. "Two-thirds of the city will know we're on the trail before we've gone two blocks. It is our game for the Black Star to think we have no idea where his headquarters can be found, that we were dead to the world when we left to be brought here!"

Muggs swung the door open as the police machine stopped before the gate, and the chief and two of his men charged up the walk toward the veranda. Verbeck met them at the top of the steps.

"Listen!" he commanded. "Let's have no noise! The slightest alarm may spoil our plans. I'll tell you what I've done."

He spoke rapidly, clearly. He told what had transpired in the Black Star's den, about Riley, how he had remained conscious, and left the chalk trail. He kept murmuring the numbers he had to remember until Muggs handed him a pencil; then he wrote the numbers on his cuff.

"No siren!" he ordered. "Drive to the National Building corner first. That's where we take up the trail."

"I've got men busy telephoning," the chief reported, as the machine darted down the boulevard. "If there's a bank or trust company got that gold shipment, there'll be a crowd of police in their building within half an hour. And if we get the Black Star and some of his men——"

"Muggs and I have spotted two of his men," Verbeck said. "Muggs can identify the one who abducted him, and the chauffeur. And I got a good look at the one who rode in the cab with

us, though I couldn't identify the chauffeur very well. But you can lay a wager right now, chief, that those men will receive a roll of bills each and be sent out of town at once. The Black Star, you understand, knows we have seen them. Their usefulness for him is at an end."

"Here's your corner!" the chauffeur cried.

Verbeck stood up in the machine and looked around him, then glanced at his cuff to be sure he was making no mistake.

"Drive south eight blocks," he ordered, "then stop."

The machine sped away. The destination was reached. Verbeck sprang out and looked around at the pavement. He gave a glad cry and ran toward one curb. There in the street was a white blotch, where the heavy wheel of some vehicle had run over and crushed a piece of chalk.

"You see?" he cried. "A moment now!" He looked at his cuff again. "Three blocks this time—but in what direction, I do not know. I didn't have a chance to see very well, remember. All I know is that the taxi made another turn three blocks from this corner."

They went toward the west first, and on the third corner searched without success for the bit of chalk. There was a small searchlight on the car, and with it they swept the pavement for a hundred feet in every direction. They found no trace of chalk.

They went to the next corner, thinking Verbeck might have made a mistake counting the number of blocks, and again they searched without reward. Back to the first corner they hurried, and this time went to the east. Before they had searched the third corner there less than a minute, Verbeck found what they sought. The chalk had not been crushed here, but here it was, close to the curb.

Verbeck consulted his cuff again.

"Five blocks," he said. "It must be five blocks north or south. We know the place we want to find is in the manufacturing district somewhere, so the best guess is south."

Again the machine dashed down the street. Once more they descended and searched the pavement. Muggs, the chief, the two detectives from headquarters joined in the search. The chauffeur operated the searchlight and flooded the street with brilliance. There was no sign of chalk.

"Down another block—maybe you made a mistake," the chief said.

They hurried to the next corner. It was nearly eleven o'clock. Unless the chalk could be found, they would have no direct trail to follow, and a systematic search of the manufacturing district would take hours, and put the Black Star on guard.

Five minutes' search convinced them there was no chalk on this corner. They got into the machine and turned back to the last corner where they had found the chalk.

"I'm sure I counted five blocks," Verbeck said. "Perhaps it is in the other direction."

"I've got it!" one of the detectives cried. "See that private alley? You counted that. It's the fourth corner instead of the fifth."

They stopped on the fourth corner. There was a blotch of white on the pavement—the police machine itself had made it by crushing the chalk as it passed.

"Now what?" the chief demanded.

"Two blocks," said Verbeck. "And that's all I could remember when I regained consciousness. Two blocks to another piece of chalk, and after that a considerable run without a turn. We'll have to go blind until I see something that recalls the locality."

Two blocks they journeyed at top speed, two blocks to the east—and

there they found the bit of crayon in the middle of the street. Once more Verbeck stood up in the car and looked down the intersecting thoroughfares.

"Try that," he said, and pointed to the south again. "Drive slowly."

The machine went on. Block after block they passed, while Verbeck searched the side of the street, trying to spot some building he remembered. And then he saw a one-story empty building, with boarded windows.

"Stop!" he ordered. "To the curb! I remember this. We're within two blocks of the place! We'll leave the machine here and go ahead on foot."

Only the chauffeur remained behind. Verbeck led the way, with Muggs at his side, and behind came the chief and the two headquarters detectives. They passed the first corner, and then Verbeck began walking slower, watching the curb line, glancing at the gateway of every factory fence.

"There!" he whispered.

He pointed to the curb, to the chalk smeared on the walk there, where he had ground it with his heel as they were putting him into the taxicab.

"This is the place!" he said, and led the way to the gate. There were the crosses he had marked; they were at the end of the trail!

The building was small, and stood in the middle of the lot, with the fence entirely around it. It did not communicate with another building, and was easily surrounded.

"There's the door they use," Verbeck said. "Through a hall, down half a flight of steps to another hall in the basement, a few steps along that, and you come to the door of the room that holds the Black Star."

"What do you consider the best plan?" the chief asked.

"It is bright moonlight—we can see every square foot of the yard. Suppose your two men keep near the fence and watch the sides of the building.

You, too, chief. I'll take Muggs and enter. We'll go prepared for trouble and try to spring a surprise. We'll get into that room some way, and there'll be action as soon as we do. You'll just have to guess from anything you hear whether it'll be best to remain outside on guard or enter the building to help."

"But Riley——" the Chief began.

"I suppose he is in there, unless he has been taken away by some of the Black Star's men. If he is there, we must rescue him, of course, so he can aid us."

"Better let me send in a call——"

"No!" Verbeck interrupted. "We can do that later, if it proves necessary. A surprise, swift action by just a few of us, may turn the trick. A bunch of reserves would alarm the gang. If we do not do that, we may be able to pick up several of them if they come to report or receive orders."

"All right," the chief replied. "You go on in with Muggs, and we'll watch the outside and be ready to make a rush if you need help. You're armed, of course?"

"I'm not—I forgot. Neither is Muggs. The Black Star relieved us of our automatics and failed to return them."

The chief stepped to the curb and signalled the distant chauffeur, and the headquarters automobile came to them swiftly. The chauffeur handed his automatic to Verbeck, and Muggs received a revolver that was in the machine.

The chief and chauffeur were to hold the gate. A detective slipped along the fence in each direction, keeping to the shadows, trying to get to a post where two sides of the building could be watched. Verbeck spoke softly to Muggs, and they stepped out into the bright moonlight and started walking swiftly across the yard toward the little door.

Verbeck had but one fear—that the

Black Star, his plans for the night's crime completed, had left the headquarters and gone to whatever place he called home. There would be nothing to do then except watch the empty nest. But, if the Black Star and some of his men were in the building—

A flash of flame came from one of the windows. A bullet whistled past Verbeck and Muggs, and struck the fence near the gate.

Another flash of flame—another bullet!

"Get out of that moonlight!" they heard the chief shriek.

On another side of the building there was a shot from a window, and one of the detectives replied to it.

Verbeck and Muggs dashed back to the fence and got in the shadows. More shots flashed from windows. The Black Star, evidently, was in his headquarters with some of his men, at bay, forgetting his abhorrence of violent methods, giving battle in an effort to escape the police he had scorned.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VOICE OF DESPERATION.

THE chief crept slowly along the fence until he stood beside Verbeck and Muggs.

"They're on to us!" he exclaimed. "They must have had somebody watching. Afraid Riley had given the tip before he was caught, I suppose. Now we've got to smoke 'em out!"

Shots came at intervals from some of the windows, and now and then one of the detectives fired in return. The chief spoke a few rapid words to the chauffeur, and in an instant the machine was tearing down the street, the siren shrieking.

"Told him to send in an alarm!" the chief explained. "No use trying to handle this thing by ourselves, Verbeck. We'll have a sweet time getting

in there—but we've got 'em! Thank Heaven, it's an easy place to surround, and if they try to come out, we'll get every last one of them. This will be the end of the Black Star. But I'm afraid for Riley, if he's still in there. These smooth crooks are always the worst when they get cornered. They forget they're human. I wouldn't put it past the Black Star to do for old Riley, if he finds he's up against a losing game."

More shots from the windows—then a lull! It was somewhat of a ticklish situation. Here were five men guarding the four sides of the building, and it was impossible to say how many were inside. If the master criminal and his men made a rush, some of them might escape.

Crouching nervously in the shadows of the fence, the five waited, straining their ears to hear sounds that would tell of the coming of a police machine. Minutes passed, and there came no rush of determined and desperate men from the building. Verbeck remembered the Black Star's cleverness—began wondering whether there was some sort of underground passage through which he could lead his men to safety.

Again a fusillade of shots, and he knew they still were in the building. Did the fusillade herald a rush for freedom? Gripping their weapons, those near the fence waited, but the rush did not come.

And then, from far down the street, came the shrieks of a siren, rapidly drawing nearer. The chief gave a sigh of relief. He left Verbeck and Muggs and hurried through the gate and to the curb. The machine turned the nearest corner and dashed up to him, and half a dozen police sprang out.

Another siren in the distance—another machine. The chief had reinforcements of some fifteen men now. He explained the situation rapidly, sent his men to surround the building.

When those inside fired again, they drew a volley in reply.

"Give it to 'em hot for a while," the chief passed the word. "We won't try any rushes yet—can't be losing men. Get too much criticism—and it isn't necessary. Make it so hot they can't stay near the windows. Give it to 'em!"

From all four sides of the factory building volleys were poured at windows and doors; and from the windows came answering shots, now in twos and threes, now with such rapidity that it seemed at least a score of men were on the defensive there.

"How many crooks has he got with him, do you suppose?" the chief asked.

"That is what puzzles me," Verbeck admitted. "According to his usual methods, there never are more than two or three men besides himself at the headquarters at any one time."

"Well, it looks to me like there's a couple of dozen in there now!"

"Perhaps," Verbeck offered, "we caught them just at the right time to nab quite a number. According to what was written on the blackboards, six men were to steal the gold, and they may be there for final orders. There may have been other crimes contemplated for to-night, too. Or, it is possible there is a grand gathering of the band for a distribution of money from other thefts. I have ceased to be surprised at anything unusual connected with the Black Star."

"Well, we've got him now!" the chief said. "It will be the same old story of police besieging desperate men barricaded in a building. They'll hold us off just so long, and then we'll get in. And I'll bet we find him a suicide when we do."

"He made the remark to-night that when the time came he would know how to die, even if he had to descend to suicide."

"There you are! Those smooth

crooks always do that—can't stand the thought of prison. Well, we'll end his work anyway; we'll get him—either dead or alive."

There came another lull in the battle, and then another volley from the windows. From one side of the building came a shriek of pain.

"Barton's hit!" the word traveled along the line to the chief. "He's got it bad—through the breast!"

The chief sent orders to have the man removed and hurried to a hospital.

"That's the thing I'm afraid of," he confided to Verbeck. "I want to get the Black Star, but I don't want to lose men. And those fiends in the factory, if they think they're cornered, will shoot to kill."

Another shriek of pain from the side of the building. The chief muttered a curse as he slipped away, following the fence, going to see what man of his had been wounded now.

"How long they goin' to keep this up, boss?" Muggs whispered to Verbeck.

"They are cornered, Muggs, and you know what that means. I suppose they'll keep it up until the Black Star is dead, and the others decide to surrender and take their medicine rather than to die. I'm sorry about this. I had hoped the three of us would get the Black Star alone, without gun play."

"Why don't they go in and get 'em?" Muggs demanded, with a tinge of disgust in his tone.

"It could be done, but we might lose men," Verbeck said. "They can't leave the building without facing police guns—and we're sure to get them in time. The chief intends to batter at them, wear them down, then make a rush when they realize they are losing the fight. They'd fight twice as desperately now, at the beginning of the battle, as they will later, when their nerves are on edge and the truth of the situation dawns on them."

"Then we're just goin' to stand off and fight long distance?" Muggs said. "If we'd get in the building, we'd end it quicker."

"I realize that, Muggs. But between the shadows of this fence and the nearest door is a patch of bright moonlight fifty feet wide. Why take chances in that bright moonlight when, by playing a waiting game, we win without such grave chances? Eh?"

"Well—you see, boss—Riley is in there."

"I—I realize that, too, Muggs."

"And Riley is a good scout. I had a little run-in with him once, when I thought he believed I wasn't square, but I'm strong for him now."

"I understand, Muggs."

"And he had a nerve comin' in the headquarters like he did, in that mask and robe—and he did it to help us out, I'll bet, as much as to get the Black Star."

"You want to make a rush for it and get in the factory? Is that it, Muggs?"

"Well, I'd take a chance, boss, to help Riley. This game belongs to the three of us, anyway—the police are just backin' us up, you might say."

The chief slipped back to them through the shadows.

"I got a little of that conversation," he said. "It would be foolish to make such an attempt now. We'd just have more men in there in trouble. Why, I've known Riley for years—knew him before I ever got in the department. I'd be the first man to go across that patch of moonlight, if I thought it would help."

"Well——" Muggs said.

"We'd walk into trouble. We can tell there's from a dozen to a score of men in there, and they're desperate, ready to die with their boots on like the old-time bandits did. Suppose two or three of us did get across that moonlight and get in the building. We might whip the dozen or score, and again we

might not. And, if I order a rush now, I'm going to lose men. I don't want to do that. We'll just batter away at them for a time first. I've sent for searchlights."

"Searchlights?" Verbeck gasped.

"I can connect with a power wire at the corner of the alley. We'll flood every window with light, so not a man will dare get in one of them to shoot. And then, when the proper time comes, we'll rush and get into the building. I've sent for more men, too."

"More men?" Verbeck asked.

"Exactly—more men! Two of my men are down now, and one of them is liable to die. Nothing in this town is as important, right now, as getting the Black Star, no matter whether we arrest him or kill him trying to. We've got him cornered—we know that. He's got some of his gang with him. And the police department drops everything else until we finish this! All the reserves are coming. Every policeman in the city now on duty is getting orders to report here as soon as possible when he pulls a box. I'm stripping the town of police to throw a police army around this block. It'll never be said we had him surrounded and that he got away. Here's where we finish the Black Star."

"If news of this is scattered around town——" Verbeck began.

"It is scattered around town already. The call for the reserves scattered it. There'll be extra editions of the papers on the street in another quarter hour, or I'll miss a guess. And then we'll have a mob down here—several thousand fools who want to see the scrap, and won't have any more sense than to try to see it at close range. I want men to handle the fool mob as well as surround the block."

There came another lull in the firing. No flashes of flame showed at the windows. On the outside, the police re-filled weapons and waited, half expect-

ing a delayed rush, ready to close in and balk an attempt at escape.

An instant of comparative silence—and in that instant a voice—deep, striking, staccato—that seemed to come from the interior of the factory, but could be heard plainly.

"No quarter!" it cried. "We're cornered! Die game! Get as many as you can! They'll never get me alive!"

A confused murmur came as if in answer.

"Good!" the voice cried. "That's the boys! Make every shot count! after them!"

Another fusillade of shots from the windows, and answering volleys from the police!

Verbeck bent close to the chief so that the latter could hear him above the din.

"That was the Black Star!" he said. "You were right—he'll die with his boots on! And he'll get as many of us as he can before he dies!"

CHAPTER IX.

MUGGS GOES TO TRY.

THE rattling of pistol shots continued. From every direction police officers hurried toward the block and reported either to the chief or one of the captains. Lines were stretched two blocks away on every side, and behind the ropes gathered scores of automobiles that had carried hundreds of morbidly curious persons to the scene of battle.

Throughout the city had flashed the news that the Black Star and his band of criminals had been surrounded by the police in an abandoned factory building, and that a siege was in progress. Rumors told of the death of Roger Verbeck in a duel with the master criminal, others that the Black Star had escaped, and only some of his men were surrounded, still others that a

dozen policemen had been wounded, and some slain.

Held in check by the ropes and the police guard, the throng, ever increasing, passed these rumors around and invented new ones on the spur of the moment. Police arriving from suburban districts had to fight their way through the jam to get to the battle line. The sheriff, hearing of the siege, journeyed to the spot with his deputies to offer his aid to the police. A frantic mayor, unable to get into communication with the head of his police department, debated whether to visit the scene of conflict or wire the governor of the State for the use of militia.

The first hysteria passed, as it always does. The throngs behind the ropes settled down to a steady wait, plying police officers for late information; the sheriff and his deputies mingled with the city's officers on the firing line; the mayor remembered that only a few criminals were in that building, and that it would be a reflection on his administration to ask the governor for help.

The searchlights arrived and were connected. Floods of light bathed the factory building, but they did not stop the volleys of bullets. Officers poured leaden hail through those windows, until it looked as if no man could approach one near enough to fire out, yet from the factory's interior came answering shots.

A perspiring chief crept close to Roger Verbeck again.

"Please come with me, Mr. Verbeck—you and your man," he said. "The mayor wants to speak to you."

Verbeck and Muggs, hugging the wall, and so keeping in the darkness, followed the chief to the gate and dashed through it. The mayor stood against the wall outside, half a dozen other officials with him.

"We ask your advice, Mr. Verbeck,"

he said. "You believe the Black Star is in that building?"

"I heard his voice urging his men," Verbeck replied.

"And how many men do you believe he has with him?"

"Frankly, I have no idea, sir."

"I am insisting that the chief have his men rush the building, Mr. Verbeck. He tells me it would be a foolish thing to do at this juncture. I am of the opinion that few, if any, policemen would be wounded making the dash to the doors."

"Kindly remember," Verbeck said, "that getting inside the doors is not all of it. Once inside, there'll be a hand-to-hand fight. I know the Black Star, Mr. Mayor. He is a tricky individual. He had traps in his other headquarters, and he may have in this."

"Are we to do this sort of thing forever, then?"

"I believe the chief is taking the right method," Verbeck replied. "He is flooding the place with light now. If they continue the fight, they must appear at the windows to fire, and sooner or later some of them will be wounded. A few wounded men, a few hours of this continual warfare, and the men inside that building will lose heart."

"I understand Detective Riley, an old and tried officer, is held prisoner in the building."

"The last I knew of him, he was," Verbeck said.

"Um! It seems peculiar to me that you and your man could not have overcome this Black Star when you were in the room with him and Riley had him covered. I understand he defeated the three of you."

"He did," Verbeck admitted. "Muggs and I were bound hand and foot. The Black Star took a chance and smashed the only lamp in the room. In the darkness he overcame Riley and Muggs with a vapor gun he uses. The rest was simple, since I was helpless."

"Say!" Muggs shoved his way forward and confronted the city's chief executive. "Have you got the nerve to stand here and bawl out my boss because we got the worst of it? Why, he's got more nerve than you and all your police together! He——"

"Muggs!" Verbeck shouted.

"Well, it makes me mad! Why are we mixed up in this thing, anyway? Because the police can't handle the job—that's why! And now the mayor tries to bawl us out——"

"My good man——" the mayor began; he was an aristocratic mayor.

"Don't you 'good man' me! Want to rush in there, do you? Peel your coat, Mr. Mayor! Get a gun and come on! I'll lead the way, if you'll follow! Riley's my friend—I'll lead the way! Well?"

Verbeck smothered a grin. The chief turned away quickly to hide the twinkle in his eyes.

"I—er—we'll just drop the subject," the mayor said. "Perhaps the chief knows best."

A volley of shots came from the building; volleys from the police answered it!

"Some shootin'!" Muggs exclaimed. "And it takes just one of them bullets—just one—to do considerable damage to a man. Want to rush in, mayor?"

"That'll do, Muggs!" Verbeck commanded. "The mayor is all right—he just didn't quite understand."

"Well, if he thinks we haven't got *nerve* enough to go in—— You might tell him we'd have been in there before this, except that the chief is commandin' officer and said to stay out!"

"There is no question of your courage, Muggs."

"Nor of yours, Mr. Verbeck," the mayor said quickly. "Let us drop the subject, and await developments."

The firing ceased for an instant. From the factory came a chorus of such

shrieks as a man undergoing torture might make.

"If—if that's Riley——" Muggs said. He whirled suddenly upon Verbeck. "Let me go, boss!" he implored. "If I can get in all right, I'll take a chance afterward. If that's Riley——"

"No, Muggs!"

"Aw, boss! Just turn off the searchlight from that door. It won't take me a second to run across. I'll—I'll take a chance! I might do something where a gang of police couldn't. I—I might be able to pick 'em off!"

"Perhaps that would be a good idea," the mayor said.

Verbeck whirled upon the city's executive, and the mayor involuntarily took a step backward. He realized he had said the wrong thing, and he didn't care to antagonize Roger Verbeck, for Verbeck had political influence.

"Muggs' life is worth as much as that of any man!" Verbeck said. "He's not getting paid to do such a thing, and your police are. I refused to say I thought the police ought to go in. You might do as much for my friend."

"I—I didn't think!" the mayor stammered.

The shooting was continuous now. Despite the glare of the searchlights on the windows, shots came from the factory. Verbeck found himself wondering why they did not shoot at the searchlights. Perhaps they had, and had proved poor marksmen, he thought. Certainly they were not hitting many policemen, for none had been wounded except the two early in the fray. Yet the police, of course, fought from the shadows.

More officers struggled through the crowd and reached the firing line. Word reached the chief from the central station that all men had been sent to him except a dozen or so who remained there and at the precinct stations to receive telephone messages and

issue alarms in case of an emergency. The cordon around the factory was as strong as the chief could make it without swearing in special officers. And he had enough men—it would be impossible for any of the Black Star's band to escape.

It was unusual, this stripping the city of defenders by gathering them all at one spot, but both the chief and the mayor felt the situation justified it. For months the Black Star and his men had terrorized the city. Every attempt to capture them had failed. Banks had been raided, jewels stolen. Citizens were demanding protection. And now that he had the Black Star in his headquarters, it was policy to make it impossible for him to escape.

"Boss," Muggs implored. "It'd be a cinch! And Riley's in there!"

"If you go, Muggs, I go with you."

"No, boss. Just let me take the chance. I ain't worth much, anyway, boss. I've had my fling. And you—you're goin' to get married—and all that. You stay here, boss, and let me go. Just have 'em turn off that searchlight a minute——"

"No, Muggs!"

"But old Riley——"

"I know, Muggs. But we must wait."

"I've always done as you wanted me to, boss. Can't I have my own way this once. Let me go."

"No!" Verbeck answered again. "It would be foolish, Muggs. You'd only get into trouble yourself—and you'd not be able to help Riley, perhaps."

"I—I could try."

Another fusillade of shots. More shrieks from the factory. It seemed to Muggs that those shrieks sounded like Riley. In the past ten days he had learned to think a great deal of Riley. And he hated the Black Star. To think of the Black Star torturing Riley, killing him——

A cry from the mayor caused the

chief and Verbeck to whirl around. Muggs, revolver in hand, had run out into the path of light.

"Muggs!" Verbeck shrieked.

But Muggs did not seem to hear. He turned around, threw up his revolver, and fired. The lens of the searchlight was shattered—the path of bright light that illumined the door died away. A shadowy form darted in zigzag fashion toward the factory.

Muggs had gone to try!

CHAPTER X.

IN THE DOORWAY.

ROGER VERBECK, millionaire and clubman, wealthy son of a wealthy father, realized in that moment what true brotherhood means. His relations with Muggs flashed through his mind. Muggs, derelict of destiny, crook, offspring of scum—Verbeck had picked him up in Paris one night when Muggs, weary of existence, was about to throw himself into the Seine. Muggs was at the points those who tread the paths of crime often reach—disgusted with what he had made of his life, seeing no hope of living differently, ready to die rather than continue.

Verbeck saved him; Muggs became an honest man. They had been comrades since—a peculiar comradeship that caused comment because of the difference between them.

Now Verbeck remembered the adventures through which they had passed. Why, Muggs had even saved his life once! And now Muggs had gone into that factory, facing almost certain death—gone to the rescue of a man he did not know two weeks before, simply because he admired that man. Should not Roger Verbeck, then, stand by Muggs, whom he had known for five years, with whom he had stood shoulder to shoulder in many battles?

Verbeck forgot his wealth, his station in life, even his fiancée, and the happi-

ness in store for him. He remembered only Muggs—Muggs, who often had fought for him, who now was facing danger, perhaps death, without Verbeck by his side.

Acting on the impulse that had come to him, Verbeck started forward.

"Oh, no, you don't!"

It was the chief who spoke, who grasped Verbeck around the waist, and called to two officers near for help.

"We can't allow it, Mr. Verbeck," he said. "I'm sorry Muggs went in. Certainly we cannot allow you to throw your life away."

"Then send in your men! Muggs has gone because Riley, one of your detectives, is in there!"

"Soon—but not just yet!" the chief said. "We must batter them more first!"

He signed to the two officers to watch Verbeck, and then hurried away to have another searchlight turned on the doorway in place of the one Muggs had smashed. Verbeck, raging, walked back and forth along the fence.

And Muggs, meantime, was crouching just inside the door, recovering breath after his dash. Muggs was the fighter, the killer now. His lower jaw was shot forward again, his lips set tightly over his teeth, his eyes narrowed.

He buttoned his coat tightly across his breast and pulled his cap down low over his eyes. Gripping the revolver, holding it in front of him ready for instant use, he began to creep slowly along the hallway.

When Muggs had passed through that hallway before, he had been unconscious, hence he knew nothing concerning it, and he did not dare strike a match; he was not sure his dash for the door had been unobserved. He made his way forward slowly through the blackness, his left hand continually feeling the wall.

He reached the short flight of steps

and felt his way down them, stopping now and then to listen. From outside came the rattle of revolver fire; from the rooms above him came the answering shots. Muggs realized he was in the basement of the building, and he wanted to get to the first floor.

He came, presently, to the other hall, to the stairs, and went up, one step at a time, ready for instant battle, trying to hear the voices of the Black Star's men. But it was the voice of the Black Star himself that he heard.

"At them!" it shrieked. "No quarter! Die like men!"

Muggs could not locate the voice in the din. He was not sure from which room it came. He crept on along the hallway until he reached an open door. There he hesitated a moment, then, holding his weapon ready, he peered into the room.

The searchlight did not penetrate here, and the only illumination was reflected from the wall outside the one window. Not a person was in the room.

"At them! Die like men! No quarter!"

Muggs decided the voice of the Black Star came from another room down the hall. Again he went forward, always alert, expecting every instant that one of the master criminal's men would run into the hall and discover him. He came to another door, and found it closed.

He stopped to listen. Yes—shots were being fired from that room. And a searchlight flooded it, too, for the strong light came from beneath the door. To open that door meant to face bullets, perhaps. And Muggs did not want to do that unnecessarily until he had found Riley, or the Black Star.

He heard the Black Star's voice again—and it seemed to come from the basement. He went on along the hall and turned to the right. Before him a

streak of bright light swept the floor. The door of the next room was open.

Crouching at the turn in the hall, Muggs listened and watched. He knew shots were being fired from that room, too, and bullets were being poured into it by the police. Some of them came through the door and crashed into the wall.

He heard the Black Star's voice again, and turned back. It would avail little, Muggs knew, to clash with some of the master crook's men. A single shot might strike him down, and his effort would have been in vain. He wondered where Riley was being kept. He wondered where the Black Star could be found. He didn't want to go out without either trying to help Riley or getting the Black Star if Riley had met with foul play.

Back along the hall he went, listening for sounds that would tell him how to meet the Black Star or his men to best advantage. He came to another flight of steps, and went down them. The master criminal's voice came to him again, and Muggs could distinguish from which direction now.

Once more in the lower hall, he turned to the left and crept along the wall. The voice was louder, more distinct.

"Die game! No quarter! That's the boys!"

Muggs hurried on. In the distance he saw a faint streak of light. When he got nearer he saw that it came from the side of a door. Here was a time for extreme caution, and Muggs used it. He stopped again to listen. The rattling of revolver shots continued. And the voice of the Black Star rose above the din.

Muggs crept forward to the door. The Black Star was in that room! A sudden entrance—and Muggs might get him covered. And at the first move he would shoot! He'd be quicker than Riley had been. He'd be watching for

treachery. Even if they got him, he'd get the Black Star first!

Now he was beside the door. The crack at the side, through which the light came, was wide enough to give a man a glance at the room's interior. Muggs put an eye to the crack.

He recognized the room instantly—for it was the headquarters room. He saw Detective Riley, bound and gagged, stretched on the couch in the corner, tossing from side to side. The lamp without a chimney was smoking on the table, casting its uncertain light. But it gave light enough for Muggs to see around the room. And, as he looked, he gasped in astonishment.

Outside, by the gate, Roger Verbeck was raging at the chief and the mayor. Once more a searchlight bathed the doorway in brilliance. The volleys of shots continued, and answering shots came from the factory. Throngs of people were behind the police ropes two blocks away. Rumors were flying again—twenty policemen had been killed, the criminals were breaking out; the police were going to take the place by assault!

The chief was holding a conference with some of his captains, and plans for the assault were made. The searchlights would go out for an instant when a whistle was blown. A score of officers would rush for the doors, while the others volleyed bullets at the building's windows. The halls would be seized, and the Black Star's men driven from room to room until they surrendered or gave intimation that they would die fighting.

Verbeck, automatic in hand, braced himself for the race across to the door. He intended to be one of the first inside the building. The chief could not hold him back when the police rushed.

The orders were passed around; the searchlight operators were warned. There came another lull in the fighting, and the chief started to raise his whistle

to his lips to give the signal. But a cry from one of the captains stopped him.

"Look! Look in the door!"

A stick had appeared there—a stick to the end of which was attached a white handkerchief—a flag of truce. Orders to cease firing sped down the lines of police. The white handkerchief was waved frantically. Gradually the firing died out; not a shot came from the factory.

The man in the doorway evidently wanted to be sure his appearance would not be greeted with a volley. He continued to wave the handkerchief from the end of the stick, not even his hand showing.

"Well?" the chief bellowed. "What do you want?"

Another moment's wait, and then—Detective Riley appeared in the open door!

As the cheers of the police greeted his appearance, Muggs suddenly stood beside him.

"It's all right, boss!" he called to Verbeck. "Come on in!"

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE BLACKBOARD.

RILEY and Muggs blocked the doorway.

"Better keep every one out except a choice few," Riley said to the chief, in a low voice. "You come, and Mr. Verbeck—possibly one of the captains—that'll be enough."

Something in the tone of his voice caused the chief to look at him with quick suspicion, and caused Roger Verbeck to glance with apprehension at Muggs. But neither Riley nor Muggs gave them a sign as to what they were to expect.

The chief, however, took the hint. He selected one captain to go along, and ordered another to guard the doorway and keep every one out of the

building for the present. The mayor had not been courageous enough to leave the gate.

Flashing his electric torch, Riley led the way down the hall and steps, and to the door of the headquarters room, the others crowding after him. Verbeck got a chance to whisper to Muggs:

"What is it?"

"Just another little trick."

"But——"

"Wait, boss—you'll have to see it!"

The door of the headquarters room was closed, but Riley threw it open, and they stepped inside. The chief and his captain gasped when they saw the rich furnishings. But they were not new to Verbeck, and his glance wandered elsewhere. Everything seemed the same as when he had been there before, except——

There was a phonograph, with a gigantic horn, on the mahogany table.

"The Black Star—his men——" the chief implored.

"None here!" Riley answered.

"Nonsense! They couldn't have escaped! Unless there's a tunnel of some sort——"

"There is no tunnel. Neither the Black Star nor any of his men has been in this building since you arrived."

"But——" the bewildered chief gasped. "Why—nonsense! Haven't they been shooting at us? Haven't we heard him screeching to his crooks?"

Riley pointed to the phonograph.

"That is what you heard," he said.

"But the shooting——"

"Let me tell it in my own way, chief, and we'll get at it quicker. After I was put out by that blamed vapor gun—which the Black Star kindly explained to me afterward—I came back to life to find that Verbeck and Muggs had been taken away. I supposed, naturally, that they had been doped first, and would be unable to find the place again. Since I did know the

whereabouts of this place, I supposed the Black Star intended to keep me where I'd not do him any harm. The first thing he did was to assure me I'd not meet with violence—and that Verbeck soon would be back."

"But——"

"Wait, chief! I want you to get this straight. After that, the Black Star went ahead to explain a few things, gave me the laugh, took off his robe and mask, put on his coat and hat, and bade me adieu as cheerfully as you please. That was within ten minutes after Muggs and Verbeck had been taken away—and I've been the only man in this building since until Muggs stumbled in here a few minutes ago."

"Nonsense! The shooting——" the chief persisted.

"Oh, there is an explanation of all that! By the way, what time is it?"

"Three o'clock!" answered the captain, after glancing at his watch.

"Then he's done it!"

"Done what?" the chief cried.

"Got away with a hundred thousand in gold coin. He said he was going to, didn't he?"

"But the shooting——" The chief could think of nothing else.

"Look at the two blackboards," Riley said. "You'll find your explanation there. Read the one to your right first."

They whirled to read. Verbeck, with sinking heart, was reading it already. And this was the message the Black Star had left:

To Roger Verbeck and any others it may concern: If you are reading this, it probably means that all my plans have been successful, as they are generally.

I have scant time, and must be brief. First, this is not really my new headquarters, but one fitted up for this special occasion. I arranged to have Verbeck or Muggs abducted and carried here. Accidentally, both were captured, but that made no difference. I allowed them to overhear certain plans, knowing that afterward they would help carry them out.

Detective Riley's arrival was unexpected, and threatened disaster, but happily I gained the upper hand. I will leave him here, and trust he meets with no harm.

Mr. Verbeck, your struggle to keep from inhaling the vapor was amusing, since there was no sleep-producing vapor in the gun used on you. It was a harmless gas instead. It was intended that you were to think you were outwitting me by remaining conscious. I knew you would strive to make sure of the location of this building. The same plan would have been worked with Muggs, had he been captured alone.

It was very clever of you to take the chalk, and I doubt not you marked everything along your way. You have departed now, feigning unconsciousness, and I must hurry away. Just a few words then, to tell you what will happen.

"Now read the other blackboard," Riley said. "Oh, it is interesting, all right—the crook!"

They turned to the second blackboard, and read:

You, Mr. Verbeck—and I'd wager my life on it—will send an alarm to police headquarters as soon as you reach home and regain consciousness, for my man will use the real vapor gun on you before you separate—to give me time to get away.

You will find your way here again as soon as possible, to rescue Riley and catch me. When you arrive, you'll be fired upon.

A disturbance will be created, and police reserves sent for. The firing from this building will be heavy. The chief, eager to catch me, will call for more men. You'll start a siege. You'll batter this old building with bullets. You'll receive bullets in return. You'll hear my voice urging my men to die game.

Presently you'll rush in—and find this! And while the town is attracted by this disturbance and the business district left practically unprotected, I'll get my hundred thousand in gold. I'll not make the attempt, of course, unless you do start a siege.

The writing ended, for the blackboard was filled with it.

"But the shooting——" the chief exclaimed again.

"Here is the rest of it—written on a sheet of paper," Riley said. "The Black Star left it on the table. Read this."

He handed it to the chief, who read it aloud:

The phonograph is simple—it has an electric connection and holds a special record made from my voice.

As to the volleys of shots—and I trust no one is injured, for if so it will be an accident—that is simple, too. Examine the building, and fastened in the windows you'll find automatics. You never saw any exactly like them before; they are an invention of a good friend of mine. You'll notice the cartridges are fed from a belt containing a hundred rounds of ammunition. Since there are fifteen guns, that will make some shooting. You'll notice, too, that the guns are operated by electricity. You'll find wires, and if you trace them they will lead you to a cheap lodging house three blocks away. Do not blame the lodging-house people, for they are innocent.

One of my men, sitting in a room there, has a good view of the factory. He touches a button, and a gun is fired. He plays a keyboard, and you get a volley. Another button starts or stops the phonograph, and you hear me shriek encouragement to my men. Quite simple, is it not?

I have been to some trouble and expense fitting up this fake headquarters, but I am sure my profit will be great. Please be kind to the furniture I am leaving behind. And tell yourselves again you cannot cope with the Black Star.

And now go out and explain to the newspaper men what became of the band of desperate crooks you besieged in the factory. It ought to make interesting reading!

Muggs gave a snort of disgust and turned away from the table. Roger Verbeck's eyes met those of Detective Riley, and each read determination in the other's countenance. The Black Star had evaded them again, but the end was not yet.

"And I've got to tell the newspaper men!" the chief exclaimed. "That gold—I wonder if he got it—and from where!"

His answer came immediately. A sergeant of detectives hurried to them from the hall.

"Chief!" he cried. "Word just came from headquarters. There's been a consulate robbed. Got a fortune in gold yesterday at noon, to buy war stuff.

Thought they were keeping it quiet, I suppose. The Black Star knew about it, though. His men robbed the vault and left the watchman on the floor, bound and gagged, with a black star

pasted on his forehead. It's a hundred thousand in gold coin! Consul's frantic!"

"Yes," said the chief wearily, "it seems the Black Star knew about it!"

Johnston McCulley—John Mack Stone being the *nom de plume* under which the first two of this series of novelettes were written—is writing another novelette dealing with the Black Star and the efforts of Roger Verbeck to capture him. You can look forward to soon having the pleasure of reading this story—and Mr. McCulley says that it is his best Black Star story so far.

A NEW BUNKO GAME

MEYER CLAYMAN, a blacksmith of No. 1735 Harrison Street, Kansas City, Missouri, was introduced by Harry Naster, a butcher, of No. 1003 East Eighteenth Street, to Mr. Grossman:

"Meyer, meet my friend, Sammie Grossman. He's a good boy, and can make you rich."

Grossman explained he had disposed of all his jewelry stock in St. Louis, except nine pounds of pure gold, melted into small, coin-shaped pieces. He was willing to sell the gold for one hundred dollars a pound, he said, half its value, because he had been called out of town hurriedly on a long trip and was afraid to take it with him. Clayman desired to see the gold.

Grossman opened a shoe box he had under his arm. The box was lined with cotton, on which were many bright-yellow disks.

"I'd buy them myself, if I had the money," volunteered Naster. "Maybe I could get the money."

Then Clayman decided he would buy the gold.

"Now, you take these samples to a jeweler, and see what he says," said Grossman, producing several disks like those in the box.

Clayman went to a jeweler, who said the samples were pure gold, worth \$247.20 a pound. Clayman returned, stopping at the bank to get nine hundred dollars in gold money, and counted it out in Grossman's palm. Grossman took back the samples.

That night Clayman carried the treasure home with him.

"I guess I'll buy a motor car with the nine hundred dollars I made," he said to his brother.

Misgivings overtook Clayman the next day. He put the box under his arm and went hatless to his jeweler friend. The jeweler began his examination, then looked up with a start.

"These are brass," he said.

The excited Clayman soon learned he had paid nine hundred dollars for a shoe box filled with the sort of brass checks used to set an electric piano to churning. They had been gilded over.

Naster was remorseful, and volunteered to search for Grossman. He had known Grossman three years, he said, and always he was a nice young man.

A Rustic Rival

by Sergeant Ryan

NICK CARTER had just concluded a most exciting adventure in a manner highly satisfactory to himself. It had been a contest of skill against pluck, and success had never been sure until the very last moment.

By a thousand artful turns and twists of his adversary, had the great detective been forced to do his level best. But he had conquered, and the victim of his prowess lay on the grass, at his feet.

I had come up in time to witness the conclusion of the struggle. The scene was a "deep hole" in the prettiest trout stream in Monroe County, Pennsylvania. The time was five o'clock of a May morning.

Nick held up the sparkling prey for my admiration. Then suddenly he dropped the brook trout, and faced about, looking across the pool.

I followed the direction of his glance, but saw nothing worthy of special attention, nor could I hear any sound but those that told of nature waking in the forest.

"That fellow is in a great hurry," said Nick.

"What fellow?" I asked.

"That's a question I can't answer," rejoined Nick, with a smile. "But I can make out that he's a tall man, familiar with the woods, has been running a long way, and will hit the stream about opposite us if he keeps on as he's going."

Half a minute later I was able to dis-

tinguish the faint sound of crackling twigs; but it seemed incredible that even Nick's ear could catch the separate footfalls, showing the length of the stride, and the labored breathing of the runner. That he was a woodsman was evident to me as to Nick, from the lightness of his tread among the underbrush and from the rapidity of his advance.

Presently he appeared upon the other side of the pool. He was a tall young man, seemingly a native of those parts, but certainly not a farmer. He had a rather handsome and remarkably intelligent countenance; and, despite his brown skin and rough attire, there was a hint of the scholar about him.

It was evident from his expression, as he looked across at us, that he had come to seek us, but he seemed in no hurry to announce his errand. I noted that he paid little attention to me, but stared at Nick point-blank.

"Good morning, Mr. Carter," he said, at last.

I was considerably surprised by this recognition, though my friend was known as Mr. Carter to Farmer Marvin, at whose house we had spent the previous night, and to a few others thereabouts.

"I sized you up from descriptions that I got from one or two people," continued the young man. "There's only one Carter from New York who can shoulder Marvin's flatboat as if she was a birch canoe, and walk off with her."

The feat to which he alluded had been performed on the afternoon before, when we had fished in Waverly Pond. I was not aware that anybody but myself had seen it.

"Your facts are scanty," rejoined Nick pleasantly; "but your conclusion is accurate. What can I do for you?"

"The boot's on the other leg," retorted the young man. "I'm going to do something for you."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," said Nick. "What is it?"

"I'm going to put you on to one of the prettiest murder mysteries that ever you tackled," said the young man, with enthusiasm. "It happened last night, but it wasn't discovered till this morning. I was right there at the time, and I knew what to do.

"I said to all of 'em, including Deputy Sheriff Wilson, who got there almost as soon as I did: 'Don't disturb anything. Save it for Nick Carter.' And I made 'em do it, too."

"What was it that they saved?" asked Nick.

"There was his coat, all covered with blood, and the horse and wagon in the yard, and the broken board over the hiding place where he kept his money, and——"

"Where who kept his money?" demanded Nick.

The young man paused, shamefaced, like a boy who had done something very foolish when he has tried to be especially smart. He covered his embarrassment with a laugh.

"Guess I'm a bit rattled," he said. "Besides, I've had a hard run, and my breath's not as yet got back into my body. I'll be all right in a jiffy. You come across the brook—there's a fallen tree for a bridge just below here—and by the time you get over I'll be ready to talk."

Nick said nothing; but he started at once for the broken tree. I followed

him, and we crossed the brook. The young man was waiting for us.

I had already "sized him up." He was, or fancied himself to be, an amateur detective, with great talent for criminal investigation. He had probably studied the subject as it is presented in fiction. This crime which he had so imperfectly disclosed to us was doubtless his first opportunity for the display of his abilities, and he intended to prove his merit under the eyes of the great master of detection.

It struck me that he was acting wisely. A man of less sense would have tried to keep Nick Carter out of the case as long as possible, in order to secure for himself the honor of detecting the criminal.

The young man had fully recovered his self-command when we joined him after crossing the brook.

"My name is Walter Fairman," he said. "I've been teaching the school at Waverly Falls. Everybody round here knows me.

"Now for this crime. I was coming along the highroad, toward Marvin's, about three-quarters of an hour ago, intending to fish this stream. Just as I got opposite Sam Bennett's house—which is about a third of a mile the other side of Marvin's—I heard a woman scream.

"She seemed to be in Bennett's stable, which is built alongside his barn. The barn's back of the house, and the stable stands out at right angles with both, so that when you walk into the yard, the stable faces you and the house is on the left.

"As I came up, I had noticed Bennett's horse and wagon in the yard. The horse was facing the stable doors, which were closed. It looked as if Bennett had just driven in; and I wondered where he had been so early in the morning.

"When I heard the scream, I ran into the yard. Just as I did so, Mrs. Ben-

nett threw open the big doors of the stable.

"She seemed to be a good deal stirred up about something. Says I: 'What's the matter, Mrs. Bennett?'"

"She looked at me sort o' queer, as if she didn't know what to say. Finally she told me that she'd been robbed.

"Of course, I asked her all about it. She took me into the stable, and showed me a hole in the floor in a corner. Two or three planks had been pried up, and there were fresh splinters of wood, showing that it had been done very recently. Also, the amount of breaking and splintering proved that it had been done in a hurry. An ax lay on the floor, near by.

"Under one of the planks—a short piece, evidently cut to fit across two beams that were only about two feet apart—was a sort of box, made strongly, and fastened to the beams, on each side.

"'That's where Sam kept his money,' said Mrs. Bennett; 'and it's gone.'

"Certainly, there was no money in the box, then. I asked her if he threw it in there loose, and she said no; he had a small, sheet-iron box to hold it, That had been taken away.

"'Where's Mr. Bennett?' I asked.

"'He's gone away,' she said. 'I don't expect him back to-day.'

"I thought that her manner was queer, but it was a good deal stranger when she began to urge me not to say anything about what I had seen.

"'Sam wouldn't like it,' she said. 'Besides, we can catch the thief easier if we keep quiet.'

"Just then, who should walk in but John Wilson, the deputy sheriff. He happened to be passing by—going fishing, just as I was—and he saw the horse and wagon in the yard. It seems that the horse had started while I was in the stable, and had come near turning the wagon over. Wilson had run in to keep him from doing it. Then he

had naturally looked into the stable, to see who was there.

"He heard what Mrs. Bennett said about catching a thief, and that being in his line, he asked what had been stolen.

"Mrs. Bennett started to lie to him, but she thought better of it, and told him the truth.

"While she was doing it, I was taking a look around, and what do you think I found? Why, I found Sam Bennett's coat, all covered with blood, lying on the stable floor. I didn't pick it up. I just stooped down and examined it, to make sure that the stains were really blood. At the same time I saw other red marks on the floor, near the coat.

"Then I managed to get Wilson aside for a moment, and I told him that there was something worse than robbery in the case. He took a look at the coat, and motioned to me to say nothing to Mrs. Bennett.

"'You'll get cold here,' says he to her, intending to get her out of the way, so that we could talk. 'Run into the house, and put a shawl on.'

"She was dressed very thinly, and it was rather chilly. I had noticed that she was shivering.

"When Wilson told her to go in and get a shawl, she went right away. Then he asked me what I knew about the matter, and I told him.

"'Bennett's been murdered,' said he. 'Probably he came out here early, to hitch up the horse, and went to his money box. Some tramp, that had been sleeping in the barn, saw him, and killed him for the money. We'll find his body hidden in the barn.'

"'That theory won't work,' said I to him. 'These bloodstains are several hours old. Besides that, why did Bennett hitch up his horse with his head toward the stable doors? No, sir; this crime was committed last evening.'

Bennett had just got back from somewhere.'

"All this time I was doing some thinking. Why had Mrs. Bennett told me her husband had gone off to stay a day or two, when she knew that the horse and wagon were in the yard? What had she been doing in the stable? How did she account for the horse being there, without any driver? It wasn't reasonable to suppose that she had been out anywhere in the wagon, dressed as she was."

"In short," said Nick, "you believed Mrs. Bennett guilty of the crime."

"No, sir," replied Fairman, with something like a chuckle. "I'd been keeping my eyes open, and I'd seen one or two things. In the first place, the thief had ripped up several planks before he'd found the right one. Mrs. Bennett knew where it was.

"In the second place, she never could have ripped up those planks; it required a man's strength. Now, here's the problem, and I think it's worthy of your genius, Mr. Carter:

"Mrs. Bennett lied to me. She tried to keep the affair a secret. Her manner was calculated to excite suspicion in anybody. Her story about her husband's absence shows that she knew something had happened to him.

"Yet she didn't do the deed; she screamed when she found that it had been done. How do you reconcile these facts?"

"Let me have a few more facts first," said Nick. "What happened after she left you and Wilson?"

"Several other men came by, and Wilson called them in. They were most of them strangers, who had come up here to fish. Wilson explained the case to them, and a search of the stable was begun. I didn't wait for it. I didn't have the time to waste."

He looked knowingly at Nick as he said these words. I could not fathom

his meaning, but Nick seemed to understand.

"I told Wilson about your being here," Fairman continued. "I made him promise not to disturb things; to hunt for the body, but not to move it in case he found it, till you arrived. Of course he won't find it."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because it isn't there," he replied, with a wink at Nick.

I was nettled to be treated in this way by a yokel. Yet I could not deny that he was a shrewd fellow.

"I see your point," said Nick. "You think that the murder was committed somewhere else, and that the bloody coat was put there just as a blind."

"Precisely!" cried Fairman. "Why should the murderer take pains to hide the body, and leave the coat in plain sight?"

"There's something in that," said the detective. "Did you have any further conversation with Mrs. Bennett?"

"No; she hadn't got back from the house when I left. I hurried away because I hoped to catch you before you left Marvin's."

That was the substance of Fairman's story as it was told to us as we hurried toward the Bennett house.

Half a dozen men were talking excitedly in the road before the house as we came up. Wilson was one of them. Others could be seen in the yard before the stable door.

"Well, Wilson, did you find the body?" asked Fairman, as we came up.

"No; is that Mr. Carter?"

All eyes were turned upon the great detective.

"That's the man," said Fairman, with the air of one who is exhibiting a trophy.

"I'm glad to see you, sir," said Wilson, walking up to Nick. "This is a very strange affair."

"From what this gentleman has told

me, I should judge that it is," replied the detective.

"Where is Mrs. Bennett?"

"That's the strangest part of it!" exclaimed Wilson. "She has disappeared!"

"You're a smart man, I don't think," said Fairman. "Why did you let her get away?"

"I never thought of her going," protested Wilson.

"It's natural enough," sneered Fairman. "Circumstances are against her."

"Now, look here," rejoined Wilson warmly; "I don't set up to be a detective, but I hope I've got common sense. Here's a woman who has lived in this community all her life, and is known to be a good Christian and a loving wife. Don't you try to tell me that she killed her husband. I know her too well to believe you. She had nothing to do with it."

"Then why has she run away?"

"I don't believe she has run away."

"Then what's become of her?"

Wilson threw up his hands with a gesture of utter bewilderment.

"Have you searched the house and barn?" asked Nick.

"We've searched everywhere," responded Wilson, with something like a groan. "We can't find a trace of her or of Sam Bennett's body."

"If you'll allow me," said Nick, "I'll take a look around the premises. Meanwhile permit me to suggest, if there's any place where Mrs. Bennett would be likely to go, that you send there."

"That's what I was about to do," Wilson replied. "These five men are going around to all the houses near here."

"Has she any relatives in the neighborhood?"

"No; she has a brother living about three miles down the road."

"Who occupied this house besides Mr. and Mrs. Bennett?"

"Nobody is here now. They have lived alone since their daughter Jennie was married, about three months ago."

Nick, Fairman, and I walked toward the stable. Wilson and the other men went upon their several errands.

We were assured by a man named Hamlin, who was on guard in the stable, that nothing had been disturbed. Hamlin was a sort of unofficial deputy of Wilson's.

Nick made a rapid general survey of the place, glanced into the barn, which was reached by a door from the stable, and then turned his attention to the bloodstains.

There were some small, irregular splashes on the floor, and then a line of drops leading direct to the spot where the coat lay.

It was a much-worn garment, spread flat upon the floor, with the lining upward. The stains were all on the lining, and close together. They represented a considerable quantity of blood.

As Nick rose from beside the coat, I saw a peculiar smile upon his face.

"Here's something that will interest you," he said to Fairman.

Between his thumb and finger he held half a dozen short, gray hairs.

"That fits my theory exactly!" cried Fairman. "Bennett's head has rested on that coat. His hair was gray, and he wore it about that length. He must have been killed by a blow on the head, and then this coat was wrapped around the fatal wound to prevent the blood from staining something else.

"My belief is that the body was carried in that wagon from the place where the crime was committed to the place where the murderer has concealed the corpse. Then, probably, the horse was turned loose, and wandered here."

"There is evidence in support of that last view," said Nick. "I suppose your sharp eyes noted the wagon tracks in the street and in the yard."

"You bet; I noticed them right away," replied Fairman, with an emphatic nod. "The tracks show that the wagon must have grazed one of the gateposts, and that the horse had strayed about the yard before coming to a halt. I can swear that there was nobody in the wagon when it came into this yard."

"As to the crime having been committed elsewhere," said Nick, "what do you say to this?"

He pointed to a broken bottle on the floor. It had been a large and heavy bottle. The bottom of it, and a few fragments, lay near those bloodstains which were farthest from the coat. The neck of the bottle was some distance away, in a corner.

Nick picked up the bottom of the bottle and showed a faint stain of blood upon a ragged edge of the glass.

Fairman was staggered.

"It looks as if he had been knocked down with that bottle," he admitted. "Perhaps I was wrong. In that case, the body was certainly carried away in the wagon."

"You noticed that a piece had been torn out of the lining of the coat?"

"Yes; but that might have been done long ago."

"I do not think so," said Nick; and he proceeded to tear out another piece.

The first had been a strip about two inches wide and a foot long. Nick put into his pocket that which he had torn off.

"The murderer probably used that to wipe his hands on," commented Fairman.

Nick made no reply. He was scanning the stable floor closely. At last he walked toward a small and rough door which opened from the rear of the stable.

"Here are more bloodstains," he said.

We approached just as Nick opened the door. There were stains upon the threshold, though they were very faint,

scarcely perceptible, in fact. The principal one was nearly round, and somewhat smaller than a watch.

"Let's see what we can find in this direction," said Nick, leading the way into a little garden behind the stable.

"Here are a man's tracks!" exclaimed Fairman. "They're not Bennett's; they're too small. He had enormous feet."

"You'll find several men's tracks if you look closely," remarked Nick. "The searching party seems to have been out here."

There was a path leading toward a field. The ground was very soft, and footprints could be easily traced.

There was one line of them that was plainly visible. It led along the path. I made out that he who had made those footprints had been running rapidly.

Considering the ease with which they could be seen, I was surprised to observe the extreme caution with which Nick proceeded.

After he had gone about fifty yards, however, he went on with more confidence. We passed into the field, which was partly overgrown with grass, and partly bare.

Crossing this, we came to a fringe of trees. Here Nick made quite an extended search. He went down to the bank of a brook which flowed beyond the trees, and I followed him, but I saw no tracks there. Then we returned; and presently Nick found what he was seeking. It was a box made of tinned iron. There had been a padlock on it, but it had been wrenched away. The box was empty.

"You've tracked the thief," said Fairman, in envious admiration. "That's Bennett's cash box, beyond a doubt."

Nick said nothing. He began to walk rapidly back toward the stable.

When he reached the little door he paused for a moment, and, naturally, Fairman and I came to a halt. The schoolmaster turned about, and set his

back against the stable. Then he sprang away, uttering a loud cry, and pointing to the field.

I looked, and saw a woman running. Just as my eye lighted upon her, she dodged behind some bushes on the edge of the garden.

"It's Mrs. Bennett!" cried Fairman. "She's coming back."

"Don't let her know that you saw her," said Nick, and he drew us into the stable.

We watched cautiously from a window. The woman approached the house, shielding herself from observation as well as she could. No one saw her but us. She passed on the other side of the barn. We walked hurriedly through the stable, crossed the yard, and entered the kitchen of the house, just as she came in by a door on the opposite side. The room was an L, and occupied the full width of it.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bennett," said Nick. "Where have you been?"

"Well, that's cool," she rejoined. "If it's any of your business, I've been down to the barn, looking out for the cows."

"You don't seem to take much interest in this robbery."

"Why should I? We'll never see the money again. It's gone, and there's the end of it. Some of those pesky tramps have stolen it. I should think the law might do something to protect us from those critters."

"Where is your husband?"

"I dunno. He's gone off somewhere. He'll be back in a day or two."

"Who hitched up your horse this morning?"

"The tramp, I reckon. He probably intended to steal him, but was frightened away. I heard the horse in the yard, and went out to take care of him."

"Mrs. Bennett," said Fairman, breaking in, "why do you act in this way? A crime has been committed, and you seem disposed to shield the criminal.

Don't you know that we have reason to believe that your husband has met with foul play?"

"You mean he's been murdered?" she cried.

Fairman bowed his head.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed; and then, falling into a chair, she buried her face in her hands, while her frame shook as with sobs.

At first I pitied her, but, on closer inspection, I decided that she was only pretending to cry.

The woman's heartlessness shocked me. That she was an accomplice in the crime was to me a matter of certainty. Her clumsy efforts to account for her husband's absence, and her absurd assumption of the manner of an innocent person ignorant of the facts would have excited my pity if the enormity of her crime had not made them abhorrent.

I tried to question her, but she would not speak. Nothing could induce her to move from that chair or to take her hands from her face.

Nick paid no attention to the woman.

"I'm going over to the railroad station," said he to me. "I want to send telegrams to the surrounding towns, giving a description of the criminal, with directions for his arrest."

"A description!" I cried. "How can you give that?"

"I can furnish one that is infallible," said Nick, with a smile.

"There was something in his footprints——"

Nick shook his head.

"I never saw any that were more commonplace."

"Then I'm all at sea."

Fairman's face took on a strange expression, made up of surprise, disappointment, and a dozen other emotions. He followed Nick to the door.

"You have learned about Martin

Heywood," he said, in a low, anxious voice.

"Never heard of him," said Nick. "Who is he?"

"This woman's brother, and the principal in this crime, beyond a doubt. Don't try to deceive me. You are on his track."

"I may be," said Nick; "but, upon my word, I didn't know it."

"Didn't know it!"

"No; what makes you think he's the man?"

"He's Bennett's only enemy. There was a lawsuit. Everybody around here knows that Bennett's testimony would have cost Heywood nine-tenths of all he's worth. He had testified once against his brother-in-law, and Heywood threatened to kill him then."

"The case went against Heywood, but, on appeal, a new trial was ordered. The case was to be called to-morrow."

"Wilson had the summons for Bennett in his pocket. He wasn't going fishing; he was coming here to serve it."

"Rather early in the morning," said Nick.

"Yes; Wilson was afraid Bennett would evade it. As a matter of fact, he was afraid for his life if he testified."

"And you think that Heywood killed him to suppress his testimony?"

"Yes; is there any other explanation of this woman's conduct? She knows her brother did the deed. She's trying to shield him."

"That's a promising theory," said Nick. "Suppose you go to Heywood's house and try to work it up, while I go and send my telegrams."

"Telegrams? Do you think Heywood has run away?"

"I don't know anything about it."

Fairman was puzzled, but not more than I was.

"You seem to be guessing," said the schoolmaster, at last. "You discover

evidence accidentally. I've heard a good deal about your luck, and now I believe it.

"I'll tell you one piece of evidence that you've turned up. There's a way to Heywood's house along that brook where you found the box. What do you think of that?"

"It's quite interesting," said Nick. "I suppose Mrs. Bennett ran away to see her brother?"

"Of course."

"Very natural."

Nick nodded an adieu to Fairman, and walked away in the direction of the railroad station. I followed him. As we went down the road, we saw Fairman going the other way, probably toward Heywood's. There was nobody to watch Mrs. Bennett, unless the men who loitered about the stable yard could see her through the windows.

Nick sent his telegrams, and we spent the forenoon waiting around the station for replies.

None had come at twelve o'clock. We decided to go to Farmer Marvin's for dinner, crossed the railroad tracks, and struck into the road, when suddenly Nick went down upon his knees, and closely examined the ground.

I had no doubt that he had recognized a footprint, but none was visible to me. Nick was surely on the trail. He followed it back to the railroad, then up the path, beside the tracks, until at last he stopped beside some freight cars that were stalled there.

After several efforts he opened the door of one of them. As he did so, I noticed a faint mark of blood on the wood just under the door.

The light that struck into the car shone full into the face of a frowzy tramp who sat on a sackful of merchandise, and stared stupidly at us.

His hand rested upon the head of the most miserable dog that ever I saw. The animal was a mongrel of a thousand low breeds at once. It had suf-

ferred in its wanderings even more than its master. I observed with pity that the creature was lean with hunger, and that one of its feet had been badly hurt, and was bandaged.

It offered a feeble resistance—the best of which the faithful brute was capable—when Nick sprang into the car and laid his hand on the man's shoulder.

"You are under arrest," was all the detective said.

The tramp swore a round oath, but he made no resistance. He took the wretched dog in his arms, and tenderly carried it out of the car. Once upon the ground, the dog ran well enough with three legs.

There was a rude hotel opposite the station. Nick put the tramp and the dog into a room there, set the landlord to guard them, and called to me to follow.

"We have the criminal now," he said. "It's time to look for the body of the victim."

"And for the money," said I. "The tramp had none when you searched him."

"We shall find that, too," rejoined Nick.

As we walked along, I plied him with questions about the proof against the man whom he had arrested. All I could get out of him was the somewhat irrelevant remark that he had a right to make an arrest, for Wilson had authorized him to act as a deputy.

We came at last to a very nice house, nearly two miles beyond the station. To my surprise, we found Fairman at the gate.

"What does Heywood say?" asked Nick.

So that was Heywood's house. I had not known it before.

"He won't talk," replied Fairman; "but his manner is conclusive. That man is guilty."

Heywood appeared at this moment.

"This is all foolishness about Sam Bennett being murdered," he said. "And, as for my having anything to do with it, that's worse yet. I've got nothing agin' Bennett."

"Since when have you been reconciled?" demanded Nick.

The man bit his lip, but did not answer.

"Now, Mr. Heywood," said Nick, "look right down in the dirt at your feet and you will see the track of Mr. Bennett's wagon, made last evening. He came over to see you, and, in my opinion, he's here yet. I'm going to search your house."

Heywood groaned.

"You've got the authority, have you?"

Nick nodded. Of course, it was a "bluff."

Heywood turned toward the house.

"Sam!" he yelled. "Come out here. There's no use of staying in there any longer."

Presently the elongated form of Samuel Bennett appeared at the door.

"Well, I swear!" ejaculated Fairman.

"Good day, Mr. Bennett," said Nick. "I was told that you were murdered, but I didn't believe it. I'm not yet sure whether you've been robbed."

"No, I ha'n't lost nothin'," growled Bennett. "I took all my money out'n that hidin' place last evening. I'd seen a tramp critter hanging 'round my barn, and I was afeared."

"He was in the barn when you hitched up your horse last night," said Nick. "He watched you through a knot hole in the door between the barn and the stable. I saw the prints of his muddy boots on the floor. He had to stand on tiptoe to see through the hole, and he supported himself by partly gripping a dusty beam over the door."

"He saw you when you went to your bank, but he didn't know that you took your money out. After you were gone,

he ripped up the floor and stole the empty box.

"Meanwhile his dog stepped on a piece of an old bottle, and cut his foot. Then he limped over to your coat, and lay down on it while he nursed his wound. The bloodstains led to the theory that you had been murdered. Our friend Mr. Fairman was impolite enough to say that some of the dog's hair looked very much like yours.

"After a study of the case, I sent some telegrams requesting the police of neighboring towns to arrest a tramp with a three-legged dog. I subsequently arrested him myself. I also recovered your box, by following the trail of three legs out of four—for I knew, of course, that the dog was so badly hurt that he would hold up one of his feet.

"Your wife's disappearance this morning, and her subsequent demeanor could be explained only on the theory that she had come over here to see you,

and had found you all right. Therefore I came to seek you here. I suppose she persuaded you not to testify against her brother, and that you intended to hide at his house to avoid service of the summons. Am I right?"

"Yes, blast you!" said Bennett.

"And the horse?" queried Nick. "Did he run away?"

"Yes; confound him. I had just hitched him up this morning, intending to take him back before it was light, when he bolted. I went after him, but lost the track, and when I at last got in sight of the house, there were a lot of people around, and I didn't dare to go in."

Nick turned to Fairman.

"I'm obliged to you for a pleasant and novel experience," he said. "Will you join us on our fishing trip this afternoon?"

"No!" growled Fairman. "I'm going home, to kick myself."



LOSES HIS FALSE TEETH WHILE IN JAIL

THE whole Cheyenne, Wyoming, police force, moved by compassion and urged on by apprehension that the owner will starve to death in the meanwhile, is searching for a set of false teeth, the property of W. Kennedy, of Johnsons, Colorado, who is reported to be living on bread and milk while the search is in progress.

The teeth were lost by Kennedy while he was in the city jail, following an incursion into "wet" Cheyenne from "dry" Colorado, and Kennedy complains that he hasn't the price of a new set. He relates his woe in the following letter to Chief of Police Embery:

CHIEF: Doubtless you remember me and doubtless you don't, but I'm the guy what lost a pair of false teeth while I was in your bull pen. I didn't know that I had lost them until I got home and started on steak and potatoes. Now I won't be able to eat until I get them or part with ten (\$10) dollars, which I haven't got. Yours in pain,

W. KENNEDY,
Johnsons, Colo.

Chief Embery has had the jail searched and has instructed the police to search all other inmates of the jail at the time Kennedy was a prisoner there that they may be able to locate the teeth, but no trace of them has been found.

The Captive Soul

by H. Ellis Davis

I HAD arrived the day before for some late fishing; but as the weather was raw and gusty, I remained inside my little one-room lodge and sorted tackle.

I had built this camp several years before, and, two or three times each year, I came here to fish or hunt ducks. It was two miles up the winding bayou from the Mississippi Sound, and stood on a little eminence surrounded by scrub oak, with the somber swamp stretching away at its back. It was, perhaps, a dreary, lonesome spot; but to me, a busy practicing physician of New Orleans, the days spent here alone, relaxing my mind, exercising my body, were welcomed periods of rest.

On this trip, I had promised myself I would do something I had wanted to do for a long time—visit an old savant, a Doctor Hetzel, who lived across the sound on Gull Island. From the mouth of my bayou, his big, white house, which, except for one servant, he occupied alone, could be plainly seen on the western extremity of the island, a mere strip of sand running for miles along the outer edge of the sound.

Living the life of a recluse, Hetzel was hard to approach. But I had read several of his books with interest, and had a desire to meet their author. Those on vivisection, especially, were written with a boldness and finish far beyond anything by his contemporaries, showing throughout, where a fixed end was to be reached, the ruthless fanaticism of the true Teuton.

Wealthy, seclusive, a mysterious

family of scientists, the Hetzels had lived on Gull Island since beyond the memory of the oldest natives, and this old man was the last of his line. Tradition had it that out of the East had come a great ship with the first of them, and the material for the big stone house, and back into the East it had gone, never to return.

As the dusky twilight began to creep into the room, and I bent lower and lower over my work, suddenly, without hail or knock, the door opened and a man entered—a man stooped, white-locked, wrinkled.

Trying to show no surprise at his sudden appearance, as I was seated on the floor, I pushed a chair toward him with my foot and invited him to sit down.

Listlessly, he sank into the chair and sat there in the half light, regarding me with an expressionless stare, his lips forming words and moving without sound, as is often the case with very old people. At last he spoke, and I was surprised to find his voice clear and strong, with scarcely a quaver.

“Doctor Tyson, who I am makes no difference, but what I am about to relate, if I can force myself into the telling, will shock the entire civilized world.”

Rising nervously from his chair, he several times paced the length of the room; then:

“But I cannot shake from my mind the doubt; cannot remain decided whether or not I should tell you and let the world take its action in the matter.

"I am going mad! Yes, I fully realize, now, that my reason is leaving me. The doubt, the horrible doubt, inflicts a greater strain than the mind of any man can withstand! I cannot decide whether I should divulge what I know, and tell the world where to find the proof of my statement, or remain silent. But when I am wholly demented, when I am confined to a room with a keeper, then my uncontrolled babblings will disclose my secret. But who would consider the wild raging of a madman?"

"Then, another uncertainty is madness itself, the uncertainty as to whether I should have killed him—that sorcerer who, by the black art of science, can hold forever captive the souls of men and women."

The man had now worked himself into a frenzy, and the palsied hand clawed again and again at the white locks straggling over the shrunken, leathery brow. Becoming somewhat alarmed, I said sharply:

"Here, old man, calm yourself! Come, sit down and tell me what you wish me to know."

He turned on me fiercely:

"'Old man!' And how old do you think I am?"

Taken aback, I did not answer, and he continued:

"I am not thirty years old! A man under thirty; yet, my hair is as white as yours will be at eighty. My body has shrunk to a mere shadow of its former bulk. Sleep has almost deserted me; for, when my tortured soul would rest, I no sooner begin to sink into a happy unconsciousness than I start up with the shriek: 'Why did I not kill him?' Or, in the grip of a nervous, clammy sweat, gasp in horror: 'Suppose I had?'"

"Already I catch myself at times muttering my thoughts aloud, and, when I meet people, they turn as I pass to watch me with suspicion. It is not long,

not long before I will be a driveling, senile idiot—no, a shrieking maniac!

"Yet, I linger within the sound of the lap-lap of the waves that seem to beat upon my soul; for, from them, there ever comes a voice that holds me."

Getting to my feet, I took him firmly by the arm and pushed him back into the chair.

"Calm yourself," I told him. "If you like, it needn't go any further, but you must tell me what is on your mind that's troubling you so much. I might be able to help you."

Suddenly, he half leaped from his chair, leaning forward toward me, his bony, clenched fist thrust almost into my face.

"Yes, I will tell you! By the heavens, I will tell you, and may the responsibility rest where it belongs!"

He got to his feet and advanced toward me, thrusting his face forward, so that I fell back.

"I could have killed him!" he hissed. "My hands were about his throat—and he slipped from my clutch." His long fingers worked convulsively. "But I could have killed him!"

Almost in desperation, I took him by his two hands and again made him sit down. Then, standing in front of him, still holding his hands, I said to him:

"Look here! If you expect to tell me your story, begin at the beginning. I know that some horrible thing has happened to you; but get behind it. Tell me about yourself before it occurred. Have you always lived here? If not, where did you come from? What did you do for a living? Now sit there for a minute and think it over calmly before you begin."

For a long time he was silent, looking vacantly in front of him; while I again took my place on the floor and resumed my interrupted work. Then, looking forlornly down at himself, he began:

"It is hard to realize that, instead of

this bunch of ragged nerves, I was once a strong man."

Pausing, he remained silent so long that I laid aside my tackle and, sitting with arms clasped about my knees, prompted him:

"What was your occupation?"

"I was a lawyer, practicing in Mobile, the junior member of a firm of three. Because I had been doing a good deal of extra work, and was pretty well run down, the senior member persuaded me to take a week's rest, and come down here on the sound to the little village of Cody, with the hope of regaining my appetite. As I have always had an aversion to any large body of water, I tried to beg off; but he was obstinate.

"One afternoon, shortly after I had arrived, while floundering about in the shallow water, ankle-deep in the slimy ooze that covers the bottom, trying to persuade myself that I was enjoying a swim, a clumsy old scow, filled with a crowd of laughing boys and girls, swung slowly out from the near-by wharf.

"'Come and join us!' called a young man I had met at the hotel. 'We are going to pole out to deep water, where we can have some sure-enough swimming and diving.'

"Scrambling aboard, I was introduced to the party; but it was with a sinking sensation that I noticed the water growing deeper and deeper, the long poles with which we were propelled becoming more and more submerged, as we moved slowly out.

"Then, one of the girls, Vivian White, rose from where she was crouched on the bottom, and made her way to the bow. As she stood there, poised for a dive, she seemed to me like some goddess of the waves. A rubber bathing hat, above a beautiful, smiling face, covered her head; her body was slender and graceful; the wind

whipped her short skirt about strong, shapely limbs.

"For an instant, her arms were raised high above her head; then, deep, deep into the black water, she plunged, and I shuddered as it closed above her. But in an instant she reappeared, and, swimming to the side of the boat where I sat, held out her hand to me. I helped her aboard for another dive, and, from then on I thought of nothing but her. Devoting myself entirely to her service, I did not enter the water that afternoon.

"From that time, I became her admirer, her follower, her ardent suitor.

"She was a good sailor, and often took me with her in her crazy little cat-boat. But the haunting fear of the water still clung to me, and many times I begged her to give up sailing. She just laughed, however, and my misgivings seemed only to amuse her.

"It was now time for me to return to my work, but I arranged for another month. For I passionately loved this sailor girl from an up-State town; and at last, one moonlight night on the beach, I held her in my arms and made her acknowledge that she also loved.

"The next morning, I met her as usual; but soon she sailed away alone in her little boat, straight out across the sound, leaving me disconsolate on the end of the wharf, to follow the white sail with my eyes until it became a tiny speck, and then disappeared altogether, seeming to mingle with the rippling, oily water.

"After moping about for an hour or two, I began to notice black clouds rolling and banking in the southern sky, and, landsman though I was, I knew that one of those sudden, fierce squalls was gathering, and I was filled with terror.

"Frantically I tried to find a boatman who would go with me to meet Vivian, in case her own little boat should come to harm; but each, in turn,

shook his head. Drenched by the spray, madly I raced up and down the beach, across which the wind had now begun whipping in fierce gusts, vainly scanning the horizon for a sight of her returning sail. All that met my straining gaze was the water, now broken into choppy waves, and a distant haze that was the long, low outline of Gull Island lying on the outer edge of the sound, with a tiny white spot at its western end, the home of the old scientist, Hetzel.

"That night, a fishing smack, beating her way in before the gale, towed behind her Vivian's little, overturned boat, which had been picked up near that dangerous pass between Gull and Pinto Islands, where the incoming and outgoing tides surge through like a mill race. Here, as you know, many lives have been lost, and the victims' bodies never recovered, presumably having been swept out into the gulf.

"At dawn, the wind having gone down, I persuaded a boatman to take me in his gasoline launch to look for Vivian. As she was such a strong swimmer, I was in hopes that she might have swum to one of the islands. When we rounded the western end of Gull Island, and entered the pass, the wind and waves hurled against our bow, while the outgoing tide surged around us in a torrent.

"Suddenly, with a wheezy grunt, the engine died, and our launch, tossed around by a big wave against its bow, lay in the trough of the sea. A crest broke over us, half filling the boat with water, and it seemed about to sink. With a yell to me to follow, the boatman kicked off his shoes and swam diagonally across to a point on the eastern end of Pinto. But the old terror of the water, which had been crowded out of my mind during our search, now returned to grip me. Crouching in the bottom, I screamed in an uncontrolled frenzy, while the boat, knocked about

by wind and tide, rolled and spun, and crest after crest broke over me.

"Then there was a crash, a dizzy upheaval, and I was flung through the air to the sand, the boat rolling completely over me, crushing my body under it.

"How long I lay there, I do not know; but it must have been hours, for, when at last I staggered dizzily to my feet, it was growing dark. Casting my eyes about for some possible refuge, I for the first time noticed Hetzel's house, a great, white pile, without a light showing, set back among dwarf pine and scrub oak. Stumbling up the beach toward the house, I became aware that my wavering course was crossing and recrossing footsteps in the sand that led in the same direction.

"I stopped to examine them, then dropped to my hands and knees to get a better look; for the sand, left firm and hard by the late rain, held a good impression, and showed the maker of the footsteps to have been a boy or woman wearing canvas bathing shoes, such as I knew Vivian to have worn. Rising again to my feet, I began following the tracks back in the direction from which they had come. They led down to the beach, turned up it for a hundred yards, then, abruptly turning again, they led straight down into the water, as if the one walking there had come up out of the sea.

"For a while, I stood looking out over the dark water, trying to grasp the full significance of what I had discovered, for, if Vivian had swum ashore, she would have waded out of the shallow water and turned in the direction of the only shelter that presented itself, Hetzel's house.

"Running back to where I had first discovered the footprints, I began to follow them, only soon to lose them among the grass and shrubbery. But so obviously were they leading to the house, that I did not pause, and, as I

neared the front entrance, increased my pace again to a run.

"With no surrounding grounds, the house was built on the sands of this bleak little island, and was occupied only by Hetzel and the old man who attended his wants. Giving no thought to the mystery with which superstition enshrouded the place, I raced up the steps and rapped loudly on the front door. But my knock was answered only by hollow echoes within, and I repeated it several times, each time harder and more insistent. Baffled, I caught the knob and gave the door a vigorous shake. It was securely locked.

"Going to one of the old-fashioned blinds in front of a window reaching to the floor, I tried to insert my hand between the slats and unfasten the latch. Not being able to do this, I deliberately kicked loose two of the little pieces; for I was obsessed with the idea that Vivian was in the house, and to find it closed against me only made me the more determined to enter.

"With the shutter open, I quickly raised the window and passed into the room. Here, all was in darkness, and, as the matches in my pocket were soaked and useless, I began groping about for the mantelshelf with the hope of finding some there. At last, treading on the hearth beneath, I found the shelf, and my searching fingers soon encountered a candlestick about which lay several matches.

"With the candle held high, the little blaze flickering above my head, I inspected the room, which was evidently the library, as row upon row of scientific works lined the walls. Going to a door that stood open at one end, and peering out into what seemed to be the hall, I looked intently to the right, then to the left. Unable to fathom the heavy darkness beyond the feeble rays of my candle, I stepped gingerly forth.

"To the left, toward the front of the house, something sprawled on the floor,

and, in dread, I shrank back until I could no longer see its outline, and stood panting with nervousness. Then, calming myself, and deciding that the object could be nothing more than a rug, I resolutely advanced to inspect it at closer range.

"It was a man—stiff, cold, dead. He lay on his back, and seemed to have died in the grip of some anguishing physical struggle; for his eyes protruded, and his tongue stuck out between the bluish lips. His shirt had been torn open at the collar, and, stooping lower, I could see that his stringy throat had been pierced by what I at first took to be some sharp instrument. There were two small holes on each side, from which a little blood had oozed and dried on the chalky skin. Then it dawned on me that the wounds must have been inflicted by some animal. The man's throat had evidently been gripped in powerful jaws that had strangled him to death.

"With an apprehensive glance about me, I turned from that thing on the floor and went back into the library, where I remembered to have seen, on a flat desk, a daggerlike paper knife of brass, which might prove handy as a weapon. For, horror-struck though I was, though I longed to flee from the accursed place, I still felt that Vivian had come here, and knew, now, that I must find her. That thing in the hall was all that remained of the old butler. Where was his master? Where was Vivian?

"Taking in my left hand the candle, and a box of matches I had found on the desk, firmly grasping the weapon in my right, I again entered the hall, this time turning toward the rear of the house. The darkness was filled with terrors. Each instant it seemed that some weird monster of the gloomy house would spring upon me from the obscurity ahead. Once, a chair, directly in my path, took a sinister shape

and appeared to be rearing at me. I turned and fled, stopping only when the light went out, and I could no longer see to run. But I relit the candle, and again turned to my search; for I had now reached that desperate stage where an animal, even a cowardly animal, when absolutely cornered, will fight till the last breath leaves its body.

"Following the hall to its lower end, I found another running to the right. As I turned down this, I suddenly stopped, my blood freezing in my veins. In the darkness ahead, glowing in the candlelight, shone a pair of eyes; then, with a rumbling snarl, a great object came hurtling toward me.

"Calling on Heaven to help me, I waited, the knife raised above my head.

"The creature struck me heavily in the chest, hurling me backward to the floor, and the candle flew wildly, leaving me in utter darkness. But, even as I fell, with all my might I struck, landed solidly, and the knife was wrenched downward and out of my hand.

"For a while I lay where I had fallen, half stunned, instinctively covering my throat with my hands, expecting each moment to feel the hot breath on my face, the horrible fangs biting into my flesh. Then, I became aware of a scuffling sound, a few heavy, deep-drawn breaths, a gurgling, rattling cough, and all was still.

"At last, on hands and knees, I began groping for the matches, which had been flung out of my hand with the candle. Once, I touched something hairy and warm, and shrank back, my hands held before me to ward off an attack. When my search was rewarded, I struck a light, dreading what it might show me.

"On the floor, weltering in its blood, the knife still sticking in its throat, lay an enormous dog, a powerful, savage, murderous brute. Drawing out the bloody knife, I proceeded down the hall to the other end, where I found a heavy

door standing ajar. My light fell through the opening on a small landing, with a flight of steps to the left descending into the darkness.

"As I shoved the door farther open to pass through, it resisted; an unseen hand seemed to be there, pushing against me. Determined to fight my way if necessary, I threw forward my weight, shoving the door wide, and, as I did so, kicked a soft object from under my feet, down the steps. I found that a strong spring was what had been shoving against me, and, as I released it, the door slammed to with the click of a latch, evidently having been kept from shutting by the thing over which I had stumbled.

"Trying the door to make sure that I could open it again when necessary, I descended the steps, which led down about ten feet, and stooped to examine whatever it was over which I had stumbled. It was an old, oilskin hat—Vivian's! This was the first positive evidence I had found that she had been here, and I do not know whether my feeling was one of relief or of horror.

"I now found myself in an underground passage, paved with cement, and my footsteps echoed noisily as I pushed on into the blackness of the gloomy way.

"Then, right at me, before I noticed it, I saw something that made me start back with such violence that my candle flickered ominously. A bare, human foot, sole turned toward me, toes widely spread, was what my bulging eyes saw; and the leg to this foot—that was all.

"Pressed against the wall, I was circling the ghastly fragment, keeping as far from it as possible. Abruptly, however, I turned and bent above it. Could it be— Was it— But I drove the horrible thought from my mind, and hurried on down the passage.

"At length, I reached a door at what seemed to be its end. This was unlocked, and I pushed it open to find my-

self in an enormous laboratory. Great containers, filled with chemicals, lined the shelves and stood on tables; many curious-looking machines for making tests sat about; a brilliant flood of artificial light made the room as bright as day. For a moment I paused, amazed at the strange scene in such an out-of-the-way place. Then, cautiously, silently, I began to cross the room.

"Although this was very large, on account of the stands and tables holding apparatus, with here and there a small revolving bookcase, I could see only a few feet in any direction. It looked like the accumulation of ages. Then I came on a cleared space, and what seemed to be a workbench, or operating table more likely, for a number of surgical instruments lay scattered about. As I looked around me, my eyes suddenly encountered a sight that petrified me where I stood.

"Still, even in the grip of that awful shock, I tried to calm myself, tried to reason that it was some wonderful work of art on which I looked. Some master, I argued, had wrought this marvelously lifelike appearance, so far beyond anything I would have imagined could be fashioned by the hand of man.

"Held by a pedestal four or five feet high, supported by a slender neck of wonderful beauty and symmetry, which rose from a base of ivory, was a head. The face, delicately tinted, was perfect in contour; slightly oval, but with a proportionate distance between chin and brow. The lips were a scarlet bow, full, sensuous, appealing; the nose was perfect; long lashes, resting on the cheeks of delicate pink, hid eyes whose slumbrous depths could only be imagined. The hair, dark, soft, lustrous, abundant, arranged at the back of the head, with little tendrils falling over the ears, formed a fit setting for the radiant beauty of the face. It was the head of Vivian White!

"Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the

dark lashes lifted, disclosing eyes of limpid night, eyes from which a soul looked out, speaking to me in accents of comfort and peace as I groveled there on the floor. A smile, sweet, tender, solicitous, appealing, passed over the face and was gone; the eyes slowly closed, as if unable to resist the desire to sleep.

"To some extent, the look, the message from those beautiful eyes, calmed me. Kneeling there, speechless, numb, my brain in a whirl, totally unable to comprehend what I saw, I yet began to realize, in a way, what had happened—the operating table, the surgical instruments.

"At a slight sound, I turned to find Hetzel at my elbow. He showed no surprise, and even greeted me with a smile. Smiling and bowing and rubbing his hands together there before me, I recognized him for what he was, and into my half-crazed brain came the impulsive desire to kill. I know that I snarled like an angry dog, and, as I had dropped my knife, for lack of a better weapon, I caught up a heavy stone crock, which was on a table beside me, and, in another moment, would have knocked out his brains where he stood. With a gesture, however, he stopped me.

"'Hold on, young man,' he said, without showing the slightest trace of alarm, 'I have something to tell you. Sit down.'

"Taking his seat on a stool, he motioned me to a chair, the cool indifference of the man making it impossible for me to carry out my sanguinary purpose. Or there might have been a half-formed idea there was something for him to say—something he could say. Or he might have thrown some spell over me. At any rate, I sat down, and, after a slight pause, he began:

"'You have just made a discovery that fills you with horror—the more so, because you cannot comprehend its sig-

nificance. I will explain to you what has happened to Miss White.

"The name of Elie Metchnikoff is, perhaps, familiar to you; for he is the greatest man in his field to-day—except myself. To prove out a certain line of theories, my grandfather began work in this laboratory more than a hundred years ago. He left the work to be finished by my father, who, after years of labor, passed it, still uncompleted, on to me; so that more than a century of incessant toil and study has been the work necessary to produce results that I have reached.

"Where Metchnikoff is to-day, I arrived twenty years ago. Metchnikoff has said that, under certain conditions, man can live forever. He is right; but—he has never yet found those conditions. He is on the right track, his theories are all sound; however, his greatest opponent is man himself.

"Metchnikoff has found that life is made difficult in the animal body, and finally ended, by certain protoplasmic cells; and the place where these bacteria get in their best work is in the intestinal tract. The obvious remedy, therefore, is to introduce something that will destroy this death-producing enemy, and, with the discovery of the microbe glycobacterium, the problem appeared solved. So it is—if this microbe can be kept alive in sufficient quantities. But, to do this, it must be fed the right food, and, to feed it, you must first feed the man in whose intestine it is living.

"That is the task that can never be accomplished; for, unfortunately, man is so constituted that he is a slave to his appetites. What man, do you think, unless he was put in a cage and fed like a beast, would maintain a lifelong diet of the required kind? I have solved the problem in the only logical way."

"He went to the stand that supported Vivian's head.

"It has been demonstrated that when the animal stops breathing, the tissues of the body do not always die, but that, provided with the proper medium, they can be kept indefinitely alive. This base—indicating that from which the neck arose—is filled with a liquid that will feed the tissues of the head forever with all the food necessary for healthy reproduction. She is the fifth person to whom I have given everlasting life, and I find that, rid of the encumbrance of a body, the brain is clearer and more capable of concentrated thought. After I have made my discoveries known to the world, it will be only a question of time when people will live to a certain age under normal conditions, then have the body removed, and the real being, consisting of, or closely allied to, the brain, will continue to live; and the great work of the world will be carried on by these clear-brained thinkers.

"Miss White will remain in a state of coma for, perhaps, a week. Come, I will show you the other people I have with me."

"Yes; I actually sat and listened to that fiend, that archvivisectionist, as he expounded his hellish theories! Indeed such was my state of mind that, at his invitation, I arose and followed him into an adjoining room.

"There we found the heads of four men and women, each mounted on its pedestal. To my further astonishment, if that is the word to express the mental shock I had sustained, they were conversing in low, well-modulated voices. As I entered, an old graybeard looked at me sadly and said in a firm, clear voice, as though speaking to the others: 'Another who will be denied the peace of death.'

"Strange, but the significance of his remark did not strike me, and, still in a kind of daze, I followed Hetzel back into the laboratory. The scientist, who was in advance, said:

"This way; I wish to show you something more."

"He turned from sight around a great bookcase, and I was just about to follow when something, and it seemed the voice of Vivian, told me: 'Look above you.'

"Following the voice, or impulse from her, whatever it was, I looked up, and was able to spring back just in time to prevent being completely enveloped in a great blanket, ten feet square, that came fluttering down from overhead. As it was, a corner struck me in the face, and I staggered drunkenly, my head reeling from a sickening, stupefying odor that came from its folds.

"Then, in a flash, it dawned on me what had just happened. Hetzel intended to add me to his list of subjects.

"The spell was broken. With a spring, I caught the old viper by the throat, intending to throttle the life out of him; but, with the agility of a cat, he twisted out of my grasp.

"Not to be checked in my intent to kill him, in mad fury I caught up from a table a heavy piece of copper pipe and swung it aloft to crush his skull, intending, then, to take my poor little captive soul and escape from that place of living-death. But, with that same gesture—the power of which I cannot explain—that had arrested my hand before, the old man stopped me.

"'Kill me,' he said, 'and Vivian White will also perish. The last ingredient is to be added to her food on the third day. Should this be left out, within a week's time the flesh would begin to shrivel and dry, until nothing would be left but a grinning skull; and she would remain conscious, as her brain would be the last to go. Before I perfected this last element of food, I lost just seventeen subjects.'

"He laughed satanically as he said this, and the weird light of fanaticism shone in his eyes. As my hands fell nerveless to my sides, he continued:

"The material for my laboratory has been furnished from among those counted as lost in the treacherous pass, who were but washed ashore and sought refuge in my house—and found it. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"With the diabolical laughter of that fiend ringing in my ears, the pipe slipped from my limp fingers, and, helpless, I turned once more to that beautiful face.

"Again the lashes were slowly lifting, and, for an instant, the soft eyes rested tenderly, wistfully on me. When they were again closed, as though in sleep, I was seized with a feeling of utter despair. Then, something seemed to snap in my brain. A great fear overcame me. With horror that was a frenzy of terror gripping my heart, I turned and fled—fled shrieking from the place."

It had now grown quite dark in the room, so that objects were discernible only in outline by the reflection from the windows. After a pause, my visitor suddenly leaned forward, his face thrust close to mine.

"The soul of her whom I love is there now, a captive in that chamber of horrors. Tell me, man of science, what I should have done. Advise me what to do!

"Ah," he said, as I remained silent, "you have no answer for me! I should have not expected it. The uncertainty must remain. And it is making of me a madman, a madman, a madman!" His voice died out in a shrill wail.

I rose and lit a lamp, the light revealing him slouched back in his chair, his haggard face more drawn than ever, his eyes staring vacantly in front of him.

"How did you escape from the island?" I asked at last.

"I do not remember anything more. A searching party found me the next day down on the beach beside the boat.

I was unconscious at the time, and knew nothing for a week. I was severely bruised about the head and body where the boat had crushed me, injuries unheeded in my excitement."

Suddenly, as abruptly as he had come, he rose from his chair, crossed the room, and disappeared through the door into the dripping night.

By two o'clock, the gale had risen to a hurricane, and, stout as was my cabin, it trembled in the grip of the wind. Now and then, above the roar of the tempest, I could hear the crash of some great pine in the flat woods to the north of me. That September storm along the Gulf coast was the event from which people in that region reckon time.

It was noon the next day before I ventured out on the flooded bayou in a canoe that I had fortunately carried indoors. Making my way over to Cody, I was astonished at the havoc that had been done by wind and water.

The story I had heard the night before had gripped me with a strong

fascination, that I could not shake off. I tried to put my strange visitor down as unbalanced, as some poor unfortunate under a delusion. But, somehow, there was such a ring of the genuine in what he had told me, something in his description of the scientist so like what I imagined Hetzel to be, that I felt, in spite of my desire to discredit the whole thing, the man's statement warranted an investigation.

I tried to find some one in Cody from whom I could make inquiries. But all were in dire distress and confusion, with scant heed for anything but their own troubles. Many houses had been wrecked, several lives had been lost, and everybody was more or less uncomfortable and miserable.

At last I came on a little group at the water's edge, gazing off across the sound, and taking turns at peering through a pair of glasses.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Hetzel's place is gone," replied one of them. "That whole end of the island is washed away. Here, take a look."



FINGER PRINTS AGAIN PROVE VALUE

TWO brothers, twins, as alike in appearance as two peas in a pod, have been discovered in the rogues' gallery records to be serving separate sentences of five years for burglaries committed in Los Angeles.

When the pictures of the brothers reached Adolph Juhl, head of the police identification bureau, in San Francisco, California, it was thought at first that the prison records were in error, that through some slip two records had been sent out for the same man.

Juhl immediately wired to the officials at San Quentin and Folsom, asking for the finger prints of Mesak Kartangen, which is the name claimed by both men, and it was only when the prints were examined under the glass that it was found that there were two separate and distinct Mesak Kartangens.

The men have prison records in various parts of the country, and both are graduates of reformatories. One was convicted March 20, 1915, and the other March 18th, of this year. They are twenty-two years old.

Snarled Identities

by Douglas Grey

CHAPTER XL.

FLINT OUTLINES HIS CAMPAIGN.

IN a moment Doctor Lord and the nurse were back at the patient's side.

"I must ask you gentlemen to go," the physician said crisply. "This has been too much for him, as it is, and any further excitement might cause serious complications, if nothing worse."

There was nothing for it but to withdraw, and to hope that the effect of the interview would not be as serious as the doctor suggested.

Fortunately, the detective instinct had been strong in Cray, notwithstanding his condition, and he had covered the ground pretty thoroughly—surprisingly so, in view of the few words he had spoken. His statement about the suit case, and his description of the car might prove particularly valuable.

Flint took pains to interview Simpson, his wife, and the servant before leaving the house, and then paid a visit to the garage.

He smiled as he noted the subterfuge of the underground gasoline tank.

"Quite clever, on the surface," he remarked, "but Simpson seems to be a queer mixture. He impresses you at one time with his cleverness, at another with stupidity."

"I don't see anything stupid about this," Griswold objected. "It strikes me as very ingenious. It permitted him to dig up the ground to his heart's content without arousing suspicion."

"True," conceded the detective. "The ordinary person would have seen nothing strange about it; but doesn't the presence of a gasoline tank underground, or any other kind, strike you as a little peculiar when a man owns an electric?"

The millionaire looked very sheepish.

"I'm afraid I must plead guilty to stupidity as well," he confessed. "That didn't occur to me, and I doubt if it ever would."

The two detectives made a thorough examination of the little garage, the ground about it, and the pile of lumber, as well as the road at the rear.

They found some finger prints, and photographed them carefully, after bringing out other details by artificial means. They were inclined to believe that some of them belonged to Gordon, and if so, their discovery would prove valuable. Beyond that, however, they learned little.

"Well, we had better part company here, Judson," Flint told his assistant. "I'm going to let you pick up the trail of the electric car and follow it, if you can. See if you can locate the machine. Probably it has been abandoned long before this, for it would have to be recharged before it could go very far. Doubtless, Green Eye remembered that, and deserted it before such attention was necessary. Still, if you can find where he dispensed with it, you can get a clew to his subsequent movements, especially as he was burdened with a couple of very heavy suit cases."

"Consider me on the job," was Jud-

son's ready reply. "I'll start work right away, and keep going as long as the going is good. How about you, though? What are you going to tackle?"

"I shall return home at once," Flint replied, "and go through the safe. I must find out which records are missing, and when I have learned that, I ought to be able to catch the rascal sooner or later."

"You mean that he'll be sure to visit some of the people interested, or write to them, and that you can nab him in that way?" his assistant asked.

"That's the idea. If Green Eye hasn't learned of our return—and I sincerely hope he hasn't—he won't lose much time in getting to work at the blackmailing business, and you may be sure he'll choose some of the most tempting of the local people for his first victims."

Judson held up his hand.

"I get you," he said. "That's just what will happen, unless he's scared off, and he'll work quickly, for fear you may return earlier than you had expected, and get wind of the whole thing. Alongside of that, my job seems pretty punk, but you are the general."

"Your job is a necessary one, and we may need all the dope on Green Eye's movements that we can get," Flint told him.

Very shortly afterward they separated, Judson remaining behind, while Flint and the millionaire reentered the car and started back to the city.

Very little was said on the latter's journey. To be sure, Griswold seemed willing enough to keep the conversational ball rolling, but he soon found that Flint was of a different mind. He was glad, therefore, when the detective's house was reached, and Flint stepped out of the machine, after instructing the chauffeur to take Griswold wherever he wished to go.

"You think you can catch him, then?" the millionaire asked in parting.

Flint gave him a strange look.

"If I fail in this, I'll shut up shop," the detective replied.

It was said rather lightly, but Griswold was a shrewd student of character, and knew that the famous Nemesis of criminals was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XLI.

WAITING FOR A NIBBLE.

THORNDYKE FLINT hardly knew what to do about the members of his household. They had not yet been informed of the way in which they had been taken in, and it was difficult to decide whether they should be or not. After some reflection, however, the detective decided to say nothing about it, for the present.

They accepted his presence as a matter of course, just as they had done in the case of the impostor, and if he told them the truth, they would be plunged into a state bordering on panic.

Moreover, if Gordon should take a notion to return to the house, after such a revelation, it would be almost impossible for the butler, housekeeper, and the rest to be their natural selves in his presence. If they betrayed their knowledge, they might scare him off just when Flint wished him to be most at his ease.

Flint entered his study, and, after walking up and down for a few minutes, seated himself in his desk chair.

There was a tenseness about his look and every movement he made. He was like a perfectly trained athlete, crouched for a start of some record-breaking dash.

The famous detective was well acquainted with danger, and to risk his life was an easy matter of everyday occurrence. He took up the most serious and dangerous cases without a thought of the possible consequences to himself. Here, however, was something different.

This came nearer home, perhaps, than anything else had ever done, for, through him the honor and peace of mind of numbers of persons—conspicuous targets, all of them—were threatened.

Too late the detective recognized that his reputation was not enough to protect his house and his private safe from violence, and that he had no right to keep such records there. They should all be in a safe-deposit vault.

The reports of his ordinary cases might continue to be kept in his steel filing cabinets, where they were available for ready reference, and those concerning persons of wealth and position—men and women who were tempting prey, and whose secrets, if revealed in the newspapers, would cause a widespread sensation—must be better protected in future.

That, however, would not help the present situation which Flint was now forced to face.

He actually shrank from going over the disarranged papers which Green Eye had left behind, but after a little delay he forced himself to open the safe, empty the remaining pigeonholes, et cetera, and dump their contents on the desk. That done, he sat himself down and went to work.

Fortunately, there was a comparatively small number of papers of that description in the safe, therefore, it did not take very long to go through them and check off those which remained—for the methodical detective had a list of all of them.

In this way, by a process of elimination, Flint quickly learned the ones which had been stolen, and his expression grew grimmer than ever as he realized the shrewdness of Gordon's choice.

Most of the missing papers concerned individuals or families in and around New York, which seemed to imply that a quick, clean-up was contemplated.

Some few, though, involved persons farther away, and these appeared to have been selected because they had offered particularly tempting bait to the blackmailer.

It needed only the brief entries in the index to bring back to Flint's mind all of the important details of each case, and he ground his teeth as he pictured the scoundrel gloating over those same details, and cleverly scheming to demand the top price for their suppression.

"What a haul!" he murmured aloud. "All those papers, and seventy-five or eighty thousand in gold, to boot! If it's really Ernest Gordon with whom we have to deal—and I'm morally certain it is—he must be drunk with joy, for he has made blackmailing an art, and he could not ask anything bigger or more promising of that sort. In his calmer moments, though, he must realize that he won't have the chance to hold up many of these people.

"Doesn't he know that the first man he approaches will in all probability come running to me to demand an explanation, if nothing more? And hasn't it occurred to him that I would receive an urgent summons home under such circumstances?

"Well, if it has, he'll see all the more reason for striking while the iron is hot."

He had put the papers away temporarily, intending to find a safer place for them at the earliest opportunity, when the butler entered the study with a telegram. It proved to be from the warden at Clinton prison, and was a long one—sent "collect," of course.

It contained certain new and significant, though minor, details concerning the supposed death of Green Eye Gordon, and the escape of the yegg from Buffalo, which served to confirm Flint's suspicions, but the most striking thing about the message was the tone of it. It appeared from the latter, that

the warden had been doubtful, or was doubtful now concerning the identity of the man who had been burned. He did not say so, of course, but Flint could read doubt between the lines.

Obviously, the identification had been a very careless one, or else the prison authorities had deliberately winked at the misleading statements which had found their way into the newspapers. Very likely, they took it for granted at first that the partially burned body was that of Gordon, and afterward preferred to hush the thing up rather than let it be known that there was any reason to believe that the redoubtable Green Eye had escaped.

"Well, that settles it, I think, for all practical purposes," the detective told himself. "Cray's identification was a very hasty one, made under very unfavorable circumstances, but when it's taken in connection with this transparent telegram, and especially in connection with the nature, daring, and adroitness of the crime itself, it seems safe enough to conclude that Ernest Gordon is the man I must look for—and find."

Which would be the best course, though? To warn those who might be expected to be approached by the criminal, or to wait until they came to the detective?

After some thought, Flint decided on the latter course. Naturally, he did not wish that every one concerned should know what had happened, for that seemed unnecessary. He believed that Gordon would concentrate on a few intended victims at first, and if the detective could discover who those persons were, he ought to be able to trap the rascal without allowing the others to know what had threatened them.

It was his confident belief that practically every one who might be visited or written to by the blackmailer would try to get in touch with him—Flint—

at once. That made him willing to play this waiting game—at least, for a time.

"The first one who communicates with me," he thought, "should give me a line on the fellow's methods and plans. No one is likely to yield to his demands on the spot, and if I can learn of a proposed rendezvous or two, the rest should be fairly plain sailing—unless the scoundrel learns of my return and plays dead for a while."

He had reached this point in his musings when he heard a furious ring at the doorbell.

"Possibly that's the first of the victims now," he thought. "If it is, I must prepare myself for some more or less well-grounded reproaches. I can stand them, though, if in addition, I'm put on the track of the man I want to lay my hands on more than I ever wanted to lay them on any one else."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FIRST VICTIM.

SHORTLY afterward, the butler knocked at the study door and opened it.

"Mr. Chester J. Gillespie to see you, sir," he announced.

Before Flint could reply, or the butler could get out of the way, for that matter, the young man named pushed into the room, his face pale with agitation.

"You must help me, Mr. Flint!" he cried excitedly. "I——"

He paused as Flint motioned the butler to withdraw and close the door. When the servant had complied, Flint said quietly:

"Sit down, Mr. Gillespie. I'm very sorry to learn that some one has attempted to blackmail you, but there's no necessity for such great haste."

His caller had started to take a chair, but paused with his hand on the back of it, and stared at Flint in the greatest amazement. Presently, a spot of angry

red appeared in each pale cheek, and his rather weak jaw was thrust out aggressively.

"By Heaven!" he breathed. "I believe you are in league with the fellow. I'll swear I do! How otherwise could you know that——"

"That will be about enough of that, Gillespie!" the detective said sternly. He had heard too many such accusations in the last few hours. "If you have come to me for help, as your rather abrupt opening words would seem to indicate, let me warn you that you are not furthering your cause by insulting me."

"I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Flint," the bewildered young man stammered. "I didn't mean it, of course, but you are positively uncanny, and I could not understand how——"

"It's very simple, though," Flint told him. "I've been robbed of some papers, unfortunately, and those dealing with your case are among them. Naturally, therefore, when you rushed in in that fashion, I concluded that the thief had tried to bleed you."

"Oh! So that was it?" Gillespie murmured somewhat sheepishly. Again, however, his anger and sense of injury got the upper hand. "Then it's you I have to thank for this, after all!" he cried. "I supposed my secret safe with you, as safe as if it were buried with me. Now, you calmly announce that it has been stolen from you. This is too much, Flint! Can't you keep your papers where they will be safe? What right have you got to preserve such records, anyway? Why don't you destroy them for the sake of your clients? It's unbearable! This will be the ruin of me! If Florence finds out about it, she will refuse to marry me, and——"

The detective held up his hand commandingly, and the young man—he did not appear to be over twenty-five—lapsed into silence.

"I have already told you, Gillespie, that I profoundly regret what has happened. You are forgetting yourself, though, and wasting time. I already know who made away with those papers, and, with your assistance, I hope to lay a trap for him that will bring his schemes to an end very quickly. I think I can promise you that there will be no publicity, and that nothing need interfere with your approaching marriage. Now, tell me precisely what has happened."

Young Gillespie was several times a millionaire, having inherited a large fortune from his father a year or two before. The responsibility thus involved upon him had sobered him down in a remarkable manner, and he was looked upon in certain quarters as one of the coming leaders in the financial world. Before his father's death, however, he had sown a lot of wild oats of one sort or another, and it was in connection with one of these youthful escapades that Flint had been called in about four years previously.

The affair threatened to be very serious, for the time, but the detective's skill had been brought to bear in a surprising manner, with the result that everything had been smoothed out as well as possible without the vaguest rumor having got abroad.

The young man fumbled in his pocket with a gloved hand, and produced a sheet of notepaper, the top of which had obviously been cut away.

"That was found under the door when the house was opened up this morning," he said. "Here's the envelope. It was not stamped, of course."

Flint smoothed out the sheet of paper and looked at the sprawling, uncertain writing that covered it. He read:

I know all about the affair of four years ago. My price for silence is one hundred thousand dollars. Have it ready when I call, or pay it to any one who may present an

order from me. Don't think you can stop this by trying to have me arrested. You will fail, and the whole story will come out. I have fully arranged for its publication, no matter what happens to me. The money is the only thing that will buy my silence. Pay it, and your secret is safe. What is more, you will never hear from me again. Refuse to pay it, and—ruin!

It was a bold letter, but Flint saw that it was nothing but a bluff. He said as much.

"I hope you haven't been deceived by this," he remarked, tapping the sheet. "This fellow is working alone, you may be sure, and, therefore, it isn't at all likely that he has 'arranged' anything of the sort in case he should be arrested. By this, as you ought to know, the newspapers would not publish a story about you without warning. You have too much money and too many friends. You would have an opportunity to bring your influence to bear, and the story would be killed."

"That sounds plausible enough," Gillespie admitted. "That's what I would tell any one else in my position, if he were similarly threatened. When this sort of thing comes home to a fellow, though, it makes a lot of difference."

"I know," the detective replied, with a nod. "That's the sort of mood such a scoundrel counts on."

He paused and thoughtfully fingered the letter.

"I must confess that this is a disappointment," he resumed slowly. "I had hoped that the blackmailer would set a definite time for his call, or ask you to take the money to some specified place. This, however, avoids anything of that sort, and leaves me nothing definite to go on. All it tells us is that he expects to call at some unnamed hour—perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps not for several days. I think we need not bother about the hint that he may send some one with a written order, for if such a person presented himself, I feel sure it would be the blackmailer, and

no other. This absence of details, however, makes it rather difficult to know just what to do."

"How would this do?" Gillespie said hesitatingly. "You are a genius at make-up. Why don't you pass yourself off for me? Go to my place on Fifth Avenue and wait for this fellow, whoever he is, to call? The chances are that he won't put it off very long, and even if you had to remain there a couple of days, you would not mind, would you, if you could nab your man at the end of your wait?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN ASTOUNDING RUSE.

GILLESPIE went on more confidently:

"It ought to give him the shock of his life to think he's dealing merely with me, and then to have you reveal yourself to him. Of course, we could both stay there, and you could walk in and collar him while he was holding me up, but I'm afraid he may be watching the house. In that case, he would be suspicious if he saw any one else going in and not coming out again, no matter whether he recognized you or not."

Flint smiled slightly.

"You must have been reading detective stories lately, Gillespie," he commented. "However, it isn't a bad idea, and I'm inclined to try it. There are certain other advantages about it which make it appeal to me. How about you, though? You would have to remain here as long as I found it necessary to stay at your place."

"Oh, that's all right. I don't mind. I'll promise to keep out of sight, and if I have to stay overnight, I suppose I can find a bunk somewhere, if you'll explain my presence to your servants."

"You certainly can," Flint assured him; "and let's hope that you won't have to kick your heels here very long."

The detective conducted him into an-

other room, and, seating him in the light, proceeded to busy himself with his make-up materials and appliances. At the end of half an hour, the transformation was complete.

"Will this do?" asked Flint, turning from the glass and facing his visitor.

"By Jove, marvelous!" Gillespie cried enthusiastically. "By the time you've got into my clothes, you'll be able to pass for me anywhere. Luckily, there's only my old butler, Simms, and his wife, at the house, as I've been abroad, and was not expected home as yet. The chauffeur outside is a new man, and has never seen me before."

"Good!" Flint answered. "Now for the clothes."

Soon the disguise was complete, and, after another careful inspection of himself, Flint was ready to leave.

"I'll explain matters to my people here as I go out," he said. "Come this way and I'll show you the room you may occupy in my absence. I hope you'll find it comfortable. Don't hesitate to ask for anything you want, and I'll let you know as soon as there's anything to report."

After conducting his guest to one of the spare bedrooms, the detective parted with Gillespie, and ascended the stairs. Five minutes later he stepped into the waiting car as if he owned it.

"Home!" he ordered, and the machine whirled away in the direction of upper Fifth Avenue.

Meanwhile, from behind one of the curtains at the front of the detective's house, the young man had seen the car drive off, and, as it passed out of sight, a remarkable change came over him. He threw back his head and laughed in a curiously noiseless way that many an ex-convict has.

He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and at last flung himself into a chair and fairly panted for breath. At length, he recovered himself, however, and wiped his eyes.

Simultaneously, his face took on harsher lines.

The fresh complexion of youth seemed singularly out of place now, for age and experience—and evil—peered through the veneer.

Had there ever been any doubt about Green Eye Gordon's daring, there could be none any longer, for this was the criminal himself.

In some manner best known to himself, he had managed to learn of Flint's return, and had taken this extraordinary means of fooling the detective—an example of supreme audacity, in which he was manifestly taking the greatest delight.

He expected to kill more than two birds with the one stone.

"Oh, what a sell!" he thought. "How are the mighty fallen! You don't happen to know, my dear Flint, that the real Chester Gillespie is still abroad, and that while you are waiting for your bird in that gloomy old mansion across from the park, your enterprising little friend Ernest will be tapping the various other sources of income as rapidly as he can."

Nevertheless, when the first flash of triumph had passed, there seemed to be an undercurrent of uneasiness in the scoundrel's mood and manner. Doubtless, he knew that in boldness lay his only hope, but perhaps he allowed himself to fear for the time being, that even boldness would be insufficient in the long run against such an antagonist.

Apparently, the great detective had been completely taken in by this latest astounding ruse, but very likely Gordon realized that he was in the lion's mouth, and that there was no knowing when the jaws might close with a snap.

Some time after Green Eye returned to Flint's study, the door opened, and Judson entered. Flint's assistant did not look any too well satisfied with his work thus far.

"I beg your pardon," he said, halting

at sight of the supposed Gillespie. "I didn't know any one was here. Are you alone?"

"Yes," Gordon answered coolly. "Mr. Flint has gone out. I think he left word for you with the butler, but I might as well explain that he's absent on an errand for me, and that I'm to remain in more or less close confinement here until he returns."

And in response to a look of surprise on Judson's face, he explained a little further: "If you wish to call him up——"

"No, not now," Flint's assistant interrupted quietly. "I have nothing to report as yet."

That was good news to Gordon, for he felt sure that Judson had been trying to pick up some clew to the whereabouts of the electric car, and if so, it was plain that he had failed to make any headway.

"Well, I'll leave you in possession here and go into the room Mr. Flint placed at my command," Green Eye remarked easily, rising to his feet and helping himself to another of Flint's cigars. "If there's no objection, I shall appropriate some writing materials."

Judson supplied him with paper and envelopes, et cetera, and assured him that the study was his to use if he wished, but the visitor would not consent to "be in the way." Three minutes later, he was in the bedroom, with the door closed.

Quickly he removed the tapestry cover and droplight from the small table between the windows, and, drawing up a chair, set to work.

It was clear that his desire to write some letters was genuine enough, and the fact that he cut the engraved headings from several sheets of paper suggested that the privacy of the room was welcome.

At the end of an hour he was still writing, and beside him were several

sealed and stamped envelopes addressed to a number of well-known names.

The campaign was going forward.

"I shall have to find some means of getting rid of this man Judson though," Green Eye told himself, as he finished one of the letters and leaned back in a chair. "These fellows I have written to will come flocking here before long, and I must be Thorndyke Flint again, in order to receive them properly."

CHAPTER XLIV.

FLINT'S SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.

IF the criminal could have read Thorndyke Flint's mind about that time, he would have been still more uneasy—and with good reason.

Ernest Gordon had not been the only one who had played a part during that interview with Flint, which had ended in the detective's act of copying his caller's features, and borrowing his clothes.

For the first few minutes, it must be confessed that the detective was completely deceived. He knew Green Eye to be a master of surprises, but it had not occurred to him to suspect that the clever rascal would resort to anything so spectacular.

Besides, Gordon had placed himself so that the light did not fall strongly.

It was not until Flint's caller suggested a change of identities that the detective began to question. It was very seldom that a client presumed to offer such assistance, and Flint's knowledge of Chester Gillespie had not prepared him for such a proposition. He gave no evidence, however, that the seed of suspicion had been planted, but fell in with the suggestion, knowing that in carrying it out, he would have the best possible opportunity of studying his visitor.

He noted a slight hesitation on the latter's part when he had asked him to

take his place in the brightest light obtainable, and the subsequent scrutiny had soon confirmed his suspicions. "Gillespie" was plainly Ernest Gordon.

No make-up could have stood that test—at least, with Thorndyke Flint at the observer's end.

"What fools the cleverest of us are sometimes!" the detective thought, with an inward chuckle. "Gordon has such a good opinion of himself, and is so certain that a man needs only to be daring enough in order to carry everything before him, that he's actually willing to undergo this sort of thing—and he thinks he's getting away with it!"

It was no part of the detective's plan, however, to reveal his knowledge of the deception. He wished to give the masquerader as much rope as he could, in order to find out just what Gordon was trying to do. Moreover, he was curious to visit Gillespie's house and find out how Green Eye had succeeded in making himself at home there.

Gillespie might have been overpowered and stowed away somewhere, or even murdered—though that was unlikely, unless the crime had been committed owing to an accident or miscalculation on Gordon's part.

When the detective reached Gillespie's house on Fifth Avenue, he found the situation just as Gordon had described it. An aged butler answered the bell, and, save for him, the big house seemed deserted.

Flint was about to question the old man in a roundabout way in order to discover, if possible, whether there had been anything which might seem suspicious or not. Before he could do so, however, the butler offered a couple of letters on a salver.

Flint took them after a second's hesitation, studying the butler's face as he did so. From the man's squint and the lines about the eyes, he saw that the butler was nearsighted. Probably he had been in the family for a long time,

but this defect in his eyesight explained his failure to detect the deception.

But where was the real Chester J. Gillespie, whose second double was now entering his house, and calmly inspecting his letters?

Gordon had given Flint certain necessary particulars concerning the arrangement of the house, and, thanks to these, the detective mounted the stairs with the utmost assurance, leaving the nearsighted old butler bowing in the lower hall.

He found his way to Gillespie's private room easily enough, the letters still in his hand. After looking about him curiously, and noting the certain evidences of recent occupancy, he sat down and glanced mechanically at the letters.

One of them obviously was a business communication, but the other was not.

The envelope was unusually large, and of the finest texture. As for the writing, it was big, heavy, and sprawling.

In the lower left-hand corner were the words, "Important—please forward," and they were heavily underscored.

All is fair in love and war, they say, and if that is so, all is fair in detection as well, especially when the detective is trying to safeguard the man whose identity he has temporarily appropriated.

Under the circumstances, therefore, Flint felt justified in opening any of Gillespie's correspondence that seemed to promise a solution of the mystery, just as he would have ransacked the house for a similar clew.

There might be nothing in it, of course, but this letter appeared to be somewhat out of the ordinary, and might be valuable.

Consequently, after a little hesitation, Flint ripped the envelope open without the slightest attempt at concealment, and drew the inclosure out. Soon he was

very glad that he had done so, for the letter read as follows:

DEAR OLD LUNATIC: You do not seem to have improved in the matter of memory or level-headedness. You write me from some unpronounceable place in South America—I judge solely from the postmark—and do not tell me where to find you. How the dickens can I join you down there for a month's shooting, if you do not give me more particulars? I know you too well, you see, to imagine for a moment that you stayed more than a day or two at the place from which you wrote. That was nearly two weeks ago, and by this time you may be thousands of miles away from there.

Your letter was forwarded to me up here in Maine, and the best thing I can think of doing is to send this to your New York address, in the hope that it will be forwarded to you with as little delay as possible.

There was a little more of it, but the rest does not matter. It was signed by a well-known young man about town.

So that was it, was it? The only original Chester Gillespie was still down in South America, and only about two weeks before had written to a New York friend, inviting him down for a month's shooting. That argued that he did not expect to return for many weeks. In some manner, Gordon must have learned that interesting fact, and, seemingly, had disguised himself as Gillespie, with the aid of a photograph or photographs of that young man.

So much for the way the trick had been sprung. For the rest, there was no doubt in Flint's mind as to Green Eye's further intentions. The criminal had learned of the detective's return, and had guessed what Flint's plan of campaign would be.

In other words, he had concluded that Flint had the index of the records in the safe, and could easily find out which ones were missing. Knowing by that means where danger threatened, Flint could see a trap for the black-mailer, with the help of one or more of the latter's unidentified victims.

"He knew just about what to expect," the detective mused, "and when he found that Gillespie was out of the country, having left only a couple of old people in charge of the house, he hit upon this scheme of circumventing me. If he's left alone, he'll find some means of sending Judson off on a wild-goose chase, or otherwise dispose of him, and then he'll impersonate me once more, and in that disguise he'll probably advise his victims to pay the sums demanded.

"Oh, it's a pretty smooth scheme—one of the smoothest anybody ever thought out! I'm afraid, however, that he's inclined to underrate my intelligence, and to overrate his own ability."

CHAPTER XLV.

FLINT AND JUDSON COMPARE NOTES.

IT was not until dusk that Thorndyke Flint left the Gillespie house, and when he did so, it was on foot. He had not gone more than a block or so, however, before he hailed a passing taxi, and ordered the chauffeur to drive to a certain corner of Madison Avenue. The corner named was only a block from Flint's house.

Some hours had passed since Flint had read the letter which revealed the whereabouts of the real Chester J. Gillespie, but he had been in no hurry to act. For one thing, he wished to give the scoundrel a sense of security in this new and climax-capping adventure.

Flint was still disguised as Gillespie, but he was wearing a golf cap, which he had pulled down over his eyes, and a light overcoat, with upturned collar. His purpose was to get in touch with his assistant in one way or another, and his only anxiety concerned the possibility that Gordon had already got rid of Judson.

Fortunately, that was not the case, and, after a wait of no more than half or three-quarters of an hour, the young

detective left the house, and unconsciously approached his chief, who was lounging at the corner.

As he passed Flint, the latter said quietly:

"Go around the corner and wait for me."

His assistant stiffened slightly at the well-known voice; but that was the only sign of surprise he gave. With a grunt and a nod, he turned about at right angles into the side street, and along this Flint presently followed him.

A short distance beyond the corner, well out of sight from Flint's house, Judson paused, and there his chief overtook him.

"I haven't made any headway yet," Judson announced, without any preliminaries. "I located the car late this afternoon, but there I came to a dead stop."

"Never mind about that," Flint said quickly. "It doesn't matter in the least. I can lay my hands on Green-eye Gordon at any moment."

"The deuce you can!" ejaculated Judson. "Then I should certainly say you don't need me—for the sort of leg-work I've been doing to-day, at any rate."

"What about my double, though?" Flint put in swiftly, without giving Judson time to ask any questions. "Is he still at the house, and if so, what has he been doing?"

"He's there, all right. He's been writing letters in the bedroom. He declined to use the study."

"Ah!" Flint murmured, in a peculiar tone. "Letters, eh? Has he mailed them?"

"No. I offered to do it for him a little while ago, but he said he would be going out himself later on."

Flint thought over this information for a minute or two, while his assistant watched him questioningly.

"Did you happen to see any of the letters?" Flint inquired at length, rous-

ing himself from his abstraction. "I mean, could you tell whether they were stamped or not?"

His assistant nodded.

"I got a squint at a little pile of them," he admitted. "The top one was stamped, but I could not say as to the rest."

This required further thought on Flint's part. He was tempted, of course, to end matters then and there, before those letters could reach their destination, and cause the consternation they were certain to create. On the other hand, he felt it necessary to give Gordon a little more leeway, and, in order to do that, it seemed essential that the letters be mailed.

He had searched Gillespie's private rooms, on the theory that Green Eye might have left the stolen papers there, but he had found nothing of the sort. Yet, it was imperative that these papers be recovered, if possible, at the same time the rascal was captured.

Unless that were done, the precious records might not be returned at all, for certainly Gordon could not be counted on to restore them voluntarily.

To be sure, the fact that he had been writing those letters—doubtless, blackmailing ones—under Flint's own roof, suggested that he had the documents there to refer to. That, however, was by no means certain, for he might have put the records in some remote place, perhaps a safe-deposit vault, after making a list of the names and addresses desired.

Therefore, it seemed wise to give the fellow his head, for the time, and meanwhile, to keep him under observation, in the hope that his movements would give some hint as to his possession or nonpossession of Flint's papers.

The detective was about to explain this to his assistant when the latter broke in excitedly.

"For the love of Pete! What's up?" he demanded. "What are you cooking

up in that brain of yours, and why are you so curious about Gillespie's doings?"

"Gillespie is down in South America, Judson," Flint returned quietly. "That's why. Our friend back there in the house is—well, you can guess, I imagine."

And then he proceeded to give his instructions to the dumfounded Judson.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GORDON'S LETTERS REACH THEIR MARK.

EX-SENATOR WILLIAM DEANE PHELPS smiled complacently as he stood before a glass in his dressing room.

He was a tall man, and the sixty years that had passed over his head had left him his rather slim and upright figure. His hair was white, but abundant, and, on the whole, he had good reason to consider himself a handsome and well-preserved man.

"Is there anything else, sir?" his valet asked respectfully.

"No," the ex-senator answered. "It's probable that I shall be very late, so you need not wait up."

"Thank you, sir. Shall I ring for your car?"

"No, no! A taxi will do."

Possibly the ghost of a smile curved the lips of the valet, but if so, it was quickly gone. If his employer chose to keep his movements secret, that was his employer's business.

Ex-Senator Phelps took the light coat and silk hat that were handed to him, and strolled toward the door. He was a single man, but his position in the world had made it necessary for him to keep up a rather pretentious establishment.

He stood in the doorway holding a cigar as the taxi drove up, but at that moment his valet, who had followed him as if to close the door, spoke up in a surprised tone.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but this was lying on the floor. You stepped over it just now without knowing it. It's addressed to you, and marked 'Urgent.' It's stamped, but not postmarked—looks as if it had been slipped under the door instead."

Ex-Senator Phelps took the envelope with a careless air, and no premonition chilled him as he stepped back into the light of the hall and tore it open. As he glanced at the single sheet of paper, however, his face turned ghastly, and he reeled against a small statue that stood on a pedestal, throwing it to the floor and breaking it.

"After all these years!" he muttered hoarsely to himself. Then his eyes fell upon the amazed face of his valet, and, as he crushed the letter in his hand, he made a great effort to pull himself together. "I—I shall not be going out, after all," he said, in a curiously dead voice. "I'm not—feeling well."

Every year of the sixty seemed to weigh heavily upon the ex-senator as he pushed open the door of the room on the left. His feet dragged across the thick carpet, so that he stumbled, and when he dropped into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

The Forty-second Street Theater had been famous for years as the home of light comedy of the more brilliant sort.

That night was to witness a new production, for which great things were expected—for had the play not been written by one of America's cleverest and most experienced playwrights, and staged by a production wizard? And was not the star Harold Lumsden?

Already the cheaper parts of the house were packed, and the orchestra was filling up. Here and there a pair of white shoulders gleamed in one of the boxes which would soon be filled—for it was a foregone conclusion that the S. R. O. sign would have to be displayed in the lobby that night.

Harold Lumsden himself was peering through a peephole in the curtain at that moment, idly surveying the nucleus of what he knew would prove to be an unusually brilliant first-night audience. For years he had enjoyed great prestige, and this was to be his first appearance following a successful invasion of London, which had added greatly to his laurels.

"This is going to be some night, Harold!" his manager remarked impressively, coming up from behind and putting his hand on the star's shoulder. "Dressed early, didn't you?"

"Yes, I felt restless," was the reply. "Hanged if I know why. This sort of thing ought to be an old story to me by this time, if it's ever going to be."

As he turned about to face the portly manager, he noticed an envelope in the latter's hand. Knowing the manager's absent-mindedness, he inquired:

"That letter isn't for me, is it?"

"Why, yes, it is," was the reply. "I had forgotten it for a moment. It's marked 'Urgent,' but I suppose it's only from some friend of yours—or, more likely, some friend of a friend—who aspires to the deadhead class."

"Probably," Harold Lumsden agreed, as he glanced at the handwriting for a moment, and then ripped the envelope open. "We haven't needed to 'paper' our houses for the last few seasons, have we, old man? What's this! Great heavens!"

The distinguished actor clutched at one of the wings for support, and the letter fluttered to the ground. The manager stopped to pick it up, but with an oath the star forestalled him, seizing the letter hastily and thrusting it into his pocket.

"Bad news?" the manager asked anxiously.

"A rather disagreeable surprise," Lumsden managed to say, making a strenuous attempt to control himself. "It's nothing you know anything about,

you know, and I'll be all right, never fear."

Harold Lumsden played the part that night, for there was nothing else to do, and the traditions of his profession demand that an actor or actress should always appear, unless ill in bed, no matter what news may have been received, or what tragedy may have been left at home.

But some idea of the sort of performance the famous star gave on that memorable occasion might have been gathered from the newspaper comments the following morning, for all the critics seemed to agree that Lumsden was far from himself, and that his conception of the part was strangely heavy and lifeless.

Such was the effect of Green-eye Gordon's second demand. There were other letters—several of them, in fact—but we need not trace their influence here.

There was no doubt that the black-mailer had struck some stunning blows, expecting that gold would flow from the wounds thus inflicted.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BLACKMAILER ADVISES HIS VICTIM.

ERNEST GORDON was inclined to consider the world a pretty good place, as he finished his breakfast in Flint's dining room the following morning. Everything had gone very well, thus far, and he seemed to have reason for self-congratulation.

He had peddled the letters around himself the night before, thus saving time, and making it more difficult to trace them, as he believed. He did not know that he had been shadowed throughout by Judson, who thereby knew just what victims the blackmailer had chosen for his first broadside.

Later he had returned to the detective's house, and so had Judson; then there had come a telephone message to

the latter from Flint, sending the young detective out of town for at least twenty-four, if not forty-eight, hours.

That unexpected turn of affairs had caused Gordon great satisfaction when Judson gloomily confided the news to him.

"The chief seems to think that fellow Gordon has doubled back, and is hiding not far from New Pelham," the assistant informed "Gillespie." "He still hopes he'll turn up at your place, and is going to wait there all of to-morrow, if not longer, but he wants me to get busy, and see if I can locate Gordon independently. It seems unnecessary to me, but what he says goes. The worst of it is, though, I've got my orders to pull up stakes at once."

Of course, Gordon did not know that this was all a put-up job. Flint, by seeming to play into the rascal's hands, had worked out this scheme, in order to get Judson out of the way, so that Gordon would not feel compelled to take strong measures to accomplish the same object.

As a result, Green Eye had slept alone at Flint's that night—except for the servants—and now, after a good breakfast, looked forward to a day of undisturbed peace and freedom to do whatever circumstances might require.

First, however, it was necessary for him to absent himself temporarily, in order to make up as Flint once more. Therefore, he made a flying trip to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, and there disguised himself, returning as fast as the taxi could carry him.

When he reëntered the detective's residence, it was in the character of the owner.

"Has any one called up or been to see me?" he asked the butler.

"No, sir," was the reply, a welcome one to the scoundrel, for it meant that none of his victims had yet sought the detective.

He did not have long to wait, how-

ever, for hardly more than half an hour later the butler entered the study, and presented a card, which bore the name of ex-Senator William Deane Phelps.

"Show him up," the supposed detective said, with a glow of anticipation.

The butler turned on his heel to obey, and if Green-eye Gordon grinned behind his back, his face was serious enough in expression as the ex-senator nervously entered and closed the door behind him.

In the few hours that had passed since he had received the threatening letter, a great change had come over this man, whose name was known from one end of the country to the other. It was plain that he had not slept, and there were heavy, loose bags of skin under his eyes. His face was almost grayish in hue.

"I feared that you would feel compelled to come here before long, senator," the impostor said gravely.

"Then you know?" his visitor asked, in surprise.

"Yes," Gordon answered. "Some one knows the facts in regard to—well, we need not go into the case—and is attempting to blackmail you."

Phelps sank into a chair and drew a sheet of paper from his pocket.

"The infernal scoundrel demands one hundred and fifty thousand—no less!" he said hoarsely. "It isn't so much the money, but I—I naturally assumed that you alone held my secret."

Green Eye rose to his feet, and his face was very solemn.

"Until a short time ago that was the case," he answered, and crossed to the safe. "The records were here, and you will see that it has been burgled. If it's any comfort to you, though, I'll tell you that you are not the only one who will suffer."

"I care nothing about that," Phelps said angrily. "It's my own plight that interests me to the exclusion of everything else. Do you wonder? This is

terrible, Flint, terrible! I thought I could trust you, and now, after all this time, I find that I've been living in a fool's paradise."

The criminal interrupted him with a dignified gesture.

"I don't think I deserve that, senator," he said quietly. "Thorndyke Flint has never yet betrayed a secret. Much as I regret this unfortunate occurrence, however, I don't see how I can be held responsible for it. I didn't rob my own safe, and certainly I wouldn't have chosen to have it robbed, if I could have helped it."

"That's neither here nor there!" declared the ex-senator. "Why didn't you destroy the records?"

"Do you expect me to destroy my stock in trade, or burn up the reference books I have had occasion to consult countless times?"

"I hadn't thought of it in that light," Phelps confessed. "Even that doesn't make it any easier to bear, however. What can I do?"

"I'm sorry to say that I see nothing for you to do, except to pay," Green Eye answered, fingering the letter which had been handed him.

Phelps looked at him in amazement. "You actually give me that advice!" he murmured.

Green Eye nodded.

"I know I'm disappointing you," he said, "but that's the best advice I can give under the circumstances. It may sound strange, but we must face the facts. I know perfectly well who is at the bottom of this, and I have to confess that he's one of the shrewdest men who ever defied the law. He's amazingly daring, senator, and you may be sure he means exactly what he says. He'll drag this whole unsavory business into the light, if you don't stop his mouth with gold, and stop it without delay."

"But aren't you going to——"

"Of course, I'm going to do every-

thing I can to catch him, senator," the criminal interrupted, in a tone which seemed to imply that that was a matter of course. "If possible, I shall try to trap him just after you have met his demands, and while he has the money on his person. I cannot promise, however, to catch him to-day, or this week, and, knowing his methods as well as I do, I know that you can't afford to risk any delay. The chances are, of course, that I can make him disgorge, and that you'll get your money back, but the important thing is to play safe, isn't it?"

Ex-Senator Phelps nodded slowly and hopelessly.

"I suppose you're right," he agreed. "I had hoped for immediate help, Flint, for something that would put new hope into me. Evidently, I expected too much, though. I'll do as you say, of course, and try to believe that everything will come out all right. Good morning."

And with that he left the room, walking as if he were seventy instead of sixty.

"Number one!" Green-eye Gordon chuckled as he leaned back in his seat. "A hundred and fifty thousand isn't bad for a starter. I wonder who will be the next?"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

UP AGAINST IT AT LAST.

A FEW minutes later, the front-door bell rang again, and this time the salver which the butler presented to his supposed employer bore the card of Harold Lumsden.

Gordon nodded impassively.

"Very well," he said.

"I only hope he'll prove worth the trouble," he told himself, as the butler left the room. "He's a spendthrift, of course. Money turns to water and runs through his fingers, no matter how fast it comes in. He's just back from London, however, and I hardly think

he has already squandered everything he picked up over there."

Then the door opened, and a tragic figure entered. The caller's face was haggard, his eyes wild, his hair disordered. Even his clothing seemed carelessly worn and ill fitting, though Lumsden had always been considered one of the best-dressed men in the profession. Certainly he did not look like a comedian now, successful or otherwise.

"Something terrible has happened!" he burst out. "Mr. Flint, I am being blackmailed! Somebody has learned the secret which I thought safe with you, and has demanded an enormous sum of money. It means my ruin, unless——"

"I know all about it, I am sorry to say," the bogus detective interrupted.

Once more he gave a brief and very unsatisfactory explanation, pointing to the rifled safe, and winding up with a statement of his belief that there was nothing to do but to pay—"just as a temporary expedient, of course."

Naturally, that advice did not appeal to the actor any more than it had to ex-Senator Phelps, but Gordon adroitly argued him into a somewhat less impatient mood.

"How much does he want?"

"A cool hundred thousand," was the bitter reply, and it did not convey any real news to the man in Flint's desk chair. "And I haven't more than eighty thousand to my name!"

"The devil you haven't!" Green Eye exclaimed harshly. "Not after that London engagement?"

He had spoken without thinking, and did not realize what he had said until the caller looked sharply at him.

"I beg your pardon, Lumsden!" he hastened to say. "That must have sounded impertinent, I'm afraid. I meant no offense, I assure you. It was merely surprise. You know, we outsiders are inclined to think that you popular actors are made of money."

"Well, we're not," the other answered, as if slightly mollified. "What shall I do?"

"Pay what you can," Gordon answered promptly. "I know it doesn't appeal to you, my friend, but as I have said, it's only temporary. I'll have the fellow where I want him in short order, you may be sure. This is only in the nature of insurance to keep the rascal from carrying out his threats before I can stop his activities."

That seemed to appeal strongly to the actor.

"It's asking a good deal to trust everything to you, including my whole bank roll, when the trouble originated through you," he said. "However, I see nothing else to do. I'll do as you suggest. Anything is better than exposure, and I can always earn more money if I have to see the last of this."

He paused for a moment.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "You have made me feel that I shan't be comfortable until I've paid the money over. If you don't mind, I'll make out a check to self right now, and take it to the bank to be cashed, so that I can turn over the currency to the scoundrel when he comes."

Green Eye had no objection to that, of course; in fact, it brought an anticipatory glitter to his eyes. With shaking hands, Lumsden took a check book from his pocket, seating himself in the chair which Gordon vacated for the purpose. When he tried to write, however, he found it exceedingly difficult to do so.

"Confound it!" he cried impatiently. "See how infernally nervous I am! Would you mind filling this in for eighty thousand, Mr. Flint, and then I'll try to sign it."

"Gladly," Green Eye said, with alacrity, reseating himself in the vacated chair, and taking the pen from his visitor's trembling hand.

The masquerading criminal held down the cover of the little check book with his left hand, while he began to write with the other. Lumsden leaned over his shoulder, watching him, as if ready to try his luck at signing his name as soon as the rest of the check was filled in. His hand slipped into his pocket, however, and when it came out silently, there was something in it which had a metallic gleam.

"Ah! Thanks!" he exclaimed, a moment or two later. "You have made it very easy for me, Gordon!"

Simultaneously, there was a sudden, unlooked-for swoop, followed quickly by the click of a pair of handcuffs as they closed on Green Eye's wrists.

And the voice which uttered the mocking words was not the voice of Harold Lumsden, but that of Thornydyke Flint himself. Gordon knew it after the first word or two, and even if he had not done so, the action which went along with it would have been enlightening enough.

"Flint, by Heaven!" the rogue cried hoarsely, jumping to his feet and overturning the chair.

"Flint—exactly," the detective agreed, removing the wig which had played such a large part in transforming him into Harold Lumsden. "You didn't think you were going to have this little masked ball all to yourself, did you?"

After the first dazed shock—a merely momentary one—had passed, Gordon's face seemed to grow actually black with rage and hatred.

"You may think you have me, curse you!" he snarled. "But I'll show you—"

He leaped forward, his manacled arms raised to strike together. Flint quietly side-stepped the mad, bull-like rush, but Green Eye turned and charged him again.

There was one more surprise awaiting him, though.

The door opened, and Judson entered, coolly fingering an automatic.

"Pretty neat weapon, isn't it, Gordon?" he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone, then stopped in feigned surprise. "Oh, you and Mr. Flint are having an argument? Hope you don't think I've butted in. Now that I'm here, though, I think I might as well stay. You look as if you needed your wrists slapped, and the chief may not care to bother with it."

The escaped convict had halted in his tracks at the first interruption, and was now looking from the detective to his assistant with baffled rage. He would have liked to fight it out to a finish, but his shrewdness told him that he would gain nothing by such a course, and it was one of his rules never to exert himself unnecessarily.

The consequence was that he merely shrugged his shoulders.

"So be it," he said quietly. "You fellows can trump my ace, I see. Let me remind you, however, that you haven't got that gold that our mutual friend, John Simpson, took such a liking to. Likewise, you're a long way from the possession of those papers which you were foolish enough to keep in a more or less ordinary safe."

Flint and Judson looked at each other and grinned.

"Think so?" queried the former. "I'm afraid, in that case, that you are scheduled to receive another disagreeable surprise or two. I located the gold yesterday afternoon—in one of Gillespie's closets. As for the missing records, I feel very sure that we shall discover them on you."

And they did.

Therefore, there was no need of delay, and No. 39,470 Clinton was shipped northward to Dannemora the next day, under escort.

"Lucky for us that he belonged to the 'Gray Brotherhood,'" Flint remarked to Griswold, when he turned a little

over seventy-five thousand dollars in gold over to him. "Otherwise, he would have gone scot-free, just as in the case of Simpson. As it is, he'll get something extra for his escape, at least,

and I don't believe he'll have a chance to slip away again."

"But another case like this would give me heart disease, I'm afraid," he added to himself.

THE END.

DECADE'S MURDERS AND HOMICIDES

THE most "murderous" city in all the world is Memphis, Tennessee, where 63.7 persons out of every one hundred thousand lose their lives by violence, according to statistics for the decade 1904-1913, prepared by the *Spectator*, an insurance journal, in an article on the "Homicide Record of 1914."

Six other Southern cities hold records for "killings," while New York City—Manhattan and the Bronx—with its enormous population, is a peaceful, law-abiding place, ranking only sixteenth out of the thirty registration cities used.

The thirty cities, arranged in the order of "killings," together with the rate per one hundred thousand of population, are:

Memphis, 63.7; Charleston, South Carolina, 32.7; Savannah, 28.4; Atlanta, 26; New Orleans, 25.3; Nashville, 24.3; Louisville, 16.6; St. Louis, 12.9; San Francisco, 11.8; Cincinnati, 11; Chicago, 9.3; Seattle, 8.1; Spokane, 7.8; Washington, 7.5; Cleveland, 6.1; Manhattan and the Bronx, New York, 6.1; Dayton, Ohio, 5.5; Pittsburgh, 5.3; Providence, 5.2; Boston, 4.8; Baltimore, 4.6; Brooklyn, 4.5; Philadelphia, 4.2; Buffalo, 4; Minneapolis, 3.7; Reading, Pennsylvania, 3.5; Rochester, New York, 3.3; Hartford, Connecticut, 3; Newark, New Jersey, 3; Milwaukee, 2.4.

There were 11,981 homicides in the thirty cities for the decade, or an average of 7.9 per one hundred thousand of population for the whole area. The figures for 1914 show 1,489 murders for the same area, at the rate of 8.6 per one hundred thousand population, which, if continued for ten years, would make the total for the decade 14,890.

Assuming that the recorded murder death rate for the registration area may be applied safely to the whole country, more than fifty thousand human lives have been deliberately sacrificed. The increase in murder during 1914, as compared with the ten years ending 1913 was most marked on the Pacific coast and in the Southern States.

The Eastern cities show the murder of 4.9 persons out of every one hundred thousand population for 1904-1913, and 5.1 persons for 1914; the central cities show 8.6, and in 1914, 9.3; while the Southern cities 18.2 for the 1904-1913 decade and 20.4 for the year 1914 and Pacific-coast cities, 10, and an increase to 12.8 for 1914.

Among males, 62.8 per cent of the deaths are caused by firearms, and among females 52.2 per cent, while cutting or piercing instruments caused 15.7 per cent, and among females 12.7 per cent of the deaths. The mortality was highest between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four years.

The number of murders in the United States is about one hundred for every thirteen committed in England and Wales, thirty in Australia, thirty-one in Prussia, and fifty-six in Italy.

Tales of the Chemists' Club

VIII. Every Man Has His Price By Howard Fielding

BERTRAM J. RITCHIE was a mining chemist in Dawson, and he was not making money. He was a failure there, as he had been at home. Behold him pacing the floor of his laboratory and swearing aloud to the bare walls and meager furnishings that he had but one desire in life, which was to get away from Dawson.

The reason why he did not leave Dawson was to be found in his trousers pocket. He could not pay his way. It was equally true that he could not remain, except to starve, unless fortune relented. He would much rather have seen a chance to get out than a chance to stay and make his living. He was sick of the place.

In most respects it had proved to be just what he had anticipated. He had always possessed a singular talent for discounting misfortune. It may be said that his single reason for satisfaction with himself was that he had never been so foolish as to look for good luck anywhere. Yet of all the calamities that he had foreseen in this particular adventure, none could approach in the quality of misery the one that he had encountered unexpectedly. It struck

him as a last proof of fate's injustice that in coming to that howling wilderness he should have run into a snare of love.

Yet he perceived it very early. The first time he met Jennie Winsted he knew why she was there. He reasoned it all out after their first half hour of acquaintance.

Miss Winsted was in Dawson City, in her father's care, though her version was that she had come to take care of him. He was a person about whom nobody seemed to know very much—in which respect he was by no means singular in that city. He said that he came from Boston, and no man could prove the contrary. He seemed to have plenty of money, for he and his daughter lived as well as people could live in that region at that time. It was said that Winsted was prepared to speculate in mining properties, but he was not known to do anything of that sort in the first months of his residence there.

He was a singularly placid individual, on the surface; a man of strong frame, of a genial countenance—such as Capital wears when depicted hand in hand with Labor in a "prosperity"

cartoon—and of most benign demeanor. It is not to be supposed that he favored Ritchie's attentions to his daughter, yet he viewed them with the most unmoved composure, and put no perceptible obstacle in the young man's way. Unfortunately, the daughter was quite as calm as her father, by which token Ritchie knew that he had not one chance in a million of winning her. And it was all preposterous, anyway, because he was a poor beggar, who would never be richer, and would probably starve to death in the coming winter. The only thing for him to do was to pull up stakes and get away, so that he might be spared the humiliation of starving in her presence. But a man must have either money or exceptional nerve to get out of that country, and Ritchie had neither.

The information which has been imparted to the reader was the basis of Ritchie's reflections, as he paced the floor of his laboratory, anathematizing fate. His steps and the flow of his language were interrupted by the sound of voices and the creaking of a staircase. Presently three men entered the room. One of them he knew slightly, the second he remembered having seen, and the third was a tall young Englishman who was a total stranger to his eye.

"Good morning, Professor Ritchie," said number one, whose name was Atherton. "Shake hands with my partner, Mr. Tripp, and then with Mr. Medway, of London."

Ritchie said "Good morning," and acknowledged the introductions in the manner suggested.

"We've come on a little matter of business," Atherton continued. "I suppose you know all about my uncle's claim, up Burnt Creek?"

"I know that your uncle died a short time ago," replied Ritchie, "and that you were supposed to be his heir. I also knew that he had dug quite a hole

in the ground, alongside of Burnt Creek. I believe he called it the Yellow Dog, didn't he?"

"Right you are," responded Atherton; "that was his name for it. Well, the estate is all squared up, now, and the Yellow Dog is mine, or, to be exact, two-thirds belong to me and one-third to Mr. Tripp. To tell the truth, I didn't believe the claim was good for anything until a few days ago, when I got my legal business settled, and took it into my head to have a look at the Yellow Dog. Tripp and I went up there, and we came back with the conclusion that that dog was a valuable animal. He is yellow with gold, professor. Mr. Medway, also, has had a look at him, and he wants to buy him."

"Well, you know," said Medway, apologetically, "I'm considering. I'm not altogether convinced; but, upon my word, the ore looks good—and I've seen a good deal of that kind of rock; really, I have, you know."

"We want you to make the assay," said Tripp. "There's a boxful of specimens outside, on a wagon. They were taken under Mr. Medway's eye, and according to his directions—and I'm bound to say that he's all right when it comes to that sort of business."

"I sampled the main lode at intervals of ten feet," said Medway, "breaking the ore across the full width. You'll find everything in good shape for your work, and, when that's done, we shall know as much about this matter as anybody can know about a mine."

"You see," said Atherton, "this is all an open negotiation. All we want is to get at the real value of the property, and no advantage to be taken on either side. Is that right, gentlemen?"

Tripp nodded with a somewhat savage emphasis, for he happened to be biting off a piece of plug tobacco at the time, and the Englishman said, "Quite so," very politely.

During this conversation Ritchie had

been consulting his memory regarding Atherton with a result exceedingly meager in the matter of good report. He had had so bad a reputation just before his uncle's death that that event had been viewed by many with suspicion. As frequently happens in such cases, the discovery that the suspicion was baseless had gone far to rehabilitate the young man in popular esteem. Moreover, he will gain friends who falls heir to property; and Atherton's uncle had been reputed well off, though he was one of those men whose left hand does not know what the right hand doeth.

Tripp had the air of an "old-timer," and he did not look honest. Medway, the Englishman, bore himself like a gentleman. He was probably thirty years old, but he looked much younger; and he had the unduly confident manner of a smart boy.

Altogether, the case seemed clear enough—a matter of a lamb and two wolves. The chemist felt a strong disinclination to assist in the slaughter. However, if certain samples of ore were offered him for analysis, he could hardly do less than put them through the process, and pocket his fee.

At the suggestion of Atherton, his partner and the Briton went down to get the box of ore. No sooner was the door closed behind them, than Atherton turned quickly toward the chemist, and, walking up close to him, said, in a low, intense tone: "There is money in this for you, if you do the right thing." Ritchie felt that he ought to be angry, but it simply wasn't in him. He had worried and suffered until he hadn't energy left for a strong sentiment of any kind.

"Bogus report, I suppose?" he said wearily, sinking down into the only good chair in the room.

"Don't let that bother you," said Atherton. "I know how you're fixed. You can't afford to be honest. Your

name is Dennis if you do. I'm right on to you. You haven't got money enough to do one thing nor the other. You can't either quit or hang on. Here's where you get your chance. That fellow Medway has got more money than a horse can haul downhill, and he's no baby. Anybody that can fool him will earn what he gets. You ought to have seen him at work out there in the Yellow Dog. There ain't a man on the Yukon that could have made a better examination of a claim. He's fair game, that fellow!"

"If he's so sharp a man," said Ritchie, "why didn't he tumble to the fact that the claim was no good?"

"That rock would fool anybody," responded Atherton. "Tripp and I know there's nothing in it, but you won't, until you've run it through your mill. Now, quick; what do you say?"

"I won't do it," said Ritchie; but he spoke without spirit.

"Will you take the stuff in here, and keep it till I can have another talk with you to-morrow?"

Before the chemist could answer, Tripp and Medway appeared at the door with the box. They put it on a table, and invited Ritchie to take a look at it. He complied like a man in a dream. This thing had fallen in so opportunely that he was dazed by it. He had been declaiming his willingness to do anything that would get him out of Dawson City, and Satan had taken him at his word. Did fate mean to make a rascal of him? If so, judging by the record of his past performances, he would probably become one. Anything to oblige destiny, was his motto.

The ore looked good. As Atherton had said, it would fool anybody. Ritchie found it hard to believe that the stuff was worthless, though he had once or twice seen equally promising rock with no tangible value.

Tripp and Atherton were obviously anxious to get their victim away, and

they succeeded before Ritchie could make up his mind upon a course of procedure. When they were gone, the chemist sat by the table, trying to think. He made poor work of it, being deadly tired in the brain. He would fancy himself engaged in formulating a line of action, and would wake with a start to find his thought busy with a problem of years gone by, a question of conduct long ago decided the wrong way. Again, he would picture himself denouncing Atherton, on the following day—speaking a speech to him full of high moral principles and absurdly unsuited to the person addressed.

While his mind was thus running around like a squirrel in a revolving cage, accomplishing nothing at great expense of energy, he was suddenly aware of Medway, who entered in haste.

"I've got rid of those fellows," said he, "and now I want a few minutes' quiet talk with you."

"You can't talk too quietly to suit me," replied Ritchie; "I've got nervous prostration."

Medway looked as if he thought the chemist expected him to laugh, and then he shifted to the serious side of the proposition.

"You've been having a hard time," said he. "I know that; and it's the real cause of my being here. Atherton thinks it's your reputation for honesty, and that I trust you. No, sir; you're hard up, and you've made up your mind not to stand it any more."

"Suppose I have," said Ritchie. "What then?"

Medway leaned forward and tapped him on the knee. In the Briton's hand were some coins, which jingled as he tapped.

"You'll give me a private report on that ore," said he.

Ritchie had hardly expected the lamb in this transaction to show so much worldly wisdom.

8A DS

"Why, what's the game?" he asked stupidly.

"They think the Yellow Dog is no good," said Medway, "and they intend to bribe you to make a favorable report to me. Take their money; take my money, and make three reports, one privately to Atherton that the claim is no good; another privately to me, stating the facts, and a third to all of us, containing whatever they want you to put into it."

"You can all go to blazes!" cried Ritchie. "I don't want anything to do with you."

Medway laughed.

"You'll feel better about this to-morrow," he said. "Sleep on it. But, for the love of Heaven, get to work on that assay as soon as you can. I'm scared gray-headed for fear some one else will come along and make them an offer for that property. Ten thousand dollars would buy it, and, unless I've lost my eye, it's worth fifty times as much. My terms with you will be these: A full price for your work, anyway—and you can get another one out of Atherton, so you're a winner, anyhow—and, if my game works, ten per cent of the difference between what I pay for the mine and its honest value."

"Get out," said Ritchie.

Medway laughed, and made a hurried exit, saying, as the door closed: "Think it over; think it over."

Ritchie tried to think it over; but the harder he tried, the less he accomplished. Experience had taught him that when he got into that condition he could find some small relief in work. So, having nothing else to do, he began to prepare some samples of Yellow Dog ore for assay. No sooner were his hands busy than his brain evolved a rational idea.

"I'll make an honest assay of this stuff," said he to himself, "and force those fellows to pay for it. I'll charge them enough to get me out of this for-

saken wilderness, and they won't dare to refuse, for fear I'll blow the whole story."

With this inspiration, he went to work in earnest, and was speedily conscious of a betterment of spirits. Presently he found himself thinking of Jennie Winsted, and in a pleasant vein. In utter hopelessness he was trying to earn enough money to take him forever out of the sight of her, and yet, as he worked, he indulged himself in day-dreams of success in the world and the winning of her favor.

He ate with appetite at noon, and his pipe was more than ordinarily satisfactory when he set it alight in the laboratory after returning from dinner. He remembered to have felt this unreasonable sense of cheer, many years ago, just previous to his one brief run of good luck. Was the sensation prophetic? This problem occupied a good share of his thought for an hour or more, and then a most unexpected occurrence drove it out of his head. This was no less than the appearance of Mr. Winsted.

Ritchie had never been thus honored before; and he was childishly pleased, the more that Mr. Winsted should have found him busy, and such a weight of ore upon his table. The coincidence was astonishing; indeed, it is probable that Winsted was surprised by what he saw, but he was far too well bred to say so. He greeted Ritchie most politely, and sat down on a cracker box with the grace of one who is at home in the drawing-rooms of the rich and great.

"Very fair-looking rock," said he, indicating the ore.

"It is, indeed," replied Ritchie.

"Any objection to telling where it comes from?"

"No objection to telling you," rejoined the chemist. "It is from a claim on Burnt Creek that they call the Yellow Dog."

The statement seemed to make a considerable impression on Winsted. He rose from the cracker box and paced the width of the room twice or thrice.

"Do you know a man named Syd Cullom?" said he suddenly.

"Never heard of him," responded Ritchie, frankly meeting a searching glance from Winsted. "Why?"

"He told me this morning that I'd better look into the Yellow Dog property," said Winsted. "I didn't know but he might have had the tip from you. That wasn't in my mind when I came here, however. I was only thinking that perhaps you could help me to get a line on the value of the claim."

"I don't know anything about it myself, yet," said Ritchie. "I'm going to make an assay for young Atherton and an Englishman named Medway—who may purchase."

"One assay for both parties?"

"Yes; it's an open business. No, it isn't, either. Why should I lie to you? It's a crooked game on both sides."

And he told Winsted the whole story.

When he had finished, the elderly gentleman went to the door, and softly opened it. There was no one in the hall, so he closed the door again, and walked up to Ritchie.

"Give me an advance report on this stuff," said he, "and I'll make it worth your while."

Ritchie whistled.

"This is a pretty good day for bribery and corruption," said he.

"Never you mind that, my son," responded Winsted. "Remember which side your bread is buttered on, and let others attend to their own. Those fellows are trying to cheat each other; why shouldn't an honest man step in and get the property. Your Englishman thinks ten thousand would buy it, if offered spot cash. I'll put up the money and give you a tenth interest."

It is unnecessary to follow the conversation in detail. The charitable

reader will remember Ritchie's unfortunate condition of mind and his still more distressing condition of heart, and will pity rather than censure him for agreeing to this nefarious proposition. When Winsted had gone, the young man sat for many minutes with his head in his hands, a prey to remorse. Then he sprang up, and began to rave. He swore that all was fair in love and gold mining; that the moral law was well known not to extend north of the fifty-fifth parallel of latitude, and that any man alive would do the same under similar conditions.

Having relieved his mind in this way, he went to work with vigor. No leisure and short allowance of sleep was his rule from that time forth, during the course of these analyses. He was occasionally interrupted by one of his three tempters—four, indeed, counting Mr. Tripp—and he agreed to every proposition made to him; but he touched nobody's money.

It was four o'clock on a certain morning when he finished his work, and made the last of his calculations. From the full report, he made a brief abstract, in which the results of his analyses were shown in three classifications, as follows:

	Ounces of gold per ton.	Value per ton.
No. 1	6.44	\$137.70
No. 2	5.89	117.96
No. 3	6.27	125.48

The Yellow Dog was a surprisingly good property, judging from this assay and from what Medway had said about the general characteristics of the lode. If Winsted could buy it for ten thousand dollars, he ought to be a good father-in-law to the man that had given him the opportunity.

This thought in confused form was in Ritchie's brain, as he turned from his work in utter exhaustion. Throwing an old fur coat upon the floor, and drawing the first thing he could get his

hand on over him for a coverlet, he prepared to sleep upon the problem involved in his singular situation.

When he awoke it was noonday, and the problem had solved itself, for there sat Winsted beside the table, digesting the result of Ritchie's labors. The young man had forgotten to lock his door before he slept.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, raising his stiffened and aching frame from the floor, and glaring at his visitor.

Winsted nodded pleasantly, as he thrust the report into his pocket.

"It's all right," he said; "I'm going to find Atherton. You'd better take another nap."

He was gone before Ritchie could interpose any objection. As quickly as possible the chemist followed. Winsted was out of sight. In these circumstances it seemed to be Ritchie's duty to hunt up Atherton and Medway, and make a report to them.

He sought them all day, and for some hours of the evening, vainly. At last, in great weariness, he went to bed.

On the following morning he decided that the best thing to do would be to wait in his laboratory. It should be a certainty that those he wished to see would come here during the day.

At four o'clock in the afternoon they had not appeared. At five, there came a young Indian with a note. It was from Jennie Winsted, and it ran as follows:

DEAR MR. RITCHIE: I know that you are perfectly innocent, but father is crazy. Atherton, Tripp, and Medway have decamped together. Of course, you know by this time that father bought the mine for fifteen thousand dollars cash. It was all a swindle. The ore that you analyzed never came from the Yellow Dog Mine. It was bought somewhere else. Medway, of course, was in the plot. They got that fellow Cullom to give father the tip, and they knew he'd go to you, because we all like you so much, and you have been seen so often with father and me. It's dreadful; but don't you worry. I won't

let father do anything bad. A little bit of money won't hurt him. He is very rich, richer than you'd believe if I told you. So cheer up; I'll stand by you. Through thick and thin, I am, yours most truly,

JENNIE WINSTED.

For one instant Ritchie was stunned. An alternating current of bad and good news had shocked him to the marrow. Then he slowly came to a realization of what it all meant.

"The old man's abuse of me has done the business!" he cried. "It has put Jennie on my side, and all is won. Now let me starve or freeze; I am content with any fate. Heaven bless Atherton and Tripp and Medway! May all their past sins be forgiven, and all their future ones be profitable! They have saved me and made a man of me. It is the turn of the tide."

He danced around the table, to the great amazement of the youthful Indian, whom, at last, he surprised even more by a large gratuity.

Ritchie saw nothing of Winsted in

several days. He received, however, several notes from Jennie, describing the varying conditions of her father's feelings, and her own warfare upon Ritchie's side. Then, one fine day, Winsted walked into the laboratory, smiling as sweetly as ever, and with extended hand.

"I've thought this thing out," he said, "and you're not to blame. I swindled myself; that's the fact about it. Jennie has shown me how the case really stands. She's a bright girl, and she likes you. She wants you to come up and take dinner with us to-day. And I like you, myself; be hanged if I don't. She's talked me into it. I think you and I can make some kind of partnership. I believe you're an honest man, and I need your advice. I—I want you to help me soak somebody else with that Yellow Dog claim."

"As an honest man," said Ritchie, "I can't view that proposition with favor. But I will go to dinner."

No. IX. of "Tales of the Chemists' Club" will appear in the issue of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out October 20th.

NEW COUNTERFEITING SCHEME

WEEKS of patient searching and watching by Captain Loughry, of the police bicycle squad, of Fort Worth, Texas, were rewarded when he placed under arrest a white man who is wanted by the Federal authorities in connection with the recent counterfeiting operations of two men at Abilene. The other man in the case was arrested about three weeks ago, and, according to Captain Loughry, is now serving sentence in one of the Federal prisons. Captain Loughry's prisoner was transferred to the Federal authorities for a hearing.

Counterfeiters have alleged to have photographed United States bank notes, a photograph of each side of the bill being printed and pasted back to back. The prints were thinned down by wearing away the reverse side with sandpapers. Tinting was done in a crude way, and wonder is expressed by authorities at the ability of counterfeiters in passing their spurious money.

Operations were carried on principally in the vicinity of Abilene and Baird, Federal authorities say.

Suggestion

by I.M. Hanbury

BUT when he touched his wife's temple with the revolver, he saw the old love light come into her eyes. He knew that look was a farewell to the dead man behind him, but he could not fire. "Kitty, Kitty," he cried, in anguish, "I cannot kill you!" Then he raised the weapon to his own head . . . a flash . . . and he fell. . . ."

"Thank heavens, *that's finished,*" Pasquale muttered. "Writing this kind of rot takes it out of a fellow. I've heard of actors becoming criminals because they've always played criminal parts, but when a man has had to feel the part of a husband, wife, and a lover, before he can write a convincing novel, he stands a fair chance of becoming a central figure in the annals of psychical criminology!"

Pasquale, author and genius, dropped on his bed and, as sleep instantly claimed his exhausted brain and body, forgot that he had been trying to personify a woman standing between a dead lover and an equally dead husband.

The next morning he awoke, depressed and unrefreshed. "Nerves, overwork!" he growled, and dressed hurriedly, all the while fighting the feeling of impending disaster. But later, as he swung down the Strand, he laughed at his previous forebodings—for the world was going well with Pasquale.

His publisher had not yet arrived, and while waiting for him, Pasquale

took up the morning paper. "The same sordid story," he groaned, glancing at the headlines:

CHELSEA SUICIDE AND MURDER.

Lord Fairfield Shoots His Wife's Artist Lover, Then Himself.

Lady Fairfield's Fatal Condition.

Without interest, Pasquale read how, hearing the shots, men from a neighboring studio had rushed in, and found Lady Fairfield standing beside the two dead men. She seemed dazed, and nothing could be learned from her. Her mind was evidently unhinged by the shock.

"The devil!" Pasquale cried, and, with sudden fear, searched for his manuscript. Yes, it was safe; every page properly numbered and in order. Was he mad, or had last night's work been too severe that he had his story always before his eyes? That was it, of course! He was tired, and had dropped to sleep in the office chair and dreamed. He laughed, and, cursing the state of his nerves, again took up the paper. On the front page he read:

CHELSEA SUICIDE AND MURDER.

Passing his hand over his eyes, he saw what this would mean to him. His long work was now useless. No one would take a story, good enough in itself, but an exact copy of a sensational tragedy told in the morning papers.

Laughing hysterically, he staggered down the stairs, and found his way home.

It was a cruel blow, and hit Pasquale hard. For ten years he had written stories of life, stories of death, love, and adventure. Every character, incident, and situation, was born in his own brain, and he heartily despised those who drew their copy from current events. Now, by strange coincidence, on the night when he had finished his latest book, his plot had been acted by live people, in some other part of the city.

Worn out and disgusted, Pasquale left London indefinitely. But soon, publisher and public were clamoring for more of his work, so, once more, Bloomsbury saw him working at his table, putting all his mind into a tremendous burglary' serial which, when finished, was to bring him a sum sufficient to drop out of the old life for a year or two.

The principal feature of the serial was the inexperience of the burglar, and the safe's lock. Pasquale, all his old college books strewn about the floor, studied to work out a simple and original combination.

For weeks he worried over the lock; the combination bothered him, until one day he accidentally picked up an article on suggestion and will power. Being a practical young man, the facts seemed hysterical, but being also an artist, the idea pleased him greatly. That night, while absently going over the diagram of the lock, his eyes followed the carefully traced lines of the combination, and he saw with surprise that the letter which had always eluded him, was a "G," and having found it, the key to the opening of the safe was the word "suggestion."

"Strange I didn't see that before," he mused. "I didn't even know there were two g's in suggestion. Now for the character. I've got him in my head, but I don't seem to get in touch with the unwashed devil."

The story dragged, and, when com-

pleted, Pasquale reread it with disgust.

"It's weak," he complained, "and here's two months already gone, and the whole thing has to be rewritten! It's that burglar. He isn't the right sort—he doesn't *live*." Lighting his pipe, Pasquale sank wearily into a chair.

Twenty minutes passed . . . an hour. . . . He reached mechanically for his pouch, and, still staring into the fire, refilled his pipe. Again silence; then his lips moved. . . . "I've got you at last, you inexperienced fool!" he muttered.

The room was full of smoke. Pasquale leaned forward in his chair, his face flushed with excitement. Then from his trembling lips the words fell in whispers: "No, not that way! Two g's. . . . S-U-G-G-E-S-T-I-O-N. . . . Yes! . . . Good heavens, can't you spell? . . . There! You've got it! . . . Three hundred thousand pounds clear for you! Now *git!*"

Pasquale fell back in his chair, exhausted and fainting.

Suddenly he arose with a start. "Good heavens! Two o'clock! I must have been asleep. I'm dead tired and don't feel like work, but that serial must get off to-morrow, and it has to be completely rewritten!"

Stretching himself, he crossed the room to his littered table, and listlessly prepared to write.

After the first few words, his pen flew; the ideas tumbled from his brain so quickly that he could not keep pace with them. "Hurrah!" he cried joyously. "I've got it! It's like a dream, and clear, too. I must have caught that young burgling rascal when I was asleep just now." Laughing like a boy, Pasquale set to work in earnest.

As the clock struck three, his door burst open, and Billy Sheldon, odd-job man on the *Daily Scum*, rushed in. "Come on, Pierre," he called. "Put up

that stuff and come with me. The *Scum's* got wind of a big thing, and I'm booked for the details. Burglary and combination-lock affair, with old Moor-kins, the millionaire, thrown in!"

"Get out!" Pasquale growled, never lifting his eyes from his work. "I've a burglar and combination lock of my own on hand, and there's more money in it than in your real-life stuff! Get an easier job, Billy; bring your burglars to your rooms and make your own combination locks!"

Sheldon laughed, and, seeing his friend had no intention of accompanying him, ran downstairs, and off to his "story."

Five hours passed, and as a foggy sun peered through the window, a woman entered Pasquale's room with a tray. He looked up in surprise. "What's that, Mrs. Green? Lunch or dinner?"

"Breakfast, sir," the good lady replied, sniffing the heavy, smoky air; "and you've been working all night again, sir! Look at your face!"

Pasquale rose to his feet, but staggered back against the table.

"There, there, Mrs. Green," he laughed. "Don't worry about me. It's my last all-night bust. To-day I get a fat editorial check and trot off to the green fields. I caught a perfectly innocent young man, and it's been an all night's work to turn him into an intelligent burglar for the *Fiddler!*"

Mrs. Green sniffed again, and set down the tray. "If bein' a genius, sir, means I'd have to talk crazylike, I'd rather keep my house, sir, and cook for folks what never eats," she ended wistfully. Genuine concern on her motherly face, she went below.

Pasquale smiled good-naturedly at the retreating figure, swallowed his tea, and, tucking his manuscript under his arm, started off for the office of the *Fiddler*.

"Hello, Pasquale," the editor said

cordially. "We've had an awful scare about you. We're just going to press, and that story of yours has to appear in this issue; advertised it four months ago. What was the matter? You've never been so late before."

"A lock, for one thing," Pasquale laughed, "and a burglar for another! It's taken me two months to get a combination, because I had forgotten how to spell. Then the man wasn't real, and the whole thing was silly. But last night I got the hang of it, and rewrote the entire first part, for which my landlady is at present in tears!"

The editor laughed, glanced over the manuscript, and wrote a check.

"One thousand pounds," he groaned. "Heaven help you, Pasquale, if it isn't one of your best! This is the biggest check I've ever signed, and it depresses me! But if anything *can* pull up the *Fiddler*, it's a story from you. So long, old man. Get your money's worth out of that piece of paper!"

In a little village in Cornwall, a man dug his potatoes, smiling the while.

"Oh, the joy of it," he laughed, as he threw himself down on the warm earth to inspect his blistered hands. Just then, the rural postman shouted across the fields: "Mr. Pasquale, sir?"

"Hang!" grumbled the farmer, as he crossed the potato patch. "I told Burns not to bother me with mail until I sent for it." He stuffed the letter unopened into his pocket and resumed his digging. But the touch from the outside world had jarred, and, putting up his tools, Pasquale went into the house.

"Hang Burns," he repeated, as he opened the lawyer's letter:

DEAR PIERRE: You had better come back at once. Your publisher is making the devil of a row, and has sent back your story, at the same time demanding his check for one thousand pounds.

I do not wish to write much, so come up

immediately, for at any moment the *Fiddler* may turn the matter over to their lawyers. That Moorkins burglary is still bothering Scotland Yard, and if your story gets into their hands before they catch their man, we'll have to put up a big fight.

I need not assure you, old man, that my mind is at rest, knowing there is some explanation which, at the time of writing, my matter-of-fact brain is incapable of conceiving. Therefore directly you arrive, come to my office. Yours ever, ARTHUR BURNS.

"What's it all about," Pasquale mused. "Arthur writes as if he is trying to soothe a lunatic, or give courage to a criminal." Glancing at his watch, he left the bungalow, and sprinted along the country road to catch the London express.

When Pasquale arrived at his lawyer's, Burns led him into his private office. "Glad to see you, old man," he said affectionately. "Have a cigar, and sit still while I tell you my story, and then you can talk. Fact is, I'm all on edge over this blamed thing, and feel as if I want to keep you from talking as long as possible."

"Sort of 'every-word-you-say-shall-be-used-against-you,' eh?" Pasquale laughed, as he settled into his chair. "Hurry along, Arthur. I want to get back to my potatoes!"

Burns walked up and down the room, and finally blurted out in quick, nervous sentences:

"About four months ago you received a commission for a story from the *Fiddler*. On the morning of May 21st, you took the manuscript to them. You were nervous and unstrung, and told the editor you had written the story only the night before—night of May 20th. The editor gave you check for one thousand pounds. . . . You disappeared. Same time as first installment went to press—morning May 21st, the *Daily Scum* came out with the Moorkins burglary case. The *Scum* was the only paper that had anything about it, as Moorkins had cautioned Scotland Yard to keep the thing quiet.

Since then, all the details have come out, and—and—hang it all, man, the only difference between your story and that robbery is that you wrote the one, and the other is dry police fact!

"The *Fiddler* sent for me at once, gave me back your manuscript, and intend to sue, if you don't make good their check for one thousand pounds. They believe you got the whole thing from the *Scum*, and played a low-down trick by sending it in as original stuff. Good! But their lawyers will want to know *how* you got the details; *how* you learned the combination of the lock Moorkins invented and manufactured himself! Remember, all these details did not come out until nearly a week after your manuscript went to press.

"Now, man, it's serious; and if you can't make it clear, you'll probably be under suspicion as the man for whom the police are at present scouring London! That's all—and, for Heaven's sake, say *something!*"

Like a man who had received his death sentence, Pasquale raised a white face and looked at his friend. "Just my luck, Arthur. There's my little potato patch and the bungalow with the yellow roses all wiped out!"

Burns looked at his friend with consternation. "Man alive, stop this talk about potatoes and yellow roses! Can't you understand? It's this: *Did you rob Moorkins' safe and get off with three hundred thousand pounds, or did you, like a beastly cad, sneak the whole story from some reporter and pass it off as firsthand stuff?*

"The first I won't believe. The other . . . why, it's your utter ruin, and the ruin of whoever gave you inside information! In that case you'll be lucky to get off with heavy damages, but you'll never be able to soothe the feelings of the public after playing the fool like this! Ruin, man . . . utter ruin!"

Pasquale stood up wearily and

walked to the door. "It's no good, Arthur. You're wrong in both conclusions. I wrote the story out of my head, and that's all there is about it!"

Burns started as if his friend had struck him. "Prove it! Prove it, man, by showing where you were that night! Tell me everything!"

"Nothing to tell," Pasquale sighed. "I was in my rotten dig's in Bloomsbury, and wrote the whole thing during the night. Then my landlady brought up some grub, and I went to the *Fiddler* and got a check."

"But didn't any one see you at work? Didn't anything happen to prove you were there before the landlady came in the morning?" Burns asked excitedly.

"No—yes . . ." Pasquale answered wearily. "Billy Sheldon came up, I think. Still, I'm not sure, for my head was full of the story then. I remember it was the very deuce to make it run smoothly."

But Burns had rushed to the telephone. "*Daily Scum?*" he shouted. "Send Mr. Sheldon to No. 23 Frogmorton Street, at once—Arthur Burns—third floor!" Then, as he hung up the receiver, he began to pace the room again.

"Sit down, Pierre!" he ordered. The two men sat in silence until Billy Sheldon hurried in, copy lust lighting up his handsome, young face. Pasquale glanced impatiently at his eager friend. "For Heaven's sake, Billy, look less like a newspaper man, and stop grinning," he growled. "Then, when you've found out what Burns thinks he's been explaining, come and tell me what the row's about. I'm going to your rooms."

When Pasquale had gone, Burns turned to the reporter. "Mr. Sheldon," he said, "I hope you have nothing of importance on hand for an hour or so, and that I may speak to you now as a friend of Pierre Pasquale, and not as a newspaper man?"

Seeing the old man's worn look, Shel-

don answered seriously: "Wherever Pierre is concerned, Mr. Burns, my chief fault is sincerity and affection, for there never was found in the make-up of one man a greater genius and a greater child."

Burns took the young man's extended hand, and characteristically went to the root of the matter at once.

"It is this, Mr. Sheldon: Our friend may be dragged into the courts and convicted for the Moorkins robbery on the sole evidence of an unfortunate story. He tells me you came to him on the night of the robbery. Is that so?"

"Yes," Sheldon answered immediately, "and he was head over heels in work when I went up at two o'clock in the morning." Then, under the lawyer's questioning, Sheldon set himself to remember every detail of the conversation on that night.

"And you did not return later with any further details you had learned?" Burns finally asked.

"No. Nor did I see him again until half an hour ago in this office. Moreover, I could have told him nothing further, for we didn't know the details ourselves until three or four days later, when all the stuff about the lock being Moorkins' invention came out."

"Well, Sheldon, I'm floored," Burns muttered. "Here, read this. It's the story. You'll then understand how serious this is."

Sheldon took the manuscript, and for an hour read in silence.

"It's great!" he cried, when he had finished. "But all the facts are stale now. What do you make out of it, Mr. Burns?"

"Nothing, or everything; I don't know! Go back to Pierre and make him talk. It will take both of us to sift this, especially as at present his mind runs on nothing but potatoes!"

When Sheldon reached home, he found Pasquale working over a sheet of figures which proved to be an ac-

count of the profit to be made after three years, from an investment of five hundred pounds in potatoes!

"Let 'em wait, Pierre," he said awkwardly, "and talk to me. Burns is not himself with worry about you, and you can put everything straight in a minute by saying how you got the facts for your story."

Pasquale looked like a hurt child wrongfully accused, but, touched by the expression on his friend's face, answered slowly: "Out of my head, same as I told Arthur."

"But the combination lock Moorkins invented, and put together himself?"

"Out of my head, and a devil of a lot of bother it gave me, six months ago!"

"Six months ago!" Sheldon exclaimed. "That was when Moorkins was inventing his lock!"

"Can't help that." Pasquale was becoming irritable. "If you want to know anything else, get my old trunk out of the warehouse, and you'll probably find the diagrams somewhere, with the story as I first wrote it, before the whole thing came like a dream. I'm fond of you, Billy, but you and Burns are getting tiresome. Fish out that trunk, and leave me alone."

More to gain time, than with any hope of solving the riddle, Sheldon hurried off to the warehouse, Pasquale's authority to get the trunk, in his pocket. A little later he was back, rummaging the trunk for the first proofs of the burglar story.

At the bottom, he came across a roll of manuscript and drew it out. "What's this, Pierre?" he called, glancing over the papers. "Never seen it in print. Turned down?"

Pasquale looked up from his figures for a moment. "Oh, that. No . . . never in print. Rotten piece of luck, that; made me so disgusted, I nearly chucked writing. Read it—it's good-enough stuff."

Sheldon opened the packet, and began to read. Suddenly he cried: "It's fine, Pierre, but it's the story of the Fairfields and poor old Ceril Thornby, the artist."

"It is," Pasquale laughed. "That's just what I said, too, when I sat in the publisher's office with my manuscript under my arm, and read the whole thing in the morning paper!"

"You're not trying to tell me——"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything, except that that story gave me the blow of my life. I thought it rather good, for me; then some live fools acted the whole thing before I had time to get my stuff into print—and, as put down in journalistic eloquence, it was a rotten story, too! That's what I am trying to tell you, though not for a moment thinking I can explain it to you."

Sheldon sat like a frightened child and stared at his friend.

"Don't tell me it's suggestion, Pierre, for although I once wrote an article on that for the *Scum*, it's rot, and I don't believe in it."

"Suggestion!" Pasquale shouted. "Then you're responsible for my lock combination, you villain! That article of yours stuck in my head, and finally I found that the combination I was working out opened my once-thought-unique safe by that one word; spelled differently from the way it ought to be, however."

Sheldon still stared open-mouthed at his friend; then, without a word, collected the scattered manuscript, and rushed from the house to Burns.

"Here, read this, Burns!" he cried. "He wrote it before the Fairfields case came out in the papers!" Unable to grasp what Sheldon meant, Burns took the manuscript and read.

"Aye, it's uncanny, man," he said at last, relapsing into his native tongue. "The lad is clean daft, or under some evil control. I dinna like the sound of yon article—it reads like he kens too

weel the feelings of these ither folk. It's as if he went into them and listened to the things they say and do, a' the time keeping the power to write it doon. It smacks of forcing the pair souls to do what he writes doon for siller! It's like—it's like——"

"Suggestion," Sheldon whispered to himself.

"Aye, man, what's that ye say? Suggestion? That's the word, laddie! It's as if they *have* to, because he is thinking of it! I dinna like it."

"But it proves Pierre didn't——" Sheldon began, and hesitated. "Aye, it shows the laddie never did bother Moorkins, money or no! It's nae mair than some evil influence the lad is under. I'll telephone the *Fiddler*, and see what we can do."

As they waited for the representative from Pasquale's publisher, the two men talked. "But Pierre has spent more than half the thousand pounds already," Sheldon objected to the lawyer's suggestion that they refund the money with the explanation that, being pressed for time, Pasquale had taken the entire story from the newspapers, hoping it would pass unnoticed. "For," Burns explained, "so long as it has not gone to their lawyers, there is no danger of the editor wondering where the details came from. He doesn't know whether they were known before the newspapers printed them later, and in the meantime Scotland Yard will probably catch their man."

Burns was interrupted as the clerk ushered in the *Fiddler's* representative.

"Be seated, sir," Burns began sternly, the light of battle in his eye. "I have sent for you to tell you how much I regret the inconvenience to which your firm has been put, and to offer you, in the name of my client, Mr. Pasquale, the sum of one thousand pounds as compensation for your loss of time, and money spent in advertising and printing his unfortunate story. I also re-

fund you the one thousand pounds paid to him by your firm. The only explanation my client wishes to offer is that he was pressed for time and money, and as it is perfectly legitimate to make use of any current topic, he used the Moorkins robbery as the theme of his story. However, if by any further work he can further compensate you, I have no doubt he will gladly do so."

Burns paused, and Sheldon, wondering where the lawyer intended getting two thousand pounds, looked on aghast.

"Compensation!" the representative cried, in disgust. "We will accept the check, but as for any further commissions from us or any other self-respecting paper, you may tell Mr. Pasquale from me, his account is closed. This is his ruin; not one of us would touch the greatest work in the world, if written by him!"

Burns, grown suddenly gray and weak, sat down heavily and wrote a check for two thousand pounds. The *Fiddler's* representative looked at it. "This is your personal check, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," Burns replied simply. "Mr. Pasquale deposited that amount to my account when he realized he had made a mistake in this—his only unworthy act."

Then, as the man left the office, Burns dropped his head on his arms, like an old man who has looked on the destruction of his life's dream.

Sheldon stared at the bowed head for a moment, anger and emotion fighting in his heart. Then, he, too, wrote a check and laid it beside the old man.

"You can't do it alone, Burns," he said kindly. "Pierre is my friend, too." At the unasked question in the lawyer's eyes, he added quickly: "Oh! I've a couple of hundred left, and nothing to do with 'em." Then, seeing the other still doubted, he turned on his heel and left the office.

Pasquale was still at work. Sheldon touched his shoulder and said quietly: "Go back to the country, Pierre, and—give up writing, old man. Your publishers are liberal in their denunciation of you and your stuff!"

"Good!" Pasquale exclaimed, regaining his good humor at the thought of an immediate return to his potatoes. "I never intend to write another word in my life. Good-by, Billy, and thanks awfully for whatever you and Arthur have done, though, for the life of me, I still don't understand what the row's been about! Both of you come down some time, and I'll show you a potato patch that will make your hearts young again!"

During the five years Pasquale had planted potatoes, his ardor had never for a moment diminished. True, for the last year he had been constantly drawing on the bank, but, to him, that seemed the sole excuse for its existence, so when he received word that his account was overdrawn, he felt as a petulant child might, when temporarily deprived of jam.

Now did he realize the seriousness of his position, until the plow needed a new share, and he had not the wherewithal to purchase it. Then it was only anger he felt—anger against the bank, the series of bad summers, and the world in general. "There is nothing for it, but to write again," he told himself dejectedly. Calling his farm hand, he told him the facts.

"I've no more money, John, and we need a new plow, and lots of other things. It seems I can't buy them, so I'll have to pay you off, and get along alone, as best I can, until I get fresh funds."

John, who was devoted to Pasquale, would not hear of his plans. "I shall work on as before, sir," he said. "Me and the missus have saved up a tidy sum from the overpay you always give

me, and—and—well, sir, I never earned that money, and please, sir, wouldn't you use it, sir, until you get the other money, sir!"

John's honest face was red and embarrassed, and Pasquale slapped him on the back in friendly fashion. "No, John, I'll have a check in two or three weeks; but if you won't go, I suppose you'll work on, that's all! It won't be long before I can square up, anyway."

That night, Pasquale wrote to his friend, Billy Sheldon:

Come and see fair play, Billy. I won't use my own name, and I'll spin out a yarn about myself this time, so you and Arthur can put your old minds at rest about the "tender feelings of the public!"

Then he shut himself up in his den to work.

"Fine subject I am, for a penny shocker," he mused. "I'm afraid I'll have to be satisfied with the hero's part, and John can be the villain!" He chuckled to himself at the idea, and wrote rapidly all through the night.

The next morning John brought in breakfast as usual.

Pasquale eyed him with amusement. "Not so polite, my villain," he laughed to himself, as the adoring John left him after a puzzled stare at the pile of manuscript strewn about the table. "You don't strike me as a murderous ruffian, and you're no inspiration at all when you look at me like a worried old hen!"

That afternoon Sheldon arrived.

"See that?" Pasquale laughed, as John served the dinner. "That specimen of British honesty is my villain; he has to make away with me, the English baron!"

Sheldon glanced over the manuscript and found it to be one of Pasquale's best, but later, when John confided to him his fears that his young master was overworking, and related harrowing tales of untouched breakfasts—he secretly marveled at Pasquale's san-

guine genius, if he intended to get copy from his devoted servant!

Sheldon retired early, tired with the unaccustomed outdoor life, and Pasquale worked in his silent den.

A few nights later, Sheldon was awakened by the sound of a window shutting. Thinking it was Pasquale going to his room after a long night's work, he called out: "That you, Pierre?"

There was no answer, so he got up and followed the direction he imagined the footsteps had taken. Before he had gone far, a cry rang through the house. It came from Pasquale's den, and as he dashed downstairs, Sheldon collided violently with some one running up.

"Hello, Pierre," he gasped. "You all right? Where's the row?" Then he saw the man was John. "Oh, sir—Mr. Pasquale—in the study—quick—he's dying—I killed him—quick—for the love of Heaven!"

Sheldon ran to the study, and for a moment was relieved, for there, at his desk, his back to the door, sat Pasquale. But as Sheldon crossed the room, the figure slid from the chair, and fell in a heap on the floor.

Instantly Sheldon was beside his friend, and saw that Pasquale, who had been stabbed from behind, was rapidly dying. As Sheldon bent over him, he struggled to speak, and at last whispered faintly:

"Billy—he—couldn't help it— It must—have been—like—the other stories. Promise—to clear—him—"

Then, as the blood gushed from his mouth, Pasquale sank back and died.

Bewildered, and half fainting, Sheldon still sat beside his friend's body, when the door opened, and John stumbled in. He threw himself upon the dead man, moaning and muttering incoherently, until Sheldon forced him aside roughly.

"What are you doing here at this

hour of the night?" he asked harshly. John began to moan again, and with difficulty Sheldon caught the drift of his mutterings: "I found myself dressed—and with a knife. . . . I don't know how I got out of my house—I ran along the road—I climbed into the window—I don't know why. . . . I only know I suddenly awoke with the handle of a knife in my hand. . . . Oh, heavens! The blade was in my master's back! I must have done it—I—I must have killed him. . . ." Then, before Sheldon could stop him, the distracted man had plunged the knife into his own breast.

Morning found the local police in possession of the little cottage with the yellow roses and the potato patch, but although the den gave evidence of recent use and work, they could find nothing to show what Pasquale had been doing on that fatal night. So, baffled, they called it "murder and suicide—motives unknown."

But Sheldon and his friend Burns were in possession of Pasquale's last manuscript, and in the lawyer's town office they read it and, together deciphered the last bloodstained page.

"Aye, the laddie created his ain murderer," the Scotsman said sadly, "and oot of a perfectly innocent and affectionate man, too. Did I no say 'twas a power from the Evil One? See his last words: 'Stealthy footsteps stole down the hall, and, creeping behind his master, John raised his arm, and the knife—' The puir laddie never wrote that last word 'buried' or 'sank,' or whatever was in his mind, for John struck then, helplessly doing his master's bidding, and it was only when the influence of that strong mind was broken, the puir creature came to himself and saw what he had done! Ah! My puir, puir laddie. . . ."

After a few moments, Sheldon said softly: "Burns, I feel it my duty to

write this up, for the sake of poor Lord Fairfield, and the innocent man who robbed Moorkins' safe. He is no more guilty of theft than was John of murdering his master!"

"Nay, laddie," Burns replied sorrowfully, "you nor I can do naught. Are ye hoping to stand op before a judge, and twelve healthy-minded British

jurymen, and convince them of this thing that neither I nor you can understand? Think of the feelings of the public when they read the accounts of your speech in a respectable morning paper!"

"Darn the feelings of the public!" Sheldon exclaimed, as he mixed himself a stiff drink.

PASSING OF NEW YORK'S CHINATOWN

TIME was when poker threatened the supremacy of fan-tan in New York's Chinatown. The elusive full house was taken to the Chinese bosom, and players sat up far into the night in pursuit of the higher learning which tells a student of Hoyle when to toss away one of his two pairs for the sake of improving his chances in the draw. But that time is past. In this day poker and the Chinese of Pell Street scarcely speak as they pass.

Because poker, with its chance for the individual player as against games in which the dealer holds all the advantage, appeals to the Chinese gambling sense, it thrived in Chinatown. The American deck was easier to handle, too—and perhaps to slip into a capacious sleeve—than the narrow cards of the Orient.

But its vogue was of brief duration, for American detectives, who knew even more about the game than the crafty Chinese, swooped down upon it, confiscated the cards and chips, and arrested the players. Fan-tan came back into its own because, to quote one of the detectives who helped put poker out of business: "You can't tell by lookin' at a bunch of chinks playin' th' blasted game whether they're gambling or takin' up a collection for the Belgians."

When detectives battered down half a dozen "ice-box" doors, broke their heads in low-ceiled passageways, and barked their shins on chairs thrown in their path by fleeing "lookouts," they often got to gambling rooms to find from half a dozen to fifty bland Chinamen sitting about tables and fingering buttons and dominoes. There was no money in sight.

Sometimes they went over roofs, clambered down fire escapes, dropped into courtyards, shinned a wall, and let themselves in through a window. By the time they had pried loose the iron bars covering the glass, kicked out the window frame, and tumbled into the room, there was one suspected gambler left, and he was asleep, his head pillowed on a gambling table.

To-day there is no gambling in Chinatown. That is a statement worth emphasizing. The activity of the police department is responsible.

Consequent of this, Chinatown is threatened with extinction. In another year, those who know say, there will be hundreds in the district where once there were thousands. The Chinese theater is gone. Stores are closed.

Chinatown is near effacement because of the closing down of gambling. The Chinese is the world's natural gambler. He will wager on the number of seeds in an orange, on the number of grains in an ear of corn—on anything, in fact, that affords the chance. Unless he can gamble he does not stay in his home. Absolutely without home ties, and willing even to sacrifice his business, of whatever it may consist, for a chance to be where he may bet something on something, he packs up and gets out when gambling is denied him.

Headquarters Chat

IT was the worst snowstorm of the year. Two o'clock in the morning. The wind struck hard at the two figures toiling through the drifts. One was taller than the other, a man, by his manner and action, held the shorter, possibly a woman, close and vehemently, with a determination that evidently combated the other's desire to escape.

Now almost carrying his companion, the taller of the two slid and lurched down the incline at One Hundred and Thirty-fourth Street, to the Hudson River. The gale had cleared just a bit just here, and the plank and shoring showed bare, where, nosed to it, lay an interned ship.

The burden bearer halted for a moment as he reached the interned boat, then stepped on the narrow plank; and, coursing like a hunted stag up the deck, he and his burden sank into the inscrutableness of the darkness that is a super-darkness, and heralds the birth of all our To-days.

In this way, two of the leading characters in

THE BLACK OPAL

By FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS

the novelette in the next issue, are introduced to you. This is one of the best detective stories that we have ever read, and we have read *some* detective stories. That you will agree with us, that the story will thrill you as you have not been thrilled in many a long day, and that you will write and ask for more stories by Miss Mathews, we feel assured. To the reading public, Miss Mathews needs no introduction, celebrated as she has been for many years as an author of rare talent.

Forceful, dramatic, with the element of suspense masterfully sustained,

A BATTLE FOR RIGHT

By DOUGLAS GREY

begins in serial form in the next issue. Thorndyke Flint, the great detective, and his assistants are pitted against the wit and brawn of as crafty a criminal as ever thrust aside honor and man-made laws to gain his own dastardly ends. This is the best serial, so far, from the pen of Douglas Grey.

The next installment of "The Yellow Claw," by Sax Rohmer, is a corker. The short stories include: "The Indelible Stain," the ninth of the "Tales of the Chemists' Club" series, by Howard Fielding; "The Haunted House," by Alice Ziska Snyder; "A Prima Donna in Plain Clothes," by Frank Blynton; and "Bije Hicks and the Safe Blower," by Keene Thompson.

CAN YOU SOLVE THIS ONE?

Readers of the magazine have taken such an interest in solving cryptograms and puzzles that we intend making these puzzles a regular feature. The answer to this one will be printed in the next issue, so solve it now; and when you get

the October 20th number, see if your solution is correct. Here is the puzzle. Go to it!

Following the arrest and conviction of Slim Pete, who committed one of the most daring burglaries in the history of crime, the police of one of our largest cities spent considerable time, and went to great pains, before the loot was recovered. The only clues they had to work on were a note containing a purposeless lot of words, and the whispered word, "Hoakersville," which passed from the lips of Pete to a pal as he tried to hand Pete the slip of paper, just as two detectives were leading the dejected prisoner into the station house.

The quick ear of one of the detectives caught the word. The note was taken to the handwriting expert at police headquarters, and, when he had spent considerable time with it, he discovered that it contained a sentence telling the location of the spot in Hoakersville where the loot was buried. A search was made and the stolen property was recovered.

In writing the words, the burglar jumbled them in an unintelligible string, and intended that his pal should work over them until he had them rearranged in a sentence containing correct English. In order to make it a little easier, he built a skeleton of this sentence as it should be, by placing the first word, and each sixth word after it, in its proper place, and made it necessary to rearrange only the other words in his note. This, the handwriting expert tells us, is what he meant by the memorandum in the upper left-hand corner. What can you do with it?

1st and each succeeding 6th.

On lighthouse between imaginary running line and cabin, walk on the cliff five from north breakwater, at paces high, turn breakwater to face tide headlight, edge to waters advance, and dig.

Here are some more names of those who correctly solved the cryptogram in the June 20th issue. The first lot of these names were printed in the September 20th issue, together with names of the one hundred persons who were given free subscriptions:

R. E. Trye, Marie Russell, Leo B. Williams, Theo. J. Asper, J. P. Isbell, Ed. Banfield, Michael Sheehan, Walter Haddas, Lulu Beyer, Bradford W. Gweans, Chas. Urban, C. G. Howard, Fred. Holt, Walter H. Whitacre, C. D. Baker, Burnis C. Parmelee, Horace Willis, C. A. Bolgiano, O. N. Scherer, Gabriel Lipschitz, G. Christy, May Parkinson, Joseph M. Serman, J. P. Sands, R. A. Blunden, Wm. Ackermann, L. J. Smith, Fred Endert, Alfred Cook, Frank Gillespie, Edwin H. Powell, E. A. Walls, R. E. Davis, R. W. Cropley, Havelock McEachern, Andrew Stockton, J. V. Abel, Lyman Sexton, William B. Ranch, George Winslow, Clinton L. Stocxdale, A. Barker, Leo Hirsh, David McDonald, A. C. Preston, Nat. Nathanson, R. M. Losea, E. H. Hutchinson, C. G. McCoy, Thos. J. Tealey, Theodore L. Genter, Samuel Levy, C. M. Hoff, Robert L. Hoadley, Roy Carlson, Richard J. Carr, Albert Muth, Mrs. H. L. Hall, Wm. H. Rohli, Frank Baude, Marie V. de Sato,

Francis Mulcaly, Ora Price, Flora Janke, Carl Nickelsen, L. H. McIntyre, Francis E. Shannon, J. F. G. Mueller, A. C. Junll, Glen M. Roystory.

Clifton Stewart, C. A. Collingwood, Albert S. Flood, W. L. Moats, L. M. Washburn, William Gardiner, Olin Kopp, R. L. Gilmore, Thos. A. Jackovics, W. E. Fox, W. Spratlen, Wm. J. Murdock, Joseph Hamill, J. H. Holms, H. R. Stoaps, Miss Olga Broad, J. E. Burshfield, Edgar C. Cox, Harry Jeitner, Walter Stevens, Mrs. L. J. Real, H. M. Kelly, J. W. Jones, G. H. Cummings, Muriel Jordan, Louis Wood, Mrs. David G. Brown, John Baker, Raymond Kittel, Arthur Hopkins, Albert Cratus, Frank E. Coyre, George R. Hatch, Ralph P. Young, Ernest G. Bishop, Wm. A. Stanley, C. H. Sweet, Daniel Westfield, John Glismann, Albert Lusigman, R. W. Barton, Geo. Desrosier, J. L. Williams, Walter Wurdeman, Mrs. W. I. Banks, Miss I. J. Castro, Fred. Sharpe, Inez Kisselburgh, Geraldine Meacham, Mrs. Dorothy Gormoll.

Headquarters Chat

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