

THE BLACK MASĀK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE



AUGUST, 1920

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THE BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE

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He took one step within the battleship-armored doorway, gasped, and took two steps backward, yelling for help.—Page 6.

The Man Who Was Seven

(A Complete Novelette)

By J. Frederic Thorne

CHAPTER I

A man cannot be in two places at the same time.

That is a law of physics—isn't it?

But how about the other law, of evidence, and your own senses? If you saw and heard a man in that impossible situation or condition, which would you believe, the law or your own eyes and ears?

"But the thing is impossible!"

So? Then how about this:

ON ONE of those fine Italian spring mornings that pass for summer in the Puget Sound country, there entered the Savoy Hotel, Seattle, a man who ordinarily would not call for specific description, but who, for the sake of this argument, we need to identify particularly.

He stood out from the world about five feet eleven inches, weighed approximately one hundred and sixty to one hundred and seventy pounds, was apparently in his late thirties or early forties, wore a neatly trimmed brown mustache and beard of the cut known as Vandyke, spectacles with large, rimless, egg-shaped lenses, a soft black broad-brimmed hat, blue serge suit with double-breasted coat, black tie, low tan shoes, carried a light-weight gray overcoat, a black Gladstone bag and a sole-leather suitcase. He walked with a slight but noticeable limp of the left leg.

Relinquishing coat and bags to a bell-

boy, the newcomer nodded pleasantly to the clerk and registered, in a distinctly legible hand, the name "Samuel Smith," without address. This done, he set his watch by that of the clerk—it was just 10:02 A. M.—received his key and followed the bell-boy to room 314. Tipping the boy generously but not lavishly, he asked that the hotel valet and public stenographer be sent to him. To the one he gave a suit of clothes for pressing; to the other he dictated two short letters. Returning to the lobby, he bought a dollar's worth of cigars, asked to be directed to the Totem National Bank, glanced at his watch and, commenting audibly upon the time, 10:48, walked out into the crowd on Second Avenue.

Nothing remarkable or unusual about that, nothing that does not occur, in a general way, in a thousand hotels all over the land every day in the year?

True. But wait a moment. The case is not stated yet.

On that same fine Italian spring morning of the same day, in this same city of Seattle, Washington, there entered the Butler Hotel, a man who ordinarily would not call for specific description, but who, for the sake of this argument, we need to identify particularly.

He stood out from the world about five feet eleven inches, weighed approximately one hundred and sixty to one hundred and seventy pounds, was apparently in his late thirties or early forties, wore a neatly trimmed brown

mustache and beard of the cut known as Vandyke, spectacles with large egg-shaped lenses, black tie, low tan shoes, blue serge suit with double-breasted coat, a soft black broad-brimmed hat, carried a light weight gray overcoat, a black Gladstone bag and sole-leather suitcase. He walked with a slight but noticeable limp of the left leg.

Relinquishing coat and bags to a bell-boy, the newcomer nodded pleasantly to the clerk and registered, in a distinctly legible hand, the name "Samuel Smith," without address. This done, he set his watch by that of the clerk—it was just 10:02 A. M.—received his key and followed the bell-boy to room 264. Tipping the boy generously but not lavishly, he asked that the hotel valet and public stenographer be sent to him. To the one he gave a suit of clothes for pressing; to the other dictated two short letters. Returning to the lobby, he bought a dollar's worth of cigars, asked to be directed to the Totem National Bank, glanced at his watch and commented audibly upon the time, 10:48, and walked out into the crowded street.

That makes it just a little more unusual—eh, what? But don't be impatient or jump at conclusions. There is more to come.

On one of those fine Italian spring mornings that pass for summer in the Puget Sound country there entered the Rainier Grand Hotel, Seattle, a man who ordinarily—

Well, there's no use going through it all again in the style of "One dark and stormy night in the Carpathian mountains a robber band gathered about their chief—."

To clinch the matter, a man of exactly the same appearance as described above entered, at the same hour and minute, signed the same name in the same handwriting, did exactly the same things, made the same remarks, and

left at the same minute, not only the Savoy and Butler, but also the Rainier Grand, Washington, Lincoln, Seattle and Frye Hotels.

Hotel clerks are observing people, as men go, and each of them, of all seven hotels, not only stated the facts as here set down but swore to them, with many additional and confirmatory details you have not been bothered with.

Talk about your alibis! Most men are content with proving that they were at some one other place at a given time, but here was a man—if the singular pronoun be correct—who was in seven different places at the same time, with some thirty-odd reputable witnesses able to testify to the fact, if it *was* a fact.

That sort of thing isn't an alibi—it is the fourth dimension.

CHAPTER II

You never would have taken Jim Carranaugh for a detective. He was too obvious. Entirely too big. Too big by a number of inches, both ways.

To be sure, he could and had, by strenuous starvation, trained down to two hundred and eighty pounds; also, he had reached four hundred and one. Some place between these two extremes might be called normal, if Jim could be called a normal human at any time. Four inches and a half above six feet and almost an equal distance around his equator makes a fairly sizable man, so it is no wonder he attracted and held attention wherever he went.

But for all his size, Carranaugh was nimble of hand and foot as well as of wit, and could catch a car or a culprit as readily as the point of a joke. His command of polyglot American was the marvel and joy of his friends. The English language could not be broken into too small or too irregular pieces

to escape his power of mimicry. Had he not been the able detective he was, he would have made a rare character actor; had he not been so good an actor he might not have been so efficient an officer of the law.

CHAPTER III

THE Totem National Bank of Seattle occupies a one-story building of its own just off Pioneer Square in the older part of the city, close to the wholesale and commission firms, warehouses and shipping interests that form the bulk of its depositors.

Westward to the present shore or wharfline is all made ground. The lower layers of this are, or were, sawdust and slabs from the sawmills that were one of the earliest industries of the little town that was to become a great city. To this substratum was added the refuse of the growing community, until finally the casual and indeterminate merged into the planned and ordered earth-and-stone fill upon which paved streets and huge buildings rest.

The outer and western edge of this district still is, however, in more or less of its earlier formative state, piled and planked over for much of the area between Western Avenue and Elliott Bay. Beneath these streets and their wooden structures the rising and falling tides slosh about and the industrious *toredo* lunches on fir and spruce with creosote dressing.

On a certain summer Monday morning the steamship *Bertha* arrived at her dock in Seattle, bringing from Alaska via Skagway a shipment of \$200,000 in gold—bars, nuggets and dust—consigned to the Totem National Bank. As was sometimes the custom in those days, this gold was displayed heaped up in the bank's windows to satisfy the curiosity, whet the avaricious appetite

and inspire the confidence of passersby.

This comfortable fortune was exhibited during banking hours on Tuesday and Wednesday under the jealous eyes of two guards stationed within the bank and two others at either side of the window on the street outside. There really was no danger of robbery. The heap of gold weighed over a thousand pounds and the window was heavily and closely barred inside and out. The guards were nearly as much a part of the peep-show as the gold, the additional and necessary touch to give it the proper importance in the public eye. At night the gold was transferred from the window to the bank vault, with due ceremony, lapsing there to its proper measure of importance in a bank that reckoned its resources by the million.

So much for the stage setting. Now for the first scene of the comedy-drama.

CHAPTER IV

PERHAPS it had better be called prologue, since it happened nearly a week before the arrival and display of the gold—to be exact, on the very day that the *Bertha* cleared from Skagway. At that time it attracted no greater attention than any other of the many routine transactions of the Totem National, being merely the leasing of a safe-deposit box, one of the largest, such as generally is used for the safe keeping of large books or other bulky records of value.

The lessor gave his name as Seth C. Seeley; address, temporary, Hotel Savoy, Seattle; permanent, Bankers' Trust Company, New York; business, dealer in securities. In less than an hour after receiving his card of identification and key Seeley returned with a large parcel heavily wrapped and corded, apparently of considerable weight and of a size that just fitted

into and filled the box. Remarking pettishly that the Totem National should be prepared to supply its customers with more adequate accommodations, Seeley grumblingly hired the two adjoining boxes of the same size as the first and in turn filled them with similar parcels. These, like the first, he carried and put in place with his own hands, despite their evident weight, roughly declining all assistance proffered by the banks employees.

Thursday morning of that week Daniels, first assistant cashier of the Totem National, unlocked the vault to withdraw the cash necessary for the day's business and to superintend the removal of the \$200,000 gold to its place in the limelight. He took one step within the battleship-armored doorway, gasped, and took two steps backward, yelling for help.

There were two entirely sufficient causes for the first assistant cashier's excitement. The most apparent was the body of a man lying sprawled on the vault floor, very evidently and most completely dead. The second, to Daniels' trained eyes, the almost equally obvious fact that the vault had been looted—of the \$200,000 in gold and he did not know how much more.

For reasons that all bankers will understand and sympathize with, but toward which newspaper men hold very different attitudes, the officials of the Totem National made every effort and used every means at their command to keep all news of the robbery from the public, to such good effect that no suspicion of any of the happenings here related reached the newspapers until the whole incident was history. The body of the dead man added annoying complications to this hushing-up process, but the power of money is great even when it lies fallow in banks, so no insinuation of bribe tendering or acceptance is intended here.

Far be it from me to even remotely suggest that a banker would give or a policeman take money for the suppression of the truth. The police were only too willing to keep the whole thing quiet until they should have arrested the thief and murderer, which consummation, they assured the bank, would be a matter of only hours or days, as is the optimistic, not to say egotistic way of policemen the world over.

Whatever the views on publicity held by the board of directors of the Totem National, they were not disposed to take their loss philosophically or inactively. While they assured Chief Stein, of the Seattle police, that they had every confidence in his zeal and ability to both capture the thief or thieves and recover the stolen valuables, they also availed themselves of the additional services of the Pinkertons and the Government secret service men, the latter being interested by reason of the fact that part of the loot taken was some thousands of dollars' worth of revenue and excise stamps temporarily in the care of the bank while in transit to other points of distribution.

As this indicates, the \$200,000 worth of gold was not all of the treasure that was missing, the total figure reaching to over the million mark when the careful check of the vault's contents had been made. This sum was made up, in addition to the gold brought by the *Bertha*, of gold coin, bank notes and easily negotiable securities. Silver specie, bills of small denomination, and papers of problematical value to the thieves were found scattered about the floor of the vault around and under the dead body, discarded as contemptuously as this now insensate and useless clay.

The body was that of a man about five feet eleven inches in height, weight one hundred and sixty to one hundred and seventy pounds, in his late thirties

or early forties, with neatly trimmed brown mustache and Vandyke beard. It was dressed in a suit of blue serge, double-breasted coat, tan shoes. On the floor near by lay a lightweight gray overcoat, a broad brimmed black soft hat, the broken pieces of what had been spectacles with large, rimless, egg-shaped lenses, a black Gladstone bag and a sole-leather suitcase.

The last named was empty, but the bag was partially filled with pajamas, shirts, collars and the usual toilet accessories of a man particular about his appearance. In the pockets of the clothes there was found nothing by which to identify the dead man except a card-case stamped with and containing cards engraved with the name, "Samuel Smith," and receipted bills made out in the same name and all bearing the same date, that of the previous day, from seven Seattle hotels.

But the foregoing might apply in a general way to the body of any dead man under normal circumstances. What took this body out of the ordinary was not only its inexplicable presence in the locked and guarded vault but also the fact that from the back there protruded the handle of a large hunting knife—one of the elkhorn variety never carried except by chechahco hunters. The long blade was buried in the body just below and to the right of the left shoulder-blade, between it and the spine, and had been driven in with such a forceful blow that the haft made an indentation in the flesh about the wound.

An inquiry, conducted quietly and circumspectly out of regard for the tender feelings of the Totem National, developed the fact that a man answering to this description and the name of Samuel Smith had stopped at each and all of the hotels indicated by the bills, that he had settled his accounts and departed the day before, Wednesday, for a destination unknown to any of the

clerks, leaving no forwarding address. But the policeman in plain clothes who reported on this feature of the case was not gifted with imagination above "carrying a message to Garcia," and so he did only what he was told to do and asked only what he had been told to ask, thus he overlooked the coincidence in the times of arrival and departure of the said Smith, which later was developed.

The Chief of Police and the city detectives working under him on the case were unanimous in their opinion of the dead man's part in the problem. There was not the slightest doubt, Chief Stein declared, and the others echoed, that the man must have been one of the gang that turned the trick, and that he had been murdered by his confederates during a quarrel over the division of the spoils.

The suitcase, they pointed out, unquestionably had been provided for carrying away this Smith's share of the proceeds of the robbery, and its emptiness was conclusive evidence that he, in turn, had been cheated of that share and stabbed when he attempted to protest. To them, the police, the dead man simply was one crook the less to require their attention—and good riddance. Nor, to them, did he even provide one of their dearly beloved clues.

The government officers were not interested at all in the death or murder, except for its possible value as an indication of the gang's identity, presupposing that there *was* a gang that had turned the trick. The man's face and description were not on file at any police headquarters in the country and cabled inquiry abroad did not serve to identify him as a known or suspected criminal.

The Pinkerton operatives, acting directly for the bank and the Bankers' Protective Association, were, like the secret service men, far more interested

in the recovery of the vanished treasure than in avenging the death of an unknown and, presumably, unimportant stranger, who probably had received only his just deserts.

So the main facts of the case were, and so they remained without a single illuminating ray of enlightenment at the end of a week after the discovery of the crime. Of course the police arrested a number of tramps, I. W. W.'s, ex-convicts and others known unfavorably to the force, but were forced reluctantly to let them go again for lack of a single item of even police evidence that would warrant their further detention as suspicious characters. That is one of the annoyances of police administration under our puerile system of limiting the power of the guardians of our wealth and safety. Now in Russia—

Oh, yes, Stein reported daily to the officials of the Totem National that he was "making progress." But nothing whatever had been discovered to indicate the means taken by the thieves to enter or leave the vault or the bank building itself. The guards, regular and special watchmen, the patrolman on the beat, had seen nothing, heard nothing. All doors and locks were in perfect condition, as they had been left the night before the robbery. There were no signs of violence other than the dead body and the litter within the vault. No tool-marks, no finger-prints, no tampering with combinations, nothing that appeared in any way different from the way it should be.

The treasure had disappeared. The dead man's body had appeared.

That was all and it remained all.

Until—

CHAPTER V

"I CAME in for a little help, Tom," said Jim Carranaugh to Tom Peiper-

son, head of the Seattle Advertising Service, as the big man entered his friend's office.

"Sorry, but I'm down to small change. If that will do you any—"

"It's not bracing you I am—this time. I want a little advice, maybe a little help into the bargain."

"Cheapest thing I know."

"I'm up against a queer sort of proposition."

"Let's have it."

"You noticed about that last shipment of gold from Skagway—two hundred thousand dollars' worth on the *Bertha*?"

"Yes. Saw it in the window of the Totem National. Now if they only would let *me* handle their advertising I'd—"

"Never mind about that now, Tom. If you can help me pull off this stunt I'll whack up more than all the banks in Seattle would spend for advertising in a year."

"That sounds reasonable. Proceed."

"Can you—will you keep mum if I tell you something that the newspapers would break their city editors' necks to get hold of?"

"I can and will."

"Listen: That two hundred thousand in gold, along with over eight hundred thousand more in money and securities, was stolen from the Totem National a week ago last night."

"What! Who? Stolen! When? I haven't seen a word about it in the papers. Where'd you get the story? Have they caught—"

"'Cease firing.' The 'what' I've just told you. I'll give you details in a minute. The 'who' is for us to find out. You haven't seen anything about it in the papers for the very good reason that they neither know nor suspect anything about it—and are not apt to unless and until the thing is cleared up."

"Then how, where did you—"

"I've just come from an interview with old man Snedeker—president of the Totem, you know. He sent for me this morning, swore me to secrecy by every oath a banker knows and told me all about it. Seems Stein, the Pinkertons, and the secret service men have been working at the case for a week without finding the smell of a smell. Snedeker said he was disgusted with the whole outfit, had heard of the work I did in that 'Praxiteles' affair—I didn't interrupt to tell him that you did as much or more than I in clearing that up—and that if I could do as well in this case for him there'd be a cool fifty thousand in it for me—and no questions asked. I gathered that he meant he was much more anxious about the bank's recovering the money than about catching the thieves, though of course he wants them snagged too if possible. So it's up to us. Think of it, Tom! Fifty thousand bucks!"

"Sounds very luscious. But why the 'us'? Where do I come in?"

"Fifty-fifty with me. Or, better—twenty-five—twenty-five."

"But you're the only original Sherlock, Jim. I'm ready to tackle any problem in the advertising line, but when it comes to—"

"How about the 'Praxiteles' case?"

"That wasn't de-teck-eting. That was just advertising. You don't expect me to run a personal, do you, saying: 'The gentlemen who robbed the Totem National Bank will learn of something to their disadvantage if they will call at the office of James Carranaugh, Sleuth.'?"

"No-o-o. Not quite that."

"'Not quite'! What in the name of the Chilkat gods do you expect me to do?"

"Nothing—that is, I want you to tell me. I thought you might be able to help me locate or find out something about a chap by the name of 'Samuel

Smith,' who stopped at seven Seattle hotels one day last week."

"What's that? At seven hotels? Is this Smith a man or a convention?"

"That's one of the things that I don't know, that we have to find out. But he, or they, is, are—that is, were—"

"Give her more gas, Jim, your engine's missing fire."

"Don't josh, Tom. This is the biggest thing I've ever had a chance to tackle, one of the biggest ever pulled off on the Coast, and if I—we can make good before the government men, Pinkertons and police, our reputation's made, and with that reward we can buy that island in the South Seas and all—"

"Wait until you catch your hare. To return to this Samuel Smith—where does he come in?"

"He stopped at seven hotels—"

"So you said. That's unusual but not necessarily criminal."

"And they found him in the vault."

"Hold on! What's that? 'Found him in the vault'? I thought you said, a minute ago, that they hadn't caught anyone, didn't know who did it? If they've got him what's the use of—"

"They've got Smith all right—at the morgue. But that hasn't helped any—yet."

"At the—he's dead?"

"As dead as they make 'em. About eight inches of knife in his back."

"Better back 'way up, Jim, and tell me the whole story if you want me to help, if I can help you at all. It's beginning to get interesting."

"It'll get a heap more so before we're through, or I miss my guess. Well, Snedeker told me—"

There is no need of repeating what Carranaugh told Peiperson of what Snedeker had told him.

When the detective had finished recounting the details of the robbery the advertising man smoked thoughtfully for nearly five minutes, gazing out of

his window at the Olympics with their perennial snow peaks like old men in nightcaps. Coming out of his trance with a jerk Peiperson grabbed his hat and was halfway out of the door of his private office before Carranaugh could heave himself to his feet.

"Where're you going?"

"To those hotels. Come on! Hurry! You have the list? Must get busy. There's something queer there. Might as well start at that as well as at any other place, now that you've roped me into this. And I'd have murdered you if you had left me out! Then we can go down to the morgue and the bank and—"

The rest was lost to Carranaugh as Peiperson stopped to tell Chris, his office boy, that he probably would not be back that afternoon and to tell any possible callers that he was busy figuring on a big contract. "And that's no lie!" he said to Jim as they ran for the descending elevator.

Going from one hotel to another until they had talked with the clerks and attachés of all seven they gradually pieced together the amazing and perplexing problem of the apparent sevenfold identity of Samuel Smith.

As they left the Hotel Butler, the last on Carranaugh's list, Jim uttered a piously emphatic belief in his future eternal condemnation, and Tom Peiperson agreed, for both of them. Mulling, wordless, over this mystery within a mystery, they walked over to the morgue and as silently checked up the items of the dead man's former appearance that coincided exactly with the seven times told description they had just listened to. Discuss it from every angle, they were no nearer a solution when, within a block of the Totem National, Peiperson halted, saying:

"No use both of us covering the same ground—there's plenty for each of us to do, and then some. You go on to

the bank and have Snedeker let you examine that vault, as you suggested, and pick up anything more you can about the way the body of Smith looked when they found it. I don't suppose any of 'em had the brains to take a flashlight of the vault interior before they disturbed the lay-out. That's what comes of keeping the newspaper boys out of it! If they had been let in on it from the jump-off we wouldn't have to be depending upon the alleged memories of a lot of incompetent witnesses who have probably forgotten most of what they did see and imagine a lot that never was, they'd have a detailed and exact description by someone who knew how to see and what to look for. This hush stunt makes me tired."

"But in that case maybe we wouldn't have had a chance at the fifty thousand."

"That's so. Maybe not. Anyway, it's too late now. While you are at the bank I'll get busy and see if I can learn any more about this 'Samuel Smith'. Talk about your alibis! Meet me at my office—wait for me or I will for you. *Adios.*"

CHAPTER VI

It was close to nine o'clock that evening when a tired, hungry, perplexed and perspiring advertising man let himself into his office to find an equally hungry and perplexed detective awaiting him.

"Well, what'd you find?"

"How about it?"

"Your lead, Tom."

"It won't take me long to tell. Smith left town the day before the bank was burgled."

"Left town! But the dead—"

"No, alive. Six times or six of him. He took boat for Victoria, San Francisco and Skagway, and train for Spokane, Portland, and Vancouver, B. C."

"The same day?"

"The same day."

"The same Smith?"

"The same Samuel Smith—or a man who is described as looking exactly like him and who used that name."

"But I tell you he's dead."

"Maybe so, maybe so. But he wasn't last Wednesday, not six of him."

"But he couldn't—"

"No, *he* couldn't, any more than *he* could have done the same things at the same times at seven different hotels. But *they* could."

"I get you! There were seven of him—then."

"Seven is right—seven men who looked alike, who dressed and acted in the same way according to a carefully prepared and rehearsed schedule, each of whom appeared, did his little stunt, and disappeared by and on the appointed minutes."

"But that lets them out of cracking the vault—if they left the day before. Everything was all right up to midnight Wednesday a week ago."

"Six of them left town that Tuesday."

"Six? Six! Then the seventh turned the trick and—"

"Aren't you forgetting the dead man found in the vault with a knife in his ribs?"

"Well, I'll be—"

"You probably will, if you continue to insist on it. But don't let's worry about *that*—yet. I'm anxious to hear what you found at the bank. There's nothing except the results that is interesting about my afternoon's work. I simply made the rounds of the railroads and steamship offices, depots and docks, until I satisfied myself beyond any doubt that all six and *only* six Samuel Smiths had left for the places I named, that they actually had gone and not merely pretended to. I would have thought the seventh one had taken an

automobile for his getaway if it had not been for the man in the vault. He completes the count."

"That surely lets them out of it—at least of getting away with the million. But if they didn't—then why all the acting? They must have been mixed up in it in some way, or one of them wouldn't be in the morgue. And I was almost ready to finger Snedeker's check! Damn!"

"Then you found something at the bank?"

"I did—or I think I did. I can't be sure until—but wait until I tell you. I told Snedeker what I wanted and he gave me the run of the whole place—but with that idiot Daniels tagging at my heels and blatting every second about the 'effrontery of the miscreants' in picking on the Totem National for their 'dastardly outrage.' To hear him you'd think that the Totem was the only bank that ever had been cracked, that it was nothing short of sacrilege and high treason for rude hands to touch even a deposit slip belonging to it. If Daniels was judge and jury the thieves would be convicted on sight and boiled in oil—when they're caught. And he thinks the whole city, state and country administration should come to a halt until the heavy hand of the law is laid upon them—and that of the Totem National on its million. He got on my nerves until I wanted to hit him, choke him, anything to stop his incessant cackle—until I discovered what I think I discovered. Then I didn't hear his clack any more, though he kept it up without interruption. He—"

"Oh, cut the Daniels part now, Jim. Tell me what you found."

"Well, I *think* I found the way the thieves or thief got into the vault."

"You did?"

"Think, mind you. I'm not sure and can't be until I get a chance to investigate further. If I'm right I don't want

Snedeker to know about it—yet. Not until we are ready to spring the whole story. He might go blabbing to the cops and spill our fat in the fire. They would try to grab all the credit and nose in on the reward. Then where would our island be? We don't want—"

"For the love of Mike, Jim, can the soliloquy and get down to cases. *What did you find?*"

"I'm telling you fast as I can, ain't I? Of course, if you want to call in every flattie on the force to share our pie or take it all away from us and put that island in the 'too muchee bimeby'—"

Peiperson threw up his hands in mock despair and Jim, grinning, got down to cases as exhorted.

"I had gone over every inch of the vault—walls, floor, ceiling, every nook and corner—several times without seeing a single thing out of kilter, and was standing thinking what to do next, wishing Daniels would shut up long enough to let me think uninterruptedly for a second, when I noticed one of the plates in the floor.

"The vault is built up, Snedeker told me, of three-inch chrome steel plates, three feet square, bolted together underneath like those of a battleship and set in concrete. The vault, the whole building, in fact, rests on solid ground, Snedeker said, without cellar or space of any kind below the level of the street. Seems they were afraid of water in that locality. He had assured me that our burglars could not have broken in from underground whatever other route they may have taken. Of course, I took his say-so on this point for what it might be worth, and no more.

"But as I looked at that plate in the middle of the vault floor I began to suspect that his confidence was not based on any firmer foundation than his building. The plate looked just like

any of the others. It was the appearance of the lines where it joined the four around it that made me kneel down for closer examination. And, you know, I don't stoop my proud stomach any more than I have to. Luckily Daniels was puttering around absorbed in his monologue of Gottstrafing all bank burglars and paying no particular attention to what I was doing. His opinion of detectives, I had gathered, was only one point better than it was of burglars.

"What first had attracted my attention was no more than that the lines of demarkation between this particular plate and the others seemed a bit wider than the corresponding lines elsewhere and quite a bit dirtier, as if they were filled with greasy dust. When I knelt I found I was right about both—they *were* wider and they *were* dirtier. It was greasy dust or dusty grease and deeper than I could probe with my finger-nail, though the similar lines nearby were not depressed over a few hundredths of an inch.

"I confess that my hand trembled as I opened the blade of my knife and thrust it into those cracks—not in one place only but in a dozen, on all four sides of the plate. And each time it went clear in its full length without meeting any obstruction! I scraped out a little bit of that 'grease'—I'll show it to you in a minute—and then smoothed over all the holes that I had made. What do you think of *that*. Sticking an ordinary knife blade through chrome steel!"

"Let's look at that sample of 'grease'."

Carranaugh took his wallet from his pocket and from it a cigarette-paper-wrapped pellet of a greasy gray steel color. It was odorless, had the feeling and consistency of paraffine filled with small grit.

"And then?" asked Peiperson, laying

the gray pellet carefully on the desk beside him.

"Then, more with the idea of getting Daniels away from that vault where he might happen to see what I had seen than with any idea of finding anything more, I asked to be shown the other vaults. I went through them all but discovered nothing until we came to the one used for the safe-deposit department, next to and directly east of the one from which the money had been taken.

"In the floor of this vault, and, as far as I could judge without making measurements, in direct line with the other loose plate, was a section in exactly the same condition—the same thin crack all around it filled with this."

Carranaugh touched the gray pellet and replaced it in his wallet.

"And?"

"Isn't that enough? There have been at least twenty trained men, supposedly experts, who have gone over that vault with fine-toothed combs in the past week, and not one of them discovered a smidgeon of evidence to show how the vault or the building was entered. And here I—"

"It's mighty fine work, Jim. I didn't mean that it wasn't. I simply was anxious to know what came next."

"If you mean what did I do next—I told Snedeker I thought I would have something interesting to report within forty-eight hours. He sniffed and mumbled something about 'they all say that,' but I didn't mind his being sceptical. Can't blame him for sniffing at the end of a week of nothing but promises without performances. Then I came here and put in the time, while waiting for you, in figuring out a working theory."

"Have you got one?"

"Sort of one. Remember, I'm not sure those plates are loose. I only think so. But I'm basing as much of a

theory as I have on their being so."

"Then they must have tunneled under the building after all—is that it?"

"It looks that way. Something like that. But what I'm bothered about is the loose plate, if it *is* loose, in the safe deposit vault. Instead of making the proposition simpler, it complicates it. What on earth did they want to monkey round *that* vault for—probably not enough valuables in the boxes to pay high class crooks for the taking, men who were figuring on more than a million. Can you dope that out? I can't, yet."

"Maybe they made a mistake—opened up the wrong vault first and then went on to the right one."

"Maybe. That's possible. But not probable. Expert cracksmen who could locate the center of the vaults at all wouldn't make a mistake of over twenty feet in their point of attack. No, that isn't the explanation. I'm sure it isn't. There's some other twist in the tangle, a better reason than that."

"Then maybe—"

"Hold on a minute, Tom! An almost human idea is trying to bore its way into my brain and I'm afraid to frighten it away by talking. Sit still and pray!"

Peiperson smoked his pipe and was silent as directed while Carranaugh almost visibly labored in his effort to concentrate on the glimmer of thought that suddenly had occurred to him. Finally, slowly, his eyes brightened, his huge body seemed to bulk even more hugely, he breathed like a diver coming to the surface as he whispered:

"By-the-seven-gods - who - rule - the-seas, I believe I've got it! I believe—I believe I know where that million is lying this blessed minute and how it got there! I believe I could lay my hands on it in less than ten minutes' walk from where we're sitting! I believe—I believe—." His voice trailed

off into nothingness as he stared at the wall as if his eyes were piercing through and beyond it to the hiding place of the missing million.

"Spring it, Jim! Spring it!"

But Carranaugh insisted that they go and eat their long deferred dinner before he told his vision, declaring that he needed to piece it out in spots before telling even Tom. So it was not until he had fed mightily that he explained his "almost human idea." Then the two fell eagerly to discussing the pros and cons, the possibilities and their plans of activity for the morrow—a morrow that was fairly well begun when Jim caught a Madison street car for his houseboat on Lake Washington and Tom one going south for Mount Baker Park, where he knew that Mrs. Tom would be waiting up for him even at that hour, so unholy for the homecoming of a married man.

CHAPTER VII

At nine o'clock next morning Peiperson appeared at the office of the city engineer and asked to be allowed to examine plats of the Pioneer Square district, new and old, the older the better.

There was little that Tom could not get granted when he asked for it as he knew how to ask. For the next several hours he pored over the maps looking for a certain definite something that he felt convinced was in existence, whether the plats showed it or not. Luncheon and everything else were forgotten as he dug and delved through the dusty blue prints, tracings and brown paper drawings.

Finally, as his finger followed line after line on the earliest city map he could find it came to rest upon two parallel series of small dashes enclosing the word "Abandoned." Heaving a sigh of combined satisfaction and wea-

riiness, he borrowed a piece of tracing cloth and a pen from one of the draughtsmen and made a rapid but carefully accurate copy of the street and property lines in the district surrounding the spot that had ended his quest and the contiguous waterfront and wharves.

This sectional map he then compared and checked with the latest official plat, noting the changes and corrections made by the city's development and growth. Thanking the engineer who had assisted him he departed, trying to whistle and smoke at the same time.

Meanwhile Carranaugh had put in an equally busy morning at the Totem National going over the records of the safe-deposit department, making numerous inquiries of the bank official directly in charge and generally, in the opinion of that official and of Daniels, making a pronounced and utterly useless nuisance of himself.

"Instead of going right out and catching the thieves and returning our money to us," as Daniels phrased it to his fellow employe, who agreed wholeheartedly, adding that "asking foolish and impertinent questions about respectable customers who rented safe-deposit boxes" was not the way *he* would have set about catching bank burglars if *he* had been a detective, which, he was devoutly thankful to say, he was not.

"Little better than burglars themselves," declared Daniels. "No wonder they talk about 'setting a thief to catch a thief.'"

—And so on in undertones during the interims between Carranaugh's countless inquiries of who, why, when and whither about the men who held the keys to those boxes.

Finally Carranaugh discovered the specific something for which he had been looking as evidently as had Peiperson, made an entry consisting of three

numbers in his note book, smiled contentedly in self-appreciation that would have been no whit lessened had he overheard the opinions that had so recently been expressed about detectives in general and one in particular, and betook himself to the appointed rendezvous with Peiperson.

About six o'clock that evening Carranaugh and Peiperson, dressed in old clothes and rubber hip-boots, rowed out into the Bay in a boat, in which fishing tackle was prominently displayed and other equipment as carefully concealed.

At nightfall they had not returned but the boat owner, knowing both intimately as fishermen and men, neither worried nor waited.

They would "get back when they returned" this safety-first-prophet declared and was satisfied to let it go at that.

CHAPTER VIII

It was high tide and dark when Tom and Jim rowed in from the Bay, heading for the lights of the West Seattle ferry slip.

They did not stop at any of the landing-floats but pulled slowly along the face of the wharves until they came to an opening between the piles near the foot of Yesler Way. Here they shipped the oars, eased the boat through the gap and so beneath the wharf and, pulling and pushing with their hands, continued eastward until they felt the bow bring up softly against the ooze a hundred yards or so in from the dockline of Railroad Avenue.

With large electric torches to light their way and using the oars for poling they slipped and slid still further through the liquid muck until they were stopped by comparatively solid ground. Here they tied the boat's painter to a stringpiece and with grimaces of disgust stepped overboard,

sinking at once almost to the tops of their hip-boots into what seemed to be nothing more than a semi-solidified smell. Stifling their gorge they made their way inland, Carranaugh floundering like a stranded whale spouting unseemly language, Peiperson, long, lean and lank, not having a much better time of it.

What the one suffered on account of weight the other equaled by greater ease of penetration. But all things mundane must have an end, and eventually Peiperson exclaimed in an excited whisper:

"There it is! Dead ahead. Just where I said it would be!"

"It," in the flare of their flashlights, was a six-foot circle of even deeper darkness than the surrounding gloom.

In another minute they had entered the old wooden-stave sewer pipe that had been indicated by the parallel dashes marked "Abandoned" on that map in the city engineer's office. To their gratification and yet according to their hopeful expectations they found this ancient sewer-pipe not only in an excellent state of preservation, due to the thick cedar staves of which it had been constructed, but unchoked to a remarkable degree by the débris of years that normally would have been looked for.

"Chain!" called Carranaugh, a hundred feet in the rear, as the surveyor's steel hundred-foot tape tautened, giving the signal to indicate that another length of the "chain" had been measured. And, as he came up with Peiperson, who pointed to the tally mark, "That makes five hundred."

"Guess we can thank our friends for this easy going," remarked Tom, as he prepared to go on again.

"Unh-hunh. Must 'a' been a nice job of house-cleaning," puffed Jim, who very nearly filled even that six-foot passageway. "I'm glad the old sourdoughs

who built this boulevard made it sizable enough for a man to squeeze through, or I sure would have been up against it taking part in this expedition. We ought to be nearly there. Keep your eye peeled for signs of their work. Watch the ceiling."

"About four hundred feet more, if my estimate of the distance was correct. Look out for a big snag here."

"Chain" was called three more times and Peiperson had dragged out more than half the length of the tape again when Carranaugh heard a muffled shout from the darkness ahead, where he could just make out the flare of his friend's torch.

Dropping his end of the tape, Jim plunged ahead at as near a run as he could achieve in the, for him, cramped quarters, until he joined Peiperson, who was pointing dramatically with his hand holding the torch at something over his head and with the other at something else evidently lying in the darkness at his feet.

"Was I right?" panted Carranaugh as he came up.

"Right as the seventh son of a seventh son, you son of a gun of a prophet! Look!"

Carranaugh looked up.

Directly above their heads was an opening, similar to what miners call a "raise," roughly squared six feet by six, cut through the stave pipe and continuing upward as far as the light of their torches penetrated.

At one side was the lower end of a crude but strong ladder, rising into the darkness. At their feet, upon a mixture of mud, rotted planks and sawdust, broken concrete and general débris, lay several hand drills, short-handled sledges, picks, shovels, a hand pneumatic pump, what looked like a complicated variety of plumbers' blowpipe, a head-piece such as is used by electric welders, a V-shaped trough about five feet long

and a foot deep made of some highly glazed material resembling porcelain, a broken electric torch, and odds and ends of tools—axes, saws, braces and bits, nails, a small iron pot for melting glue or lead, all the miscellany of a small workshop.

"Our friends the Samuel Smiths evidently knew what they wanted when they wanted it," commented Peiperson. "And you're a wiz for doping out their plan of campaign, Jim. My kindest regards."

Carranaugh only grunted in reply as he heaved himself up the ladder, gingerly testing each rung to see if it would bear a weight not usually required of such a makeshift.

"Well! I'll be eternally and everlastingly—" floated down to Peiperson from the regions above as he scrambled quickly upward.

He found Carranaugh standing on a small platform of heavy timbers, set solidly into the earth at either end. In the center of this there was raised another box-shaped structure about five feet square, and upon this were set four jacks such as are used by contractors for raising and upholding buildings. The upper ends of the jacks, thrust through a space that had been filled with the reinforced concrete that extended from the hole in all directions, were resting against or, rather, were rested upon by a steep plate. And if any identification of that plate had been necessary, it was supplied by a narrow streak on all four sides, outlined in dirty, steel-colored grease!

"So this is what holds up that vault plate," said Carranaugh, as he patted one of the jacks. "I wondered how they had managed that. Now let's see if my other guess was as good as this one."

They descended the ladder, went some twenty feet deeper into the abandoned sewer, and then saw that Carranaugh had guessed right both times.

Here a practical duplicate of the other "raise" and its several features led up to another similarly supported plate. They would only have to release the four jacks, lift out the plate section and raise themselves through the opening to be standing in the safe-deposit vault of the Totem National Bank.

But, fearing the possibility of heart disease afflicting the guardian, who probably was standing no more than three inches above their heads, and for reasons not unconnected with their own safety should that extra vigilant watchman suddenly see their heads above the floor level of the vault, they reluctantly postponed making the spectacular entrance into those sacred and supposedly safe precincts that would have been at once so easy and, to say the least, unexpected.

Two very tired and extremely dirty but almost hilariously elated fishermen tied up their boat in its appointed place some time after midnight and disappeared in the direction of the Alaska Club's Turkish baths. In these saponaceous quarters, as moist as those they recently had left, but gratefully clean, they luxuriated for a good part of the night.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN U. P. Snedeker, president of the Totem National Bank, arrived at that institution shortly before ten o'clock the morning of the tenth day after the robbery he was in a very bad humor.

The board of directors, as well as several gentlemen who were powers in the financial world and coincidentally in the affairs of the Totem National, had seen fit, the day before, to treat him, U. P. Snedeker, as he often was in the habit of treating lesser employees of that bank.

In a word, he had been "called upon the carpet"—the carpet of his own com-

fortable and handsomely furnished office, to speak literally as well as figuratively—and there also "called down." He had been spoken to in very plain, rude words, words that were not minced and that hurt his self-love and pride, pointed words that also seriously threatened to affect his almost equal love of self and position.

He, Snedeker, U. P. Snedeker, president and autocrat of his little realm, who daily was accustomed to making his power and personality felt by all with whom he came in contact in the bank or out, had been told in almost the same tone and terms he would have used to a mere bookkeeper that one more chance would be given for him to make good. Making good, in this case, signified the recovery of the lost million of the bank's most liquid assets, a loss, it was intimated more directly than diplomatically, which was due to his, Snedeker's, failure to foresee and provide adequate safeguards of the funds intrusted to him as the controlling official of the bank.

If he failed to restore—"restore" was the word they used—the funds within the additional time allotted to him by the aforesaid powers his resignation would be accepted—without regrets. Not only without regrets, but, it was intimated, with the possibility of civil or criminal action. They handed it to him good, with no more regard for his feelings or the facts than he himself would have shown.

So, as has been said, U. P. Snedeker was in a very bad humor. He barked at the doorman, snapped at the receiving teller and almost bit Daniels.

It was into this surcharged atmosphere, this mental and temperamental curtain of fire—and brimstone—that Jim Carranaugh entered a few minutes later. A very blithe and cocky Carranaugh, radiating peace on earth and good-will toward all men, including even burglars and bank presidents, one may

almost say particularly toward burglars and bank presidents, since it was to the happy combination of gentlemen pursuing these more or less diverse activities that Carranaugh owed his present high spirits.

Nor were these spirits in the least ironed out or even dampened by the scowl of the doorman, the snarl of the receiving teller or the snap of Daniels. No, not even by the excellent imitation of a savage and surly dog given by Snedeker. The Honorable James J. was above and beyond the reach of all such petty irritations, human or canine.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Snedeker!"

Grunt.

"I've a bit of news for you."

Growl.

"You remember I promised to report progress this morning."

Grumble.

"But first I want to have a little understanding with you."

The substance of Snedeker's response, divested of its accompanying verbal adornment, was to the effect that Carranaugh certainly would come to an understanding that would leave no room for doubt about the bank president's opinion of all detectives in general and Carranaugh in particular.

When the cyclone had passed, Carranaugh, unruffled by so much as a single hair, continued:

"About that fifty thousand reward."

It is too bad that Snedeker's language at this part of the dialogue cannot be reported verbatim, but the rules of public print forbid. If beauty consists of artistic expression, then Snedeker's remarks were beautiful, however indecently nude. But beyond a smile of appreciation for successful effort, Carranaugh continued to be unimpressed, and unmoved from his line of thought and conversation.

"Will you pay it upon return of the

money and securities, or must delivery be made of the thieves as well?"

Snedeker, with a banker's sense of the all-important when actual cash is the subject under discussion, immediately stopped wasting perfectly good words and countered:

"Have you found them?"

"The money or the thieves?"

"Both—either?"

"I think I have."

"Think! Think! I'm not paying you to think! I'm paying you to know!"

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Snedeker, but you're not paying for either—yet. You are only promising to do so. And it is what that promise covers, or demands, that I want to know."

"Did I say 'fifty' thousand, Carranaugh? Wasn't 'five' the sum I mentioned? Seems to me, as far as I can remember—"

"You'll have to remember a good deal farther than that, Mr. Snedeker, if you want me to recover that million for you! If you are trying to crawfish because you think maybe I have succeeded where all the others failed, if you are trying to Jew me down because you think I'll be lucky, and glad, to get even five—anything you choose to pay—well, all I have to say is that you have another think coming! If that's the way you feel about it I'll say good morning and you can go to—"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Carranaugh, don't allow yourself to get so excited and jump at unwarranted conclusions. Maybe it was fifty thousand, I said. Maybe it was."

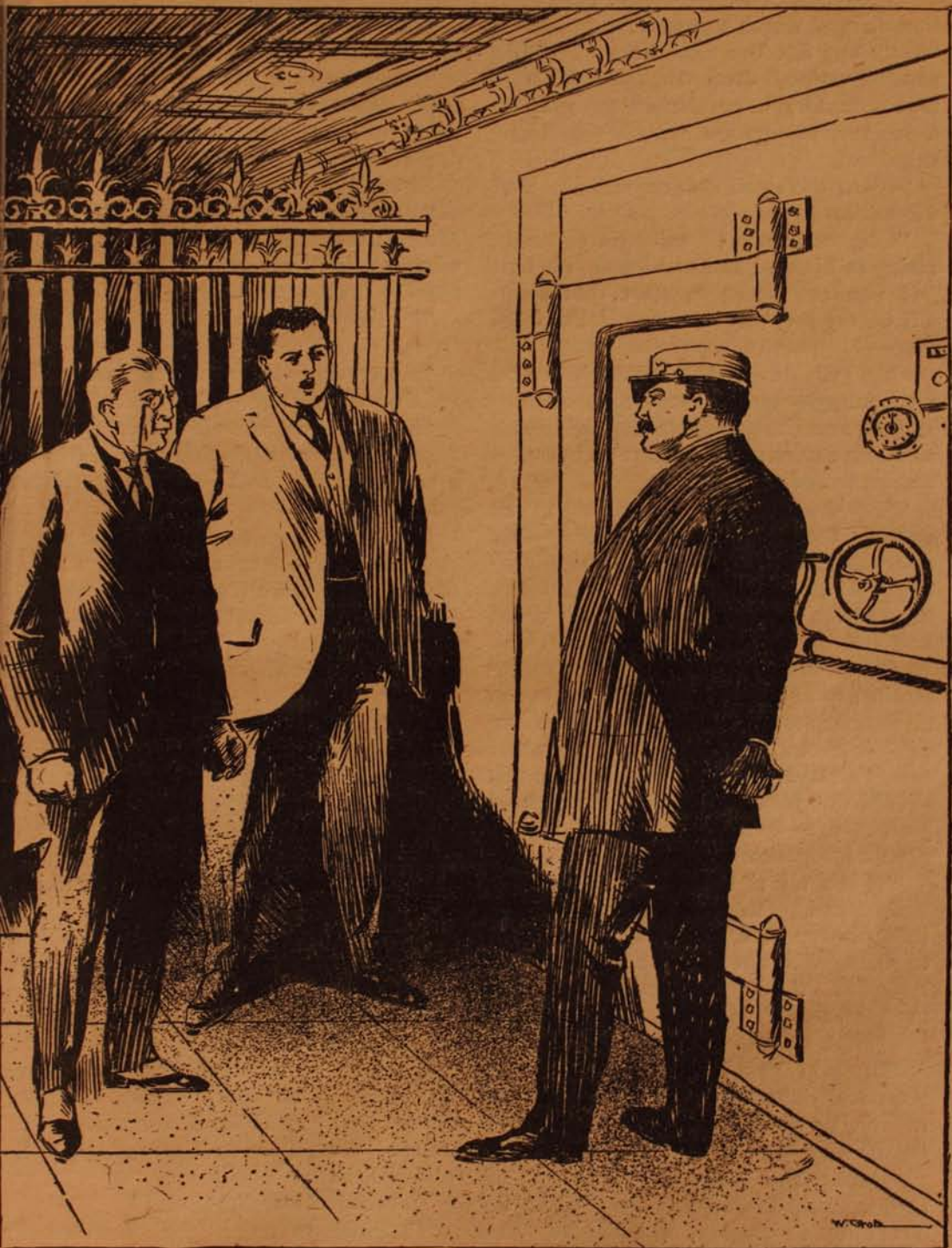
"No 'maybe' about it! *Is* it fifty?"

"Have you got them?"

"That depends, as I said before."

"Don't fence with me, man! This is serious. Very serious. Much more serious than you can imagine."

"I'm not fencing with you. I am trying to do business. Fifty thousand dollars' worth of business to me—a mil-



"Open the door please." The guardian of the door looked from the big man to the president.—Page 21.

lion dollars' worth to you. And if you'll kindly cut out the cuss words and the condescension, drop the rough stuff and talk like a gentleman as well as a banker, maybe we can do that business."

"What the devil do you mean? You impudent—"

"Oh, very well!" said Carranaugh, rising to his feet and picking up his hat. "If you are going to start that again I'll be on my way and see if Peter B. Far—"

One syllable of that "power's" name was enough, under the recent circumstances and Carranaugh's implied intent, to bring Snedeker to at least an outward semblance of politeness.

"Sit down, Mr. Carranaugh, sit down. I didn't mean to be hasty—but you don't know the load of responsibility I am carrying, what a strain I've been under the past ten days. Sit down and tell me all about what you think you have discovered and I'll try to restrain my natural impatience. Between my anxiety and the everlasting promises of 'tomorrow' of the score or more men I've had working on this case, you should not blame me for being sick of your tribe—I mean of your incompetent competitors."

"That's all right, Mr. Snedeker. I understand. Only don't class me with them or try to talk to me as you may to them. I'm apt to be fussy when I'm sworn at. And now, if you will answer my question, I will answer yours."

"What question?"

"Do you pay that reward of fifty thousand dollars for the return of the million, or must the thieves be included in the delivery?"

"Damn the thieves! That is, of course, you understand—we must do our duty to society, uphold law and order at whatever cost to ourselves, consider the public weal and the demands of justice, and—"

"Then, I understand, the money and the securities will be enough?"

"Have you negotiated for their return—eh—that is, I mean can you deliver^o them—if we don't insist on apprehending the—"

"I can."

"You can! You mean it? My dear Mr. Carranaugh! You don't know what a load you are lifting from my heart! You surely—?"

"I surely can."

"All of it?"

"Every sou—less the fifty thousand."

"You mean they—?"

"No. I mean me. If I turn over the whole thing to you, without a dollar or a bond missing, do I get the fifty thousand?"

Snedeker's eyes narrowed as he gazed straight into Carranaugh's and Carranaugh's eyes were blandly wide open as he gazed back. Snedeker sighed, cleared his throat twice as if something was sticking in his thorax, finally squeezed out:

"You do."

"Will you be good enough to put that on paper?"

"Do you doubt my—"

"I'm not doubting anything. Merely a matter of form, of business procedure, of—shall we say?—ordinary banking precaution, Mr. Snedeker."

"Can you do it?"

"You can lay your hands on that million in less than five minutes after you sign that promise to pay—or you needn't pay."

Snedeker wrote hastily for a few minutes, made the wholly illegible scrawl that passed for his signature and handed the paper to Carranaugh with an explosive:

"There! Now show me!"

Carranaugh read the instrument, nodded in satisfaction with its provisions, folded and placed it carefully in his wallet and the wallet in his inside

vest pocket, and with a deliberation maddening to the banker, heaved himself to his feet.

"If you'll just step this way, Mr. Snedeker."

Leading the banker into the general offices of the Totem National, where they immediately became the focal point of every eye in the place, Carranaugh stopped in front of the treasure vault from which the million had so mysteriously disappeared.

"Open the door, please."

The guardian of the door looked from the big man to the president and the latter, frankly mystified and curious, nodded. As they stepped inside the detective said:

"I first want to show you how this vault was entered and the money taken out. If I turned it over to you first I'm afraid you would lose your interest in this feature of my discoveries."

"All right. Only hurry."

As had been said, Carranaugh would have made a good actor if he had not been a better detective, as his ensuing actions proved, nothing of their histrionic value being lost because his audience was limited to one.

With much the air of Macbeth in the "apparition scene" he advanced to the center of the vault, making an impressive gesture with his arm calling Snedeker's attention to the floor, upon which he tapped lightly with his foot.

It is permissible exaggeration to say that Snedeker's eyes threatened to pop out of his head as, fascinated, they saw one of the floor plates, one of the three-inch chrome steel supposedly impregnable floor plates, part company with its fellows and drop out of sight, to be replaced a moment later by the head and broad shoulders of a man who turned a very dirty but grinning face up to look into the banker's own, remarking:

"Hello, Jim. All O.K.?"

"Wh — wh — wh — what?" gasped Snedeker.

"This is my partner, Thomas Peiperson, of the Seattle Advertising Service, Mr. Snedeker. Mr. Snedeker—Mr. Peiperson. We'll explain all the details later. Just now you must be more interested in the money. Come on, Tom."

The banker nodded, having no words to express his feelings just then, and followed silently after Carranaugh and Peiperson as they led the way to the door of the safe-deposit vault.

It must be confessed, here and now, that for all his mystification, all his eagerness, Snedeker was not as nervous as his two outwardly calm but inwardly anxious guides, whose nerves were on a wire-edge. They had bet on a long shot, were gambling to a large extent upon what they felt were probabilities beyond reasonable doubt, but still probabilities.

It was just possible, for all the evidence upon which their belief was based, for all the feasibility of their theory, for all their confidence in their deductions, that the thieves had not hidden the million where Carranaugh and Peiperson felt they must have hidden it. They might even be right in the place of concealment originally chosen but again there was the possibility that it no longer held the treasure, that it subsequently had been removed to a place of greater safety for the thieves.

So it was that there were three, instead of only one, extremely nervous men who watched the vault attendant unlock with his masterkey boxes numbered 358-359-360, three of the largest boxes in the vault, the three boxes that had been rented by one Seth C. Seeley.

CHAPTER X

SOMETIME later, when the contents of the three boxes had been most carefully counted and checked, when every

dollar and ounce of gold, every bond and security, every item of value down to the last sheet of government revenue stamps that had been missing were accounted for, when that paper signed by Snedeker had been exchanged for a Totem National checking account made out to the joint credit of James Carranaugh and Thomas Peiperson, when Snedeker had telephoned to certain gentlemen in a tone of voice suggesting injured innocence triumphant over undeserved criticism, when Jim had told their story with such emendations and additions as his imagination suggested were called for by its proper presentation and to the due credit of one Peiperson and himself, when these and sundry lesser matters had been attended to, a smiling and affable Snedeker asked of a smiling and equally courteous Carranaugh:

"Now that everything of importance has been attended to, suppose you gentlemen go to lunch with me and later tell me how the trick was worked and how you are going to catch the thieves."

"The luncheon today—with pleasure. The explanation next week—with equal pleasure. But the thieves, Mr. Snedeker—don't you think it only fair to leave the glory of catching them to Chief Stein and his men? Surely we should grant them that consideration, not usurp their special prerogatives. Mr. Peiperson and I are not common cops, man hunters, bloodhounds willing to sacrifice value for victims. We are simply, may I say, mathematicians who put two and two together for the benefit of the financial interests of the community. Of course we could catch the men responsible for this outrage on you and your bank if we wanted to stoop to the lower problems of our arithmetical hobby—but you hardly would expect us to do that, I am sure, any more than you would stoop to the practices of a pawnbroker. I know you wouldn't. Your

own position at the head of your profession enables you to appreciate our standing and feelings at the head of ours. So we may call the case closed, the problem solved, may we not? Thank you."

With which, to Peiperson, deliciously ironical effrontery, and, to Snedeker, properly phrased and satisfactory ending of what had been a very unpleasant experience which he would be glad to forget completely as soon as possible, Carranaugh rose to his feet and mutely signified his readiness to add several more superfluous pounds to his weight.

CHAPTER XI

BUT if Snedeker was so easily answered a certain married woman in Seattle was not. She demanded full explanation of several features of the mystery that the bank president was content to consider unimportant if not irrelevant details.

But then—the banker was a man and had recovered a lost million and a nearly lost place and prestige, while Mrs. Thomas Peiperson, though she had a proprietary interest in a certain fifty thousand dollars, still was a woman and a woman not disposed to forego her feminine and marital prerogatives. And as, moreover, she was the wife of a thoroughly home-broken and properly trained husband, her questions could not be so easily evaded, not even by the clever twistings of the tongues of that husband and their mutual intimate.

On an evening a week or so later, having "fed the brutes" according to the injunction of Mrs. Solomon, placed them in easy chairs before the big fireplace with a supply of tobacco and glasses that tinkled enticingly, and curled herself up on the couch in an entirely graceful and receptive attitude of beautiful body and alert mind, she commanded:

"Now, begin. I know all about the seven Samuel Smiths stopping at the seven hotels, the six who went away and the one who—who stayed, how they stole and hid the money, and the wonderful work you two did finding it. What you are to tell me now is why and how the one was killed, how the money was taken after the six were gone and the seventh was dead, why they masqueraded that way when it was sure to attract attention, why they put the money in another vault of the same bank instead of taking it away with them, and—and all the rest of it. Go ahead. I'm listening."

"Guess it's up to you, Jim. Perform for the lady," said Peiperson.

Dropping into a touch of the brogue that he sometimes affected when in certain moods Carranaugh grinned back, saying:

"She's your wife, not mine—sorra be! It's too full I am of her dinner and good things to talk yet awhile. I'm too busy looking at her and thinkin' what a fool for luck y' are, Tom dear. Besides, I've gained another twenty pounds the past week and it's on my conscience I must bant again, bad luck to the fat of me! Let me meditate in peace upon the last man's meal I'll have for many's the day. Do you tell the girl. I'll add a word or two here and there should you forget, or correct you if you don't give me the credit that's due me, egregious egotist that y' are. Make *him*, Mary, there's the darlin'."

And Mary made him.

"Well, dear, it'll do no harm to confess in the bosom of our family that we only can guess at part of what you want to know, deduce other parts from circumstantial evidence, and be sure only of the little that remains. But if you will take the explanation as a mixture of all three and let it go at that without being too particular about which is which, here it is:

"So that you will understand from the outset something that bothered us a good deal and very nearly threw us off the right track—as it was intended to do—I'll begin in the middle with the fact that the body found in the vault was not one of the original seven Samuel Smiths at all, was not murdered or killed by them or anyone else, and had nothing to do with the looting of the bank except as a bit of 'evidence' planted in the vault to complicate the case and confuse the police.

"The leader of the gang, the real 'Samuel Smith' or whatever his name is, saw very clearly that an attempt, at least, would be made to trace the movements of the seven men. He made the departing trails of his six assistants very easy to follow, once they had done their part of the heavy preliminary work in the old sewer. He figured that the police, finding six identical clues, would be so puzzled that they would simply begin to chase their tails. And even if they caught one or two of the six, they would still be beaten, for the money was still safe in the vault.

"But, since he himself was compelled to remain in the city to carry out the actual robbery and then wait until it would be reasonably safe to take the swag out of town without being caught at railroad station or steamship dock by the plain-clothes men on guard, it was necessary that the seventh 'member' also should be as easily accounted for.

"That's where the 'murdered' man came in as part of the setting of the scene. He had, it is probable, been provided for in advance and held in readiness for the silent but important part he played. It was no insuperable difficulty for such a clever and resourceful crook as 'Samuel Smith' to secure from some other city a body of a man with a Vandyke beard and looking sufficiently like himself and the other six to pass

muster—especially since the police and we ourselves were only too ready to jump blindly at conclusions. It really needed no more than a fair suggestion of a likeness, coupled with the duplicate clothes and belongings, to turn the trick and make us all think that the entire gang was accounted for.

“And we would have let it go at that and probably never dispelled the mystery if it had not been for our sleepy friend here. Jim’s suspicions were aroused the first time he visited the morgue and examined the body. The wound in the back didn’t look just right to him as a basis for a burial certificate, and there was not nearly enough blood on the blade of the hunting knife to satisfy his demand for gore. He fussed around and made himself such a general nuisance to the coroner and the coroner’s physician that, to get rid of his pestering, they agreed to perform an autopsy.

“They did. Jim was right. That wound in the back was not the cause of death. The knife had been driven into the body at least and probably more than forty-eight hours after the man had died of a hemorrhage of one of the large abdominal arteries, due to a malignant ulceration of the intestines. This was proved, not only by finding the very evident proof of the internal rupture, but also by the fact that all the blood in the body had drained into the abdominal cavity, where it had almost entirely coagulated. Also, there was no sign of bleeding in or about the region of the ‘wound.’

“So much for so much.

“I’ve just suggested the reason for their not taking the loot with them at once—every avenue of egress from the city would be watched for days afterward by the forces of the law. Well, then, what hiding place would be less likely to be suspected than the safe-deposit vault of the bank itself? Smith

was evidently too experienced a crook to find any difficulty in getting hold of a master key. So he simply opened the boxes, took out his packages, emptied the rocks or old bricks that filled them into the sewer opening, and put in the gold, money and securities. Now he could come back, weeks or months afterward, take out his packages, and escape all suspicion. But Jim here doped it all out the moment he ran across the trail of the three boxes rented by ‘Seth C. Seeley’—who of course was none other than the gang leader himself—after he had discovered the second loose plate.

“If you could have gone through that abandoned sewer with us—which your sensitive nose may be thankful you didn’t—and seen the amount of work it must have taken to clear it of the debris of years, to cut those holes up to the concrete foundation and then chip it away under both plates through several feet reinforced with steel rods, and finally to burn those extremely narrow cuts through three inches of super-hardened steel, you would have wondered that it had not taken seventy men instead of seven. They must have been at it for weeks.

“The ‘greasy dust’ was paraffine mixed with fine steel filings and served simply to fill and hide the cuts made in the plates.

“About the ‘masquerading,’ as you call it, at the hotels. I think some of that performance was just that and no more—a touch of melodramatic theatricalism put on for its own sake and to gratify the whimsical humor of ‘Samuel Smith,’ who, I imagine, is a bit of a farceur in his way. Of course he had a serious purpose also. His plan—which he carried out exactly in every detail except the final disappearance with the million—called for the transference of the treasure from one vault to the other in a single night and by himself alone,

after the plain departure of the six lesser crooks.

"This involved not only a number of hours of very hard work for him but also the running of the greatest degree of risk that had been taken. He planned, in the event of his being caught at any stage of the proceedings, except when he was actually handling the valuables, to be able to make all attempts at positive identification so ridiculous that no court would have held him on the evidence submitted.

"He would have some thirty-odd reputable witnesses to swear that he was in seven places doing the same things at the same times—and so discredit any police testimony about his actions at any other time. If the one was impossible—the other would or might appear equally so. Or, at any rate, the chance was worth the effort—the chances plus the pure whimsical humor of it.

"There you have the whole story."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to stop there, that that is all there is to it? Fiddle! It isn't a bit as exciting as I thought it was going to be. You've taken all the romance out of it. I want to know what became of 'Samuel Smith' and his six doubles or would you call it sextuples? What he did when he found you had opened those boxes instead of his—how he finally got away—and a whole lot of other things," expostulated Mary Peiperson, pouting

at her husband and the somnolent Car-ranaugh.

"Sorry, Sweetheart, but I've told you all I know."

"And there isn't any dramatic ending?"

"Guess not. 'Them's the bare uninteresting facts' in a nutshell—unless you want to call an interchange of ads. dramatic."

"Ads.? What ads.?"

"One I wrote and one in reply from 'Samuel Smith.'"

"That sounds a little encouraging."

"Thanks for the wild applause. I can quote them both from memory. Mine, published in all the large papers of the Northwest, ran:

To the Seven Who Were One and the One Who Was Seven, Greeting.

Thanks for your contribution to the deserving charity that begins at the home of

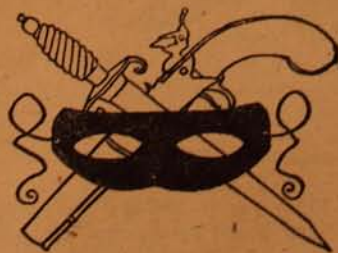
C. and P.

"And he replied in the same papers: *C. and P.*

You are welcome, since I was unable to contribute to the still more deserving charity nearer home that I had intended to benefit. Sorry not to be able to offer my congratulations in person but the first law of nature forbids. Possibly we shall meet at some later date. Tables have a way of turning. Au revoir.

The Man Who Was Seven."

(The End)





"I'm going into that room myself," he said severely, "and we'll have this nonsense over with."—Page 30.

The Summons

By Henry Altimus

IT was Elsa Lloyd's first experience with death as a nurse at St. Luke's. She was the youngest graduate at the hospital, slender and frail, with blue eyes that betrayed the strain she had been under despite her brave effort to appear self-possessed. The older nurses had been extremely helpful, not at all resentful that she had been chosen for so important a case, but she had pursued her duties to the very end courageously and competently without requiring any assistance. It was nearly over now. Scofield Carrington was dead, his body was soon to be removed to his home, and she was studying the carefully kept chart of her patient preparatory to turning it over to the head nurse.

She was seated at a little table in the floor office, the chart before her, using this brief respite after the trying experience of the preceding night to collect herself, when the bell rang softly and the indicator clicked over her head.

Elsa Lloyd did not look up. As Carrington's private nurse she was expected to answer only his summons. But presently she was aware that a floor nurse had entered in answer to the bell and, pausing a moment before the indicator, had come up close to her.

"It's 42 calling," said the nurse. "Isn't that Carrington?"

Elsa Lloyd came to her feet quickly, her eyes lifting to the indicator, a little tinge of color coming to her cheeks.

"Yes," she said weakly.

Her lips fell apart, her hand caught the back of the chair from which she had just risen, her eyes still fixed on

the little plate showing the numerals "42" on the indicator. Her tired brain could not grapple with the strange situation. Carrington had passed away in the early hours of the morning, and only half an hour before she had left his room, her duties over. And now—the bell.

She turned at last, question in her eyes.

"Perhaps it's Dr. Stockbridge," the nurse ventured.

"He's in the operating room," said Elsa quickly.

"Or some one else." And, seeing the weariness in the young girl's face, she added: "Shall I answer for you?"

"Thank you. I'll go."

She hurried down the long, silent corridor. She paused at the door, hesitated, then knocked lightly.

There was no response.

Her hand lowered to the knob. She turned it and the door yielded.

There was no one in the room. Everything was exactly as she had left it half an hour before: the drawn shades, through which the morning sunlight filtered pale and warm; the stillness of death; and, in the far corner of the huge room, the bed with its rigid, silent occupant.

Elsa's first impulse was to turn and escape, but she checked herself, waited, her back to the door, while the rapid beating of her heart subsided.

Presently she moved toward the bed, slowly, her feet scarcely lifting from the floor.

Nothing had been altered, not a wrinkle in the sheet that covered the dead

man's body had been changed. She looked down into his face, observed the strong features, immobile in death, the thin lips firmly locked, the square chin thrust forward, defiant, challenging even now.

Scofield Carrington had not wanted to die. The great financier, who had feared nothing, had not feared death. But he had not been ready to go. He had wanted to hold off the hand of death only a little while longer, but it had come relentlessly. And his features still showed the marks of the dead man's struggle, the unhappiness of his last moments, which had come without the fulfillment of his cherished hope.

Elsa's eyes lifted to the bell that hung from the back of the bed, corded wire with a button at the end, the pressure of which had summoned her so often in the past few weeks to the side of her patient—had summoned her even now to his side. Some hand had touched it within the last few minutes. Whose?

She lingered a while, baffled, immobile in the presence of the inexplicable circumstance.

"It must be some mistake," she said at last.

She spoke aloud, to reassure herself and to reassure any one who might hear her.

Somehow she felt a vague presence in the room.

She dared not look about her, and, having spoken, she turned and hurried out of the room.

The nurse was waiting for her at the office door. She noted the pallor in Elsa's face, the agitation which her strained features did not conceal. Elsa took the hand she extended, leaning heavily on it.

"Some one has been and gone," she said in a soothing voice. "You're unstrung. You ought to—"

She stopped abruptly.

Their eyes met and they stood close, neither daring to turn. For the indicator had clicked again!

It was the elder nurse who first summoned the courage to look, and when their eyes met again Elsa knew what she had seen.

"It's 42," said the elder nurse in a hoarse voice.

Elsa's head lowered, a shudder running down her frame, and her companion led her to a chair, into which the girl dropped heavily.

"Sometimes the indicator gets out of order," muttered the elder nurse. "It may be that, though I don't recall its ever happening before. The wires may get crossed—or something."

Her voice trailed away. She knew that her assurances were unconvincing to Elsa—they were unconvincing to herself. She realized that her usual presence of mind was not at her command.

Disciplined in the shadow of suffering and death, she was aware that, for the first time in her experience, she was confronted by the intrusion of an intangible element which eluded her understanding. Carrington was dead. There was no one in his room. Yet his bell was ringing!

"We ought to report it," she said at last. "Some one ought to be in the room. It's—"

She paused as a young interne entered the office. Her face lighted up hopefully.

"Doctor," she said, coming toward him, "42 is calling. Won't you—"

"That's Carrington's room, isn't it?" asked the interne.

"Yes."

"Well, it's Miss Lloyd's case. Why doesn't she go?"

"She's just been there. *And there's no one in the room.*"

"What?" stammered the interne.

"And that's the *second* time the bell has rung."

More from the crumpled attitude of Elsa Lloyd in her chair than from the words of the elder nurse the interne gathered the meaning of the strange situation. His eyes were wide with amazement. He looked to the indicator and then turned to the nurse. His lips moved, stirred mutely a moment.

"Does Dr. Stockbridge know?" he asked at last.

"No."

"I'll tell him!"

And he spun about on his heel and was gone.

The nurse moved toward the indicator mechanically, her hand lifting slowly and pressing the knob that released the number. The indicator was bare. But scarcely had her arm lowered to her side than a bell tinkled.

It was 42 again!

Elsa Lloyd, her elbows on the little desk, her face buried in her hands, did not look up. She knew from the touch of her companion's hand on her shoulder what the bell meant.

The nurse slipped into a chair beside the younger woman. For a long time she was silent; then:

"I can't understand it," she muttered, half to herself. "I've never had such an experience before. I've seen so many deaths, and death was always so final, so completely the—the end. Of course, there's the soul, the spirit—it's called by so many names and I've heard much nonsense about it. I never believed—few of us do—but every now and then something happens . . . Like this. What can it mean?"

Despite herself a tremor, half of doubt, half of awe, shook her. She turned to Elsa.

"What do you know about Carrington?" she asked. "You were with him for weeks. Can you think of anything that—"

She did not complete her question, her thought too unformed for words.

"Was there anything," she resumed in a moment, "before he died—anything that might explain this?"

Elsa sat up, but her head was averted as she spoke.

"I don't understand," she said, her voice low and frail. "But when I was in the room just now, I felt—I seemed to be aware of—"

"Of what?" prompted the elder nurse.

"Something. I don't know what. As though some one were in the room—besides myself and—and it."

"The corpse?"

Elsa nodded.

"He didn't want to die," the girl went on after a while. "There was something between him and his son. You know how unhappy he was about him. He loved him, his only son, and he didn't want to die feeling that young Carrington hadn't redeemed himself. You know what a black sheep he's been. Once I came into the room just after his son had left. The old man had been crying. I think it was that that kept him alive long after we knew his case was hopeless. He told me once he couldn't die until his son had made good, that his spirit would never rest—"

"His spirit? Did he say that?"

"Yes."

The elder nurse's eyes closed slowly and her hands met in her lap.

"Do you think—" began Elsa, leaning forward.

"I don't know," muttered the elder woman, her voice scarcely audible.

II

BOTH women came to their feet as they heard hurried footsteps approaching. The interne entered, a coat flung over his arm.

"He's coming," he announced.

Dr. Stockbridge entered the office, visibly annoyed and angry, his long fin-

gers busy with the laces of his operating apron, which he was removing. Behind him came, unhurried and calm, Carrington's lifelong friend and the executor of his will, Madison Dodd.

"What's this silly nonsense I hear about bells?" the surgeon demanded, slipping into the coat the interne held and advancing toward the women. "Why didn't you notify me sooner? And why aren't you in the room to find out what it means, Miss Lloyd?"

"She just came from the room, Dr. Stockbridge," explained the elder nurse, defending the girl. "There was no one there."

"This is too absurd," exploded the surgeon. "I've never heard of such a thing. Miss Lloyd should be in that room—"

"She's had no sleep, doctor, and she's very tired."

"Then why don't you go?"

"I—"

"You're afraid. How ridiculous. Well, we'll have—"

He turned, but the interne was gone. Dr. Stockbridge frowned. His eyes went toward the indicator.

"When did that bell ring?" he demanded.

"About ten minutes ago. And—"

A bell rang and a faint click came from the indicator. The number "42," which had not been lowered, vibrated.

"Its been ringing every ten minutes just like that," said the elder nurse, edging away from the instrument.

Dr. Stockbridge frowned. Then, striding across the room, he pressed the knob releasing the number.

He turned to the nurse.

"I'm going into that room myself," he said severely, "and we'll have this nonsense over with. Someone is ringing that bell, and we'll know who it is. If it rings while I'm there, let me know."

He stepped toward the door.

"I'll go with you, doctor," said Carrington's friend, speaking for the first time.

The men walked down the corridor, side by side. The door of Room 42 was closed. Dr. Stockbridge pushed it open impatiently and allowed Dodd to enter first.

"I hope you'll forgive this nonsense, Mr. Dodd," he said, closing the door. "These women—they're—"

But Dodd, paying no heed to the doctor, was advancing toward the bed, his face grave. He stopped within a foot of it, looking down on the still form beneath him, his hands clasped behind his back.

Dr. Stockbridge looked about the room. Its hospital bareness made it manifest at once that no one could be concealed in it.

It seemed to him absurd and undignified that he should be engaged in such a futile and meaningless undertaking. He paced up and down, pausing every now and then to observe the immobile figure of Carrington's friend, wondering what he could be thinking of the whole ridiculous episode. He was a little disturbed that Dodd should take the thing so seriously, treat the matter with silent respect. Once he paused beside him.

"I'm a man of science, Mr. Dodd," he began. "To me there's no such thing—"

There was a light tap on the door and he stopped. He strode to the door and opened it. The interne's head showed.

"It rang," the young man said.

Dr. Stockbridge's lips parted in astonishment.

His hand on the knob, he paused, undecided, looking toward Dodd for some intimation the course to pursue. But Dodd had not stirred, and Stockbridge turned to the youth.

"Thank you," he said, and closed the door.

For a moment he was at a loss, but, when he tried to speak, he was silenced by Dodd's beckoning hand. He approached, stopping at Dodd's side, his eyes following the other man's finger.

"I want you to tell me what you see in his face," said Dodd.

The request seemed so strange to Dr. Stockbridge that he glanced up quickly to see if Dodd were in earnest. What could he see in a dead man's face but—death? However, a glance was sufficient to assure him of his companion's earnestness, and he lowered his eyes. A long moment of silent scrutiny, and then the surgeon bent lower, his eyes narrowing.

"Yes," he muttered, awed by his discovery. "I see what you mean. It's amazing. It wasn't that way when he died—"

"What do you see?" interrupted Dodd.

"The mouth," said Dr. Stockbridge. "The corners seem to droop more. And the eyelids look more strained. His whole face seems to have changed, as though he were—"

"Dissatisfied?" prompted Dodd, as the surgeon hesitated.

"Yes. As though he were restless and unhappy about something."

"Ah!" muttered Dodd. "I noticed that when I first came into the room, and I have been held by it. Dr. Stockbridge," he added, looking up for the first time, "my old friend is restless, dissatisfied. His spirit is not at peace. And that is why the bell is ringing."

"Then you think—"

"I am certain. And I have been standing here, wondering what he was distressed about, what message he was trying to convey. He is trying to say something to us, doctor. He is trying to direct our attention to something he wants done. And he will not rest, doctor, until it is done. I must try to understand

him. I must find out what he wants."

"Have you any idea?"

"Perhaps, but I am not sure."

He turned.

"Shall we go back to the office?" he asked.

III

WHEN they re-entered the office, they found a group of internes and nurses gathered in a corner of the room. The report of the mysterious calls from Room 42 had spread throughout the building, and an awed, silent circle of men and women in hospital uniform were watching the indicator for the call that was momentarily expected. An interne came forward as Dodd and the surgeon entered.

"It rang twice while you were out," he said. "And young Carrington is here, in the inner office. He was told, and when he heard the bell ring and how the number came up he fainted. He's lying down in there."

Dr. Stockbridge, followed by Dodd, hurried to the inner office. Elsa Lloyd was bending over a couch, on which lay Edward Carrington, his back to the door. The girl came forward as the men entered.

"He's better now," she said.

Dr. Stockbridge approached the couch, caught Carrington's wrist and touched two fingers to his pulse. The youth did not stir, his arm hanging limp in the surgeon's grasp. Dr. Stockbridge looked up at last and nodded reassuringly to Dodd. Then he turned to the girl.

"I'll look after him," he said. "We won't need you."

The girl withdrew.

Madison Dodd retired to the window, and he stood there, his eyes fixed on the horizon, in deep thought. The surgeon came up to him.

"Poor fellow," he muttered. "I can understand how he'd feel about it."

Dodd did not reply.

Once more the bell in the outer office rang, the indicator clicked. Dr. Stockbridge turned to observe the effect on the youth. He lay there very still, as though he had not heard; but his eyes, turned to the wall, were wide open. He seemed too stunned for any sensation.

As the moments fled by, the surgeon grew more and more ill at ease under the strain of the silence and the unsolved mystery. He wondered why they were waiting there, inactive, undecided; and yet, when he tried to think what they could do, he was at a loss. He could not wait there all day, however, obedient to a vague call, an intangible summons from the dead.

If only he could persuade Dodd of the absurdity of the whole situation. But how could he convince Dodd when he was himself so completely at sea? He had never believed in these things, had always waved aside any testimony concerning spirits as the invention of gullible minds; yet here before him there was evidence that he could not thrust aside so easily. He paced the room restlessly, finally pausing beside Carrington's friend.

"What can we do?" he asked.

"I am thinking," said Dodd quietly, his eyes still on the horizon.

"But," persisted the surgeon, "do you still believe—?"

"I am sure that the bell is a summons to some one. If you do not understand its message, it is because it is not for you. Perhaps it is not even for me, for I do not seem to grasp the meaning of it. But it is calling to some one here, or it would not ring. And that one will understand if he is here."

"Still," pursued the surgeon, encouraged, "even granting the existence of a spirit that exists after death, is it conceivable that that spirit can assert itself in this way? As a man of science, it seems too fanciful to me."

"What," replied Dodd, "can be more fanciful than science itself? It is dumb before the mysteries which it pretends to understand. Can you, as a scientist, explain to me why, when a button is pressed in Room 42, a bell should ring in this room?"

"Electricity—" began the surgeon.

"And what is electricity? Even science does not pretend to know. Is it not inconceivable that it should be able to flow through a solid copper wire? And yet it does. Man's soul, his spirit, is more mysterious than electricity. Why can it not flow through the ether and create a disturbance in its environment? Released from the body which it inhabited, why can it not hover near by and make its will known to those it wishes to reach? Scofield Carrington's body died, but his spirit, refusing to die unsatisfied, is still alive, restless, insistent, urging the fulfillment of its desire that it may be set at peace. And it will not give up until it is satisfied. There," he added, as the bell rang, "it is still calling. It will continue until he for whom it is meant obeys the call."

"But who is it for?" asked the surgeon weakly.

Madison Dodd turned slowly, but his eyes did not meet the surgeon's. They made a circuit of the room and came to pause on the figure of young Carrington, who had stirred for the first time and was now sitting up, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands. The surgeon followed his companion's gaze. It suddenly came to him that perhaps young Carrington, who had not uttered a word, understood; for he could see that, beneath the surface of his immobility, there was a great struggle going on, that a difficult resolve was forming.

He turned to Dodd, expecting some revelation from him, but the man's face was a mask. His fingers were twined in the cord hanging from the window-

shade and his eyes were fixed on the youth. The surgeon observed the youth once more.

Slowly Edward Carrington's hands lowered from his face. Slowly he rose and turned. His eyes were clear. His features were firm. And he came forward with decision in his whole bearing.

"Mr. Dodd," he said in a slow, level voice, pausing before his father's friend, "that bell was for me."

IV

DR. STOCKBRIDGE'S eyes grew wide with amazement at this simple avowal. But Madison Dodd's expression did not change.

"Well?" he prompted calmly, his fingers still toying with the window-shade cord.

"I have been fighting it out with myself," said young Carrington, "all morning, ever since father—" He paused, and his lips were unsteady. "You know how unhappy he was over me, my failure to live up to his name. And he died feeling that he had failed to redeem me. But all morning I have felt his nearness. And when I came in here and they told me—when I heard the bell and saw the call from his room—I knew. The call was for me. I understood what he wanted me to do. I obey."

He came forward a step and his hand went to his breast pocket. When it came forth, it held a long envelope.

"This is it," he said, handing the envelope to Dodd. "It is father's will. It leaves me without a penny, as he said it would. I have deserved nothing better."

The shade flew up with a bang as Madison Dodd released the cord and extended his hand for the envelope, heavily sealed, and addressed to him. Slowly he put his gold-rimmed *pince-nez* to

his nose and then he thrust his finger under the flap of the envelope to tear it open. But he paused and looked up as he heard a low murmur in the outer office. Dr. Stockbridge looked up too.

Nurses and internes were whispering excitedly to each other, their eyes on the clock. The surgeon followed their glance, and then he understood the meaning of their agitation. The minute hand was pointing to the half-hour. The bell should have rung, as it had rung every ten minutes all morning with un-failing precision. It had not rung. The hushed excitement of the uniformed men and women grew in intensity as a minute passed and still the bell was not heard. Two minutes passed. Three minutes. . . .

Dr. Stockbridge turned to Madison Dodd. Carrington's friend stood near the window, a sheaf of legal papers, evidently the will, in one hand, a type-written sheet in the other. He was reading this, and he looked up as the surgeon came toward him. He waved his arm in the direction of the outer office.

"Send them away, doctor," he said quietly. "Carrington's summons has been answered."

One by one the nurses and internes filed out of the office in obedience to Dr. Stockbridge's gesture of dismissal. When they were gone, the surgeon returned to the side of Madison Dodd.

"You'll understand when I read this," said Dodd.

He adjusted his glasses and brought the typewritten sheet closer.

"This is my last test for Ed," he read. "If he gives this envelope to you, as I instructed him, then my original will stands as it is, leaving all to him. When I gave my boy this envelope, I told him it contained a new will, disowning him and leaving him without a penny. If he has enough manhood to give this to you, then I shall know that he has repented and that he has the courage to take his punishment manfully. In that case, he

will prove himself a true Carrington and will deserve the fortune that comes to him. This is exactly as we planned it, old friend. My prayer is that he will make good. My spirit shall not rest until he does. And I trust that my everlasting peace will not be disturbed by my boy's craven failure to deliver this message to you.

SCOFIELD CARRINGTON."

Madison Dodd looked up, his fingers folding the sheet he had just read.

"Scofield Carrington's spirit is at peace now," he said, in a solemn voice.

V

THE men's hands met at the door. It was a silent clasp. Dr. Stockbridge's lips pursed and his eyes lowered.

"Mr. Dodd," he said, "this is the first experience of the kind I've ever had. As a man of science—"

"My dear doctor," broke in his companion, "science is still in its infancy. Some day it may be able to explain

many things that are still beyond understanding."

He nodded and turned on his heel. There was a smile on his face, but Dr. Stockbridge did not see this.

"Basement," said Dodd to the elevator man, as the car shot downward.

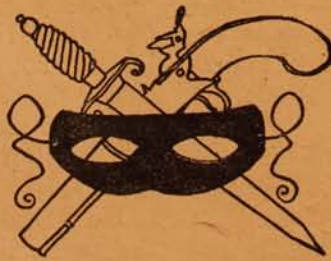
Emerging from the cage, Dodd hurried down the dimly lighted corridor. He paused before a door over which there was a neatly printed sign "Electrician."

A man in overalls rose as Dodd entered, touching his cap.

"Did I get that shade signal right?" he asked with a smile.

"Perfectly," said Dodd, drawing a banknote from his wallet and crushing it into the man's hand. "And now you may rearrange those wires. You did splendidly. Thank you."

The man touched his cap, and Madison Dodd, nodding, passed out of the room.



The Abandoned House

By Beulah Poynter

I

THE blinding rain which had been steadily falling for the last hour cut and stung our faces, and the wind wheezing through the trees about us rocked our little car until it made progress almost impossible. An illuminating streak of lightning, followed by a deafening crash of thunder, caused me to cower down in the seat and cover my ears with my hands.

"Well, here's our finish!" exclaimed my brother, who had valiantly striven to pilot the machine in the storm. "There's a tree lying directly across the road."

He brought the car to a standstill, and turned his spotlight on the dark object blocking our path. It was a huge tree, evidently stricken down by the lightning, and it covered the entire road.

"What on earth are we going to do?" I sobbed hysterically. "We can't stay out in a storm like this, and we are miles and miles away from anyone!"

We had been steadily climbing an upward grade, and the cavern-like ravines on either side and the depths of blackness behind me struck a chill in my heart. "I wish we'd never come out on this crazy motor trip," I wailed. "New York is good enough for me. Alan, what can we do?"

"I'll see," he answered. "Keep your hand on the brake, this is a pretty stiff hill, and the road is slippery; if the car starts skidding it's good night."

He spoke jocularly enough, but I knew he was worried. Climbing out of the machine, he went around to the big, supine tree and examined it.

"It's no use, Nell," he called to me,

pitching his voice above the roar of the wind, "I can't budge it."

In the brief light caused by a second flash of lightning, I saw the stark, bare outlines of a two-story house, possibly a hundred feet ahead of us on my right.

"Alan, there's a house! A house up there further on the hill," I cried wildly.

"You're right, there is. It's either an empty one, or its occupants hit the hay early. I'll pull the car out onto the side of the road, and we'll make a run for it."

He got back into his seat, and with a few careful maneuvers of the wheel succeeded in bringing the machine around to a spot where it might stand in safety. Then he searched in the darkness until he found a rock, which he placed under the wheel in case something should start it rolling down-grade.

"Turn up your collar! The rain feels like ice-water when you're out in it. That house is probably farther off than it looks."

Taking my hand, he helped me out. My feet went into deep mud, and I almost lost my balance. With a little shriek I clutched him to save myself. Then we started to run.

It was up-hill all the way, a much steeper and longer climb than I had anticipated, and, as Alan had said, the rain was like ice-water beating against the back of my neck and shoulders. I was shaking and shivering like a drowned cat by the time we reached the stoop on the front of the building.

The house was barren of fence and surrounding trees, and stood on a sort of knoll at the side of the hills. No light was visible anywhere. Alan used

his pocket flash and that guided us to the front door, which was swinging dismally back and forth on one hinge, making a doleful, creaking noise, distinguishable above the wind. We did not stop to knock, feeling pretty certain the house had no occupant or the door would be locked on a night like this.

"For such shelter let us give thanks!" Alan chuckled grimly, pushing me in first. He closed the door after us to shut out the rain, but it immediately swung open again.

We found ourselves in a long, wide hall which evidently divided the house through the centre. At the extreme end was an old-fashioned staircase with banisters. The floors creaked and gave with the weight of our bodies as we walked, and I fancied a rat scurried across my foot.

There was an odor of mustiness and damp about the place, as though it had not been occupied for years.

There were no furnishings of any kind, no blinds to the windows, and most of the panes of glass were missing; but even in the dim light that Alan's "spot" afforded we could see it had an old-time elegance. Probably at one time monstrous log fires had burnt in the massive brick fireplaces at the end of the two rooms opening off the separating hallway. The woodwork appeared to be of black walnut, the floors unquestionably had been highly polished, though now they were worn and earth-stained. The ceilings were falling, and the wallpaper hung in great strips from the plastering—a more uninviting place could not be imagined. I clung to Alan's arm, half afraid to venture farther.

"I'm awfully cold," I whimpered, through chattering teeth. "D'ye suppose there's a stove in the kitchen? Maybe we can find some paper and start a fire if there is."

Alan did not answer, but led the way to the back of the house. Before some

swinging doors he hesitated a second, then flung them open and entered; I followed. It was an old-fashioned brick-floored kitchen. In one corner stood a battered, rust-covered coal-range. The chimney was disconnected, and part of it lay on the floor before the open oven. Piles of old rags and broken bits of twigs and newspaper filled a box near it.

Alan thrust the spot light into my hand and pounced upon the debris. In a little while he had a fire burning in the old stove, and the kitchen was filled with sooty smoke and blessed warmth.

I stripped off my soggy motor coat, and flung it across the box to dry out; Alan removed his coat and did likewise.

"Now, if I just had a cup of coffee and a sandwich I wouldn't be at all unhappy," I said.

"Forget it!" he laughed. "Nothing doing. It's a lucky thing for us this old barn is well built. If it wasn't I could see visions of that wind lifting it off its pins and tossing it down into the cavern."

I shuddered. "Let's not think about it. The car may not even be there in the morning."

To kill time and to get our minds off the storm outside I suggested that we rummage around a bit, and see what the place was like upstairs.

As we stepped into the long open hallway, a gust of wind whipped through the swinging door and carried with it a perfect torrent of rain, that made little puddles at our feet.

Fearfully I followed Alan up the long, broad flight of stairs, feeling that uncanny something that is so often present in an old, unused house. I half expected some spectre of the past to reach out and lay clammy, unearthly hands upon me, or a shadowy something to greet us on the landing where we paused and looked about.

There were six doors leading off the corridor, all exactly alike. With the ex-

ception of one they were slightly ajar—the sixth appeared to be locked.

Curiosity prompted me to go toward it first. The knob turned in my hand, but the door stayed closed.

"Bluebeard's den!" laughed Alan. "Take care that you aren't another Ann."

"It's locked."

"Obviously."

"I wonder why."

"Possibly for the same reason that all the others aren't. The owner, when he left the place, didn't take the trouble to unlock it."

I twisted and turned the knob, trying to force an entrance, but the lock held in spite of its age and rustiness. Alan laughed at my efforts, then he pushed open the door to his right, which was slightly ajar. His exclamation of surprise called my attention from the bolted door.

"What is it?" I gasped.

"By George, Nell, look here!"

II

I FOLLOWED him into the room. My surprise equalled his own at what I saw. In direct contrast to the barrenness of the rooms below, this one was beautifully furnished with rich draperies covering the crumbling walls, and rugs upon the floor. The furniture was evidently new, and though a trifle gaudy, not without taste.

A table in the centre of the room covered with a damask cloth, china and silver, was spread as though for a meal. There was a half-emptied bottle of wine, and two glasses. One glass still contained the liquor. Even a loaf of bread and some cold cuts and salad remained. An open lunch kit rested in a chair near the table.

I looked at Alan in amazement. He gave me a glance of equal astonishment.

"I don't quite understand it," he mur-

mured. "Do you suppose it is possible that some one lives here?"

I shook my head. "With the whole lower floor going to rack and ruin, and overrun with rats? No, it isn't possible."

"Nell, this bread is soft." He lifted the loaf and thrust his finger into the crust; then he glanced half apprehensively over his shoulder at some velvet draperies which covered the double doors.

I don't know why, but I shivered. Judging from their juxtaposition those doors led into the room which was bolted from the hallway.

Alan lowered his voice as he spoke.

"Someone is either in this house or has been here but a short time ago," he said. "This food is fresh. For some reason it has not been eaten."

I gave a little cry, half of protest, half of fear, as he parted the draperies, and drew back the heavy-paneled doors behind them.

Then I cried out in horror. Lying across a canopied bed was a man in evening clothes. It needed no second glance even in the small light Alan's spot afforded to show us he was dead. That either suicide or murder had caused his death, for on the white bosom of his shirt was a hideous red spot, and the blue satin and lace of the bedspread was stained with blood.

"My God!" Alan whispered hoarsely.

As if to accentuate the gruesomeness of the picture and its surroundings, a streak of lightning flashed directly upon that supine figure on the bed. The burst of thunder which followed seemed to rend the sky in two. The wind careening madly around the house, rocked and banged the shutters of the one window.

"Let's—let's try to go on!" I sobbed. "This is awful, I can't stand it here like this!"

"It looks like murder—" he muttered.

Seemingly compelled against his will he advanced toward the bed. I watched him in fascination as he let his light play upon the features of the man lying there. Then more fearful of the shadows behind me, and the blackness of the room we had left than of the dead, I crept close to him.

Almost of one accord, we exclaimed, "Judge MacPherson!"

A tall lean man with reddish grey hair, a trifle long, a sandy beard and no mustache, keen, cruel eyes with criss-cross wrinkles about them. MacPherson, in life, was a man not easily forgotten if once known, and not to be mistaken for anyone else, even in death. The man stretched out before us was unquestionably Judge MacPherson. Then, too, I recognized an unusual sapphire and diamond ring on his finger which I had admired at a dinner party not a month before.

"It is murder," Alan said. "He hasn't been robbed, either. I wonder if there is a telephone here."

"Why?"

"To call up the police, of course."

"There isn't any, I'm sure of it."

I was right. Though the two rooms we had just entered were furnished and appeared to have been recently occupied, all the others were in the same state of decay as the lower floor. There was no telephone in any of them.

After a while Alan closed the double doors, and drew the velvet hangings, then silently, dazed and horror-stricken, we retraced our steps to the kitchen. The fire we had built at least had life and a certain cheerfulness, and the horror of the thing we had discovered made it impossible for us to stay in the furnished rooms upstairs.

"We can't go on tonight," he said. "With daylight we may find a détour, but we can't risk it in the dark; we don't know how close the road is to the edge of the ravine."

I could not banish the picture of the dead man lying upstairs weltering in his own blood, amidst all the garish luxury of velvets and satin, with the uneaten meal spread so near to him. Such a short time ago he had sat at the same table with us, a genial host, though a bit scardonic in his humor. Knowing him to have been a hard, cruel administrator of justice, I never doubted for an instant that he had been murdered.

"Alan," I whispered, half fearful of being overheard by ears forever deafened, "who do you suppose killed him?"

He shook his head. "Any one of a hundred people might desire his death. Revenge is unquestionably the motive behind it."

As he spoke, his eyes widened, and I noted a quick intake of his breath. Then I saw what had caused this. My motor coat which I had left to dry was gone! Though his still remained where he had placed it.

"Some one is in this house!" I cried hoarsely.

"Yes. The person who killed MacPherson is still here!"

"What are you going to do!" I wailed, as he turned abruptly and started to leave the kitchen.

"Search for him," he answered grimly.

"But you are unarmed! A man desperate enough to commit murder wouldn't hesitate to kill you."

Then a peculiar sound came to us above the roaring of the wind and the drip of the rain. Unquestionably, it was the buzz of a motor.

We ran to the window, and regardless of the drenching we received the instant it was opened, we peered out into the darkness. At first we saw nothing; then darker against the dark sky we distinguished the outline of another building, not so large as the house we were in, but beyond a doubt a big barn.

"Our man is in there," said Alan.

"He was in the house when we arrived, and beat it to the barn while we were upstairs. He has a car out there. That's the engine we heard."

"Don't go out! Alan! Don't go out there!" But my protests were in vain.

A door opened from the kitchen to a summer porch, and a path which led to the barn. Almost before the words were out of my mouth he darted through this door and out into the storm. There was nothing for me to do but to follow.

I felt I would rather face a live murderer than stay alone in that great house with his dead victim.

Before we reached the barn, a car, which by its long low outlines was just distinguishable in the darkness, swung out into the road before us. Its lamps were unlighted, and we could not see its occupant.

Alan called out commandingly, with a bravery which was foolhardy to an extreme.

"Stop! Stop where you are!"

The car came towards us. The engine sputtered; the machine swerved a little, as though driven by a drunken person or some one unused to handling a wheel.

Alan gave his command again, then deliberately stepped into the pathway. The car came to an abrupt stop.

"You can't go on tonight," Alan said. "The road is blocked, and whoever you are, you'd be a fool to attempt it in this storm."

The person at the wheel did not reply, but instead swung the car around and returned to the barn. We followed.

As we reached a doorway, a sudden gleam of light illuminated the passage. It came from a kerosene lantern held by a figure in a motor coat which I recognized as my own. A small, unquestionably feminine figure.

"I'll go back to the house with you,"

she said. "After all, what difference does it make?"

The woman who stood there holding the lantern above her head was the most tragically beautiful creature I had ever seen. She did not appear to be very young. Possibly she was in her later thirties, but her small, almost childish, stature gave her the appearance of extreme youth. Great dark eyes burnt in a small ashen pale face, whose pallor was accentuated by her vivid scarlet mouth. Masses of blue-black hair tumbled about her shoulders, and on to the leather collar of my coat. Evidently the coat had been hastily donned, for it wasn't fastened, and exposed to view the shimmery satin of an evening gown she wore.

In a brief glance I noted her sodden silver shoes, and the mud-stained hem of her gown. The silver lace which bordered it was mud-stained and spattered with blood. A pongee cloak, which she had evidently used to motor in, lay a drenched and soggy mass on the seat of the roadster.

For a strained moment we stared at each other. The fragile, infinitely pathetic woman facing Alan and myself. Then she swayed as if about to fall. I started toward her, but she straightened up bravely and gave a little laugh.

"It—it isn't very pleasant out here," she said in a musical voice, "the house is a trifle better."

Silently we trudged back through the overgrown grass and weeds, our feet sinking deep into the spongy ground. Alan relieved her of the lantern and lighted us into the house.

"I—I'll return your coat to you," she said in a half-apologetic tone, going towards the stove, which still glowed red and cheerful from the fire Alan had built. "I shan't need it now. I really didn't mean to steal it. I hoped to return it somehow—some way. I was desperate."

As we were silent, she choked and then with an air of bravado, continued:

"I am sorry I cannot offer you any better hospitality, but—" a wave of a very thin white hand expressed more than words could have done.

"Offer us any better hospitality—?" Alan repeated dumbly after her.

"Yes. This is my home, but it isn't the same as it was when I lived here."

"I—I don't quite understand," I stammered.

III

A THIN white line settled about Alan's rigid mouth. I knew he was wondering what connection the beautiful pallid woman had with the dead man lying upstairs. If she had herself killed him—or if she even knew of his existence. She seemed to sense what I did; for the half-born smile on her lips faded, the dark eyes became darker, if possible, as they widened. Her hands fluttered upward, then dropped helplessly to the side of her orchid-colored gown.

"Yes," she said dully, as if in reply to a question—"I killed him. I was in the closet upstairs when you went into the other room. While you were in there I stole out through the door I had locked on the inside, and down the stairs. I took your cloak, and ran out to the stable. I was going to drive away, when you called me back. Perhaps it is just as well you did. It doesn't matter much one way or another."

"You killed Judge MacPherson?" I gasped. "Why?"

"You knew him?"

"Very well."

An enigmatical smile played about her lips, full and softly rounded like a child's. That smile held a world of wisdom and tragedy in a moment's flicker. It made her face strangely old and careworn in the light of the oil

lamp. I suddenly seemed to be looking at the remnants of a once beautiful woman, at a battered and bruised soul—not at the woman herself.

"I wonder just how well you knew him," she said as though to herself. "Not as well as I did, at any rate."

"He was your lover?" Alan asked.

We lowered our voices as if taking our key from her. Curiously, I felt more of an interest in the woman herself than the fact that she had killed Judge MacPherson. She shook her head in reply to Alan's question and her lips curled scornfully.

After a little, she said:

"Would you like to have me tell you all about it? Somehow, I feel as if I should be relieved if I did so; I'm really very unnerved and shaken. After all, it's a terrible thing to take a human life—to watch a soul leave a man's body, even though you know that man to be a reptile and deserving of more than one death. I shan't speak when I am arrested. They can do as they like with me. But I'll not have the newspapers and their ravenous readers gloating over my miserable downfall. You do not know who I am, nor do I know you—we shall never meet again—and something tells me that when morning comes you will allow me to go my way, and you will go another, so—I should like you to know the truth."

She was strangely calm. Only the pallid whiteness of her face, and a glitter to her dark eyes, showed any of the tumult seething within her. Alan and I both hung upon her words. Somehow it seemed unnecessary for us to talk. She shivered. Without a word Alan pulled the box on which he had flung his coat nearer the fire, and half assisted her to sit upon it.

"Shall I go upstairs and fetch you a chair?" he said.

"No! No! Oh, no!" For one instant she lost control of herself. The next

moment she was as calm and restrained as a society matron serving tea.

Alan and I seated ourselves on the floor at her feet. The thunder and lightning had ceased, and but for the steady drip, drip of the rain, the night was placid and quiet.

For a long time it seemed to my overwrought nerves the woman sat there with her hands clasped loosely in her lap, her great eyes staring at a red glowing spot on the old stove. Once or twice she glanced apprehensively over her shoulder as though she expected the man she had slain to appear in the doorway behind her.

"I was born here, reared here, and married in this house," she said at last, "my little boy was born here. It was a beautiful old house then. Seeing it now, you can scarcely realize what it was in those days. When I was a girl it used to be full of young people laughing, dancing and enjoying life. We had husking bees in the barn, hallowe'en parties, dances, in the winter sleigh rides and Christmas trees.

"Many's the time I've coasted down that long hill and landed in a heap at the bottom. Then I married a man I adored. He worshipped me. He placed me on a pedestal, as something just a little more than mortal. He was an intensely religious man, perhaps a trifle austere, but because I loved society, young company, we continued to fill the home with guests. There was never a shadowy corner in the house like there is now—the lights were always bright. There were always laughing voices to be heard and music—" she spoke very slowly, in an almost pedantic fashion, as though choosing her words, and a bit uncertain of them. It was as though she were speaking a tongue not quite familiar to her. "When my little boy was born both my husband and myself were overjoyed. Even the fact that he was a

fragile little fellow did not drown our happiness. For a year we battled to keep him alive—then he began to grow sturdy and rosy like the other children who came with their parents to visit us. About that time my husband became very absorbed in his profession. He was compiling a historical volume of intense interest to himself. Because I was lonesome I used to go into the city quite often to the theatre—generally to matinées—and come back at dinner time. Several times I went later in the day, and remained overnight.

"I did not realize then that he was jealous of me—that he was suspicious. If only he had said something to me—but he never did—until too late! I was very innocent in those days.

"Principally because I did not wish to disturb him, or impose upon my friends, the few times I remained overnight in the city, I stayed in a small hotel, walking to and from the theatre alone.

"Imagine my horror when, one night, as I turned the corner to go to the hotel (which was in a side street), a man put his hand on my shoulder, and before I could make any protest, informed me I was under arrest.

"Too dazed and bewildered to demand the reason for this outrage, I did nothing but declare my innocence. I was dragged downtown to the police court, and put upon the stand before a grinning, gaping crowd of spectators. I was asked obscene questions by that man lying upstairs, sneered at because of my protestations of virtue, then thrown in a cell with two drunken prostitutes and a half-insane old woman. I was so ashamed, so horror-stricken, yet so certain of my release in the morning, that I did not telephone my husband of what had happened. It never occurred to me that I would be branded as a woman of the streets and sentenced to prison. But I was! I

was! Judge MacPherson—a man of the world who should be able to distinguish between women—laughed at me, and with one wave of his smug hand, with one word sentenced me to six months' confinement and a lifetime of hell! Never so long as I live will I forget his face!

"That same night my baby was taken ill, my husband tried to find me—his search discovered to him the fact that I was in jail for soliciting on the street!

"Then the jealousy—the suspicions he had felt for me burst into flame, making him ready to believe the worst of me.

"I never saw him but once after that. That one time he denounced me as a woman unfit to live—as a thing too vile to breathe the same air as my child. Then he told me the boy was dead. Of course, he secured my release, but it was too late.

"When I came out of prison, I went to Judge MacPherson's home. I remember he was sitting at dinner. He was very annoyed at having his meal disturbed by a pale, bedraggled, slovenly-looking woman. He was at no pains to hide his annoyance. I told him what he had done to me, an innocent woman, and I demanded that he right this wrong.

"There was the same smiling sneer on his face as when he sentenced me.

"'Just how can I do this, my dear lady?' he said.

"'Go to my husband,' I cried wildly, I had not learned to restrain myself then—'tell him that I am innocent—absolutely innocent. My baby is gone—but there is still a chance for me, if he will take me—you must explain to him—you must make him understand!'

"He laughed—laughed at me.

"'Old stuff, my dear!' he sneered, 'old stuff. Why can't you women think of something original? Of course, you are all innocent, none of

you will even admit to a first offense. I'm sorry if your child is dead, that is, if you had one, but I certainly won't help to hoodwink a man—who evidently is a person of principle. If you don't want to suffer, behave yourself; that's all I have to say. Good evening!

"Then he showed me the door. I think I went insane. I remember standing outside and pounding on it, screaming maledictions on him, shrieking to him that he must clear me, that he must give me back my good name. Then some one seized me, and I was dragged away to the station-house again. I left it under a six months' sentence for disorderly conduct.

"When I got out this time, dazed, broken, aged, I realized that nothing I could ever do or say would reinstate me. This second arrest, caused by the man who had ruined me, had branded me forever and forever. I learned my husband had divorced me, disposed of everything in our home and sailed to France.

"Those who had been my friends passed me on the street without recognition. There was no one in the world I could turn to. I was practically without means. To be sure, I owned this house, but I did not have the money to keep it in repair, and I could not live in it. The memories it recalled were maddening. Then, too, I felt everyone knew my story, and I could not face their scornful glances.

"Time and again I was tempted to kill myself, but one thing always held me back; my undying soul-eating hatred for the man who had passed judgment on me.

"One day I realized why this monstrous thing had happened to me. I was to be the instrument with which to save innumerable women from a fate similar to mine! It was to be my task to rid the world of the viper who destroyed innocence and laughed at his

handiwork. I almost became happy in contemplation of what I would do. What did it matter to me that to accomplish his destruction I must accomplish my own! The thing he had branded me, I became in reality. I was beautiful; soon I learned I was desirable, and I could be fascinating.

"I studied all the arts and wiles of the oldest profession in the world, and determined to sell myself to the highest bidder. My education, my knowledge of society, my culture all stood me in good stead. Understand, I always stayed within the law, I was never crude. I took no chances of another arrest. My new name, the one I adopted when I became of the demi-monde, I kept unsmirched, if you could call it that. I became a leader in the set where mistresses laughed at wives and where lovers were more popular than husbands.

"I discovered, to my intense delight, that although austere, and apparently religious, Judge MacPherson's besetting sin was women, that he used the time-worn excuse of an invalid wife to cover his indiscretions. You don't know it, of course, as he kept the scandal quiet, but it was I who brought about his divorce.

"It took me three years to secure an introduction to him, but it took less than three hours to hopelessly ensnare him. It was not strange that in the smiling, elegantly blasé woman of the world he did not recognize the half-crazed, bedraggled woman of the police courts.

"He was just at that most susceptible age when he felt that youth was slipping from him, and old age waiting to claim him had put a taboo on affairs of the heart. With a desperate desire to remain young he flung himself headlong into my hands, never doubting that I was what I appeared—a divorcée whose misplaced affections had made her a trifle bitter toward men, yet who was

longing and looking for a loving protector.

"I played my cards well. I used all the coyness of the ingénue with the blandishments of the courtesan to keep him on tenter-hooks before he became that protector. After that, it was easier.

"He did not realize why I suggested week-end parties, gradually making this house their setting. I had, from the first, determined that as this was the *home* he had destroyed, so *here* he should be destroyed.

"It was his money which furnished those rooms upstairs. Rather grim humor, isn't it?

"Can you conceive of the loathing I felt at that man's touch, how I cringed as he embraced me? How I laughed and anticipated the climax of it all? He called me a charming child with quaint ideas when he first saw this place, abandoned and decayed. The unusualness of our rendezvous appealed to him as unique. Early I learned unwholesome things intrigued him.

"Tonight was our third visit. We arrived just before the storm broke. As usual we brought a lunch kit with our dinner in it. That meal was never eaten. I had drugged the wine just enough to befog his brain, and make him like wax in my hands. Then as he sat there, stupid, dazed and inert, I told him who I was, and why he was here.

"And I laughed! Laughed at him as he had laughed at me when he had me taken away, kicking and screaming, by the police. You would have laughed, too, had you seen his face!

"When I showed him the revolver, and told him I was going to kill him, he cringed like a sick animal, whimpering and begging for mercy—the kind of mercy he hadn't shown me. Still I laughed! He staggered drunkenly to his feet, and came toward me. I don't think he felt certain that I meant what I said. I whirled on him and backed

him into the bedroom. Then, when he made a lurch toward me, trying to secure the pistol and stumbled against the bed, I fired—he fell across it dead.”

“Where is the pistol?” Alan asked drily.

The woman’s eyes narrowed. “I flung it under the bed. His blood smeared my gown, see! After a little, I went out to drive the car to town, but it was raining so hard I became drenched before I reached the barn. I came back to the house. Then I heard you come in at the front door. I was frightened. I had fancied myself absolutely alone out here. I locked the bedroom door when I heard you climb the stairs—you know the rest—”

We were silent for a few moments. Then Alan said abruptly:

“I’d like to take a look at him again.”

The woman rose slowly, and we all filed up the stairs again. At the bedroom door she laid a feverish hand on mine, and I felt a shudder go through her, but when we stood staring at the cold, dark figure before us, her face was unexpressive, emotionless.

Half entangled in the lace of the bedspread where it had fallen, or been thrown, as MacPherson stumbled against the bed, was the revolver. The light from the lantern, though not brilliant, illuminated more space than Alan’s spot had done, hence it had been hidden from our view before.

Alan looked steadily at her a moment. I could not read what was passing through his thoughts, then he motioned for us to follow him downstairs.

The steady drip, drip of the rain made me drowsy. We huddled in si-

lence on the floor before the stove, the woman staring off in space. Presently I dozed, leaning against Alan’s shoulder.

When I awakened, it was breaking day—she was gone!

“Alan!” I cried, shaking him a little to waken him. “She’s gone!”

“Yes, I know. I saw her when she left.”

“But—”

“Who are we to judge?” he asked slowly.

IV

Two days later, picking up a New York newspaper, I read the headlines: “Judson MacPherson, well-known justice of the Criminal Court, commits suicide in abandoned house in the Catskill Mountains.” Then followed a half-column account of the act in detail. MacPherson having gotten into financial difficulties had chosen the coward’s way out, so said the paper. A letter announced his intention of dying, and gave the location where to find his body. The paper also stated that the knowledge he had recently married a young and beautiful actress came as a distinct surprise to his friends. A picture of his bride accompanied the article.

The wistful, almost tragic, face pictured was unquestionably that of the woman who said she had killed him!

I stared at Alan as I handed him the newspaper.

“Was she lying?” I gasped.

He shook his head.

“If so, she was a clever actress,” he answered. “But one thing is certain, we’ll never know the truth. Either way he brought about his own death.”



The Face that Stared Back at Blaisdell

By Edwin Carty Ranck

THESE are the facts in Blaisdell's queer case, taken from a communication addressed to his best friend, Dr. Maynard Hamilton. Dr. Hamilton vouchsafes no explanation, nor do I. Indeed, there are phenomena in this old world that *cannot* be explained, as Hamlet pointed out to Horatio in a much-quoted speech. The statements given here were contained in a carefully written paper in Blaisdell's handwriting, that was found in Blaisdell's desk by Dr. Hamilton several days after the man's death. From this paper he has pieced together the extraordinary narrative that follows:

I

BLAISDELL thinks it must have been shortly after midnight that he fell asleep. Horrible nightmares racked him as he tossed upon his bed and one of them was so frightful that he woke up with a scream—or thought he did. At any rate, he suddenly found himself in the centre of his bedchamber, dressing with feverish haste. And here is the queer part of the narrative: for he affirms that, while he was dressing, another man lay in his bed—an exact counterpart of himself. This other ego lay quietly asleep, his head on his arm. Blaisdell studied him carefully and said he felt as a locust must feel when he looks at his outworn shell.

All the time he was dressing, Blaisdell says he seemed to be impelled to haste by queer promptings that were as

insistent as if some person were at his elbow saying "Hurry! Hurry!" He finished his dressing in mad excitement and then hurried out of the room, casting a backward glance over his shoulder at his sleeping counterpart.

Once outside his apartment house in Gramercy Park, Blaisdell hurried along, his persistent mentor seeming to walk at his elbow. A puzzling feature of this nocturnal prowling was that he felt a sense of familiarity, a feeling that he was on his way to keep an appointment that could not be postponed. The streets were deserted except for an occasional prowler or a patrolman who made the night echo with sharp blows from his club as he struck a metal post occasionally to remind the unlawful that the law was abroad.

On, on, hurried Blaisdell! By this time he had lost all sense of location, but he was aware that he was in a downtown section of New York—a section that he had never visited during his waking moments. But, although he knew that he had never been in this neighborhood during his conscious moments, he felt that he was on familiar territory.

Finally he paused in front of an old, three-story, brownstone front residence in Washington Square—paused with the air of one who has reached his destination. He walked up the steps and let himself into the house with a pass-key. Nor did it seem strange to him that he had a pass-key for a house that he had never visited during his

waking moments. It all seemed ordinary and commonplace.

Blaisdell quietly mounted the stairs until he reached the second floor and there he paused before a closed door, overcome by a suffocating sense of fear and repugnance. He half turned away and then retraced his steps as if fascinated. Something seemed to warn him away from that ominous door, behind which lay a mystery that the everyday Blaisdell, millionaire and *bon vivant*, did not care to penetrate, but which this nocturnal, prowling Blaisdell seemed to insist upon. Then, without any conscious volition on his part, Blaisdell placed his hand on the knob and the door opened noiselessly.

He found himself in a large, square living-room, tastefully furnished and lined with built-in bookcases full of handsomely bound volumes. Everywhere he looked, he saw bizarre weapons of defense and men in Chinese and Japanese armor looked threateningly at him from dim corners of the room. It was either the apartment of an art connoisseur or a globe-trotter with a propensity for the unusual.

From this room he stepped into a bedchamber and then started back with a little gasp. It was a luxuriously furnished room that appeared to have been transplanted by Aladdin's wonderful lamp straight from the perfume-scented Orient. Blaisdell advanced further into the room and his feet sank into a wonderful, moss-like carpet. To one side of the room was an old-fashioned four-poster bed, topped by a crimson canopy. In the exact centre of this bed lay a man asleep, with his mouth open.

There was something strangely familiar about the sleeper, and Blaisdell drew closer and gazed at him steadily. He was an oldish man with a sallow complexion and a wisp of a beard that was slightly tinged with grey. The ghost of a smile lingered upon his lips

—a cruel smile that sleep could not make gentle nor mirthful.

And as he gazed upon the sleeper, rage grew in Blaisdell's heart, a rage so furious that it almost suffocated him. Without a moment's hesitation he seized the sleeper by the throat and began throttling him. The man struggled furiously. His eyes popped open and gazed up into Blaisdell's with a look of freezing despair. A slight froth gathered upon his purpling lips and he squirmed and writhed like a snake in Blaisdell's unrelenting grasp. God how he struggled!

Blaisdell's fingers sank into the throat as if it were satin, and then, suddenly, there were no more struggles. The body fell back inertly as the steel-like fingers relaxed. Blaisdell pulled the bedclothes over the mask of horror and stole quietly from the room. He felt that his errand had been accomplished.

As he went back over the route that he had just pursued, he felt again that weird sense of unfamiliarity that had at first possessed him, and this feeling of strangeness increased as he neared his own apartment house. He walked in and hurried past the sleeping hall-boy without waking him. Once inside his apartment, he rushed into the bedroom, but his counterpart was gone.

Blaisdell undressed with trembling fingers, but his head had scarcely touched the pillow before he was sound asleep.

II

A SHAFT of sunlight fell across Blaisdell's face and he awoke with a shudder.

"Ugh! What a horrible nightmare!" he said aloud. "I feel as if I actually did kill that man!"

Then he yawned and rang for his valet. After a casual breakfast he was glancing through the newspaper when he received the shock that changed him

from a careless clubman into a nervous wreck.

QUEER MURDER IN WASHINGTON SQUARE

That was the headline he read. And then followed an account of the crime. A private policeman, while going his rounds, had found the front door of an old brownstone residence open and had investigated. On the second floor he had found another door ajar and, going in, had found a man lying in a queer bed that was overhung by a red canopy. He was about to steal quietly out, when something in the huddled attitude of the sleeper attracted his attention and he then discovered that the man had been strangled, the marks of fingers being plainly visible upon his throat. The police investigation had established the fact that the man's name was Stephen R. Rollins, a famous traveller and authority on spiritualism. He had lived for years in the Orient and a monograph of his on occult phenomena had attracted much attention in scientific circles.

"My God!" said Blaisdell, as the paper fell from his trembling hands. "My God! Did I go to that man's apartment while I was in the grip of that nightmare and murder him? Did I?"

These questions nearly drove him frantic. What should he do? What course of action was there for him to pursue? If he went to the police and told them that he, Herman Blaisdell, descendant of a fine old New York family, had gone forth into the night and killed a man he had never seen before—in his sleep—what would they think of him? They would probably shrug their shoulders and advise him to consult an alienist.

And yet this man, this Stephen R. Rollins, *was* dead, and his description and that of his apartment coincided in every detail with the place that Blaisdell

had visited in his dream. But *was* it a dream? And who was the other man that lay in his bed as he went out? These questions revolved in his mind like a vicious circle, almost driving him insane.

Blaisdell aged after that. He looked ten years older and his friends were alarmed about him. Dr. Hamilton advised a change of environment and rigorous physical exercise, otherwise he would not be responsible for the consequences. The man jumped at every sound and had a mortal terror of the night. He would put off going to bed until the latest possible moment and then always slept with a light in his room. Sometimes his valet would come quavering to his bedside in the night, frightened out of his wits by frightful screams from Blaisdell.

"I didn't do it! I didn't do it! I couldn't have done it!" he would scream, his eyes staring. "The thing is impossible! The thing is impossible!"

When these spells were upon him he would shake and it would finally be necessary for his valet to give him a sleeping powder. These things became noised abroad and he resigned from his clubs, went nowhere and declined all invitations. He was a broken man!

"A hopeless hypochondriac! Just a morbid victim of nerves—or drink," said his friends—and dropped him.

Things went on like this for months, and then one day Blaisdell read another item in a newspaper that dumfounded him. It detailed the arrest of a man named Franklin Sears, who was charged with the murder of Stephen R. Rollins.

"But he couldn't have murdered him! I murdered him—murdered him in my sleep," mumbled Blaisdell.

That afternoon one of the sensational newspapers published a picture of Franklin Sears—and Blaisdell cried aloud in new fright.

His valet found him with the newspaper in his hand, mouthing and trembling—his nerves vibrating like a taut piano wire.

For the face that stared back at Blaisdell from the front page *was his own face*. Yet Franklin Sears' name was under it!

III

LATER Sears confessed to the murder. He told the police that he and Rollins had been chums and college mates. Rollins had fallen madly in love with Sears' beautiful sister and had persuaded her to go away with him under promise of marriage. They had gone to South America, where Rollins had amassed a fortune, and had then visited the Orient. She begged Rollins to make her his wife but he refused and finally deserted her.

A serious illness followed and she sent for her brother, who promised her that he would not rest until her betrayer had been brought to book. She died, assured that he would avenge her. And he had kept his word, although he had to trail Rollins all over the world before he finally ran him down in Washington Square.

Blaisdell followed the developments in the Sears case with absorbed attention. He read the newspapers feverishly and finally decided that he could stand the suspense no longer. He determined to go to the Tombs, confront his counterpart and tell him the story of the nightmare. Surely there was an explanation of it all. There *must* be an explanation. He had decided to visit Sears the next day, when the last queer thing happened in the tragic series of happenings.

On the morning of Blaisdell's intended visit, Dr. Hamilton read in his morning paper that Franklin Sears, the murderer of Stephen R. Rollins, had committed suicide in the Tombs by hanging himself to one of the bars by his suspenders.

The paper commented upon the somewhat unusual fact that the prisoner's watch was found on his body and that it had stopped at three o'clock. It was just a few minutes past three when the body was discovered—still warm.

Dr. Hamilton had scarcely finished reading this account when his telephone bell rang. The excited voice of Blaisdell's valet asked him to come at once to his master's apartment, as something terrible had happened.

He responded at once, and when he was ushered into Blaisdell's bedroom by the white-faced valet, he saw at once that he could do nothing further for his friend. Blaisdell was dead, and it was very evident from the stiffness of his body that he had been dead for many hours.

"It ain't his bein' dead that's so terrible," said the trembling valet. "It's—it's—well, look *there!*"

He pointed to the throat of the dead man. There was the distinct mark of a rope upon it and this mark extended clear around his neck.

"He—he couldn't have hung himself," quavered the valet, "because I was the first person who saw him—and *there ain't any rope!*"

Some unaccountable impulse made Dr. Hamilton pick up Blaisdell's watch from the dresser.

It had stopped running, the hands recording the hour of three o'clock.



More Deadly than the Viper

By Harry C. Hervey, Jr.

I

THAT face clung to Tremaine's mind. Three hours ago, when he and his caravan had ridden into Tsagan-dhunsa, he had seen it framed in the doorway of the low, swarth building that flew the Russian flag.

A white woman—here on the fringe of the world!

For four dreary months he had seen only the faces of brown and yellow women, had heard only their tongues; and the longing for the sight of a white woman, for the sound of a white woman's voice, had become a terrible thirst that threatened to wither his soul; so now—after that journey through the white hell, from Urga across the North Gobi and the Tchuchun-Shan Range into Tibet—the glimpse of that pallid face in the doorway of the Russian Consulate in this desert village inspired in him a profound reverence for its owner.

A white woman. That face haunted him. She, too, haunted him, for as she paused there in the winter twilight, glancing over her shoulder, he found something pathetically young, something almost tragic about her. He wondered vaguely at her presence in the Consulate doorway, wondered, too, if she were connected in any manner with the Consul . . .

He shivered involuntarily and bent lower over the *argussun* fire.

Since nightfall the cold of the Tibet winter had crept into the room in the Rest House where he sat wrapped in his sheepskin coat and it bit through his heavy clothing with the savageness of a fanged beast.

Following the evening meal of *tsamba*, *talkan*-cakes and tea he had retreated to his bedchamber, one of the three private rooms off the main hall of the caravanserai, the pallid face of the first white woman that he had seen in four months burning in his brain.

As he sat there, the flames painting his tanned skin a ruddy glow, he heard footsteps in the hall and a moment later the burlap in the door was thrust aside by Shagdur, his caravan-*bashi*.

"I have a message for you, master," announced the high-cheeked Mongol youth, halting just within the bare, dim-lit room.

"For me?" echoed Tremaine.

"Yes, master—from the lady at the Russian Consulate."

At his words Tremaine's muscles grew rigid.

"You must be mistaken, Shagdur."

The boy shook his head. "The lady called to me as I was walking along the main street, saying, 'Go to your master and ask him if he will come to the Consulate. Tell him it is urgent.' Who else could she mean but you—for are not you my master?"

With a word of thanks to the

bashi Tremaine got up and strode rapidly out of the room, passing through the hall into the deserted courtyard.

A stiff wind was stirring. It bore with it, from the rear of the *khan*, the reek of a camel and yak, playing a melancholy dirge on the unseen harpstrings of the night.

An excellent view of the mountains that encircled the Tsagan-dhunsta valley could be gained from the gate of the Rest House, and here Tremaine paused a moment, not, however, to observe the dreary landscape, but to assure himself that she, this girl of the Consulate doorway, had really sent for him.

Involuntarily his eyes rose to the giant ridges that painted themselves in huge smears of dun-color on the dark sky. Below them, the Pass opened wolfish jaws on the caravan-road, and above, near the snow-tipped peaks and crags, the faint outline of the whitewashed Lamaserie was sketched upon the rocks, a single light peering from its sullen portals into the night.

Leaving the courtyard of the caravanserai, Tremaine moved at a swift pace along the winding, dwelling-lined main street to the Consulate.

At the gate, where a lanthorn on one side of the doorway stuck a lurid tongue of light across the courtyard, he was halted by a huge, bearded Cossack with a Berdan rifle slung over one shoulder and a *balalaika* dangling from his waist.

"Are you from the Rest House, *barin*?" asked the Russian.

"Yes."

The Cossack saluted. "Then come with me."

Across the courtyard and into the Consulate building he followed the Muscovite.

Within it was dark, but as they

entered, a door opposite the one through which they had just passed, opened, admitting a shaft of light.

In the entranceway, silhouetted upon the yellow glow, Tremaine saw a slim form; heard a voice speaking to him.

"Won't you come in?"

He advanced into the light alone, for the Cossack had retreated; passed through the door; and once within he felt that he had left Tibet behind; felt that he had shaken from him the dust of Tsagan-dhunsta.

"It was rather bold of me to send for you in this manner," she said in a low, sweet voice, "But desperation knows no conventions."

What Tremaine saw made him catch his breath. Skin of lustrous white; wide set eyes of night blue; hair of reddish gold, parted in the center and twisted in a knot on the back of her pallid neck; a figure at once quaint, ethereal—yet intensely human. She wore . . . but he did not see what she wore—except that it was dark.

"My name is Miriam Amber," she told him in that low, sweet voice, offering her hand.

"Mine is Tremaine," he returned, accepting the hand which was like China silk under his callous touch; "Travis Tremaine."

She smiled at him—and for a reason that was to him inexplicable he felt a holy dread of her, the fear of one who looks for the first time upon the face of a Madonna; felt, too, that the bonds of a new thralldom were being fastened about him.

"I will have Lotus-eye take your coat and hat," she said, and struck a gong that rang silv'ern in the room—a room that was small and filled with a fragrant warmth, with shadows of deep amethyst.

A brazier at one end of a divan sent

out waves of scented heat and a candle on an ebony table burned like a trembling ruby.

A moment after the sound of the gong a little Chinese girl clad in green silk slipped through a door, taking Tremaine's coat and hat. Then she melted into the amethyst shadows.

"Won't—won't you sit down?" the girl faltered.

Her face seemed suddenly swept free of all color; the eyes of night-blue swam star-like in a mist of tears.

"You are ill!" he exclaimed, moving to her side.

At his words she sank on the caravan-cloth cushions of the divan, her eyes dropping to the Khotan rug at her feet.

"Yes, ill in soul," he heard her murmur.

For a moment she was silent, then lifted her eyes to him and spoke:

"You must overlook my queer actions, for you don't know what I've suffered, here in this terrible village—in the solitude, with only Lotus-eye and Yashka as companions. . . . It has seemed a million hours. . . ."

"But the Consul?" he queried, puzzled, "Surely—"

She made a gesture that expressed absolute futility.

"Gone—his secretary gone, and my brother, too—all three in the last forty days. . . ."

"Forty days," he echoed; "you've been in this God-forsaken place for forty days?"

A shudder swept her. "Forty days—and the only white woman. . . . living in a house with three drink-crazed men, two Cossacks and a Chinese girl. Ah, God, if you only knew!"

Very gently, with a tenderness that came to him suddenly, he took

her small hands in his, looking deep into the eyes of night-blue.

"But I want to know, Miriam Amber," he said.

She summoned a smile. "The way you said that sounded like home. I live in Richmond, Virginia."

He, too, smiled. "Richmond," he repeated. "I live in Fredericksburg, so near you—yet—we came to Tibet to meet. Strange these tricks that Chance plays—or is it Chance? . . . But you are in trouble and I want to hear about it."

Once more she smiled. "Sit down. I'll tell you over the tea-table. . . ."

Again the silvern gong—again the green-clad Lotus-eye, this time bearing a tray which she placed on the little ebony table and retreated.

"I sent for you to ask you to help me," announced Miriam Amber after they were seated. "When you rode in this afternoon I felt that aid had come, and I resolved to send for you, knowing that you could suggest some plan. Now, that you're here, I hardly know where to begin—"

She poured his tea for him and passed it to him. He accepted it awkwardly, but she seemed not to notice this.

"My brother was a writer," she began. "We left the United States a year ago to travel in the East. After Egypt we visited the Holy Lands, went from Damascus through Persia; across Turkestan and ancient Dsungaria into Tibet. We were to end up in China—Pekin, Hongkong—and then home. . . . My brother had an unfortunate habit—that of drinking—and after we left Damascus a new passion for it seized him and he drank all he could obtain—"

Clouds settled in her eyes, dimming the night-blue.

"The incidents of our journey in Tibet would make up a book of hard-

ships. One late evening our little caravan rode into Tsagan-dhunsa, and the Russian Consul and his secretary, the only two white men in this village of Särtäng Mongols, invited us to stay at the Consulate. That very night M. Grebin, the Consul, told us the story of the Valley of Vanishing Men—rather, as the Chinese inhabitants call it, "*T'su chü ti fang'*"—for that is the name by which Tsagan-dhunsa is known to the desert tribes."

The clouds in her eyes darkened; for a brief instant the shadow of dread lay upon her; then the fear was mastered.

"Twenty-four years ago a Russian merchant and his wife from Kiachta, traveling toward Dsungaria, took refuge from a storm in the Lamaserie at the head of the Pass. In those days the monastery was not forbidden. The following morning the merchant's wife was found wounded—having been attacked during the night by a vampire bat. The story goes that a week later she died—and it is believed by the Chinese and Särtäng Mongols that her soul was reincarnated in the form of a ghoul—and returns to feast upon men. . . . It's only a horrid tale, but"—she shuddered—"but the facts remain that once every two weeks a man of Tsagan-dhunsa vanishes, and no trace of him is ever found. . . ."

She leaned across the table, looking earnestly into his face.

"Do you think I'm mad? Perhaps I am—for sometimes I believe so. But to go on with my story. . . . Every Consul sent here within the past five years has disappeared—and they are supposed to be victims of the ghoul-soul of the Russian woman.

"Unfortunately for my brother, Lance, M. Grebin, the late Consul, was a drinker—and so was his secre-

tary. During our stay, which ran into many days, the three of them were often intoxicated—so intoxicated that they were unconscious. Whenever this occurred I was alone with Lotus-eye, the Consul's servant, and the two Cossack guards, Yashka and Alexis. But they were always very kind to me.

"The second week we were here, M. Grebin's secretary disappeared—went for a walk down by the lake and did not come back. . . . Then, two weeks later, M. Grebin vanished in the same manner. . . . After that Alexis, the Cossack, volunteered to go to Kurruk and appeal to the Consul there—and he left. Lance, my brother, did not drink any after M. Grebin disappeared. We were only remaining at the Consulate until Alexis returned from Kurruk.

"Then—then came the night when Lance went—three nights ago. It was snowing. About midnight I awakened and prompted by a peculiar psychic feeling, I got up. As I did I could have sworn that I heard someone singing, or wailing, out in the snow. I went into Lance's room, which was next to mine, and as I entered—he sprang up from his *kang*—and jumped through the window! I ran and leaned out—and as I did I heard an eerie, uncanny *laugh*. . . . I called Yashka immediately and he searched—but it was useless, for the snow destroyed all footprints."

As she ended he thought he saw tears glistening in the night-blue eyes.

"That is all," she said. "Alexis, who went to Kurruk, is overdue and I am afraid he encountered Tangut robbers—or Dugpas. . . . Now you can understand why I sent for you. But, listen—"

Once more she leaned across the table to him.

"I think I have a solution for the mystery of the Valley of Vanishing Men. . . . The Lamaserie at the head of the Pass is like some few in the North Gobi—in that a living representative of the Divine is reputed to dwell therein. It is called the Monastery of The Shining One. Whether this Shining One is a man or a woman none know—except the monks. And only a comparatively few Lamas are cloistered there—a hundred or less. They say The Shining One has never tasted food but lives by Divine substance. In many of the Lamaseries of Tibet and the Gobi devilish rituals are practiced—and in some, it is rumored, *human sacrifice* is enacted—"

She halted significantly and their eyes met.

"Then you think—" he began.

"I don't know. It merely occurred to me. I told Yashka, but he believes it would be impossible to get into the Lamaserie—unless by force, and that can not be done, he said, until Alexis returns. But, oh, I am afraid to wait, for if—"

"The Lamaserie isn't accessible?" Tremaine questioned.

"It is forbidden to all who are not of the faith. No white man has been known to enter since the death of the Russian woman."

"And you believe your brother is there—dead or alive?"

Again she made that gesture of futility.

"God knows! Don't you see, the idea was something tangible, and in my grief I grasped it, hoping, praying that—" She swallowed hard.

"I understand," he told her, "and I will try to think of a plan to get in the Lamaserie and—"

"But I couldn't let you take that risk—the odds would be against you."

Tremaine smiled—an expression

that lighted his frank, open face and his wide gray eyes.

"There is little or no danger," he assured her—which was not what he thought.

"But you won't try it tonight?"

"Darkness is better—and a minute lost might mean much."

Her hands closed over his. He felt them trembling. Her eyes, too, seemed to tremble—like deep blue stars . . .

"No, I couldn't allow you to do that, I couldn't! You have only known me for a few minutes and—"

"But we're both from Virginia," he interposed, smiling yet solemn, "and you are alone—in trouble. Perhaps your solution of the mystery is correct. And—and, you see, for four months, traveling from Urga, with forbidden Lhasa as the objective, I've journeyed—suffering the thirst and cold; listening to jackals and wolves by night; seeing only brown and yellow women, with never the sight of a white woman's face—all these hardships on a gamble, to try and penetrate the secret city. I'm a gambler through and through, and now, for the sight of your face, the face of a *white* woman in all this loneliness and desolation, I'm willing to play another game, to do anything—to repay you for the sight of you."

They had both risen, were standing face to face in the candle-glow and the fragrant heat from the brazier hung like a spirit-hand between them.

"I think I understand," she returned slowly; "but isn't that a one-sided bargain?"

"But I want to pay that price—"

He bent swiftly, caught her hand and lifted it to his lips. It was an impulsive, boyish act, and afterward he felt embarrassed. His face burned.

"I—I had better go now," he stammered.

Miriam Amber struck the gong, and when the green-clad Chinese girl appeared, instructed her to bring his coat and hat.

"Good-night, Travis Tremaine," she said in that low, sweet voice, "I shall be waiting here—when you come back. . . ."

The next he knew he was taking his coat and hat from Lotus-eye, was leaving the room with the amethyst shadows, the face of Miriam Amber burning before him like a white flame.

In front of the building he encountered the huge Cossack, Yashka, standing under the lanthorn, smoking, the *balalaika* tucked under one arm.

"Looks as if one night is going to pass without snow," observed the American, his eyes upon the moon that was creeping up from behind the ghost-like mountains.

The Cossack shrugged his big shoulders. "It may snow and it may not. *Nié znayu!* I don't know!"

Tremaine moved off.

"Good night, *tovarishtchi,*" he said over his shoulder.

"Good night, *barin,*" returned the Muscovite.

II

UPON reaching the caravanserai, Tremaine went immediately to his room, where he found Shagdur warming himself over the *argussun* fire.

"Bring one of the camels with full equipment to the front immediately," he instructed. "No food necessary. I'll be back before morning—perhaps."

Shagdur stared. "You are not going to travel alone at night, master? There are Tangut robbers in this region—"

"I can take care of myself," he assured him.

As Shagdur left the room, Tremaine went to his camel-bags in one corner, removing a box of matches, a dagger and an automatic, all of which he placed in the inside pocket of his coat, and quitted the barren bed-chamber, making his way to the front of the khan to await the caravan-*bashi*.

For some little time he paced the courtyard, his eyes frequently seeking the white-washed Lamaserie, its spectral bulk now crowned by the rising moon. The solitary light still gleamed from its sullen portals, malevolently crimson.

At length Shagdur appeared, leading a tall, white *bughra*, or he-camel.

"You may occupy my room in the Rest House tonight," Tremaine told him as the camel knelt. "I'll hardly be back before daylight." . . .

When the shaggy he-camel had regained his feet, Tremaine guided him past the shadow-wrapped dwellings of the winding main street, around the ice-crusting lake with its *kamish* plants and across the broad plain that spread like a carpet before the ridges.

Here the caravan-road entered the fearsome jaws of Tsagan-dhunsta Pass, thrusting a narrow, crooked passage between lofty, towering walls of solid stone, until near the snow-crowned peaks it skirted the Lamaserie for the descent on the other side of the mountain; and Tremaine urged his ungainly mount to a trot, leaving the sentinel-craggs of the lower pass behind and beginning the steep climb to the whitewashed monastery with its leering eye of crimson.

By the time he reached the stone terraces of the Lamaserie the moon had abandoned its post above the peaks, swinging hawk-like into the

clear, cold sky and pouring its nacreous flood upon the ghostly, sprawling monastery.

Not many yards from the main portal Tremaine's journey ended and he forced the *bughra* to kneel, slipping from his back to the ground.

He patted the gaunt, shaggy beast upon the neck—while with the other hand he withdrew the dagger from his inside pocket.

"I'm damned sorry, old fellow," he said, "but it's for *her*—and you're willing to play the game for a *white* woman, aren't you?"

Then with a quick movement he jerked the beast's head back and at the same instant the blade of the dagger flashed. . . . There followed a queer sucking, gurgling sound, and something warm rushed over his hands.

Fighting against a terrible nausea, looking away from the dark liquid that stained his hands, he deliberately slashed open the sleeve of his sheepskin coat, and when the flesh was bare, the dagger flashed again.

His teeth ground together . . . but it was over now.

With trembling hands he cleaned the knife on his coat, returned the weapon to his pocket, and walked with unsteady steps to the nearby portal of the Lamaserie.

At the door he halted, pounding upon the heavy nail-studded panels. After several minutes had passed without a reply he again knocked—this time louder.

At last an answer—"Patience, brother, patience!"

The voice came from behind the portal, the words being spoken in the Särtäng Mongol dialect, a tongue with which Tremaine was familiar.

Presently there was the sound of a bolt being lifted and the door

opened, revealing, outlined upon a warmth of light, the form of an emaciated yellow-robed Lama, a white silk scarve of the Order about his neck.

"Peace be with thee!" was the yellow monk's greeting. "What would'st thou have of Amgon Lama of the Monastery of The Shining One?"

Tremaine fell against the door-frame in a position that would exhibit his bloody arm to the Lama.

"Peace be with thee," he returned. "I seek aid and shelter, brother."

He felt the monk's eyes searching him.

"I perceive thee to be wounded, brother," he announced, "yet I have not the authority to admit thee to the cloister—unless perchance thou art of some other monastery?"

"The world is my monastery," returned Tremaine, "but I am hurt, brother, and can not reach the village below, for see"—he waved his hand towards the camel's carcass—"my beast is dead and I can walk no further. Above the Pass Tangut robbers fell upon my caravan and killed my comrades. My camel carried me this far before he went down. Surely thou wilt not turn me away!"

The priest hesitated, then—"Even though I perceive thee to be in sore need of succor, I can not allow thee to enter without the permission of the Grand Lama. Stay here, brother, and perchance he will have compassion upon thee." . . .

After the door closed behind the shaven-pated priest, Tremaine slipped to the cold ground before the entrance, feigning unconsciousness.

Presently the door opened again. Following that Tremaine heard voices and from beneath lowered lids he saw the Lama with the white silk scarf emerge, accompanied by three

others, the latter number wearing mitre-shaped hats.

"His pains have caused him to swoon," reported one of the Lamas, having bent over Tremaine. "Look ye, his camel lies yonder." . . .

After a moment of whispered consultation the four Lamas lifted Tremaine and carried him inside the monastery. Following the harsh clang of the closing portal, he was borne some distance—up flights of stairs and through dark, incense-laden corridors—and at length placed upon something cold and hard, a *kang*, he imagined.

Three of the Lamas retreated, leaving the fourth, the one with the scarf, to light a candle and examine the American; and during this performance it required great control on the part of Tremaine, for a single twitch of a muscle might have betrayed him.

Presently one of the monks returned bearing ointment, a cloth and a bowl of water. The latter he passed to the other Lama and whilst the priest of the white scarve held the receptacle he bathed and dressed the cut in Tremaine's arm.

When this was done they departed in silence, taking the candle and closing the door easily behind them.

Tremaine opened wide his eyes. Instead of the darkness that he expected as the natural result of the withdrawal of the light, a long iron-barred window allowed the stream of moonlight to crust the floor beneath the casement with pearl and bring into vague outline the walls and ceiling of a small cell-like room. There was no furniture other than the *kang* upon which he lay.

A raw chill pervaded the atmosphere, making him shiver and shake. Too, the ordeal through which he had just passed had left him with a feel-

ing of physical weakness. He wondered if he would ever forget the piteous whine of the camel A shudder swept him.

Rising from the stone bed, he crept to the door, his hand closing over the knob. To his surprise the door was not bolted, but swung inward with a mild whine of hinges, disclosing a gloom-stricted corridor.

As he started to step over the threshold his ears caught a faint pat-pat-pat—a sound that suggested the padded footfalls of a feline animal—coming from somewhere in the dark passage.

He drew back into the room, hesitated; closed the door and returned to the *kang*.

He had scarcely stretched himself out upon the cold stone when from beneath lowered lids he saw the door open slowly—saw a misty figure take birth in the maw of darkness. His sensation, as the person entered, was not unlike an electric shock, for, he perceived, it was a woman.

She wore something that coruscated in the moonlight and her hair, the shade of a Tibetan night, was unbound in a black flood about her shoulders. And the face! In the moonlight it was clear-cut, like a piece of marble—an alluring manifestation of a hundred voices, a face more wickedly lovely than any he had ever beheld. The lips were full, smears of dark in the wan light, and flames of jet burned in the heavy-lidded eyes.

She moved across the crusting of pearly light, her garments shimmering sinisterly, and bent over him, her body radiating a warmth that was sweet, like bruised sandalwood.

She laughed, the musical peals suggesting shattered crystals.

"My white mummy!" he heard her murmur in the Särtäng Mongol dia-

lect. Her voice held a lure—promised paradise . . . and a sweet hell.

She bent lower over him, lower, until the fragrance of bruised sandalwood dulled his senses into a lassitude.

"My mummy!"

Then she allowed her hand to caress his forehead and at the touch a thousand electric volts sent a charge through his whole body.

"O white mummy!" she crooned, "Thy brow is crowned with the pallor of flaming snows! I long to love thee, to smother thee with kisses, to let thee perish in my embrace, but not tonight, O white mummy, another time . . ."

Her face sank lower . . . until her lips met his . . . and in that terrible moment he was possessed of a desire to reach up and crush her to him, to return the pressure of that mouth . . .

Suddenly she sprang back, retreating into the full clarity of the moon. The flames of jet in her eyes leaped high; her body grew rigid, tense; she flung back her arms, the shining draperies spread as wings of woven stars; and thus she stood for a brief instant, like a huge scintillating bat above the throat of prey.

"Red—red . . . like burning rubies!" fell from her lips.

A look of hellish exultation swept her face—a typhoon of emotion. She took a single step toward him, her eyes upon his arm where the skin was slashed; then conquered herself by sheer force of will—a battle that was evident in her face. He heard her teeth snap together.

The typhoon was spent.

She whirled; he saw the flash of her draperies . . . dust in the wake of a silver tempest . . . and the door clanged shut.

Once more he was alone in the cell of the Lamaserie.

III

COLD perspiration stood out on Tremaine's body. How he had been able to master himself while she fawned over him he did not know, but he did realize that he could not endure another such ordeal.

For a long time he lay there, his body quivering with reaction; and at length he rose, determined upon a course of action.

Moving to the door, he lifted the latch. The ponderous portal swung inward, revealing the blackness of the corridor—a sable flood that swam visibly before his eyes. The black-dark suggested frightful things—hidden horrors. His jaw tightened; he ground his teeth together.

Another step, a whine of uncoiled hinges and it was done—the door closed and he adrift in the fluid darkness.

He still wore the sheepskin coat; the dagger and the automatic rested in his inside pocket; and his hand crept beneath the heavy garment, closing over the cold steel of the revolver. Thus armed, his unengaged hand extended to avoid a collision with any objects that might lurk in his path, he started forward.

He had advanced not more than five yards when instinct warned him to halt. His unengaged hand slipped into the pocket where the box of matches lay; a mere instant—and following a splutter, a tiny blaze was born in the Cimmerian blackness.

What he saw caused a vacant sensation in the pit of his stomach.

He was at the top of a flight of stairs that wound down into a well of darkest night. He shuddered—and the match expired.

One hand slipping over the smooth wall, the other gripping the pistol, he began the descent and after what

seemed to him a deathless æon of downward steps, he emerged from the winding stairs into a corridor that was half-lit by a flickering oil lamp in a niche in the wall.

Upon reaching the end of the hall he found, on one side, huge iron-hinged double-doors, and opposite them, another stair that sank into deep oblivion. Here he halted, undecided which course to choose.

Stairway or doors?

The fearsome aspect of the former promised dark revelations. The double-doors could come later. . . . He stepped into the mouth of the stair.

The descent was steep, straight as a flame, and when he reached the bottom he found himself again in a flood of sable. The atmosphere was foul—smelled of freshly turned earth.

Once more he removed the match-box from his pocket and ignited one.

With the small flare, a mere spark in a great void, he strained his eyes.

At first he could make out only vague shapes, formless shadows; but soon his vision became accustomed to the poor light and he beheld what was evidently an unused chapel of the Lamaserie—a chapel that was fast surrendering to ruin, the walls being broken and seamed and grown in places with a loathsome fungi. The floor was strewn with rubbish and broken stones, and along the center of the chapel, placed at regular intervals, were twelve oblong boxes.

All this he glimpsed before the match went out.

He lit another immediately.

This time the twelve wooden boxes claimed his attention; they were all the same size and shape and built like coffins.

To the nearest he moved, aware of a pregnant dread within him. The

lid was half off, thus revealing only a portion of the interior and its contents; but that was enough to make him fall back a step, nauseated.

"God!"

The word left his tongue involuntarily.

Again he looked—to verify what he had first seen, hoping that some sorcery of the shadows had fashioned in ironic jest the Thing that he had beheld; but no; It was there. . . .

The match died, burning his fingertips.

"God!"

Again the word was wrung from his lips.

He struck another match and moved to the next box, peering in. He repeated this performance until he had examined the entire twelve—and the contents of each proved the same.

"*T'su chü ti fang!*" The Valley of Vanishing Men! He understood now and the terrible truth spread like a deadly poison through his brain.

Miriam Amber's words came back to him—

"They say The Shining One has never tasted food. . . ."

The Shining One! And who could The Shining One be but that dark-eyed priestess of Hell who had bent over him in the room above?

The match expired. As darkness shut down upon him he resolved to continue his explorations, to penetrate the mysteries beyond the double-doors opposite the mouth of the stairway, and, if possible, exterminate this monstrous menace to the world.

The Valley of Vanishing Men! The full horror of it sent his soul reeling with nausea. That such a Thing existed on this earth he would not have believed before.

He groped his way past the oblong



The woman in the Chinese gold tissue backed down the stairs, step by step, never removing her eyes from those of the man.—Page 61.

boxes to the stairs, ascended to the corridor where the oil lamp flickered in the niche in the wall, and paused before the massive double-doors.

Suppose there were persons within, suppose

He steeled himself, lifted the bolt and the doors swung open under the pressure of his weight.

A single glance showed the chamber to be without occupants—a vast rectangular hall it was, from its appearance, a place of worship such as he had seen in some of the Lama-series of the Gobi and Northeastern Tibet, its four walls ornamental with yak-horns and grotesque devil-masks and hung with cloths woven of the hair of the yellow camel. In the shadow-sunken corners, outside the intimate radiance of a globular lamp that burned on a reed table in the center of the room, were prayer-wheels and drums made of human skulls—myriad Lamist devices.

On one side of the grim apartment stood a black screen with the form of the destroying god Varchuk embroidered in gold upon it, and opposite, on the left of an iron door, a large lacquered chest was pushed against the wall.

At the extreme end of the hall low steps rose between files of gray urns—relics of the Shun-lai Imperialists—to the foot of crimson, silver-threaded tapestries.

Tremaine first moved to the iron door. It opened readily and he stepped out on a small balcony high on the walls of the monastery, overhanging a dreadful chasm in the mountains—an abyss so deep, so shuddersome that the moonlight failed to penetrate its fearful depths.

He withdrew from the balcony, closing the door behind him, and crossed the hall of worship to the urn-lined steps. At the top he faced

the crimson, silver-threaded tapestries. Without hesitancy he gripped the heavy cloths and jerked them aside, the movement rattling the rings from which they hung. At his touch they seemed to spring apart.

A broad band of light cast from the globular lamp fell over his shoulders stretching to the side of a stone sarcophagus, and here shattering to bits of argent; and into the illumination he moved, reaching the side of the sarcophagus and bending over the form therein. As he looked he throttled a cry, for the face, paler, older than when he had last seen it, was the face of—Miriam Amber.

His whole body went numb—but the following instant he realized that it was not she, that the body lying in the sarcophagus belonged to a man clad in a long black robe, his thin hands clasped across his breast.

Such a likeness! The face was the same but for a suggestion of more maturity, was, he knew, the face of her brother, Lance Amber.

Instinct prompted him to feel the heart. To his surprise, for the body lay as one dead, it was throbbing. He was alive—but that thin, haggard face! Something about it, tragically young, wrung his soul.

"Amber," he called, "Amber! Can you hear me? Can you speak?"

He returned the revolver to his pocket and began to chafe the cold hands. For fully ten minutes he employed various means to awaken the man, but he remained in the repose of the dead, silent, motionless.

Tremaine was at loss what to do next. Several minutes passed as he stood above the sarcophagus, his gaze wandering helplessly about the hall.

A faint sound aroused him to action—a sound that he identified with the bolt outside the double-doors—and

his eyes quickly searched the vast chamber for a hiding place, finally alighting upon the black screen embroidered with the likeness of Var-chuk.

Hastily drawing the curtains together behind him, he moved down the steps and attained the temporary security of the screen just as the ponderous double-doors swung open.

A lone figure entered—a figure in a gown of Chinese gold tissue. Tremaine caught his breath voluntarily, for it was the creature who had bent over him while he lay in the cell.

Her gilded form seemed to swim in the glow of the globular lamp as she drifted toward the crimson tapestries. Reaching the top of the steps, she thrust apart the curtains and stood for an instant with her draperies spread wing-fashion, looking down upon the man in the sarcophagus; then she bent over him, her dark hair cascading about her white neck, a laugh rippling from her lips.

"My king!" Tremaine heard her murmur in liquid tones.

Then she moved back, shoulders against the crimson tapestries, her eyes upon the face in the sarcophagus.

"Come forth, O Moon-brow!" she commanded.

Tremaine watched breathlessly...

Slowly, very slowly, the black clad figure in the sarcophagus sat up, his face burning with an unearthly pallor in the shadowy alcove.

"Come, O my king!" continued the caressing voice.

With a dream-like movement Lance Amber abandoned the stone sarcophagus and stood erect between the crimson tapestries, his eyes open, glassy, his black robe dragging on the floor about his feet.

The woman in the Chinese gold tissue backed down the stairs, step

by step, never removing her eyes from those of the man, and with a slow tread he followed . . . across the hall to the lacquered chest.

"Be seated!" she commanded.

He obeyed and as he sank on the chest she bent low—lower yet—until her jet-black eyes were on a level with his . . .

Tremaine, watching the strange performance from behind the screen, was beginning to grasp a tangible solution for Amber's condition. Hypnosis! This gold-robed woman exerted that power over her victims. He understood now the lassitude that he had felt when she bent over him in the cell.

She was speaking again—"Now—awaken!"

At her evocation the eyes of Lance Amber lost the glassy expression, became almost normal, and he lifted one thin white hand, passing it over his brow—as if to wipe away the remaining tangles of a nightmare.

The woman laughed again, alluringly and low. He got to his feet, staring at her.

"You, you again?" he said in the half drowsy voice of the recently awakened sleeper, "Good God!"

"And why should not I be here, beloved?"

Amber dropped on the chest, his haggard face falling in his hands, and the woman knelt, locking her white arms about him.

"Art thou not glad to see me, O Moon-brow?" she purred, "Am not I fair to look upon? Does not the sight of me stir in thee some flame of love?"

A sob broke from the man.

"Love you," he echoed fiercely, thrusting her away, "Knowing you to be what you are?"

She only laughed—that siren laugh.

"I am white like thee, O Moon-brow," she went on, "My mother was white—was from a great country beyond Tibet, called Russia. This I know, for the Lamas have told me of her, of her death here, in the monastery, just after my birth . . . O beloved, when I could have sent thee below with my white mummies I let thee remain here—for I knew that we were made for one another. Ah, Moon-brow, thou shalt be a king! Here I am called The Shining One—I talk with the gods! Neither the Dalai Lama or the Tashi Lama, nor that spineless fool at Urga, has so much power as I! And I offer to share this glory with thee! To be the consort of The Shining One? Does that not tempt thee?"

Again the man pushed her roughly away.

"Leave me alone to die!" he entreated piteously, "My God—*love* you! The touch of you is like that of a leper! You are unclean, foul, accursed, a creature damned!"

The fires of jet in her eyes rose. She laughed sharply. Her hands went to her throat and unclasped a necklace of pigeon-blood rubies—a thing that shone like threaded drops of fire.

"Ah, beloved, behold these!" she cried, extending the jewels to him; "In the treasure vaults of the Lamaserie there are gems more costly than these, jewels such as are rarely seen, and all are thine if—"

"Stop!" he fairly shrieked.

With a spring he got to his feet and snatched the necklace from her hand, hurling it to the floor where it broke, scattering in tiny pools of flame.

"God in heaven, leave me alone!" he shrilled, "You have undermined my life, murdered my soul, kept me here in this damnable place un-

til my vitality is sucked up! Now for Christ's sake let me die in peace!"

With that he struck her full in the face. She fell back, clutched at the wall and lay panting against the cloth of camel-hair.

"Thou hast struck me!" she hissed, "Whereas before thou couldst have had my love, now thou shalt know the anger of The Shining One! Thou art mine, body and soul, mine, dost thou hear? And I will take thee, break thee and fling thy body to a death worse than the horrors of the nethermost hell!"

Amber lunged at her, but she caught his arm, twisted it and sent him to his knees. Her eyes burned emerald-like.

"Thou hast no strength to resist me, for I am The Shining One, the soul of Tibet . . . as beautiful as the moons, as fierce as a she-wolf! My voice is like melted honey and when I call, men come from the furthest ends of the earth . . . and I crush them . . . as I will crush thee!"

She was forcing the white-faced Amber slowly to the floor, her eyes close to his—and Tremaine, watching, hypnotized, for the time unable to act, imagined he could feel the hot contamination of her breath upon his cheek

"I—am—Tibet!" she panted in that sweet voice, "Thou hast resisted me and I . . . shall . . . have . . . thy . . . blood!"

With a desperate wrench Amber broke free, staggering back against the reed table whereon the lamp burned. The impact of his body sent the fragile affair crashing to the floor, shattering the globular lamp in a burst of flame

A shriek, terrible, inhuman, rent the air, congealing Tremaine's blood.

"Ah, God, no . . . *not that!*"

Followed a groan—an animal snarl

Tremaine knocked aside the screen, drawing his revolver and moving forward in the darkness. After a moment of blind groping his hand touched something—the door-knob—and with a jerk he swung the door wide.

A sword of moonlight leaped through the oblong aperture, smiting the sable shadows and falling in steely clarity across two figures—Amber and the gold-robed woman.

As the light touched the creature she reeled away from the man, throwing her shoulders against the wall, arms outflung, eyes blazing, staring at Tremaine, who was outlined in the doorway.

He lifted his revolver—fired

With a scream of pain she hurled herself upon him. The jar of her body knocked the revolver from his grasp—sent him upon his back on the floor of the balcony; and locked together they rolled over and over, her hot breath scorching his cheek.

By a sudden twist of his arm—the same twist that she had employed to down Amber—she forced his shoulders to the floor, her eyes aflame, lips parted, baring the white teeth. Her face sank low—lower

The touch of her was to him more revolting than contact with the most loathsome viper yet a sort of deadly lassitude was, beginning to lock its tentacles about him. He felt a sharp pain in his throat. That stung him to greater effort and with a powerful wrench he freed one arm, locking his fingers in her hair. She shrieked; loosened the vise upon him.

He sprang to his feet, bent, caught her about the waist; lifted her and swung her body through the air out over the balcony.

Another shriek

He clung to the railing, trembling violently, watching the Thing as it shot straight down into the bowels of the awful chasm

He turned, stumbled into the hall.

As he entered a great clamor came from the double-doors. Through a blur he saw them burst open admitting a flood of human beings. They were so indistinct in the semi-dark that he could make out no details, but he understood. The Lamas

He staggered out on the balcony, gripping the railing and trying to steel himself for the encounter; but weakness drove home to him; his bones seemed to melt within him, he slipped to the floor; and before unconsciousness closed its opaque doors upon him, he beheld a huge bird-like creature winging its way out of the abyss, rising high in the air and crossing the face of the moon.

It was an enormous bat.

IV

LIFE came back to Tremaine slowly, with a faint roaring and crackling. As he opened his eyes he saw a vast blaze not far away, tongues of fire that lapped hungrily at a dark curtain; saw the moon, too, above the flames, seeming wreathed in smoke. Voices near him were talking.

He struggled to a sitting position, looking about dazedly.

“Ah, *barin*, at last you are awake—”

Following that the tangles in his vision were wiped away and he recognized the speaker—Yashka, the Cossack. At the same time he understood the flames and the voices.

A large group of men, all mounted on Tartar ponies and armed with *balalaikas* and Cossack whips, were gathered around him, and above—for they were near the foot of Tsa-

gan-dhunsa Pass—stood the white-washed Lamaserie, swathed in smoke and flames.

"Alexis arrived from Kurruk a short while ago with a detachment of soldiers," he heard Yashka telling him. "The Consul at Kurruk sent them. The *barishnya* told us whither you had gone and we followed—and broke in the Lamaserie. Nearly all the Lamas fled. Some were shot. We found the *barishnya's* brother in a large room and you on a balcony. Then we set torches to the accursed monastery."

"And what of Amber?" queried Tremaine.

"Bad wound in the throat," returned the Cossack, "The Holy Virgin alone knows what could have made such a nasty tear! But I think he will recover. See"—he indicated a form that Tremaine had hitherto not observed, lying several feet away—"there he is."

Tremaine got up, still weak and unsteady, and moved to the outstretched Amber

"We'd better remove him to the Consulate," he suggested, "Miss Amber will be waiting."

Yashka spoke to one of his com-

rades and the two Russians strapped the body of Lance Amber upon the back of a Tartar pony.

"*Vperyed! Advance!*" cried the leader of the Cossacks, and the troops moved down upon the plain.

Tremaine and Yashka followed on foot, the former leading the Tartar pony. That walk across the valley seemed a dream to the American—a dream that ended as they reached the Consulate.

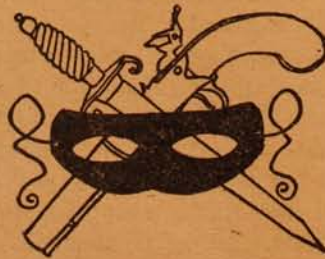
. . . . In the courtyard she was waiting, white with the stain of the dying moon, the trembling stars reflected in her night-blue eyes, arms outstretched to greet him.

"I wanted to go with them," he heard her saying, "But Yashka made me remain behind. It is always so—the woman behind. Tell me—"

Then she saw the form strapped to the saddle of the Tartar pony—darted to it

In a moment she turned back to Tremaine. In her eyes he glimpsed a light such as he had rarely seen even in the risen evening star.

"Travis Tremaine," she said in that low, sweet voice, "God sent you—to me—all the way from Fredericksburg!"



Jim Dickinson's Head

By Harold Ward

JIM Dickinson's head, pickled in a jar of alcohol, reposes in the dishonored fastness of a dusty closet in Doctor Wright's office. It has been all of a half century since I assisted the doctor's father, old Doc. Wright, in separating it from its trunk that dark, stormy night out in the weed-grown potters' field. Yet, last night, when I looked at the grisly relic, the face wore the same wolfish grin that it had borne in life, the fangs were skinned back ferociously like the tusks of an angry boar, and the one good eye—the other had been gouged out in a fight years before—glared malevolently, insolently, leeringly, as if, even in death, the owner found a certain grim pleasure in cheating the law which had declared that head and body must remain intact.

Jim Dickinson's body has, in the natural course of events, long been incorporated with the black earth slime from which it came. Over it, the loathsome worms have long since ceased to hold their ghoulish revelry. His filthy soul is without doubt in the hell it created for itself. As for his head—the head he lost to Doc. Wright in a poker game, and which the whisky-sodden old physic dispenser claimed from the grave rather than brave the unspeakable wrath of the dead outlaw—that is another story. Doc. wanted the head because of the thickness of the skull which had withstood, without cracking, a tattoo from the butt end of a revolver in the hands of a frenzied man. And

Dickinson wanted him to have it, because it had been fairly won and the only point of honor he ever observed was the payment of his gambling debts. It is of Jim Dickinson's malformed head, and the black cat with the devil's temper, and Creole May, the outcast, that this story is written.

I

WHERE Jim Dickinson was spawned, or whelped—or whatever the inception of an anomaly like him can be called—is a question. My personal opinion is that he was never born—that he was created from the slimy, green frog spit that gathers in a scum on stagnant muck—but the preachers will probably take issue with me on that point. At any rate, I know of my own knowledge that there were more maggots of devilry squirming inside the blackness of his skull than could ever exist in the same space in hell.

Jim Dickinson made his first bid for our attention by appearing in Black Peter's saloon one dark, stormy night—a big, hulking figure of a man with a broken, hooked nose and a black, tangled thatch of whiskers. His huge, misshapen head stuck out, turtle-wise, on a thick, bull neck. His thin, cruel lips were drawn back in a snarl of vindictive hatred of the world in general, over yellowed fangs so large as to almost appear artificial. One socket was empty. From the other blazed an orb, so badly twisted out of shape by

the scar from the wound that had destroyed the other, that it looked to be almost in the center of his forehead, giving him a horrible, ogre-like appearance. There was nothing human about him. He was an animal.

Black Peter's den was crowded that night. Finding no open space at the bar, Dickinson made one for himself by shooting, in cold blood, a poor Swede whose place he coveted. Before the murmur of anger and astonishment had fairly started, he stepped across his victim's twitching body to the blood bespattered bar and downed the liquor which the latter had just poured out. His baleful eye gleamed from under his mop of hair, challenging the world to dispute his right. The Swede was a stranger in the camp, and the ferocious cruelty and simian-like appearance of the slayer was such as to make the average man think twice before taking up a dead man's quarrel.

Where he had come from no one knew. Nor did his attitude towards the world at large tend to encourage familiarity. By that one venomous deed he became the bully of the camp. From then until his death he held his sway over the scum of the earth that had gathered there by sheer devilishness and wanton cruelties. He was a thief, a crook, a gambler and a red handed killer—a beast—a thing of evil.

The only sense of decency he had was in the payment of his gambling debts. He would murder a man in cold blood without a pang of remorse in order to filch from his pocket the money with which to pay a debt of honor. His philosophy of life was as warped and crooked as his twisted soul. And yet, we allowed him to live because we feared him.

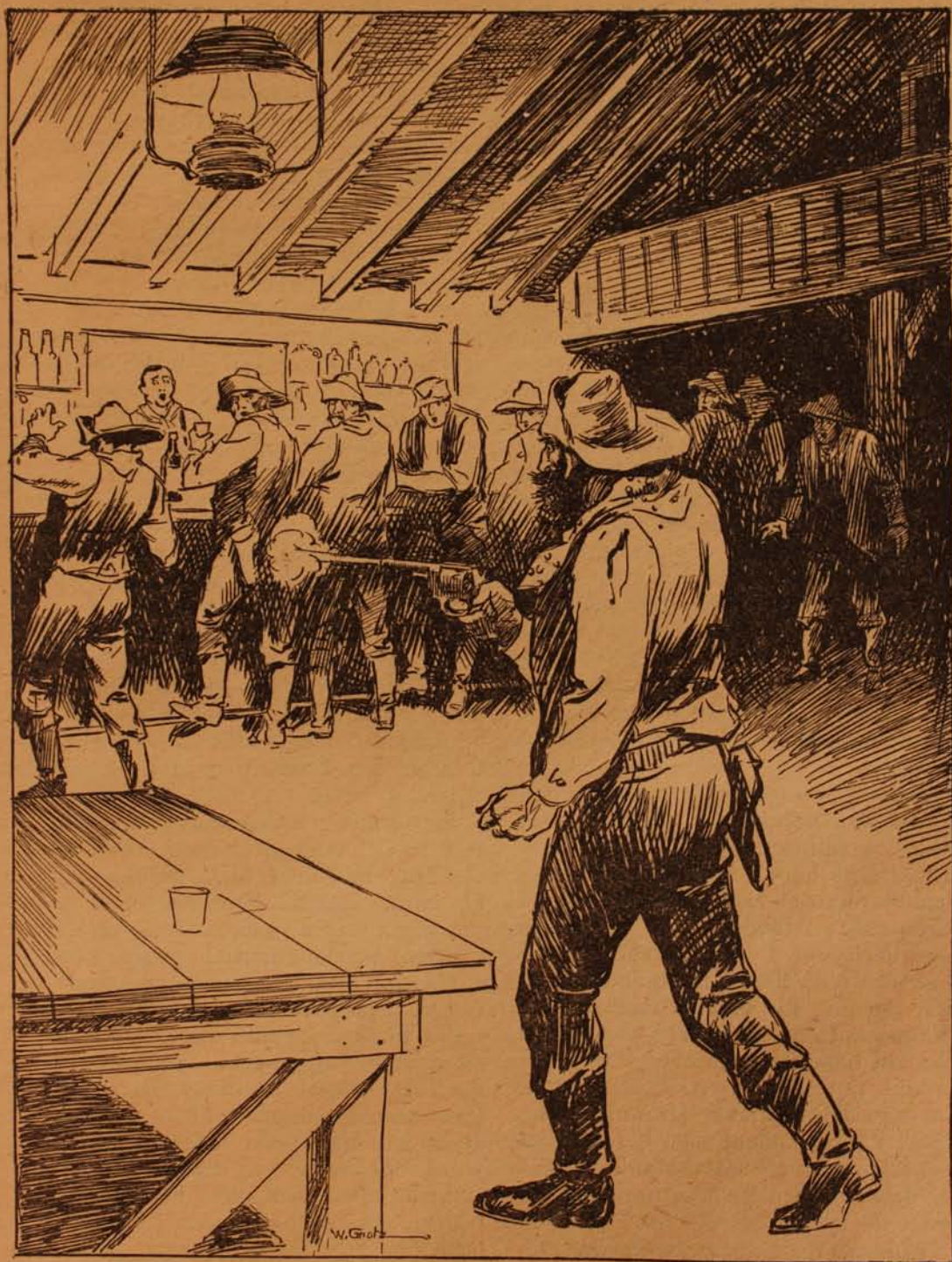
Take the affair with the gang from Devil's Gulch. Originally, there had been six of them pitted against him, as a result of some mixup with one of the partners. By shooting straight, Dickinson whittled the number down to three before they caught him at the edge of camp with a bullet through his leg and a horse that dropped dead in its tracks.

He had no friends. He expected no assistance. Those of us who were at leisure gathered around to enjoy the spectacle, and to see that the strangers handled the affair in a strictly ethical manner. The only tree in that part of the state was a stunted cottonwood, the lower limbs of which were but a few feet above his head as he stood erect. His gun was empty and he was apparently exhausted. Hence, they attempted to send him into the presence of his maker without going to the trouble of binding him, thinking, no doubt, that he would die game and save them any unnecessary trouble. They were not as well informed on the general cussedness of the man, however, as they should have been—a fact which resulted disastrously for the visitors. For Dickinson, instead of giving up the ghost without a fight, made a mighty leap and seized the lower limb with both hands, taking the strain off his neck.

Doc. Wright, drunker and more vitriolic than usual, was among the spectators. The dissipated old reprobate chuckled gleefully and hammered the outlaw smartly over the knuckles with his cane.

"Leggo that tree!" he yelled. "Why the hell can't you die like a man? You yellow dog! You're trying to cheat me out of your head!"

With the speed of a panther, Dickinson hung by one hand, slipped the noose over his head with the other,



There being no place at the bar, he quickly made one for himself by shooting in cold blood a poor Swede, whose place he coveted.—Page 66.

kicked one of his captors in the face as he hung there, and vanquished the other two in a fair fight, fists against gun. And, when he had completed the job, he humbly apologized to Doc. Wright for not allowing them to hang him so that the bonesetter could claim his honest winnings.

II

To cave men like Jim Dickinson, love comes but once—and in ways that are peculiar and dark. That he loved Creole May in his own fashion there is not a doubt. And, like his aboriginal ancestors, he demonstrated his affection by beating the lady of his choice whenever opportunity offered. And she, recognizing, in the subtle way that women have, that his display of brutality was only a cover for the flame of love that smoldered in his heart, took her beatings, whimpering, but uncomplainingly, and, seeking an outlet for her feelings, lavished her affections on Michael.

Michael was an ugly brute of a cat, black of fur and short of temper—in short, a feline double of Dickinson. Dickinson hated him with a deep, jealous hatred—hated him because Creole May loved him. With the peculiarity of a woman, she treated her lord with humbleness and humility, fighting his battles and cooking his meals in a true wifely way—until he laid hands on the cat. That, she would not allow. And Dickinson, loving the swarthy strumpet who shared his bed and board, feared to vent his feelings on the animal, lest he drive the female creature from his side.

Cheeta, the squaw, who was reputed to be a witch, had warned him against black cats—warned him as she cursed him for the killing of her

husband. Dickinson sought to close her mouth by knocking her down. But she refused to be silenced.

"It'll get ye, curse ye! It'll get ye!" she howled, shaking her skinny fist at the one-eyed man. "A black cat'll be the death of ye! A black cat'll send ye to hell, and'll spit at ye while ye'r roastin'! Damn ye! Ye spawn of the devil!"

In self-defense, he was compelled to choke her into unconsciousness. But her screams still echoed in his ears. Nor could he drown them in drink. For the maggots in his head were the kind that alcohol stimulates, rather than deadens.

We had our priest, Father O'Laughlin, a warm-hearted little chap who sought, with every means at his command, to regenerate the place and bring its inhabitants into the fold. He met with scant success to say the most. But he persisted and, because he was a man among men, measured by men's standards, he gained our respect and love, even though we refused to follow the cross.

In some mysterious manner, Father O'Laughlin learned that Creole May had once been baptized in his faith. Immediately, he set about seeking a way to win her back to the church. But she had slipped too far down the scale of righteousness and virtue. She gave no heed to the messages the good padre sent her, time after time, begging her presence at the little church in the valley, with its cross of spotless white. Of two evils, she had been taught to fear Jim Dickinson worse than the threat of hell. And Dickinson, his soul already forfeited to the devil and his head honestly lost in a poker game, waiting only his death to be claimed, forbade her responding to the priest's appeal. But, to the latter, she was

a brand to be plucked from the burning, and after several weeks had elapsed, he determined to visit her in person and appeal to her better nature. For Father O'Laughlin loved humanity and to him none had dropped so low that he could not be saved.

On the evening selected by Father O'Laughlin for his visit, Dickinson, who was violently jealous, having been called away on some expedition outside the law, had taken precautions tending to keep any of May's admirers away from the cabin, by planting a bear trap in the dirt just outside the door. To this May submitted dumbly, and without bitterness. She was a woman, and her philosophy taught her that a woman is the rightful prey of the man strong enough to take her. The method of taking did not enter into her thoughts.

They lived in a tumbledown shack far up the mountain side and approached by a single, narrow path, nicked high in the cliff. For Dickinson was a bit of a strategist, and in building looked forward to a possible siege following some new outrage.

When she saw the little priest slowly puffing up the path, she realized for the first time that something of evil might result from Dickinson's efficient though brutal attempt to capture his rivals. She was willing to stand his abuse, but sight of the priest brought remembrances of her better days, and over her swept a sense of shame. She rebelled against the man of God seeing her in her squalor and misery. There was no way to flee, for the path over which he was approaching was the only way from the place. And that path would bring him directly into the jaws of the trap.

Creole May, for the first time in

her long career of shame and sorrow, was panic stricken. There was but one door to the shack. To dodge out of it, even in the dusk of the swiftly falling twilight, would betray her presence to the visitor. Nor was there a bush or a rock in the vicinity, behind which she could take refuge. Yet she could not remain. She was not given to analyzing her sentiments. She had a vague feeling that she was not fit to meet the man who represented in that wild territory the church of her innocent youth—not for the punishment he might bring—for she knew that he brought only a message of love—but as an erring child fears the parent who governs by kindness. Physical pain she could endure. But she knew that Father O'Laughlin ruled his flock by love. And love, except the love she lavished on Michael, was missing from her strange life.

So, like a child caught in some mischievous prank, she peeped around the doorway and watched the head of the priest just appearing over the little knoll. Her foot rested on the chain which, fastened to the bed and dragging across the floor, was attached to the bear trap. To leave the snare in its present location meant injury to the priest. Even if the jaws did not break his leg, Dickinson might return ere she could free him. And Dickinson, in a jealous rage, cared nothing for God, man nor devil. He might even kill the good Father.

In spite of her fear of Dickinson's vengeance over the removal of his snare, the religion of her girlhood surged forward in her thoughts. Father O'Laughlin must be saved. To think was to act. Hastily grasping the chain, she gave a mighty heave and pulled the trap out of the dirt and dragged it into the house.

Pulling down the blanket on the battered bed, she laid the trap on the mattress, and laid the covering over it again. Then, she dived hastily under the bed, just as she heard the priest's step outside the door.

Father O'Laughlin, receiving no answer to his repeated rappings, turned sadly and wended his way back again down the mountain path.

With fear and trembling, Creole May listened to the padre's retreating footsteps. Then, as they died away in the distance, she arose and, seating herself in one of the two broken chairs the cabin afforded, she gave way to meditation and tears, sharing her troubles with black Michael, her only friend.

Dickinson, returning earlier than usual, found the cabin in darkness and May in tears. The moon, shining brightly on the front of the shack, showed him that the trap had been removed, ere he reached the spot.

With a bellow of rage, he leaped through the open doorway. He stood for a second, his single, bloodshot eye accustoming itself to the darkness of the interior. Then, with a snarl, he turned upon the woman.

"Where is he?" he demanded, shaking her as a terrier shakes a rat. "Damn you, tell me! Where's the man you had in here?"

She attempted to answer—to explain. He refused to listen. The words were choked off in her throat

by the pressure of his huge muscular fingers. Then, holding her at arm's length with his left hand, he smashed blow after blow into her face with his right until, tiring, he hurled her into the corner, a dying, battered, unconscious heap.

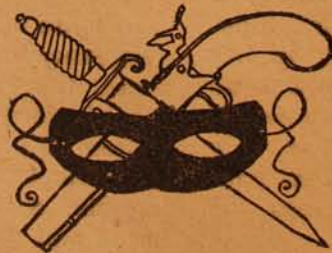
The cat, true to its nature, spit angrily at the invader. Roaring like a maddened bull, Dickinson aimed a kick at the animal. Michael, attempting to dodge out of the crazed man's way, became tangled between his legs. In the darkness, Dickinson stumbled and fell, sprawling, across the bed.

His huge head struck the trigger of the bear trap hidden beneath the blanket, squarely, and with the force of a battering ram. The jaws flew together with a snap, closing about the thick neck with a grip that had been made to hold a grizzly king.

Dickinson threshed about spasmodically for a second, his eye bulging out of its socket. . . . His finger worked convulsively. . . . then, twitching slightly, he lay quiet.

On the foot of the bed Michael, his greenish-yellow eyes gleaming like twin fires, humped his back and spit in accordance with the prophecy of Cheeta, while Jim Dickinson's worthless soul entered into Hell.

Two nights later I helped Doc. Wright claim the head he had won, and which Jim Dickinson was ready to pay.



The Triple Murder in Mulberry Bend

By Christopher Hawthorne

I

YOU will find three dead men in Molspini's cellar in Mulberry Bend."

The single typewritten line was undated and unsigned, but on the lower right-hand corner of the paper were three distinct finger-prints, made with such precision that, obviously, they were placed there with a purpose.

"Silent" Cass, lieutenant of detectives, read the note without visible excitement or interest.

"Looks like the real thing," he grunted, tossing it across the desk. "What do you think, Gatty?"

Sergeant Gatty glanced stolidly at the writing, arose slowly and put on his hat. Cass also stood up, shifting a small automatic from his hip to an outside coat pocket.

"Let's walk," he said. Mulberry Bend was only ten minutes from headquarters.

Anonymous letters belonged to the routine, but they rarely yielded anything worth while. Sometimes they came from revengeful crooks bent on getting even; often they were of the "poison pen" variety, written out of sheer malice and more frequently they could readily be identified as the fulminations of half-cracked persons moved by morbid obsessions.

But this letter, which had been left at the outside rail at headquarters, addressed "To the Police," did not fall within any of these categories. Not

that it appealed to a "trained sixth sense" or any such nonsense. The simple fact was that Mike Molspini's place was known to both men.

In the shadowy past, when as lusty young cops on the lower East Side they had pounded the pave together, it had been the resort of such picturesque criminals as The Wolf and The Ox and had achieved a malodorous celebrity as the scene of a "barrel murder." Latterly, however, its evil repute had waned and Molspini was conducting the place as a provision shop, falling in line with the growing respectability of the quarter.

As the detectives turned into the Bend from Centre street a policeman placidly saluted them with one hand while he jingled a handful of coins in the other.

"Anything doing, O'Hara?" asked Cass.

"Bunch of crap shooters took it on the run when they saw me coming," chuckled the uniformed man, exhibiting the spoils.

Sergeant Gatty looked appraisingly into the open palm.

"Hardly the price of a drink these days," he sighed.

"Get busy," thrust in Cass curtly. "O'Hara, you just mope along behind us and keep an eye on Molspini's place while we go inside."

A bronzed, sturdy man of about thirty, with a suggestion of the military in his garb and carriage, sauntered past them, halting for an instant as the lieutenant spoke.

Molspini was standing in the door of his shop. He greeted the detectives with an over-cordial grin.

"What 'a you got in the cellar, Mike?" Cass asked the question casually.

"Not a drop, chief, not a drop. The revenue men got me a month ago with ten gallons of claret. I was let off with a fine, but the next time—whew!"

Cass and Gatty laughed with him. The revenue men enjoyed no great popularity with the local detectives.

"You don't mind if we go downstairs and look, do you?" asked Cass good-naturedly.

"Hell no! Come right in."

As the detectives followed Molspini into the store O'Hara slouched past the front door, his eyes roving over the cinder-covered playground that lay directly in front of the Bend. Any show of interest in the shop would have collected a crowd in no time. If there is anything that a good policeman hates it is an assemblage of curious citizens, mixed with the inevitable small boys and peering old ladies whom one cannot very well wallop with a nightstick.

The bronzed young man, who overheard the lieutenant's orders to the patrolman, had crossed the street and was standing at the curb directly opposite the shop. As O'Hara eyed him the man drew the "makins'" from a pocket, rolled a cigarette and walked lazily away in the direction of Worth street.

II

WITH care-free alacrity Molspini led the detectives into the rear room and lifted a trap door. A faint flood of light came up from the cellar.

"Must have left that lamp burnin' all night," muttered the shopkeeper fretfully, as though estimating the cost of his carelessness.

"Silent" Cass walked half way down

the steps. Gatty started to follow, but his superior jerked a thumb over his shoulder and the sergeant remained upstairs.

"If you find any booze down there, save a drink for me!" called Molspini jocularly as Cass reached the bottom of the stairs.

The detective looked around the dimly-lit cellar, a vault-like chamber of masonry extending the full length and width of the building. Two small, square windows, closed now, afforded the only means of ventilation. The place was stuffy to a point of suffocation. The rear half was filled with provision cases and the usual litter of a grocery storeroom.

In a clear space well forward three men were seated at a large round table over which hung a single, dust-covered electric lamp.

"The tip is half true, anyway," muttered the detective whimsically. "The three men are here, all right, but they're not dead."

Kicking over an empty egg crate he yelled:

"Hey, you fellows, stir your stumps—what are you doing here?"

The men at the table did not move or utter a sound. "Silent" Cass walked over and jarred roughly against the one nearest him. The man rolled from the chair, fell to his back and remained motionless, one arm covering his face with a grotesque crook. The detective reached down and grasped the upturned wrist. It felt like a piece of damp rubber hose. He released it quickly and the arm oscillated stiffly, without alteration of its original position.

"Dead!" The word followed in the wake of the detective's surprised whistle.

The two men remaining at the table showed no interest. Cass gripped his automatic and glared at them, jerking the hat off the second man. The head

swayed slightly and a wavering glint came from the staring, opalescent eyes.

"Dead!" This time the word was uttered in a tense staccato. An echo seemed to come from the dim recesses in the rear. "Silent" Cass wheeled and backed slowly against the masonry, his eyes darting about the cellar.

The third man was seated in the most natural position possible. His chin rested within his hands and he seemed to be asleep. Cass moved toward him cautiously and with the broadside of his left arm swept the hands from under the chin. The man lurched forward, his head striking the table with a bang. A couple of playing cards fluttered from under him and fell to the floor, face up.

"Dead—the three of them!" Cass glanced down at the cards. "Buried aces, hey? Gun or knife play, I suppose."

Again Molspini's laugh sounded through the open hatch. The detective wheeled in sudden wrath.

"Hey, Gatty," he shouted, "truss that fellow up and throw him under the pool table."

A swift scuffle, a snarl and a thud as from the impact of a billy on a skull came to the ears of the listener below, then a bleating protest from Molspini: "Don't, sergeant, don't—I'll be quiet." Cass heard the snap of handcuffs and a heavy sound as though a sack of potatoes had been tossed to the floor.

A moment later Gatty's head appeared at the top of the stairs.

"What's up, chief?" he asked eagerly.

"Lock the door and fetch the wop down," answered Cass.

Somewhere in the back of his head lurked the thought that the presence of the three dead men in the cellar would be a surprise to Molspini.

"Spanish Joe and Louie the Lawyer," he muttered, gazing into the faces of two of the dead men.

He was about to lift the head of the third when Molspini stepped gingerly down the steps, followed by Gatty.

The shopkeeper gazed in stupid bewilderment at the three inanimate figures. Cass watched him keenly. If the man was acting he certainly was a master of dissimulation. Lifting his manacled hands above his head he yelled:

"Arrest those guys—they ain't got no business in my place!"

He had started toward the table when Gatty seized him and threw him back into a pile of crates under the steps.

"Stay there till your number is called," snarled the sergeant, leaping toward the table. Like his superior he instantly recognized the two whose faces were revealed.

"There must have been a hell of a time in hell when those birds flew in," he said grimly.

"Silent" Cass laid his hands on the third man's shoulders. As he drew back the head, the light, reflected from the oilcloth on the table, cast a ghastly green shadow across the face. Both men looked long and earnestly at the rigid features.

"I don't get that bird, do you?" said Gatty finally.

Cass shook his head and beckoned to Molspini. The shopkeeper sprang to his feet and ran to the table. For a single instant his frightened eyes rested upon the dead face of the man at the table. A shriek, womanish in its intensity and shrillness, broke from him. He strained vainly for a moment at the irons, then, with incoherent gibberings, slithered around the table and kissed the dead man's forehead.

A look of loathing passed between the detectives. Neither made any effort to sustain the man as he swayed for a moment and crashed to the floor without uttering a word.

Cass drew the anonymous note from his pocket, glanced at the finger-prints, then at Gatty. The sergeant seized the right hand of the man on the floor and examined the index finger. A faint smudge appeared upon it. Similar smudges were discernible on the corresponding fingers of the other two.

"Signed their own death warrants," surmised Gatty.

"Silent" Cass shook his head. "Sealed them after death more likely," he said. "The person who left the note at headquarters probably did the job."

The lieutenant had taken the pendant lamp from the hook, uncoiled the loops and was holding the light close to the face of "Spanish Joe." The countenance wore a look such as might be possible to one which in life bore the marks of all evil passions. The black, patent-leathery hair was banked smoothly down over the forehead, the clothing was undisturbed and the whole attitude of the body that of some poisonous thing suddenly bereft of life by being sealed in a vacuum. In whatever guise death had come to him, it had borne no message of terror to "Spanish Joe."

With deft fingers Gatty ran over the upper part of the body and under the clothing. There was no sign of blood. From a secret pocket in the vest under the left arm-pit he drew a poniard. It glinted in the light as he held it up.

"Clean as a hound's tooth," said Cass.

Gatty turned to examine the other two.

The search revealed no outward sign of physical violence—nothing, in fact, but the usual pocket miscellany. A bill-folder taken from the body of "Louie the Lawyer" contained nearly five hundred dollars; nothing unusual, as Louie's wealth was a matter of common knowledge on the lower East Side, if the source thereof was not.

"Silent" Cass stooped and moved the lamp slowly along the floor.

Gatty, with face close to the cement, followed the light until he came to the cards.

"Buried aces," explained Cass; "they fell out from under one of these fellows when I shook him."

"This didn't happen in a crooked game," said Gatty sagely—"not if the cards were still buried when he died." He picked up a broken Chianti flask near the table.

"Faugh!" he sputtered, thrusting it out at arm's length, "whatever was in that bottle had an awful kick in it."

Cass also thrust his nose into the broken flask, then set it gingerly down on the table.

"Kick!" he echoed. "Why, this bottle seems to be dry inside, yet it's got a kick like a South African jackass. One whiff made me dizzy—wonder if it's wood alcohol?"

The detectives were erect now and gazing at Molspini's silent figure, so much like the others that he, too, seemed dead. Gatty went to the rear, drew a bucket of water from the spigot, and, returning, threw it over the prostrate man's face. Molspini spluttered and sat up. Gatty dragged him to his feet and faced him toward the dead man whom the shopkeeper had kissed on the forehead.

"Who is he?" demanded the sergeant.

Molspini gave a frightened whimper but did not answer.

"Who is he?" repeated Gatty relentlessly, drawing back his billy.

Cass thrust out an intervening hand. The man was handcuffed; besides, the lieutenant well knew the futility of confessions made under duress when a case came to trial.

Gatty dropped the billy back into his coat pocket with a snarling laugh.

"He'll change his mind after a night in the Old Slip—we'll give him the best

room in the house—nice, quiet place where nobody can hear him squawk when we throw the boots into him.”

Cass turned away to conceal a grin from the prisoner. He did not like Gatty's coarse third-degree work—there were grits in it.

Wheeling suddenly upon the shopkeeper, he demanded:

“When did your brother come from Italy, Mike?”

The long finger of conjecture touched the point.

“It's my brother Tony,” he admitted brokenly, “but I don't know these other fellows or how they came by their death. Tony had a key to the shop. He was a deserter from the other side and had to keep under cover, so I let him use the cellar once in a while for card games with his friends.”

“You lie!” snorted Gatty. Nevertheless, he turned to Cass and said gleefully: “We cleared up that point, anyway.”

“Did we?” There was a sarcastic note in the lieutenant's voice. “Take this fellow over to headquarters. Better remove the irons and slip out the back way if you don't want to play drum major in front of an East Side procession.”

Gatty and Molspini, both trying to look unconcerned, walked rapidly across the playgrounds toward headquarters. Just as three police wagons came clang—into the Bend by way of Worth street. The bronzed young man, who had observed the detectives enter the provision shop, jumped from a bench as the two men passed him.

“What's the matter over there—pulling a raid?” he asked.

“Beat it!” snapped Gatty, pushing Molspini roughly ahead.

The young man smiled but did not resume his seat. Gatty moved along a few yards, then paused uneasily.

“Wonder if I overlooked a bet in not

putting the basket over that guy,” he muttered. “He's the same fellow who passed us on our way to the shop.”

When he turned, however, the bronzed young man had disappeared in the crowd that was flocking toward the police wagons.

O'Hara, in the meantime, had relinquished the task of handling the mob to the reserves and resumed his post. The young man who had been rebuffed by Gatty paused at his elbow. The policeman looked into the open, smiling face and relieved his chest of a weight that had been lying there since the meaning of the whole affair began to dawn upon him.

“What chance has a harness bull got in a case like this?” he asked bitterly. “You might as well hang a red lantern on him and send him out with a fife and drum corps.”

The bronzed young man smiled as O'Hara moved disconsolately away.

“Stone blind—both of 'em!” he chuckled. “The right way to escape the cops is to keep on their heels or hide in the grillroom of the Waldorf.”

III

LITTLE that was new was discovered at Headquarters. The finger-prints of “Spanish Joe” and “Louie the Lawyer” tallied with those in the archives which also contained the records of both men. There were no prints or history of the third man, whom Molspini had admitted to be his brother.

“Spanish Joe's” record was such as must have assured him a warm welcome beyond the Styx. Listed as an agent for burlesque shows, he had been twice convicted as a white slaver and once for felonious assault. It was noteworthy, however, that he had never served a full term in prison. His birthplace was given as Havana, Cuba, and his origin mixed Spanish and Carib Indian.

The record and antecedents of "Louie the Lawyer" were hardly more savory. From a slyster practice in Essex Market Court he had branched out to the dubious distinction of being considered the chief lawyer and go-between in the netherworld. It was his dark and secret operations that were responsible for the immunity from prison that "Spanish Joe" had so long enjoyed. Although he had a fine home in Riverside Drive, it was in the purlieu of the lower East Side that he found his true atmosphere, his horizon not having widened apace with his increasing wealth. In that stifling, dirty cellar in Mulberry Bend the hog had returned to his wallow and had been smothered in it.

One thing was evident from the beginning. The triple murder, if such it was, did not have its origin in a vendetta. All the fantastic earmarks usual to a Southern European feud were absent. There was no hideous marring of the bodies; indeed, no mark of any kind was found upon them. Nor did the coroner find a trace of poison after the autopsies. A chemical analysis of the organs revealed nothing. The men, apparently, *had died of natural causes and simultaneously.*

Brooding like three black crows over the sinister mystery, the finger-prints on the mysterious note to the police seemed to afford the only clew. Who had placed them with such care upon the clean white paper? What practiced hand had written the note itself? It was not the work of a bunglesome amateur—the nicety of spacing and general evenness of the work precluded such a conclusion.

"Silent" Cass and Sergeant Gatty went over the back trails of the three dead men, encountering nothing but blank walls everywhere and emerging from blind alleys with empty hands. From the very first Cass had been satisfied that Molspini had told the truth

when he came out of his faint in the cellar.

Gatty, though he did not admit it to his superior, had beaten the shopkeeper almost to a pulp (avoiding only the bruising of his face) without getting any additional information. Nor did the sergeant say a word about his encounter with the bronzed young man in the playground. Somehow, through his turgid reasoning, the thought persisted that this smiling, open-faced stranger had not thrust himself into the case by accident. The hope grew in him that some subtle influence would draw this man to the Tombs or perhaps into the courtroom when Molspini was arraigned. But in this he was disappointed.

Although the co-operation of the entire detective and uniformed forces of the city was enlisted, the case, technically, was in the hands of "Silent" Cass. Eager reporters sought him for news of the latest developments. But as one "star" remarked in his story: "Lieutenant Cass continues to have brilliant flashes of silence." Another, in the unharnessed freedom of the editorial rooms, complained gloomily that he could "get nothing out of Cass but silence—and damn little of that."

In view of all this it is not strange that the record of the lieutenant should have become an object of curious inquiry. Nothing of outstanding brilliance was found in it. From the day he had joined the force he had been taciturn to a point of eccentricity. It was his own fellows in "the clubhouse" under the green lamp who first dubbed him "Silent" Cass.

In the days of the old red-light district on the lower East Side he had been known as a relentless pursuer of "cadets," but he had never shared in the public glory of having cleaned out these worst of human vermin. His private life was found to be equally drab

and uninteresting. He owned a little home in the far reaches of the Bronx; his wife was dead and his daughter—now about eighteen—kept house for him.

All this was water on Gatty's wheel. While Cass had been silent and colorless, the sergeant had always been garrulous and spectacular. Now he was playing true to form. Hardly a day passed without some new development from this energetic and ambitious officer. He combed the underworld for suspects and dragged bloodied and disheveled prisoners into Headquarters for the line-up. He was always "on the eve of an important arrest."

The Commissioner looked with tolerant, if skeptical eye, upon these activities and with growing impatience at the lieutenant's failure to produce results.

In the midst of all this a reporter journeyed to the Bronx with the dimly burning hope that he might be able "to smoke Cass out" right in his own home. He found the lieutenant in overalls, spading the garden, and young Miss Cass pruning the vines around the porch. An ironic description of this bucolic scene was duly printed the next morning, coupled with the news of another "important arrest" by Sergeant Gatty.

Then things began to happen around Headquarters.

In a special order by the Commissioner, Lieutenant Cass was reduced to the rank of patrolman and assigned to duty in the Bronx—with a post at the Zoological Park. This play to the gallery met with instant applause. One smart paragrapher remarked that Cass would find congenial companionship among his simian brethren in the zoo. A few days later the promotion of Sergeant Gatty to the rank of lieutenant was announced.

Molspini and a few other mysterious prisoners were transferred to the de-

attention house as material witnesses and "the triple murder in Mulberry Bend" began to wear down in public interest.

Cass accepted his reduction without protest. The day he had been caught in the garden was the first one he had taken off in a month, but he did not urge the point. Instead, he left his measure for a new uniform and soon was pounding the pavement around the buffalo entrance of the Zoo. The larger measure of leisure he enjoyed in his humbler task was spent in the garden with his daughter. So things went on for another week.

One morning, when "Silent" Cass was putting down his radishes, a bronzed young man swung from the rear platform of a trolley car directly in front of the house and walked briskly over to the fence. Cass looked up and nodded pleasantly.

"Is this Lieutenant Cass?" asked the stranger abruptly.

"Patrolman Cass," corrected the gardener.

"I want to give myself up," said the stranger.

Cass made a trench with his stick and sowed a handful of seed.

"Come in," he said, standing erect and looking squarely at the newcomer. "What have you been up to?"

"I'm the man who killed those three rats in Mulberry Bend," explained the bronzed young man coolly.

Cass bent down on one knee, made another shallow little trench and sprinkled it with seed.

"Oh, yes, the Mulberry Bend case," he said reflectively. "I've been expecting you."

Turning to his daughter, he continued:

"You don't mind leaving us alone for a few minutes, do you, Nellie?"

The girl smiled at the stranger and walked to the porch.

The policeman nodded toward a bench under a magnolia that was just bursting into blossom.

"Tell me about it," he said as the two were seated.

If the newcomer found anything strange in this reception he made no sign.

"I read in the papers that you had been broken for not finding the murderer," he said quietly, "and I've been off my feed and sleep since then—I couldn't stand it any longer. I want you to lock me up."

"Silent" Cass glanced at him swiftly.

The newcomer spoke up quickly. "No, the ghosts of the dead men were not roosting on my pillow—damn them—they were not the kind that come back to haunt honest men, although they seem to have done it to you—that is, in a way."

Cass nodded. "I knew them—they're snug at home in Hell."

He looked toward the porch and Nellie smiled back at him.

"I'm a service man myself," resumed the stranger, "Medical Corps—I was on the other side for two years, and it was during that time these three dogs earned their death over here."

The record of "Spanish Louie," the white slaver, flashed through the mind of the listener.

"Girl?" he queried casually.

"Yes, a girl!"

The words snapped brokenly from the stranger's lips.

It was the first sign of emotion that he had shown.

"Sweetheart, I suppose," murmured Cass pityingly.

The young man's face had dropped into his hands and he was shaking violently.

"Worse than that," he groaned—"a sister."

Cass looked again toward the porch

and laid his hand gently on the man's shoulder.

"Go on," he said.

IV

THE tale came out in a torrent of anguished, broken words. The girl was an only sister and both had been orphaned since childhood. Out of his earnings as a chemist he had been able to support and educate her until he entered the service and went abroad. She was pretty—had a sweet soprano voice and a turn for the stage. She had smothered his misgivings with the assurance that she was able to care for herself and so they had parted. After he had been in France six months her letters, always regular theretofore, ceased abruptly.

Again Cass's mind reverted to "Spanish Joe."

The man on the bench had grown calm. A gentle breeze swept through the tree overhead and a few blossoms fluttered downward.

"If she had only died before it happened!" he said, gazing at the broken petals.

Cass patted him on the shoulder and he resumed:

"It was a long time after I came back before I was able to trace her—it was down in New Orleans—in a place that was worse than the deepest gulf of Hell. Her mind and soul were gone—gone completely with whisky and cocaine—that and—"

He pressed his hands over his eyes.

"Dad!" called the girl on the porch. "It's time for you to go on post."

Cass stood up mechanically and pulled off his overalls.

"Wait here until I get into uniform," he said, walking into the house.

He was gone fully five minutes, but when he returned the young man was still seated on the bench. The police-

man dropped to a place beside him with a trace of disappointment in his manner.

The young man had not seemed to notice the long absence.

"I was able to get the story out of her before she finally broke away from me," he continued, "then she ran upstairs and drank poison. It was the only thing left. I brought her back here and buried her beside her mother. There was a post-card picture, taken at Coney Island, in her trunk. She was sitting in an automobile with 'Spanish Joe' and Tony Molspini. She was smiling in all the innocence that I had known before I left her."

His jaws came together with a snap. "It was on that day she got the 'theatrical engagement,' with Louie the Lawyer posing as a producer of musical comedy."

"How did you get them into the cellar and what did you use to kill them?" asked Cass prosily enough.

"I palled with them for a month and let them win a month's salary from me one night right down there in that hole. They had it all arranged to trim me again when—"

He paused and there was a sudden ferocity in his tone when he burst forth again:

"The death I gave them was too easy. I was watching across the street when they entered the store together. When I saw a light in the cellar I knew I had them. It was just a matter of walking in, lifting the trapdoor and tossing down the flask of gas."

"Gas!" shouted Cass, jumping to his feet. "There was no trace of gas poisoning found in the examination of the organs."

"It was a formula of my own"—the answer came with a touch of pride—"I had been working on it in France, but the armistice came before the use of it became necessary. The action is nega-

tive—absorbs the oxygen from the air, you know." He chuckled grimly. "I simply sealed the three of them up with it—a horned toad, a centipede and a tarantula all in one bottle."

"Why did you make the fingerprints?" The question seemed natural enough. But the answer came in a tone of surprise.

"I wanted to let the authorities know I had done the world a favor—why not?"

Cass smiled approvingly and stood up. The bronzed young man also got to his feet.

"I'm ready," he said.

On the way to the gate he drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to the policeman. Cass read the contents curiously. Under the caption "Army Orders" appeared a brief paragraph: "Captain Franklin Hines, medical corps, is hereby relieved from duty at Camp Merritt and transferred to Panama."

"Silent" Cass carefully folded the official order, put it back in the envelope, and handed it to the army man.

"Assignment in the yellow fever squad, eh?" he remarked. "When are you going to sail?"

Captain Hines stared at him.

"Aren't you going to arrest me?" he demanded stupidly. "Don't you want to make good and get your old job back?"

Cass shook his head.

"Not at that price," he said. His hand was on the gate-latch and his eyes roaming down the street toward an approaching trolley car.

"Wait, father!" called Nellie from the porch. She ran down into the garden, plucked a white crocus and pinned it to his coat.

"Against regulations," he laughed, "but I've earned the right to wear it today." In a moment he had bounded across the pavement and boarded the

car, leaving the army man and the girl together.

Captain Hines glanced down the street. Another car was coming.

"Won't you have a flower, too?" asked the girl, stooping to pluck a red blossom from the garden.

"Yes, thank you," he said huskily. "Won't you give me a white one—the same as you gave to your dad?"

She fastened a white flower in his

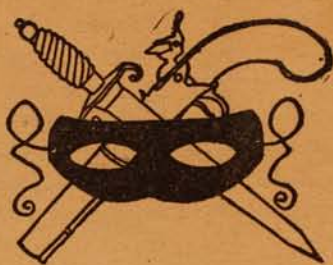
coat and in a moment he was scrambling aboard the second car. As the rear door slammed on him, Gatty swung off from the front and walked over to the fence.

Nellie greeted him familiarly.

"You just missed dad," she said.

"He's gone out on post."

"Oh, has he?" said Gatty. "I just came out here to tell him that I got another promotion today—I'm Captain Gatty now."



In the Next Number of
THE BLACK MASK
"Daughter of the Pigeon"
By
HARRY C. HERVEY, JR.



The Valley Where Dead Men Live

By Harold Ward

I

I HAVE passed through The Valley Where Dead Men Live. My eyes have looked upon sights which God did not intend that man should see. My life must pay the forfeit. As a man of science, you may be interested in hearing what I have to say—and I *must* unburden myself to someone before I pass out into the Great Unknown. But five days have passed since I said good-bye to old Sourdough Jamison. It seems as many centuries."

Professor Parmalee gave the speaker a quick glance. "Did I understand you to say that you left Jamison's five days ago? Are you sure about that?"

The man on the cot nodded. "On the twentieth of June, to be exact."

"There is no possibility of your being mistaken?"

"None whatever. My diary will prove it. I made my last entry the night before I left Sourdough's place—on the nineteenth."

The professor sat silent for a second. "There is something wrong with your story, Blake. The nearest route over the mountains, from here, is by way of Chicahoochie pass, which would make the distance from this point to Sourdough Jamison's cabin a matter of over a hundred and fifty miles. This is the twenty-fifth of June. A well man couldn't do it. It is an impossibility for you to have made it in five days in your weakened condition. Not that I wish to dispute your word, but—"

The sick man smiled wanly. "Don't you see, professor, that your own statement helps to support my story? I tell you that I wandered into an undiscovered route through the mountains. You say that you picked me up half an hour ago lying exhausted and unconscious a few rods from your camp. That being the case, the entrance to The Valley Where Dead Men Live, on this side of the range, must be near at hand."

"You'll say I'm crazy when I tell you that I have seen living dead men! Dead men who do not know that they are dead. Can you imagine it? No? Neither could I if I had not seen it myself. I've been through the Valley of the Living Dead and came out alive! I've seen them—living dead men—by the millions and millions, fighting, stabbing, shooting—tearing at each other's throats like maddened beasts! And beasts they are, maddened by blood! Blood flows in rivers in the valley where the dead men live. It's the rage they were in when they died. They carried it on with them beyond the grave and they're fighting it out in there!

"Can't you hear the rumble of cannon? Listen! You think that it's thunder. But it's not. And those flashes that you notice just over the brow of the mountain! The flashes of the big guns, man—spirit guns! No, no. It's not lightning. I'm telling you the truth. I know that you think I'm insane. I don't blame you."

He stopped suddenly, his nostrils dilating. "Take a whiff of that breeze,

professor. Don't you smell anything?"

Parmalee sniffed. "The air from the mountains *does* have a peculiar, acrid odor. It's reminiscent of something."

"Gunpowder!"

"By George! That's what it is. Somebody must have fired a weapon close at hand. And yet, why didn't we hear the report?"

The scientist gazed out of the tent door. "It was none of my party. They are all accounted for. Yet I could have sworn that there was not another human being within fifty miles."

Blake smiled again. "I merely called it to your attention, Professor, so that you would give more credence to my story. It is so strange—this story of the living dead—that it will stretch your imagination to the utmost. I am a sick man. I doubt if I survive the day. You, as a scientific man, may be able to discover the solution of the puzzle. Perhaps you may even be able to do something to help release those poor devils in there from the tie of hatred that is binding them to this earth. At any rate, I would like to tell you my yarn if you care to listen. Just give me another sip of that moose broth, will you?"

Raising the sick man's head, Professor Parmalee fed him a small quantity of the warm soup. Then he sat down again beside the cot in an attitude of attention.

II

"You are going to put me down as the greatest liar since the world began," Blake said, wearily. "Yet every word that I tell you is the absolute truth. My mind was never clearer than at the present time, so don't think that what I say to you is the raving of a disordered brain, either."

"You have heard the theory advanced by believers in spiritualism that some people who die suddenly persist in

keeping in touch with the earth, while others go directly on to their reward. I have seen enough to prove—but I digress. My time is short. Let me start at the beginning.

"When the war broke out, I attempted to enlist, but was rejected on account of my physical condition. Nerves. But I finally succeeded in hooking up with the Red Cross and got over. I was gassed and later got a dose of shell shock. You know what that means? Nerves, pure and simple. It is needless to tell you that I suffered all of the torments of hell. So we'll pass that up and go on.

"I landed in the States a physical wreck. The doctors sent me to the mountains. I am a wealthy man, but it suited my mood to travel light and alone. I wandered here and there until I finally reached this north country. I studied geology once and, while I don't need the money, I decided to do a little prospecting.

"A week or so ago I reached the cabin of Sourdough Jamison, having canoed up the river nearly two hundred miles. I remained with the old man three days, resting up, then announced my intention of striking out directly into the mountains. Jamison tried his best to dissuade me. He claimed that the Indians had a legend that there was a valley located somewhere in the middle of the range which was the abiding place of spirits—'The Valley Where Dead Men Live' they called it—and that nobody who entered it ever came back alive. I've been through it and I'm out of it. But I'm no better than a dead man, so the old legend holds good. But I hope when I do pass out that my soul can rest in peace. God! I don't want to spend an eternity in that hell hole back yonder.

"I will not bore you with the details of my trip up the mountains—for I started early next morning in spite of



"Was I dead? I raised myself on my elbows and looked about me. For an instant I imagined that I was back in Flanders."—Page 84.

Jamison's objections. That night I camped half way up the side of the range. Next morning—that would be four days ago—I chanced upon a little canyon that wound in and out among the rocks. There were signs of gold, and I determined to explore it thoroughly before going further.

"As I continued, the air grew colder. From somewhere ahead came a dull, indescribable roar. I put it down to a waterfall somewhere in the distance.

"Suddenly, after a two hours' tramp, I reached the end of the narrow pathway and found myself on the edge of a steep decline, ice covered, slippery—a veritable man trap—which seemed to surround a huge, deep basin. The entire place was buried under a pall of smoke which hid everything from view. On all sides rose the mountains, rugged, their peaks covered with snow, offering an impassable barrier. The path by which I had entered seemed to be the only means of getting in or out.

"Up, out of the basin, there came to my ears a steady, rumbling booming. The air was filled with it. The earth seemed to tremble under my feet at frequent intervals. Sometimes the noise would die out for a second, only to start again with renewed violence. There was nothing to be frightened at, yet I confess that the goose pimples came to the surface and I felt the icy chills run up and down my spine. My hair stood up like the quills of a porcupine. The very atmosphere seemed filled with despair—with a vague something the human mind could not grasp.

"Suddenly the wind brought to my ears a shout. Then came the shrill, piercing, agonized scream of a woman—a shriek that was filled with terror and helplessness. Again and again it assailed my ears. Shouting in answer, I ran along the edge of the precipice, looking for a pathway that would lead

me to the rescue of her who called.

"As I ran along the narrow shelf of ice, I threw off my heavy pack and carried only my rifle. Then, I slipped and lost my footing. My gun flew from my grasp. I struggled to save myself, but without avail. Over the slippery edge I slid—down—down—*down!* It seemed to me that I rolled for miles. There was absolutely nothing which I could grasp to stop my wild plunge. Nothing but ice—ice—ice—cold and smooth as glass. Faster and faster I went, until my speed was that of an express train. I almost lost consciousness. I could not think. Suddenly I struck the bottom with a force that knocked me senseless.

III

"I WAS awakened from my stupor by a peculiar *rat-tat-tat* that sounded like the rattle of a drum. I opened my eyes. The air was filled with acrid smoke. It hung over me like a great gray blanket. Was I dead? I raised myself on my elbows and looked about me. For an instant I imagined that I was back in Flanders. Then I remembered my fall. But where was I?

"The ground was covered with bodies, heaped up in grotesque attitudes, lying in odd-shaped piles. It was a veritable charnel house—a page torn from Dante's *Inferno*. And such bodies! Peculiar, transparent, crystalline. I could see through them as one looks through a heavy plate-glass. Heavens! It was horrible—hideous. And blood! Blood everywhere. The air rang with shrieks and groans and laughter—wild, haunting laughter that froze the marrow in my bones.

"Close beside me a machine-gun was rattling, served by a sergeant and two privates wearing the olive drab. All three were of the same peculiar, grayish cast of pellucidness as were the bodies lying around. On all sides guns were

booming. The ground rocked beneath them.

"Was I dreaming? Was I the victim of a horrible nightmare in which my subconscious mind was again living the scenes I had gone through across the seas? I pinched myself to make sure. I was at a loss for an explanation. I shook like an aspen leaf; I was filled with supernatural terror.

"Then something happened that gave me a better light on the matter. Just at my right was a small knoll, scarred and pitted with machine-gun nests. Through the drab, smoky haze, I could see the ill-fitting German uniforms on the men who manned them. Across the gap which separated them from me a man was crawling—dragging himself along on hands and knees. He turned his head toward me for an instant. I recognized Howard Prestin, an old friend—a captain of infantry, who had been killed in the Argonne after silencing a number of German guns which had stopped the American advance.

"Did he still live? But no. I had seen his body the day it was buried. Was I crazy? My head whirled. I was unable to move, so transfixed was I by what was going on around me.

"Suddenly I saw Prestin leap forward. A dozen guns opened on him. Yet they failed to stop him. I saw him fire from the hip. Then he leaped among the Germans with the butt-end of his rifle. A second later he hurled the weapon aside, and, drawing his automatic from its holster, he sprang into a second nest. The man seemed to bear a charmed life. The Germans swarmed over him time after time. But after each effort he emerged triumphant. His clothes hung on him in tatters. He was bleeding from a dozen wounds. His face was a red smear through which his eyes gleamed like burning coals.

"A German officer—a great, hulking,

blond man—fired a pistol point-blank at him. It failed to stop his rush. Both reached for their trench knives. They came together, locked in a death struggle, their weapons plying like mad. Slowly the German dropped to the ground, a peculiar, dazed look on his flat, round face. Prestin turned wearily away and beckoned, as if waving for his men to move forward. Then he crumpled up and fell forward across his victim's body.

"Then, I knew the truth—the horrible truth! The legend of the Indians was not fiction. This *was* the valley where dead men lived. Here men, who could not break their earthly ties, came back to fight on and on until their Berserker rage had expended itself. Here they were enacting over and over again the final tragedy of their lives. God! It was the most diabolical thing that the human mind could imagine.

"Think of it. All over that vast plain, in the midst of that ice-bound valley, similar tragedies were being enacted by men—dead men. Wraiths were grappling here, there and everywhere. The peculiar feature of it all was that I seemed to be able to see each individual feat of valor at the same time, although they were transpiring over miles of territory. It was like looking at an immense moving picture which unreeled itself before me. I can liken it to nothing better than one of the huge, old-fashioned panoramas that were in vogue a few years after the Civil War, some few of which still remain in Southern cities. I seemed to be floating over the entire basin. The guns seemed to be real guns, shooting real bullets, the cannon were the monsters of steel that I had seen in France. Yet I swear that several times I passed directly through barrages unscathed. The weapons, like the men who served them, were only phantoms.

"God in Heaven! It was the most

horrible scene of carnage I have ever witnessed—more awful than the hell of France and Belgium. For every detail was the result of the terrible ire under which the combatants labored when they met their death. As fast as they had played their parts, they started in at the beginning and went through it again and again, over and over, like automations—held to their posts by a divine decree of some kind.

"Words fail me. It was so unspeakably ghastly, weird—a futurist nightmare—a bedlam of noise and confusion—a kaleidoscopic phantasmagoria of light and color. Death walked everywhere. Remember, Professor, on a battlefield, the men do not die in great numbers and lie around in heaps. Hours, days—sometimes weeks—pass without carnage. Even in the heat of conflict only a small percentage of those engaged meet death. Here it was different. For miles in every direction there was death—*death*—DEATH! Nothing but cold, stark death—death and blood!

"Explain? I can't. My idea is, as I stated before, that man must work out his own salvation—that those who died in the heat of anger must work that hatred off before their spirits can quit this earth. God, in His infinite wisdom, did not care to inflict the horror upon the entire world, so He set aside this barren hole as a place where dead men might sever the ties which bind them here, and, with their passion cooled, pass on to a better life.

"No, the man never lived who could describe it—that cold, ice-bound hell. The air tingled with madness. And the look of awful malignancy on the faces of those poor souls as they went on and on and on through the same monotonous performance of killing and being killed. It was butchery. The place was a slaughter-house. Ah, the deeds of valor that I saw performed! Wonder-

ful! Magnificent! History will never be able to record the actual happenings—the cold-blooded bravery.

"Through the hazy heavens phantom aeroplanes manned by ghostly pilots dipped and maneuvered, dodging—falling to the earth in tangled masses, often burning. Gigantic balloons, in flames, tossed amidst the clouds.

"Among a heap of stones—the remains of what had once been a tiny church located in the center of an ancient graveyard—a sniper carried on his nefarious trade, his hiding-place a tomb from which the bodies had been hurled aside. I saw a group approach the place, grim determination written on their faces. Their beloved colonel had been a victim of the sniper's bullets. They found him after a long search. A youngster—he had been the colonel's orderly—leaped upon him. A knife plunged up—*down*—up—*down*, slowly, monotonously, while the screams of him into whose body it was sinking made the night hideous. And when he had completed his work on that dead thing with the glassy eyes that gazed upward, unseeingly, the youngster calmly wiped his weapon upon the tunic of the vanquished foe.

"Oh, the look of vengeance that was upon the countenances of that little group! A shell came screaming through the heavens! They attempted to dodge to cover. But too late. And so the awful drama went on and on and on.

"There is no rest for those who dwell in the Valley Where Dead Men Live!

"Men fought with the ferocity of wild beasts. They were blood mad, frenzied. A little detachment of Englishmen were laboring with automatic rifles just at the edge of a woods. In front of them was a tiny vale through which wound a sunken road. On the opposite side of the valley was another thicket in which were a seemingly equal number of Germans. It was a duel

to the death between the two groups. Both seemed to exhaust their ammunition at the same time. By what appeared to be mutual consent they left their guns and charged at each other, meeting in the middle of that once peaceful little dell.

"There were not over twenty men on either side. Grappling, they fought hand to hand, using knives, clubs, stones, their revolvers—their bare hands. They were like cave-dwellers, giving no quarter and asking none. At the end, there was no one left on either side. Only a heap of dead and dying. When it was all over the dead arose and again went through the monotonous performance.

IV

"I WAS hypnotized, held by a spell I could not break. Try as I would, I seemed unable to drag myself away from the ghastly sights. I don't know how long I remained in the valley of horrors. You say it was four days. Look at my hair—*snow white!* When I left Sourdough's cabin my locks were dark. I am just past thirty years of age. Yet, from my appearance, one would swear that I had passed the three score years and ten allotted to man.

"I have not slept. For the hellish panorama continued on and on and on. Only, at night, a different group of actors filled the stage. The darkness was hideous with the roar of the big guns, the screech of shells. Signal rockets filled the air. As if by magic, trenches appeared here and there—little sectors each with its own melancholy drama of life and death. Here was a stretch of no man's land with its grisly tenants. Men hung on barbed-wire entanglements, their clothes in tatters, swaying to and fro in the breeze like scarecrows in a farmer's field.

"Often I lost consciousness—fainted,

I suppose. Much of the time I wandered about in a daze. I knew not which way to turn. Dead men—living dead men—everywhere!

"I dragged myself into a tiny house that seemed to stand in the center of the valley. It was empty. I threw myself on the floor, thinking to gain a minute's respite from the horrors around me. I dropped into a deep sleep.

"I was awakened by the sound of voices. I crouched farther back in the darkness of the corner, frightened, not daring to make a move. What was I afraid of? I do not know. One need not fear spectres, need he? There was a sound of a match being scratched. And then a candle flared up. By its uncertain light I made out the figures of two men wearing the German uniform.

"They groped about until they found a trap door cut in the floor. Raising it, they lowered themselves through the opening. Seized by some impulse which, even now, I am unable to explain, I determined to follow them. The events that transpired are inexplicable to me. The only solution that I have for the puzzle is that, for the time being, I was someone else—some poor devil who lost his life in the attempt to avert a German surprise on Verdun. For I swear that I was propelled by some force stronger than my own will.

"Cautiously I waited until I heard their voices trailing off in the distance. Then I sprang to the trap and, a second later, dropped through into the darkness of the cellar.

"I stumbled about until I found the wall. Following it with my hands, I came to an opening. Far ahead in the darkness, I saw a tiny speck of light bobbing up and down. It was the candle carried by the men I was following. Without thought of the future, I followed in their wake.

"On, on, on they went. Then, suddenly, the passageway widened out into a huge cavern. Relying on the darkness, I crept closer until I was only a few yards away from them. Hiding behind a huge pile of boxes and barrels heaped up at one side, I listened to their conversation. At first I was unable to understand what they were about to do. Then, with a muttered 'Shhh!' one of them cautiously drew aside a small block of what appeared to be solid rock, and, peeping out over my hiding-place, I gazed through the little opening into a brilliantly-lighted passageway. I caught a glimpse of uniforms; through the opening came scraps of conversation in French.

"The truth flashed over me. I was looking into the underground defenses of Verdun. The Germans had tunneled up to them and were waiting only for the minute that the defenders were the fewest, to break down the thin barrier which held them back and throw their hordes into the very vitals of the French defense. Even as the thought came to me, the watcher closed the opening softly and, with a muttered word to his companion, lighted a lantern and waved it across his body like a signal torch. And a signal it was. For instantly a distant whistle sounded. Then lights leaped up as far as the eye could see. And from the distance came the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet.

"I forgot that I was dealing with phantoms. The thing was too horribly real. I searched about me for a weapon for some way to warn the unsuspecting men on the other side of that frail partition. In the semi-darkness to which I was rapidly growing accustomed my eyes fell upon an open box. It was heaped up with hand grenades. I made out the markings of other boxes. I almost shouted for joy. For the pile was a huge ammunition dump, placed

there by the invaders in readiness for the crucial moment.

"Seizing a grenade in either hand, I pulled the pins with my teeth and held them in readiness. Closer and closer came the German hordes. The whole cavern and passageway was filled with them. There were thousands, it seemed. The air was thick and heavy with the odor of their sweat. Then, just as the head of the column reached me, I hurled the bombs—not at the advancing enemy, but straight into the big pile of ammunition. The leaders heard me, saw me. They came at me with a rush.

"The ground trembled. . . . A concussion! . . . I felt myself being hurled through the air. . . . Around me rang screams and cries of mortal agony. . . . Then came oblivion.

"There is nothing more that I can tell you. How I came here, I have no recollection. Evidently, my mind a blank, I found some exit on this side of the valley. I only know that you found me here, outside. My secret is yours. As a man of science, you will probably try to find the way into the place from which I have come. Take my advice and stay away. Now I am tired, Professor. I must rest."

V

(EXTRACT from the report of Professor Phineas Parmalee, A.B., LL.D., etc.)

"Mr. Blake passed away shortly after completing his strange narrative. The members of the Parmalee Scientific Expedition spent nearly a week searching the vicinity in the hope of discovering the opening through which he came from the valley. But our efforts were fruitless. I would be tempted to put his story of 'The Valley Where Dead Men Live' down as an hallucination resulting from his terrible experiences during the war, but for one thing: I sent a courier by way of Chicahoochie Pass to interview Jamison. The latter says that the date given by Blake was correct. He crossed the mountains, as he stated, in five days. I confess myself puzzled. . . . We buried poor Blake where we found him. *Requiescat In Pace!*"

The Strange Story of Martin Colby

By Ward Sterling

THIS is Martin Colby's story, not mine. Three of us heard him tell it—Willoughby, the eminent English clergyman, who is now filling a number of lecture engagements in this country, Mosby, the attorney, and myself—and we are all firmly convinced that he spoke the truth. I write it just as he gave it to us.

We were spending a few days in early spring at Mosby's country place.

Possibly the weather had something to do with the way the story impressed us. It was a dark, stormy night, with drizzling gusts of rain and a shrieking, howling wind that shook the window panes and whistled and moaned through the leafless trees—one of those nights that make the shivers run up and down your backbone in pleasurable anticipation of the scare that never comes—a night created especially for tales of yawning graves and spiritual manifestations.

Seated in front of the huge, open fireplace in Mosby's big living room—a room so large that there were shadows in every corner—it was only natural that the talk should drift onto haunted houses, life after death and the supernatural in all its varying phases.

Mosby, who is something of an amateur psychologist, had been reading Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur

Doyle and other writers on spiritual lines and was filled with enthusiasm and a working idea of Ouija boards, spirit rappings and table tipping. On the other hand, Willoughby, like most clergyman, was an open scoffer. The argument continued for an hour or two without result.

Finally Colby, who had been listening and saying nothing, was appealed to.

"There is no question in my mind," he answered, weighing his words carefully, as he always does when he speaks seriously, "that our departed friends watch over us and, given half a chance, will offer us a helping hand."

"Bosh!" shouted the clergyman. "Give us proofs, man! Don't deal in generalities. Offer us something tangible!"

Colby hesitated before answering.

"What I am about to tell you," he said, finally, "is a true story. I have never repeated it to anyone before, because I do not care to have people doubt my word—and the average man is prone to scoff at what he cannot understand. To me, there is only one explanation—that of spirit intervention. Perhaps you, as a clergyman, with a supposedly better knowledge of the hereafter than is given us ordinary mortals, can offer a solution to the puzzle."

And this is the story that Martin Colby told:

II

"I WAS suffering from brain fag. The novel on which I was at work—my latest, by the way—threatened to be a dismal failure, as a result. For weeks I had not touched the typewriter, lacking ideas to put on paper. My publishers were clamoring for the manuscript. The book had been announced through the press and the advance royalties were already banked to my credit. I owed it to them as well as myself, to bring my work to a close.

"But I was dissatisfied. The plot, itself, was the best thing that I had ever done. But the story lacked that indescribable something that marks the really finished product from the machine-made drivel. It sounded forced and strained. In other words, it had no punch. And my heroine! Heavens, what a woman! She had as much life as a wilted rag doll.

"Anyone who is familiar with my work knows that I write of the wilds, the prairies, the forests, the icy barrens. But this story was to be a departure. It was to be a tale of human emotions—a drama seething with passion and depicting the under side of life among the dwellers of the great city. But my heroine was to be a woman of the Northland, transplanted from her native snows and ice, hedged in on all sides by wickedness, yet keeping herself clean and pure in spite of her surroundings.

"I wanted to make her a girl of unusual strength of character, one who dominated every page of the book and held the reader's undivided love, rather than the insipid, white-livered anaemic who wandered through the story like an automaton. But, in spite of everything, I was unable to concentrate on her—to inject any life into her. Every writer has such ex-

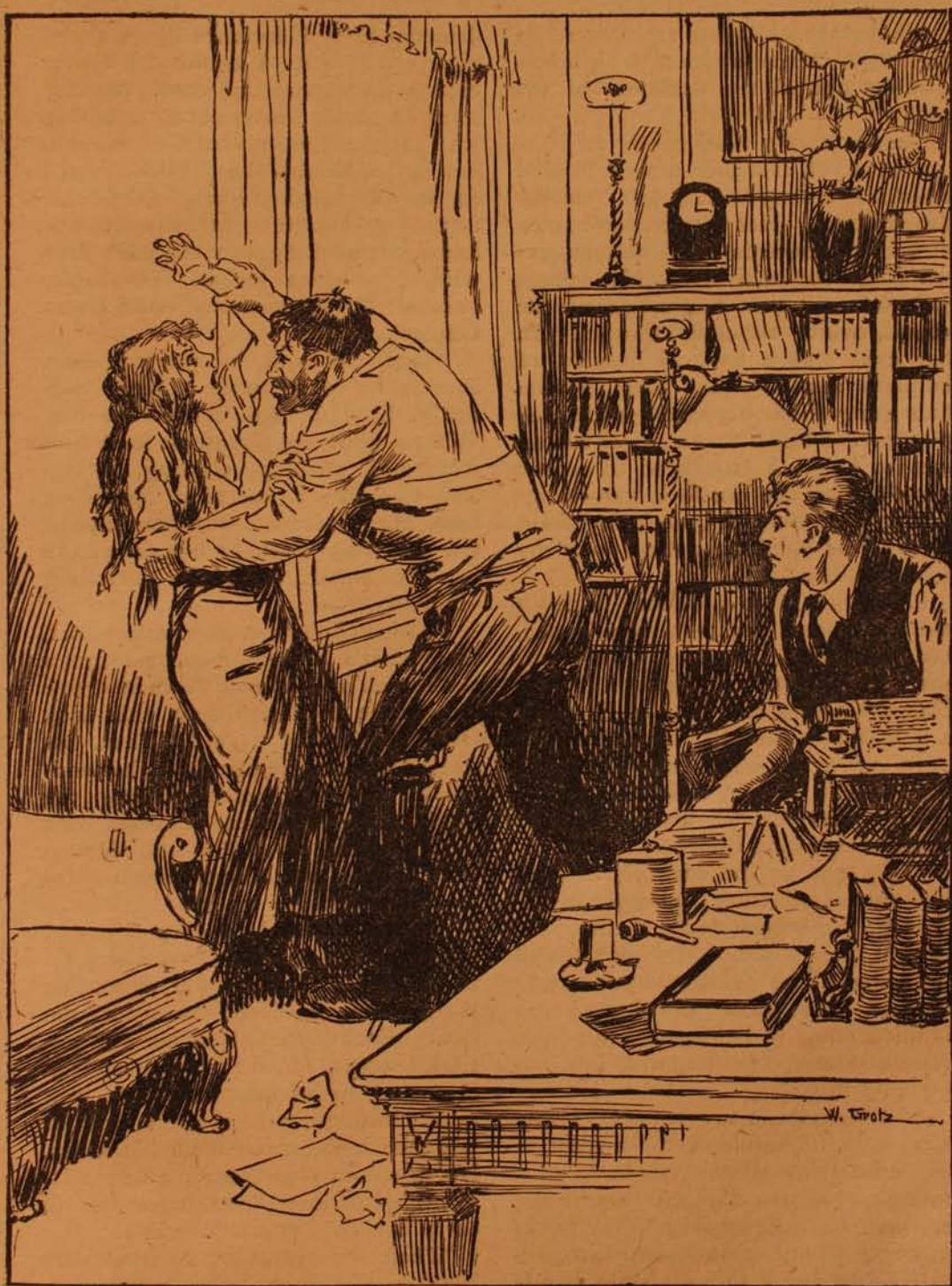
periences at times. I have had them before and I expect to have them again.

"And then, one afternoon, like a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky, came a working streak. I tackled the story with renewed vim and enthusiasm. For hours I wrote and rewrote, hacked and edited. From somewhere in the hidden recesses of my brain evolved a new heroine—Edith Morley—a sweet-faced, golden haired, full-breasted, red-blooded woman—a lovable girl and a true daughter of the Vikings I love so well.

"Far into the night I worked. Under my flying thoughts, Edith Morley grew, developing with every change, blossoming forth into radiant womanhood. I tell you, I was obsessed with her. And, gentlemen, without egotism, I say frankly that she became so real to me that she walks through the pages of my book a living, pulsating character instead of a creature of my imagination. But as for that, you can judge for yourselves when the story comes out next month.

"I forgot dinner, everything, in the enthusiasm of my work. I have no idea how long I worked. It was far into the night and, sometime during the evening, I had automatically switched on the lights. But, finally, flesh and blood could stand it no longer. I fell across the table, my head pillowed in my arms. Whether I fainted or whether it was the sleep following exhaustion, I do not pretend to say.

"Was I really asleep? I do not know. I'll swear that I could hear the clock ticking in the adjoining room and the thousand-and-one other odd, mysterious, little sounds that come in the middle of the night. Yet I must have been asleep. There is no other explanation."



Then, suddenly, he launched himself at her. What a fight she put up to keep him from her.—Page 92.

"Suddenly, I heard a scream—a piercing, terror-stricken shriek—coming out of the darkness of the night.

"Edith Morley stood before me!"

"Have you ever seen a poor, hunted creature at bay? She was panting desperately. Her arms were outstretched towards me, her fingers working convulsively. Her dress was torn so that a glimpse of the round, white shoulder showed. In her eyes was a look of despair, of helpless appeal. Her long, golden hair hung about her waist in tangled disarray. I knew that she was asking me for help. I attempted to arouse myself from the horrible, paralyzing constriction that held me to my chair. But I was helpless, bound down by invisible bands.

"And then, into the focus leaped a man—a human beast—a thick-lipped, coarse-featured creature with snapping black eyes that glowered and blazed between red, swollen lids, and a bluish-dark growth of whisker that only served to emphasize the brutal viciousness of his undershot lower jaw. I tell you, he was a creature straight from the Inferno.

"At sight of the girl, the bestial lips parted, showing a glimpse of decaying, tobacco-stained teeth. He raised one black, hairy hand and beckoned. The girl drew back a trifle further, the look of desperation kindled anew in her eyes, one white, slender hand pressed against her palpitating breast.

"As Heaven is my witness, I saw that tragedy unfold itself in front of my eyes with all the vividness of a motion picture thrown upon the screen. I struggled with every bit of strength at my command to tear myself loose from the invisible hands that glued me to my chair. But in vain. I watched the beast slowly

drawing himself forward like a snake about to strike. I could not move. Nearer and nearer he came, passing so close to me that I could smell his whiskey-and-tobacco-laden breath, moving with cat-like stealth. And, as he approached her, she drew farther and farther away until she found her back against the wall. Her wild, blue eyes looked into mine, tense with fear, desperate—and I was helpless.

"God! The sweat poured from every pore in my body. Then, suddenly, he launched himself at her. What a fight she put up to keep him from her, striking, clawing, biting. She was like a wounded tigress at bay. Her waist was torn into shreds. On the white flesh of her arms, the bruises stood out with startling vividness.

"With an almost superhuman effort, she twisted herself from his grasp and leaped away. Once more he drove her into a corner. Again that look of piteous appeal to me. Then, before he could seize her again, her convulsive fingers reached into the bosom of her dress and returned with a tiny bottle on which the death's head showed a brilliant scarlet under the electric lamp.

"Before she could convey it to her mouth, the beast was upon her, his talons tightened about her wrist. She battled now with the energy of despair. Backward he bent her arm until I listened for the snap that tells of the agony of broken bones. But again, through some strange twist of fate, she tore herself from his grasp. Her freedom was but for an instant. Yet it was long enough for her to carry the tiny vial to her lips.

"Then she crumpled up in a little heap on the floor. And, gentlemen, I will swear that there was a smile of happiness on her face.

"I awoke with a start. For a second I gazed about me, wide-eyed, trying to collect myself even in the midst of my own apartments. Then, with every nerve tingling in response to some psychic force, I rushed out of the building into the blackness of the night.

"Of course, up to this point, you will simply say that I had been dreaming—that so strong an impression had the character of my brain made upon me that it was a case of self-hypnosis. Wait until you have heard my story to the end. It will prove to you, if your minds are open, that there is some unknown, subtle force at work in our behalf, of which we know nothing. To me, the only explanation is that our loved ones who have gone before us are constantly seeking to serve us if we will but give them the opportunity.

"That Edith Morley was a real woman of flesh and blood, I am willing to testify. I never saw her until I met her in my dream, vision, or whatever you care to call it, yet I had described her accurately, even to her little traits of character, hours before when my sudden working streak had brought her into my story. It may have been telepathy, but to me it was the work of the unseen forces I have just mentioned. I will show you that she had been thinking of me at the very minute I was writing of her—or, at least, there is no doubt of it in my mind. And, too, my mind was open to suggestion. But I digress.

"Drawn by unseen hands, I walked on and on through the blackness of the night until I reached an unfamiliar part of the city.

"I swear that I had never been in that vicinity before, yet I knew exactly where to turn and what streets to take. I am not a sleep walker; I

have a perfect recollection of making that long trip across the town, and on foot, mind you, yet I am certain that I was not fully awake. I was more in the condition of a man in a daze.

"My feet carried me to the door of a battered old brick tenement house. I climbed up four flights of stairs, rickety and dirty, lighted by smoky kerosene lamps. I had no idea where I was going, yet unseen hands were guiding me, pulling me along whenever I seemed to hesitate.

"Before one of the doors on the fourth floor, I stopped. I rapped. Receiving no answer, I opened the door and entered.

"*She—Edith Morley—the girl of my dream—lay in a crumpled heap on the floor!* Every detail, even to the torn dress and the dark bruises on her white flesh, was just as it had appeared in my dream. Scattered about, near where she had fallen, were the pieces of glass from the broken bottle. On one of them the death's head grinned up at me as if chuckling at the grimness of it all. The pungent odor of bitter almonds filled the air.

"In the corner stood a battered old dresser. Tucked in the cracked mirror was my picture, clipped from a newspaper review of one of my books. Below it was spread a letter, face upwards. It read:

"I have done everything possible to fight off the inevitable. Death is all that remains. I am without money and without friends. If Twiggs comes again tonight, I will kill myself. Please notify Mr. Martin Colby, the novelist. He knows the North—my North! He does not know me, but I would like him to know that I died like a true daughter of God's country—the land we both love so well."

III

COLBY arose and stretched his long arms above his head.

"If you care for further proof, I have the letter that she left behind."

For a second there was silence.

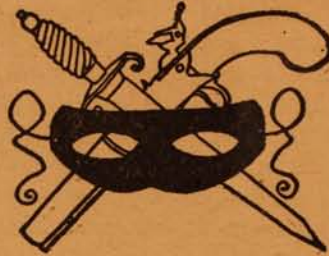
Then Willoughby broke the strain.

"Was she—"

Colby nodded and said:

"We never learned her name. I paid the expenses of her funeral and for the headstone over her grave. On it I had carved the only name I knew her by, 'Edith Morley.' And beneath it I had these words engraved:

"She left the world as clean as she came into it."



In the Next Number

"Black Shadows"

By

J. C. KOFOED



Where the Span Splits

By Sam Hellman

I

TOMORROW at 7:32 a. m. I shall have reached the end of my thirty-fifth year.

I have prepared a program for the morning that I have well-considered for fifteen years. At 6:30 I shall arise and breakfast with good appetite. From 7 to 7:25 I shall occupy myself in filling the bath-tub and regulating the temperature of the water. It will take at least fourteen minutes to get the exact warmth desired, something between 98 and 99 degrees, Fahrenheit.

Having completed this task to my satisfaction I shall go into the living room, place a record of Massenet's "Elegy" on the music machine and start it off, softly and slowly. I shall then return to the bathroom. Again testing the water and regulating the flow of hot and cold to maintain the required temperature I shall climb into the tub. With a razor I shall cut the arteries in both wrists.

This will be done at 7:32 exactly—the hour of my birth and the end of my thirty-fifth year.

I shall lie back contentedly and laugh. My body and the water, being in caloric harmony, there will be no pain. This I have learned of the Romans, who, of all men, know best how to live splendidly and die luxuriously. To the compassionate music of the "Elegy" I shall glide and melt into the Infinite with the quiet smile of a victor.

For I shall have defeated the Law of Compensation, beaten it as it never has been beaten before.

I am not insane. A cringing, spiritless, whining world will doubtless call my act one of an unbalanced mentality but what care I? I have no reason that society would accept for this deed of self-elimination. I have no financial difficulties, no worries prey on me, my health is perfect, I have not been unsuccessful in love—in fact, as I write this tonight, I am exuberantly and exultingly happy and care-free. When the cat pounces the rat will not be there. I can picture his look of chagrin.

I am putting this on paper, not that others may profit by my example, for I know they will not. Frankly, I am doing it in a spirit of braggadocio. I want a world of rats to know that one rat has escaped the claws of the inevitable. I want it known that the years that are mine I have taken and used to the utmost. The years that Compensation takes unto itself I shall not intrude upon. We are quits. We are breaking even and to break even with it is victory for me—complete, smashing, thorough and absolute.

Even at the risk of being tedious I shall go into some details for it is only in this way that the full extent of my triumph can be made plain to a race of futile, unthinking, servile pawns.

When I was twelve years old my

father died. He was in the thirty-sixth year at the time. He had been ill for many months with a malady that must have been extremely painful. His groans broke into my sleep at all hours of the night. I often heard him plead with the doctor for morphine.

"If I only could die," he moaned in his agony.

I remember the sufferings of my mother as she nursed him. She had been a pretty and joyous creature but in those dreadful months the pink in her cheeks fled before a dead sallowness, the eyes that had once laughed and sparkled with the joy of living lay drearily deep behind dark circles, the lustre departed from her hair, a hopeless stoop came into her shoulders and the shuffle of despond into her feet.

I think I was glad when my father died. I cried at the funeral, not because of his passing, but because of her he had left behind—that broken, crushed mother of mine.

At twelve one is not given much to speculation or introspection, yet I wondered. Why had my father been tormented so? His death I understood clearly. That was merely the end, and I knew that all things had to end, but why the torture of his last hours?

He had been a kind-hearted, gentle soul, considerate and self-sacrificing. He had worked hard for mother and me, he had given of his substance to the needy and bent a shoulder to the feeble. His life had been clean and wholesome, yet he had been smitten with flaming darts. I could think of no reason.

Six months afterwards my mother died. She, too, suffered greatly, I know, but so weak was she in spirit

and body that no voice was left loud enough to cry her agony. My wonder increased. Why had she been smitten so?

I went to live with my father's brother. Uncle John was thin and inclined to irritability, yet he treated me with much kindness, unsmiling but very real. I remember one evening when Aunt Susan had sharply called me in from play to my neglected studies, he had said:

"Let the boy alone with his fun. Later on he will have troubles enough. Don't rob him of his blessed childhood."

And he had sighed.

There were two other members of the family, one a boy about my age, good-natured and full of animal spirits, the other an older sister of Aunt Susan, a sweet-tempered, self-effacing little woman, who had been born a cripple. One leg was shorter than the other. Congenital hip-disease, they called it. I grew very fond of Aunt Stella.

Uncle John was troubled with dyspepsia. After each cautious meal he took pills. They didn't seem to help him much for I still recall his distress on the few occasions when he grew reckless and tasted of forbidden things. I remember the half-sorrowful, half-ennivous look in his eyes as he watched George and me romp around the place, slide down the balustrades and in other boyish ways give ear to the call of strident vitality within us. The wistful eyes that observed us as we gorged at meal times come vividly before me, even now.

One winter's day when the sidewalks were icily slick, Aunt Stella fell on the sidewalk and hurt her bad hip. There was an operation,

gangrene and finally the great emancipation.

"Uncle," I said, three days after the funeral, "why did Aunt Stella suffer so?"

He seemed startled for a moment. Then he answered:

"My boy, when you are about twice as old as you are now you will understand. It is the law of compensation. We all must pay for what we take out of life."

I questioned him further but he would not pursue the subject. I didn't sleep much that night. My mind was racing with the problem of compensation but making little headway. In the course of a restless doze I dreamed that angels and demons were fighting for the possession of my body. The angels seemed to be hopelessly outnumbered and were getting the worst of it when suddenly they came over to the side of the demons and joined them sticking knives and pitchforks into me.

II

LIFE at Uncle John's soon returned to its normal gait. George and I again romped all over the place although I felt myself a bit subdued and prone to spells of puzzled reflection. My Uncle's attacks of dyspepsia continued and Aunt Susan complained almost constantly of feeling poorly without any definite ailment as far as I could learn.

We had many visitors. Mostly they were men and women in the late thirties and forties. Although much of the conversation was beyond me I liked to sit quietly in the large living room and listen to the callers. I believe it was during this period that my views relative to the

Law of Compensation took coherent shape.

While my foster-parents' friends discussed every subject under the sun there was one topic upon which each and all spoke fluently and often—their ailments. Everybody seemed to have something the matter with him or her. Mrs. Austin had neuralgia, Mr. Hawkins had a heart lesion, Mr. Swift suffered from constant, inexplicable pains in the back, Mrs. Steffens brooded about an incipient goitre, Mr. Holliday was worried with a tenacious cough and Mrs. Taylor's stoutness preyed on her mind.

Of all the visitor's my favorite was John Shelton, a school principal. He had no particular malady except that his eyes gave him trouble. He complained that they hurt when he read at night.

"Mr. Shelton," I said to him one evening when we happened to be alone in the living room, "do all people get sick when they get to be thirty or thereabouts?"

He laughed good-naturedly.

"That's a funny question. Of course, not."

"Why is it, then," I asked, "that people of that age are always talking about their ailments or looking worried? There's you, for example. Why aren't you happy all the time, like I am?"

"Oh, you're young," he replied. "You have no cares, no responsibilities. There's nothing to keep you from being contented twenty-four hours in the day."

"That's what I thought," replied. "As you grow older you get the things that make you unhappy."

"That's the way of life," he answered soberly. "Take my advice, young man, and get all the pleasure you can out of your boyhood. The

sweetness of living is now yours."

Suddenly he turned with a laugh and said:

"Paul, do you know where your heart is?"

"Certainly," and I struck my left side with the hand.

"You're wrong," he smiled. "It's here!" He pointed to a spot three inches to the right of the place I had indicated and two inches lower.

"Know where your stomach is?"

I showed him where I thought it was.

Apparently I knew less about the stomach than I did about the heart. I was somewhat ashamed and told Shelton that we had just started the study of anatomy at high school.

"Books will never tell you just where your vital organs are," he said, "and the longer you remain in ignorance the better off you will be. When you do learn exactly where your stomach is, it will be the finger of pain pointing it out. Suffering is the perfect instructor in anatomy."

Just at that time other callers arrived and the questions trembling on the point of my tongue went unasked. Afterward he avoided the subject of anatomy.

III

THE next three years passed rapidly, happy, joyous, unrestrained years. My plan of life was rapidly developing. I was determined to squeeze out of existence every drop of happiness it contained before the location of my heart was known to me with exactness.

When I was not playing I observed men and women along novel lines. I read faces for signs of content and unhappiness. I fell into the habit of checking up the number of times I had seen this or that in-

dividual in a month, how many times he had been smiling, how many times he had been frowning, how often he had appeared at ease, how often worried. I did not let these studies interfere with my main program. I sought enjoyment with almost hysterical insistence. I would permit nothing to depress me, nothing to divert me from my purpose.

At eighteen I was sent to college. Because knowledge came easily I was a good student. Had it been otherwise I would have quit the pursuit of learning and sought less strenuous occupation.

I had a room-mate, Arthur Gates, a jolly, harum-scarum, rich man's son, who worshipped at the shrine of Play as feverishly as I. Although he was not lacking in serious moments he was dumfounded, I know, when I told him my secret.

We had been in the history lecture class together that afternoon when the instructor suddenly turned pale, clutched his coat lapel and fell at the foot of his desk. He was a man of about forty and seemingly had been in good health. We helped take him home. I learned that he was a sufferer from *angina pectoris*, an unusually painful affliction of the heart.

In our room that evening Gates mentioned the instructor's illness.

"That could never happen to me," I remarked.

"Why?" he asked. "Have you a guarantee on your heart?"

"No," I answered slowly, "but I shall not live that long."

"What are you talking about? Duckworth isn't over forty-five."

"When my forty-fifth birthday comes around," I replied calmly, "I know I will have been dead ten years."

Gates laughed.

"Been to see a fortune teller?" he jeered.

"No, but on the day that I finish my thirty-fifth year I shall kill myself."

"How do you know," asked my room-mate, "that you won't get angina before you're thirty-five?"

"I don't, but it's hardly likely. The percentage is in my favor."

Gates was beginning to be impressed with the fact that I was serious. He gazed at me with puzzled eyes.

"Arthur," I said. "I want you to listen to me for a few moments. What I am about to tell you I have told to no other person and will tell to no other person. I feel that I must unbosom myself to someone. Will you listen seriously?"

He nodded. I went on:

"I am now twenty-one years old. I have excellent health, plenty of money, no troubles, domestic or otherwise, and what are regarded as excellent prospects. Yet, I tell you in cold blood that at 7:32 a. m., on April 6th, 1920, I shall end my life. That will be the exact hour of my birth, thirty-five years before. Just how I shall do it I do not yet know. Naturally I shall take the least painful and least unpleasant way."

"But why?" interrupted Gates, who had been watching me with strange fascination.

"That," I replied, "will develop in the course of what I am about to tell you. Understand I am not trying to influence you in any way. I know that you will not agree with me. When I was a boy my father and mother both died in great agony. I can see them now, gray with torture, their pallid features furrowed with the lines of suffering and the perspiration of pain on their foreheads.

I can still hear my father pleading for death—death that stood outside the door leeringly biding its time.

"Afterwards I lived for many years at the home of an uncle. There I saw more suffering. I began asking myself these questions—Is life worth living? If so, how long should one live? When do the tears of existence begin to outweigh the smiles? At what point in the span do the joys of carrying on no longer balance the sorrows?"

"In seeking answers to my interrogations I made a close and detailed study of scores of men and women. I watched their faces and searched their souls. I have continued the researches at college, coldly, scientifically. I have tables and charts and masses of statistics, and the conclusions I reached by observation have been borne out by analysis and precise data. And my conclusion is this: The average life after thirty-five is not worth living."

I saw a "why" trembling on Gates' lips and went on:

"The span of human life is seventy years. In the first thirty-five we sow, in the other thirty-five we reap. It is the Law of Compensation. The pleasures and enjoyment of existence are freely bestowed in the first half of the span, but the bills begin coming in with the thirty-sixth year. I have made up my mind not to pay. When the collector comes I will be out."

My room-mate shook his head.

"That's certainly a bizarre theory," he said.

"It's not theory," I returned. "It's a fact, a grim, irresistible fact. As I told you, I have reached my conclusions by way of scientific research."

"But how?" asked Gates. "I don't understand."

"For example," I replied, "I have gone to a man of thirty-seven night after night for a month and reviewed the entire day with him. I have tabulated the whole of his waking hours under three heads—Joy, Sorrow, Neutral. Under the first caption I have listed everything, no matter how trivial, that afforded the subject content or satisfaction. Under Sorrow I have scheduled every disappointment, every ache, every annoyance, no matter how petty—everything he had hoped would not happen, and so on. Under Neutral I have put these things that could not properly be classed under either of the other headings."

"And the result?"

"In the particular case I am speaking of there were twice as many notations under Sorrow as there were under Joy. I conducted my inquiries with a great number of men and women over a long period and the results were about the same. With younger persons it was just the reverse. The dividing line seemed to be just at thirty-five. Between thirty and thirty-five the Joys and Sorrows about balanced with a great number of notations in the Neutral column. Under thirty the Joys and Neutrals seemed to have the field pretty well to themselves."

"Often, of course, the Law of Compensation begins operating lightly and years may elapse before the victim notices that he is being dunned for payment. But settlement must be made and it is made through the body, through those held dear, through ambition, pride, vanity, through everything that is cherished and clung to. But I am going to dance and leave without paying the piper."

Gates listened quietly to my conclusion and with serious expression.

After a moment of silence, he said:

"The ordinary person would laugh at you, Paul, and call you crazy, but I believe that I understand you. Boyhood sorrows have merely distorted your views of life. I have no doubt of your sincerity and I do not question that right now you believe that you will kill yourself when you are thirty-six. Permit me, as a friend, to doubt it. I venture to say that you will be married in 1920, be the father of several children and would blush and stammer like a schoolgirl if I should happen along and repeat what you have just told me. You are young and in the next fifteen years your conception of life will undergo a radical series of changes."

"No, Arthur," I returned, "I shall not change my mind. I propose to enjoy the time I have allowed myself to the utmost. At the end of that period you will read of my death—if you haven't forgotten all about me. That's all. Let's go down town, have a few drinks and see a show."

Gates was glad to go. I never mentioned the subject of my plans to him again. During some of our boisterous celebrations I often caught a queer smile in his eyes, but he said nothing.

After graduation we separated. Gates went to his home in California while I moved to New York. For a few years we corresponded in a loose fashion and then lost touch.

I lived up to my set program. With a generous income I was able to do about what I pleased. I went where I wished, ate and drank what and where I wanted, and did little work except that connected with looking after my property. I remained free of serious love entanglements, my health continued excel-

lent and I had no worries. I do not recall an ache or a pain or a severe disappointment in fifteen years.

There was a girl—her name is of no moment—a girl of wondrous beauty and celestial character, who did stagger my resolution for a brief spell. When I felt myself weakening I went to Bellevue Hospital where I knew a house surgeon, and walked through the wards. The Law of Compensation was operating on high gear that evening. I finished my tour, had a good laugh and never saw her again.

So this is the last night. I feel strangely happy. For my final repast I have ordered a royal gorge. I shall dine heartily at midnight and drink many a glass of rare vintage

to the vanquished Law of Compensation. Then to bed for a few hours of calm rest. After that, tomorrow morning and 7:32.

IV

THE following letter was received in the coroner's office from Dr. J. P. Sypes:

Dear Sir:

The enclosed communication or manuscript was found on a table in the room where Paul Traverse died last night. His death was entirely natural and was due, as stated in the burial certificate, to acute gastritis. The attack followed upon an unusually heavy meal he had eaten before retiring. The matter I am sending you was, I presume, a literary effort on his part.





For a moment her white lips quivered. "I—I—there's a dead man out there by the green-houses."—Page 106.

After Midnight

By Marthé Neville

"GOOD night, Mr. Lannen." Louise Willoughby extended her hand. "We breakfast at nine," she said "I'll see you then. I hope you sleep well."

"Thank you, I'm sure I shall."

She gathered the folds of an embroidered chiffon gown about her and slowly mounted the stairs. Lannen stood leaning against the newel post and watched her ascend.

As he turned away, he faced his host. The cold metallic glitter in the older man's black eyes gave him a strange uncomfortable feeling.

"Well?" said Willoughby.

"She's charming, Andrew; you should be proud of her. She has improved wonderfully in the three years since I saw her."

A slow smile crept about the drawn lips of the physician. It did not extend to his eyes, but became lost in the heavy mustache and Van Dyke beard he wore.

Lannen again shivered. The snaky glitter in his physician-friend's eyes fascinated him. He wondered if it could be true; that the woman who had just left him, with purity written on every curve and line of her, could be the wanton thing her husband fancied; that she had so forgotten herself and her social position as to stoop to an intrigue with her gardener.

It seemed impossible of Louise Willoughby. Yet many changes had taken place during the three years he had been abroad. He had not known

her well before his departure, perhaps he did not know her at all now.

"Come up into my laboratory," Willoughby said suddenly.

He closed the windows and switched off all the lights with the exception of one held in a bronze Venus at the foot of the stairs.

"Andy," Lannen said as they entered the heavily odorous room, "I'd rather you said nothing more about this to me. Some day you will be sorry for having taken me into your confidence; and then our friendship will end. There are some things a man has no right to discuss with another. I don't need to remind you of that. This is one of them!"

"I've got to talk to some or go mad! You think it's my imagination! You think I'm a jealous fool! I tell you I *know*. From the day that man came here, she has been different. I've watched them—I've seen his arm around her, I've heard him call her Louise—"

He broke, and buried his head on his arms he had flung on the table before him.

Lannen gripped his shoulder and shook him. "Why don't you send him away?"

Willoughby raised his bloodshot eyes. "And admit defeat? Give him the pleasure of saying he was fired because Andrew Willoughby's wife fell in love with him!—Never! Besides—" he sprang to his feet, and paced the little room nervously, his long hands with their gnarled

crooked fingers, stained with chemicals, twitching and pulling at his coat as he walked—"how do I know that she won't go with him if I send him away?"

Lannen remembered the brief glimpse he had had of the gardener. A slim tall fellow, little more than a boy, with close cropped dark hair, a pale almost ethereal face, a quiet unassuming manner.

"How long has he been here?"

"Allering? Six weeks!"

Willoughby hit the glass-topped table nervously. As he did so a tiny vial of amber covered liquid fell over, knocking the stopper out of it. A pungent sickish odor filled the room. The doctor gave a startled cry.

Flinging a small rubber blanket over the table, he lifted the vial gingerly. He placed the stopper back in it, carefully keeping it away from his face. Then he covered it with the rubber. He had become ashen colored. As though unable to speak, he motioned to Lannen to throw up the windows.

"Damn careless of me," he muttered a moment later.

He placed the bottle high up in a cabinet above him, then he locked the door of the chest. "Damn careless. It's an experiment of mine, Arthur. Dy'e feel alright?"

Lannen laughed uneasily. "I shouldn't care to remain in here long with that odor. It's heady, to say the least."

Willoughby poured some liquid from another bottle into a small glass and handed it to him; then he took a draught of it himself. "Drink this. It will overcome the effects of the other."

Suddenly he became tense. The glitter in his eyes became more pronounced.

He seemed to be listening to some-

thing. The warm salt air blowing through the window brought a hint of the distant sea—and something else.

"What is it?" Lannen gasped.

The quivering of Willoughby's wide nostrils, the sudden snapping of the glass's stem intrigued him.

"Listen!"

A long sort of growl—then a long drawn howl from a dog some place not far off was all Lannen heard. There was another howl, then silence. The color came back to the physician's face. He smiled apologetically.

Lannen stared at him in bewilderment.

"What is it?" he asked again.

"I—I thought I heard her come down the stairs. I was listening to hear if he met her!" The man's tongue seemed to be thick. He spoke with difficulty.

"Buck up, old man, buck up!" Lannen gave him a reassuring slap on the shoulder, but at the same time he glanced apprehensively over his shoulder out of the window toward the gardens beyond.

Again the long rumbling howl of the dog penetrated the night air. The older man suddenly lurched forward into a chair and began to sob in a broken hearted way. At that moment Lannen fancied he saw a face at the open window, but before he could ascertain whether it was his imagination or not, it had vanished; but to him it seemed he had seen a young pale face with smouldering dark eyes and close cropped hair.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "What's wrong with me?"

II

THE sudden clamor of a clock striking three startled him out of a sound

sleep. At least he thought it was the striking of the hour which did it. But as he raised himself on one elbow in the darkness, the doubled beat of his heart, the damp chill of his flesh, told him it was something else which had awakened him. Stealthy footsteps outside his room; the cautious opening and closing of a door down the hall, the rustle of garments as of someone moving in the corridor were registered with dark significance on his brain.

"Poor old Andrew," he muttered.

He sank back to his pillow. But he could not sleep; though his pulse became normal. He found himself striving to make out the objects in his room. One by one, out of the hazy grey of the blackness they became outlined and visible to his straining eyes. In an irritating fashion the drawn blind flapped forward and back with the wind which had arisen since nightfall. Unable at last to stand the sound of the flapping, he rose and went to the window to raise it.

The moon was high, unobscured by any clouds, and shone down with a dazzling white brilliance which made the grounds and surrounding territory almost as light as day. The long row of glass topped greenhouses gleamed as through covered with snow. Off in the distance, far behind the high stone wall which enclosed Dr. Willoughby's Long Island estate, shone the water, near at hand; the wind whistled in a sing-song manner through the trees.

From the darkening shelter of the stone wall emerged two figures.

The watching man knew instantly who they were; even before the moon outlined the slender figure of Willoughby's wife, and the broader silhouette of the gardener, Allering.

A feeling of nausea swept over him. He turned away from the window. Crossing to his bed he switched on a light just over it, determined to while away the time until daylight with a current magazine. But the face of the woman outside in the garden seemed to mock him from the printed page. Her dark, shadow-laden eyes seemed to plead with him between the lines of printing, as though she begged him not to judge her too harshly.

The magazine slipped from his hand. He closed his eyes and lay inert.

A moment later the cry of some one in mortal agony penetrated the night air. Then a woman shrieked in terror.

For a moment Lannen lay panic stricken; then, springing out of bed, he snatched up a dressing gown and rushed into the hall.

He came face to face with Willoughby.

His host was pallid. Willoughby's hands trembled as he held a tattered silk gown about his emaciated figure. A moment later another door down the hall was thrown open, and the corpulent kimono-clad housekeeper burst into their presence.

"You heard it?" Willoughby cried in a harsh whisper, clutching Lannen's arm.

His eyes were glassy, the lids swollen as though from heavy sleep and being suddenly awakened. His chin shook.

"My Gawd! My Gawd!" wailed the woman, trying to pull the kimono about her ample bosom—"What was it, Doctor? Did you hear it?"

"A woman screamed," Lannen said grimly. "The cry came from some place near the greenhouses. Someone must be injured."

"I heard a man too," this from the

butler who had joined them. Even partially clad he retained some of the dignity of his position.

"Oh, what d'ye 'spose has happened? Doctor dear, what d'ye think it is?" the housekeeper caught her master's arm, and clung desperately to him.

He did not seem conscious of her presence.

He was looking into the lighted corridor below, at his wife; as she stumbled blindly through the outer door into the illuminated passage-way.

She was sobbing convulsively. She started to climb the stairs slowly, dragging herself upward with an effort. Her shimmery evening gown was torn and draggled about her, her face was grey, a death color; and her eyes terror stricken.

At the head of the stairs she collapsed in a heap. When Willoughby started to lift her, she gave a shuddering cry, and warded off his touch. Her husband gave a sucking breath. He looked at Lannen.

"Mrs. Willoughby!" cried the latter dropping on his knees beside her. Subconsciously he wondered what had become of the man who had been with her, if it were he who had given that cry of terrible torture. "Mrs. Willoughby, what is it? What has happened?"

For a moment her white lips quivered. "I—I—there's a dead man out there by the greenhouses, I—stumbled over him! I touched his cold face. I—!"

"A dead man!"

"Yes—!" she suddenly straightened and stared with a fixity into her husband's face.

A strange expression came over her own; then she allowed Lannen to assist her to rise, and in a quiet manner, though with obvious effort she re-

quested the butler to bring her some wine.

"A dead man!"

"Come," said Lannen abruptly—his legal training coming to the foreground,—"She may be mistaken, the man may still be alive."

"He was cold," she answered.

The little procession filed out toward the greenhouses, a motley, weird looking crowd in bath robes, smoking jackets and kimonos. Louise Willoughby walked with Lannen and her husband. Her hand lightly rested on Lannen's all the way. He felt the nervous tremors that shook her as they neared the spot where she had discovered the dead man.

"There are lights in the greenhouse," Willoughby said abruptly. "I'll turn them on."

He left them for a moment, then the glass enclosure became illuminated.

An exclamation of horror burst from the group. Mrs. Willoughby clung to Lannen's arm in a feverish manner.

Huddled up, chest and chin meeting, lay the body of a man, unquestionably dead. He was roughly dressed, his shoes in tatters, his bare feet showing through the gaping soles; while several days' growth of beard added to the gruesomeness of his appearance. Long yellow teeth were bared in a distortion of agony; bleary eyes stared upward. There was no sign of a wound, no indications of foul play; but the man had unquestionably died suddenly and in great torture. Evidently it had been his death cry they had heard.

Willoughby knelt beside him; then after a second's examination rose abruptly. "Dead. Heart failure, I think, but it will be best to notify the police."

"Know him?" Lannen asked.

"No. He looks like a hobo."

"Are you going to leave him?" cried his wife hysterically. "It seems so awful to leave a dead man out here on the ground alone! It's so heartless!"

"He can't be moved until the police arrive," Lannen answered. "Willoughby, take your wife inside. I'll stay here until they come and see that nothing happens."

Louise Willoughby suddenly gave a cry of terror. "The police! Must you call the police? He's a tramp—he died of heart failure! Don't call the police! It will create a scandal! I couldn't stand that—please—please do something else!"

"My dear, my dear!" remonstrated her husband quietly, "this is very unfortunate. I'm sorry the poor devil chose to die here. But it may not be heart failure you know; he may have been murdered!"

"Murdered," she sobbed the word, as though it burst from her against her will.

Willoughby ignored her exclamation.

He continued suavely as though he enjoyed her hysterical anguish:

"If the man has been murdered and we placed an obstacle in the way of his murderer being apprehended, we would be putting ourselves liable for more than a scandal."

She suddenly swayed. Willoughby placed his hand on her shoulder; but she turned on him in almost insane fury.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Don't you dare to touch me!"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, turning quietly to his friend. "You take her inside, Lannen, she's wrought up, no wonder, poor child. I'll remain here. Call headquarters please."

III

WHEN they reached the house, the woman dropped wearily into a great chair. The intense pain in her face, the tremulous quiver of her mouth, caused a wave of pity to sweep over Lannen.

"Are—are you going to call the police?" she whispered.

"I must."

Her white hands gripped tighter. In spite of the things he had seen, Lannen again had a doubt as to her perfidy. Strangely enough, he now felt no sympathy for her husband.

He lifted the receiver from the hook. As he did so, she touched him.

"Mr. Lannen?"

"Yes."

"Are you my friend?"

"Yes—why—yes, of course, Mrs. Willoughby."

"I mean really, truly—my friend—or *his*?"

"Andrew's?"

"Yes."

"I trust I am a friend to you both," he evaded.

She shook her head impatiently.

"You can't be that. Can't you see he hates me, and I—I loathe him—I despise him—oh my God! How I hate him—and yet—!"

"Mrs. Willoughby!"

"Oh, I know I horrify you!" She laughed and began to pace the length of the room—"if only I had someone I could turn too, someone to aid me! Someone in all the world I could trust! You seem to be a good man—if only I dared!" she paused abruptly, then in a sudden change—"Do you think I'm a bad woman—do you think I am what *he* thinks?"

"Why, my dear lady, I—"

"I see. He has lied to you too—poisoned you against me—as he has

others—and—" she covered her face with her hands.

"I—really I—" for once he could not find words. "Mrs. Willoughby—I saw you tonight."

"You *saw* me—and—" her eyes opened wide.

"And *him!*"

As she said nothing, he turned from her and called up the police headquarters, making his request for their presence in a quiet, professional manner.

When he hung up the receiver he turned to her.

"Mrs. Willoughby, you found the body. Who was with you at the time?"

She did not reply; after waiting a moment for her to speak, he continued:

"You realize that the police will ask questions of you, when they arrive. As a lawyer and your friend, I am advising you to tell me everything before they come. I may make things easier for you."

"Easier for me?" she repeated dully. "I've done nothing. Nothing wrong."

"I think it is murder," Lannen said slowly.

She wet her dry lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Yes, it is murder. I know that," she whispered.

"How do you know?" he said sharply.

She shivered.

"I—I—" She gave a little hysterical laugh. "Just as a woman intuitively knows many things. Something here—tells me it is."

"Did you know the man?"

"No! No! Of course not. I never saw him before. Didn't you hear what Andrew said, he is a tramp—a hobo—probably—probably—" her

voice trailed off, and her dark eyes widened.

"Probably what—?" Lannen leaned forward, and laid his hand on hers. Her skin was damp and ice cold.

"Probably he—he stopped in the grounds to sleep or for a drink of water and—Mr. Lannen, I can't talk, I'm—I'm—you'll excuse me—I must go upstairs, I—" she rose unsteadily, and for a moment seemed about to faint. "You can call me when they arrive, perhaps I'll feel better then."

He assisted her to the stairs, watched her slowly mount them; then turned back into the room more puzzled than before.

As he sank into a deep cushioned chair, before the window, heavy satin draperies behind him were pushed aside. A young man wearing mud stained overalls and a dark blue shirt stepped into the room. He held one finger up to caution Lannen to silence, then motioned him to draw the blinds so that their figures could not be seen by the men outside who waited by the greenhouses.

"Well?" said Lannen.

The other slumped into a chair opposite to him. He suddenly seemed overcome and unable to speak. Lannen noted the way his hands trembled, his nostrils quivered. After a moment's silence, the lawyer asked:

"You're Allering, the gardener, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir." He leaned forward, almost touching Lannen. His eyes glowed in his eagerness. "You've sent for the police?"

"Yes." Lannen reached for a cigar and lighted it before he answered the boy. In that brief moment's survey of the gardener, he felt an instinctive liking for him.

"It might be murder, you know," he added.



"I put my hand over her mouth for fear she would cry out.—Page 111.

"It was murder, Mr. Lannen. That poor fellow out there died the death that was intended for me!"

"What do you mean by that?" Lannen dropped his cigar and quickly rescued it from the carpet.

"I'm not going to hide anything sir, only—I—I can't face the police—not yet—I've—I can't tell you! But can't you tell them what I say and keep me out of their way? Isn't it possible?" his white face worked convulsively.

He spoke as though compelled to do so against his will.

"I don't understand you," said the other man coldly, "You say someone desired your death, yet you don't want to inform the police yourself. Don't you realize that you will have to testify? You were with Mrs. Willoughby when she stumbled over the body."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm a lawyer, Allering, perhaps you didn't know that."

"Yes—yes I knew it; that's why I'm asking you to help me. To help Louise—I—" Lannen winced as he used the Christian name of his friend's wife, but the gardener did not see the movement.

"You didn't kill the man, did you?" snapped Lannen suddenly.

"No! No! Good God, no!"

"Well, then will you be kind enough to explain just what is it all about?"

"He hates me—" Allering continued.

"Who?"

"Andrew—Andrew Willoughby. He hates me as much as he fears me—"

Lannen started angrily to his feet. "Willoughby is my friend!"

The younger man laughed stridently. "Friend! He's no man's friend! There's only one thing in the world

of any value to him, that's science! Didn't you see how he took the death of that poor dog out there? I was behind a clump of shrub. I heard and saw him. He gloated over his body! He was glad! Glad that a man had died and proven another one of his damnable poisons efficacious!"

"By God!—are you insinuating that—that Andrew Willoughby killed the man out there?"

"I am!"

"A man he had never seen, a stray tramp—"

"It was intended for me—" Allering returned wearily—" he failed in his purpose so far as I was concerned, but he made a sure test and it proved successful."

"You're making an astounding statement, young man," said Lannen straining to keep his voice calm and uninterested—"You are accusing a man of murder; your employer, the husband of the woman with whom—"

Allering sprang to his feet. The veins stood out in great welts on his high, thin forehead. His nostrils quivered. When he again sank into his chair he was panting from the struggle.

"Mr. Lannen," he said abruptly, "I—I met Louise, Mrs. Willoughby, outside in the grounds—why I did so is our affair—but she is a good woman,—you must know she is! Her husband is more than a scoundrel; he is the vilest, lowest—" Lannen's gesture interrupted him, he continued in a quieter tone—

"We met by an arbor near the greenhouses. It is very dark there, and in spite of its being moonlight we weren't seen; but we saw the figure of a man as he came out of the house. It was Andrew Willoughby. At first we thought he had seen Louise leave and was following us;

but he passed the arbor and went on toward the greenhouses.

"In the moonlight, which made everything perfectly visible in the open, I could see he was carrying something. A little case, his medicine case, he uses when visiting a patient. I was afraid he could hear Louise's breathing, he passed so close to us; but he was too intent on his wicked thoughts to notice anything else. At the greenhouses he hesitated, and looked stealthily around; then he laughed. That laugh made Louise grip my arm. I put my hand over her mouth for fear she would cry out.

"There is a hydrant beside one of the houses. I use it every morning to attach the hose. To my knowledge no one else ever touches it. No one has occasion too. Willoughby was aware of this. It is an old fashioned arrangement and I have protested against it, but the thing has remained as it is. Several times I have been drenched by the nozzle slipping. As we watched, Willoughby went to this hydrant. He carefully unfastened the hose; then he opened the little case he carried. He took out something which was evidently a piece of cloth and wiped all the damp off the rusty metal. Then he put the cloth back into the case. Next he took a small vial out of it, and with great caution poured it all over the metal. Then as quietly as he had come, he whirled around and went back to the house."

Allering paused. Then—"We both stood there in the darkness, unable at first to speak or move," he went on. "Then Louise whispered, 'Charlie, what was it? What was he doing?' I didn't tell her—I knew he had contrived some diabolical way to get rid of me, though just how a liquid poison on a piece of metal could do

it, I didn't know; I resolved under no conditions to touch it. Louise became frightened and started to cry. She was pent up and nervous before, now she became hysterical. I tried to reassure her and told her she had best go back to the house. Though she tried to control her feelings, I felt she knew instinctively what I did, that her husband had planned my murder!

"Just as she braced up and started to leave me—a man vaulted the stone wall, and lurched into view, a pool of moonlight outlining him distinctly. I think he was a tramp or a thief. I had never seen him before. He wandered about aimlessly, until he came to the hydrant. Almost before I knew what he was doing, he had put his mouth to the socket and turned on the water. The next moment he gave that cry you heard. We saw him stagger backwards, fling up his arms, waving them wildly, then fall over, doubling up and writhing as though in horrible pain. It only lasted a moment. Then he was dead. Louise screamed. She started to run. She fell twice. I was going to follow her, then I knew I mustn't. I crept further back into the shadow of the arbor. After you all came back into the house, I stole out the other way, climbed the wall and returned through the servants' entrance."

"Why should Andrew wish to kill you?" Lannen asked abruptly.

Allering rose again.

He crossed to the lawyer, and stood under a stand lamp, allowing its light to shine directly on his pallid face. The skin over his cheek bones was drawn and tight. There was a feverish gleam in his eyes. His young mouth was hard and grim; but in spite of everything there was a look of candor and manliness about him which impressed Lannen.

"Arthur Lannen, don't you know me?"

"Why—Why—" the vague something which had disturbed Lannen resolved itself into a memory. The memory of a pink-cheeked, red-haired lad, with a sunny smile, an almost cherubic cast of countenance.

He gave a gasp. "Charlie Moore—not—*Charlie Moore?*"

"Yes!"

"*Louise's brother!* But why—?"

An automobile came into the driveway, stopped with a noisy purr of the engine. Some men alighted, then the door bell gave a metallic clatter.

The boy clutched Lannen's arm.

"For God's sake, keep me out of this!" he cried. "I'll explain later."

Before the lawyer could answer he had disappeared behind the satin draperies.

IV

LANNEN opened the door before the servant reached it. The inspector, followed by his medical examiner and a couple of officers, strode into the hallway.

"Well, what's the dope?" the inspector asked abruptly.

He was a large man with a twenty-four hours' crop of blue black beard; his eyes were dark and very keen. He wore horn rimmed spectacles which he kept constantly removing and polishing. Lannen knew that in that brief second's survey of the room he had noticed the almost imperceptible swaying of the curtains as they fell together behind Charlie Moore.

"You called me?" the inspector continued, not waiting for his question to be answered.

"Yes."

"Where's Willoughby?" The doctor was well known on the Island.

"Outside. A dead man was found

on the grounds. Some sneak thief or hobo evidently. We thought it best to send for you. It may be heart-failure. It may be murder."

"Alright. Take me to him."

As they stepped outside, Lannen realized that morning had arrived.

In the hazy light he saw Dr. Willoughby seated on a stone bench, his shaggy bearded chin cupped in his hand, as he stared with evident interest at the huddled splotch on the ground before him. The servants had grouped themselves some little distance away, evidently discussing the gruesome event; but at the sight of the officers they hushed abruptly.

Lannen glanced quickly at the hydrant. It was open, a slow trickle of water resolved itself into a little rivulet below it, and wended away into a tiny stream toward the greenhouses a trifle below it.

Willoughby rose leisurely at their appearance and extended his hand to the inspector.

"Mr. Dwyer," he said, "I'm Dr. Willoughby; this is my home—it's unfortunate—"

"Yes, I know Doctor—" Dwyer interrupted. "The man's dead alright. You don't know him, do you?"

Willoughby shook his head. "No; seems to be a hobo, doesn't he? I fancy he died of heart failure, but I'd rather your examiner passed upon the case. I don't think it advisable for you to depend solely upon my decision. It's awkward happening on my grounds, you know."

He spoke easily. All traces of the strain of the evening before seemed to have vanished.

The examiner knelt on the damp ground and took a brief survey of the body.

"No indication of foul play?" he said.

He scowled uncertainly, then looked from Willoughby's face to the inspector's. "He seems to have died suddenly, with acute agony. Rather an unusual attitude for a heart failure to assume, don't you think so, Dr. Willoughby?"

"I do; that is why I hesitated to diagnose it as such."

"And yet," the physician leaned closer, "I—I—I'm not prepared to say it isn't."

"Look him over, Riley," said Dwyer abruptly to a younger man in plain clothes—"see if there's anything to identify him on his clothes."

"Plain hobo," said the other after a moment's survey; there were no cards, letters, nor marks of any kind on the body or clothing to lead to any knowledge of the man.

"Heart failure it is, I take it," said Dwyer grimly. "Must a caught the poor devil suddenly. Probably dropped in here to steal a night's lodging, and having a bum heart keeled over."

Lannen started to speak, hesitated, then turned abruptly to Dr. Willoughby.

There was an enigmatical look on the physician's bearded face. Lannen almost fancied that triumph gleamed through his black eyes.

"You—you—aren't going to have an inquest?" the lawyer queried.

"Not necessary," Dwyer replied. "Thing seems pretty clear to me."

He turned deferentially to Willoughby. "You passed it as heart failure, also, didn't you, Doctor?"

Willoughby bowed his head in assent.

"We'll have the body removed at once," the inspector continued. "Riley, you can stay here until the wagon comes. If there's nothing further, we'll bid you good-morning."

Something seemed to snap in Lan-

nen's brain. The story the young gardener had told him, the scream the dead man had given, had made too deep an impression on the lawyer's mind to be dismissed lightly.

"Doctor—" he exclaimed, touching the medical assistant's arm, "do persons dying suddenly of heart failure give a cry of mortal agony?"

"Hey?"

Lannen repeated the question.

"No—no, I think not. It would be unusual, quite unusual but not impossible for them to cry out. Death comes too suddenly as a rule for them to make any sound—death so painful as this. Why do you ask?"

"This man gave a scream. I heard it. So did Mrs. Willoughby, who found the body."

The inspector dug the blunt toe of his shoe into the grass at his feet. He coughed, then looked at Willoughby, back to Lannen's expressive face, then to his assistant. A slow flush mounted to his forehead.

"This puts another complexion on the matter," he said quietly. "Where is Mrs. Willoughby?"

"In the house," her husband replied. "She was badly upset about the matter and has gone in."

"Stay here, Riley. Come on with me the rest of you." An air of alertness had taken hold of Dwyer, as though he suddenly sensed something of interest. As the servants, huddled together, did not move, he gave a peremptory gesture toward them, and repeated the command for them to return to the house with him.

V

ONCE inside the house Willoughby became a genial host, inquiring of the officers if they desired anything to drink, and when Dwyer accepted

with alacrity, he ordered the butler to serve all present.

Dwyer wandered about the room for a few moments, touching a bit of furniture here, a drapery there, and puffing viciously on a strong and vile smelling cigar. After he had swallowed a large drink of old whiskey, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, he asked that Mrs. Willoughby be called.

"You heard this fellow scream?" he said turning to Lannen, while they waited for her appearance.

"Yes."

"Wake you up?"

"No, I was awake."

"How's that? Insomnia? What time did he scream?"

"About half-past four, I should judge. No, I don't suffer with insomnia. I'm usually a heavy sleeper."

"Something else wakened you then?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"That's hard to say. Possibly being in a strange room and bed. I'm a guest here, you know, possibly the quiet of the country after the city—or—I fancied I heard foot-steps outside my door."

Willoughby leaned forward.

His black eyes lightened, the pupils became mere pin points.

"What kind of foot-steps?" inquired Dwyer.

"That I can't state. I'm not prepared to say that I heard any. I may have fancied I did. If I did hear them, they were very soft—cautious I should say."

"A man's or a woman's?"

"I don't know—but I think a man's."

Willoughby sank back in the chair, gripping the arms of it with long stained fingers.

"How long after you heard these foot-steps was it that you heard this scream?"

"I should judge thirty minutes. I lay in bed some little time, then unable to sleep I got up and sat by the window."

"Does your window face those greenhouses?"

"Yes."

"Did you see this man enter the grounds?"

"No, I had left the window when he screamed."

"And you saw nothing suspicious out there?"

Lannen hesitated. He caught the glance his host directed toward him, and coughed. Something impelled him to say "No."

Louise Willoughby came into the room. She had removed her bedraggled evening gown, and had replaced it with a tea gown of lavender satin and lace. Her face was ghastly pale in the morning light. Her eyes wide and very dark.

Lannen suddenly felt a great pity for her. Her heavy mass of dark red hair she had let down and braided into a great rope which hung over one shoulder. It made her look younger, almost girlish.

At her entrance Willoughby merely raised his head, looked at her a second, then back toward the inspector.

She accepted the chair Lannen offered her.

"You wished to see me?" she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Willoughby. I'm sorry to disturb you, but this unfortunate death on your grounds makes it necessary." Dwyer's voice unconsciously softened as he addressed her.

"I understand. Please pardon my appearance, I had gone to bed."

"You were the first to find the dead

man's body, weren't you, Mrs. Willoughby?"

"Yes."

"You were alone?"

"No." Her gaze did not falter, nor did she look at her husband.

"Who was with you?"

"A young man, Mr. Allering."

"Did this young man—Mr. Allering—see—?"

She interrupted him. "We both saw him fall!"

"Fall! The man wasn't dead when you first saw him?"

The woman bit her lip. Then she shook her head. "No, Mr. Allering and I were in the arbor near the greenhouses. We saw a man climb over the fence. He staggered. Then—then—" her eyes shifted and rested on the face of her husband.

Willoughby was yellow. His black eyes like beads stared at her with all the fascination of a snake coiled to spring.

She shivered— "Then—he gave a terrible cry, flung up his arms and fell over writhing. I think he died instantly. I screamed too. It was horrible to see a man die. Then I started to run. He lay in my pathway. It was dark—the moon went under a cloud right after it happened. I fell—I touched his cold face—"

She paused, staring straight ahead of her as if visualizing what had taken place.

"That is all?" said Dwyer.

"Yes." Lannen wondered if Dwyer realized the woman was lying.

"Where is this Allering now?" the officer inquired, looking about.

The servants, who had come into the room on returning to the house, shook their heads.

"I don't know," Mrs. Willoughby answered.

"Probably in his room," snapped her husband, speaking for the first

time. "He is the gardener employed here."

Dwyer merely raised his eyebrows. He studied the pale patrician face of the woman, then turned to one of his assistants. "Riley, go with a servant to get him."

VI

DWYER and his medical adviser again traversed the lawn to the greenhouses. Lannen went with them. The operator whom Dwyer had left in charge of the body grinned a sickly welcome as they approached. Again Lannen noted the dripping hydrant. Dwyer stalked about the grounds. Crossing to the greenhouses he opened a door and stepped inside.

He was gone but a moment. When he returned, he made a survey of the arbor, and the stone wall which surrounded the grounds. The grass was trampled and crushed; but no definite footprints were discernible.

"Stevens, go back to the house and see what's the matter that Riley hasn't found that gardener," he said abruptly.

The medical examiner, whose attention had been centered on the dead man, looked up quickly.

"It's heart failure alright, Dwyer," he said.

Dwyer merely grunted.

The man who had been with the body hitched his trousers, and passed the back of a hairy hand across his mouth. He started briskly toward the house, paused abruptly and whirling around, crossed to the hydrant. As he stopped to drink from the faucet, Lannen cried out in an unnatural voice.

"Don't do that!"

The young officer straightened abruptly. "Speaking to me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

"Don't touch that hydrant."

Stevens came closer.

"I don't understand," he said.

Wondering if he were making a fool of himself, or if what Allering had said were true, Lannen hesitated. The inspector looked at him inquiringly. Lannen laughed nervously.

"Well?" said Dwyer.

He removed his horn rimmed glasses, and polished them vigorously. His keen eyes squinted. Lannen inwardly squirmed under the scrutiny.

"I may be mistaken," the lawyer said uneasily, "but I'm under the impression that the man died after drinking from that faucet."

Stevens whistled.

Lannen realized he had told too much to withhold any more, and continued quietly.

"Allering came to me after Mrs. Willoughby retired. He said the dead man took a drink, then fell writhing to the ground. He may have imagined it. I don't know—but it's well to take no chances."

"Mrs. Willoughby did not mention this."

"No."

"Where did Allering go? Why hasn't Riley found him?"

"I don't know."

"Well," mused the inspector—"it's damned queer. We'll get a glass, and test this water."

"Here's a tin cup," said the younger officer, reaching for one which hung on a nail just below the hydrant.

Lannen suddenly remembered the gardener's words, when he mentioned the caution Willoughby had exercised in wiping the moisture from the faucet. He stepped forward quietly and drawing his handkerchief from

his pocket, he wrapped it about his hand before turning the spicket, then he drew some water and handed it to the medical examiner.

It was clear as crystal.

"Willoughby has a laboratory where he makes tests in chemistry," the lawyer said.

"Stay here," Dwyer said to the operator he had left with the body before. Then he turned to the others with a curt nod of his head toward the house. "We'll use the laboratory, though I've a hunch there's nothing to this water business; but you never can tell, and we've got to locate this fellow Allering."

VII

As they entered the house, Willoughby rose abruptly. Lannen sensed a tension in the air, as though the physician and his wife had been quarreling. The woman's face was bloodless. The great purple shadows under her eyes, and her white lips, gave her an almost ethereal beauty. She smiled a wan greeting as though welcoming the interruption of an unpleasant scene.

"Dr. Willoughby," said the inspector abruptly, "Dr. Graves, here, would like to use your laboratory for a little test if you don't mind."

"Test?" smiled Willoughby suavely.

"Yes; of the hydrant water. Mr. Lannen is under the impression that the dead hobo took a drink from your hydrant and keeled over. Water looks alright, but we'd like to make sure."

The smile never left Willoughby's face, though Lannen fancied it grew tighter.

"I'll be very glad to assist you in any way," the physician said, "though I'm positive the water had nothing

to do with the poor chap's death. We don't use it for drinking purposes, but it's pure. However, as you say, it's best to make sure. Come this way if you please, my laboratory is on the top floor."

He led the way to the odorous room that was the scene of his many chemical tests. As they reached the door, for a second he hesitated. He drew a deep breath and inserted a key in the lock. It did not turn. The physician looked puzzled.

"That's strange," he muttered. He rattled the knob.

"Maybe the lock has sprung," said the inspector grimly.

Willoughby shook his head.

"It seems to be locked from the inside," he said.

The smile left his face—he became yellower if possible.

There came to them the rustle of papers inside the room, the sound of someone moving.

The men stared at each other.

Willoughby swayed a trifle, and lurched against the door.

Dwyer thrust a huge fist forward and gave the panel a resounding kick.

"Open this door!" he called—"Open it or we'll break it down."

There was silence—then a sound of footsteps, and the door was flung open. *The gardener stood just inside the room.* He had discarded his overalls and looked very much the gentleman in a dark, well fitting suit. Though he was ghastly pale, there was a triumphant gleam in his dark eyes and an air of success in his bearing.

The room was in absolute disorder. Papers were thrown everywhere, bottles lay at random on glass topped tables. Paper baskets were overthrown. Everything indicated a hurried but thorough search.

One instant Willoughby glared at

his ransacked laboratory, then into the glowing eyes of the boy whom he seemed to recognize for the first time, then he flung himself at the younger man with an almost animal like snarl—"Damn you!"

Allering stepped aside. At the same moment, Dwyer laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Well," he smiled, but the menace in his cool tones made Lannen shiver,—*"I presume you are the gardener Allering. No wonder you didn't care to give your testimony to us. We came out here to look into the matter of a heart failure; we hardly expected to be so fortunate as to lay our hands on Charlie Moore—No. 9672."*

The boy flung back his head and looked bravely into the cool, hard face of the inspector.

"No. 9672?" gasped Stevens.

"Sure, the escaped con. sent up two years ago for manslaughter. Escaped six weeks ago. They say a society woman helped him bust out, but I never dreamed it was Mrs. Willoughby!"

"She's my sister!" said the boy proudly.

"Sure." Dwyer bit off the end of a cigar and stuck it in his mouth, but he didn't light it.

He looked steadily at the young man, then toward Willoughby.

The latter's eyes were bloodshot; he seemed to be controlling himself with difficulty.

"What did you know about this?" Dwyer asked him.

"Nothing," snapped the doctor.

"You didn't recognize him?"

"No!"

Young Moore laughed unpleasantly.

"That's a lie," he said. "He knew me the moment Louise brought me into this house, she knew he did, and so did I—but he didn't dare admit it."

If he had he would have notified you in a minute. He wanted me out of the way, but he was afraid; so he chose the cowardly way. He made everyone think I was her lover and poisoned them against her, then—"

"Stop!" It was Willoughby who exclaimed.

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

"You've made some strange statements, young man," said Dwyer quietly "and I must say for a man under arrest—an escaped convict—you're damned cool."

A frank smile curled the other's lips.

"I'm not going back, Inspector," he said, "and don't you think it for one minute."

"Is that so?"

"You bet your life it is. I spent two years in that hell-hole. I was clever enough to make my escape, you can rest assured I'll be clever enough to keep out of it. What do you think I came here for?"

"That's what I'm wondering?" said Dwyer drily. "You might have known that sooner or later we would have run you down; that we would be certain to come to your sister's for you."

"Not so certain. If that poor devil hadn't died out there, I'd still be safe here. I've had six weeks start of you, Inspector, that was all I needed. Six weeks too much for you, Andrew, but you see you didn't get me after all."

Dwyer flung his cigar from him impatiently, and stepped over the threshold into the disordered laboratory. He closed the door behind him with a snap. Willoughby suddenly swayed, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Now, Moore," said the inspector, "No funny business, *get me?* You're going back with me, and you're going

back to stay. You were sent up on a poison charge, young man. There's a dead man out there on those grounds,—what did you have to do with *his death?*"

The boy shrugged his shoulders again, then his eyes clouded, a note of pathos crept into his voice.

"Everything," he said quietly. "I suppose if it weren't for me the poor devil would be alive at this minute."

Willoughby gave an inarticulate cry.

Dwyer stared at the ex-gardener, striving to digest his astounding words.

"Let me get you right," he said slowly. "Are you confessing that you killed that bum out there?"

"No," said young Moore—"*but I'm saying that my brother-in-law, Andrew Willoughby, did.*"

VIII

THERE was a dead silence. Then Willoughby laughed. He laughed until he shook, then he staggered to his feet and waved a long bony finger at his accuser.

"You tried to implicate me before, you whelp! You tried to shift John Gordon's murder on my shoulders! By God! Don't you try it again! I never saw that man out there before—I—"

"Just a minute." The dignity, the note of authority in the boy's voice seemed to impress even Dwyer, hardened officer of the law that he was. "Two years ago, when I came out of college, I came here to study chemistry with Dr. Willoughby, my brother-in-law. I was interested in science. He had gone farther into some phases of it than any other teacher I could secure. I became his assistant in numerous tests. John Gordon was another assistant."

"Why rake all that up?" snapped Dwyer impatiently. "All that detail came out at the trial."

"Because you are going to know the truth. Because I am going to prove my statements. I don't know if Andrew Willoughby is insane or not, but I do know that in the interest of science he will stop at *nothing*, not even murder! Please," he continued, raising a silencing hand as they would have interrupted him. "He was making some tests of a new, very strange and interesting Eastern poison—it left no trace of any kind; a touch of it on a mucous membrane would produce instant death. This was not enough for Dr. Willoughby; he was searching for a poison whose mere contact would be deadly. At last he hit upon one. A harmless enough liquid until combined with metal and moisture—"

Lannen gave an exclamation of surprise.

Willoughby had seated himself, and now sat staring at the speaker with beaded, fascinated eyes. He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue but otherwise made no movement.

"The trouble with this poison," continued Moore, "was that the victim died in convulsions—the death being of several moments' duration. Consequently Willoughby was still dissatisfied. I don't know what his desire was in making of poisoning a fine art, I don't think that at that time murder was his object. He sacrificed numerous animals in his experiments, even Louise's pet Airedale and a Persian cat belonging to the house-keeper were destroyed. The brutality of their death, the horrible agony they suffered was getting on my nerves. I wanted to get away. He did not let John Gordon into the secret of these poisons, so Gordon was

in total ignorance of Willoughby's ambition.

"I began to fear my brother-in-law. There was an insane glitter in his eyes when at work. It dawned upon me that he would not endure any obstacle being placed in his way, and that because of my knowledge of his tests, he hated me, although he needed me. Then John Gordon was found dead. His attitude, the tortured expression on his face proved conclusively he had been poisoned, though if Willoughby had not so painstakingly explained the nature of that poison no one would have detected it in his system. Whether my brother-in-law deliberately killed him as a test—or it was an accident, I am not prepared to state,—but I had nothing to do with it. The metal cup which contained the coffee which Gordon drank, I never saw before—so help me God! Willoughby swore in court to my carelessness—that I had deliberately left that cup which had been used on a tea table—and young Gordon had poured coffee into it and drank it! It was a lie; Dr. Willoughby himself did it! I had nothing to support my statement *then*. I was working for a reputable famous scientist. What was my word against his? With every proof in the world against me? *But* I made up my mind that the instant those prison doors closed behind me, and I was again a free man. I would not only prove my innocence—but Andrew Willoughby's guilt, and I have done so."

He paused abruptly.

"I escaped. The papers gave the details. I took a chance in coming here,—but as Louise's gardener I was safe from you if Willoughby did not recognize me. For a long time he never noticed me. One servant was the same as another to him. His wife

always engaged them. Then he noted our friendship, Louise's and mine, and he became jealous. Too late we recognized our mistake, for the instant he took a good look at me, he knew who I was.

"As I said, he was cowardly. He knew I had something more than my liberty at stake. He feared me. He was afraid of what I knew of him. He instantly sensed that my presence in his household meant I was spying upon him. He could not *send* me away. He determined to *do* away with me. Cleverly he planted the idea in the mind of all his wife's friends that she was unfaithful to him, that I was her lover; he did this so that if he were discovered as my murderer he would be exonerated for protecting his honor; then he began to study my habits. Knowing what he intended, I ate all my meals at a nearby road-house. Everything suspicious I handled with gloves—but in spite of all my precautions, if that poor devil had not appeared last night, this morning I would be a dead man."

An enigmatical smile curled up the corners of Willoughby's eyes. He shifted his position. He glanced in an almost disinterested fashion at the papers tossed about the room.

"He had contrived my murder in the cleverest, most diabolical fashion conceived of by man," continued Moore. "Knowing that to water the plants I must attach the hose every morning, he carefully saw to it that it was unattached—then using this poison which he had perfected, he placed it on the faucet—so that the instant it came into contact with moisture and metal it became deadly; so deadly that the touch of it on my bare hand was enough to kill me."

"Very pretty," said Dwyer with something like a snort—"but it strikes me like some sort of a fairy tale. You

can't get away with that stuff, young man."

Moore smiled. "I saw him place the poison on the hydrant faucet, so did his wife. I saw the tramp touch it and fall over dead, so did she. I have found the formula—the thing I've been hunting for—and his diary—"

Dwyer sniffed again, though he took the book Moore extended toward him and turned over its pages curiously.

"We're always getting dope on mysterious poisons that leave no trace," he said—"But it's going a little too far to believe in the existence of one that kills by the mere touch of flesh which has no abrasion or scratch of any kind."

Willoughby suddenly stiffened. His nostrils quivered.

"You don't doubt its existence?" he exclaimed in a high-pitched excited voice.

"I do."

"You don't believe what he says is true?"

"I do not."

"Well, it is true, every word of it," the professional pride in the doctor's voice showed he had clearly forgotten that such a statement meant an admission of murder.

"Are you confessing that you attempted your brother-in-law's life, and killed that hobo?" exclaimed Dwyer, whirling on him.

"I am making a statement that I have discovered the greatest existing poison—that I have proven its potency! You doubt my word. Watch—"

Before any of the startled spectators could stop him, he had reached for the little vial of amber-colored liquid Lan-nen so vividly recalled as spilling the night before, and pouring a little of it in a metal measuring-cup half filled with water, he rubbed his hand over the surface of the cup. For a second he smiled whimsically at the men who stared in bewilderment at him—then he

suddenly stiffened, his muscles gave a convulsive movement, and he rolled off the chair onto the floor.

"Dead!" exclaimed the other physician, bending over him. "Almost instantaneous!"

"Well I'm damned!" ejaculated Dwyer.

"My sister!" gasped young Moore. There was a horrified expression in his dark eyes. "I must go to her—you don't want me, do you?"

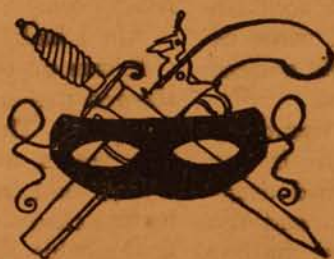
"No—but don't try to get away," re-

plied Dwyer grimly, still staring in blank astonishment at the stark figure of their late host.

"You'll find everything in his diary," said the boy in the doorway, "his vain-glory prompted him to write it up."

"It prompted his death," said Lannen, turning away heart-sick at the thought.

Then the knowledge that Louise Willoughby was free sent him down into the drawing-room, where she sat, hands clasped in those of her brother.



In the Next Number

I

"Bulling the Bulls"

By

WALTER SCOTT STORY

II

"Devil's Choice"

By

PAUL EVERMAN

III

"In the Shadows of the Jungle"

By

ERIC A. DARLING



Brothers-of-the-Coast

By J. C. Kofoed

I DROPPED over the side of the *Mary Rose* when she steamed out of Port Royal, and swam back to the wharf. It was a foolish thing to do, for the harbor was full of ground sharks, but the heat and rather too much rum-and-sugar had made me reckless. Probably, too, I had imbibed some of the devil-may-care spirit of this ancient nesting place of the buccaneers.

When I reached the dock I was dizzy and blown from my exertions. It was terribly hot. Something seemed dragging at the nape of my neck, and the winking lights in Port Royal harbor looked like the blazing eyes of mammoth animals. I sat down on a cask, and watched the red lantern on the *Mary Rose's* stack disappear into the night. I couldn't quite recall why I had come back to Port Royal. It was because of something someone had told me—damn that rum! My head was like an empty barrel. I could not remember a thing.

After a bit I lit my pipe, having tobacco and matches safe in a waterproof bag, as all sailormen should. Gradually the fog in my brain started to shred out. I began to remember.

First it was Mary Logan. She had promised to marry me back in New Bedford. She had laid her little hands in my great, horny ones, and pressed her lips against my cheeks, murmuring words of endearment, and promising to wed me in a fortnight. All the time she knew she was lying, for her plans had been laid to run away with Benjy Harrison that very night. Something snapped inside of me then; the world

went black before my eyes. . . . Later I shipped on the *Mary Rose*, bound for Port Royal.

But it wasn't Mary's treachery that had made me leave the old tramp. What was it? I pressed my fists against my aching temples, and tried to think.

Ah, I had it!

It was on account of what Hong Fat showed me—that and the sugared rum, I guess. The filthy, slit-eyed Chinaman was a magician in his own country, he said, and I'll give it to him that he was clever. For two dollars he went through his whole bag of tricks, but it didn't satisfy me. I'm a deep water sailor, and I come from a long line of blue-nosed, psalm-singing Puritans, but there's a streak of the mystic in me. I always wanted to look behind the veil, and Hong Fat said he could lift it for me.

So I gave him five dollars to do it. He brought out a little bronze bowl from under his robe, and made some passes over it with his lean, long-nailed fingers. A thick, oily smoke curled up from it and almost hid his emaciated yellow face and beady eyes.

Then he asked me in his crooked Shantung dialect if I could understand Chinese. I told him yes, rather sourly, for the smoke was making me drowsy.

"Sailor man," he said in his sing-song way. "You are a brave one—a brave man, but you have done enough wrong to offend the gods; wrongs that you must atone for."

"Wrongs?" I said. "I've led a pretty rough life, but a square one, and I can't call to mind anyone in particular that

I've wronged. I'd like to kill Benjy Harrison, but I haven't done it, so you can't call that a wrong. As for Mary Logan—

"No, I can't call any to mind," I said.

What of the smoke there was a tightening around my throat, and my arms and legs had lost all feeling. "Hurry up—tell me—what was it—when—?"

"Not in this life," droned Hong Fat. "Long, long ago—"

The smoke flattened out like a gray screen. There were pictures on it, but so jumbled and twisted at first that I could not make head or tail of them. I seemed to see Mary's face peep out, but I couldn't be sure. Then the pictures began to take shape. Familiar things flashed up. I seemed to be going back into the past—centuries ago—

Suddenly there sprang into view the old city of Panama, with its houses of aromatic rosewood and the tower of the great Cathedral of St. Anastasius. I could see the slave markets, where black men were being sold, while their buyers sat at tables, sipping Peruvian wine. Beyond the city rolled the green savannahs, and on one side an arm of the sea crept inland. It was the Panama of the old days, before Sir Henry Morgan sacked it.

I don't know why I recognized it, for the ancient city was gone long before I was born. There is left only a tangle of weeds and sun-cracked limestone. The slave-market is a swamp; the haven a stretch of surf-beaten mud, inhabited by pelicans quarreling over the stinking remains of fish. But, in spite of that, I saw old Panama there in the smoke, and felt as a man does when he comes upon a forgotten nook. *Except for this:* At sight of all that beauty a crawling horror whelmed up in my throat, and I would have screamed and beat the air, but it was as though only my brain was present. I had no consciousness of a physical body.

Men came into the picture. They were muscular and bronzed, with the rolling gait of sailors. They wore hats, wide of brim and running into a peak, dirty linen shirts and knickerbockers. Around their waists were sashes, bristling with knives, and they carried guns of a make that would seem strange to modern eyes. They were Morgan's buccaneers on their way to the sack of Panama—to pillage and burn and torture and rape. I recognized them: Dubosc, with his swagger and black mustachios, squat Sawkins, one-eyed Peter Harris, Ringrose, and then—God pity me!—I saw myself, running with the rest, sweat stained, ragged, but with the lust of battle flushing my cheeks. At the head of the troop was a tall man, with a face framed by lank gray curls—as cruel and evil and ruthless a face as this old world has ever seen. His clothes, of silks and satin and lace, were as weatherworn as those of his men. No need to ask myself who it was. I knew him as I had known the others—Morgan, the damned!—the man I had followed in a forgotten century across the blood-smearred waters of the Caribbean!

I knew then why Hong Fat had said my wrong was a great one. None could fight under the black flag of this arch brother-of-the-coast without loading his soul with crime.

Sitting there in a dazed trance I watched the capture and sack of Panama—living over again the wild excitement of that day. The clash of swords on steel casques and breastplates; the priests and nuns whipped before the advance to place scaling ladders against the walls; hate-twisted Spanish faces in the desperate struggle on the ramparts; the final capitulation of the town.

The smoke cloud grew darker. The pictures that followed faded as though the scene of torture and outrage were too terrible for the black art of Hong

Fat to compass. Through the haze I saw the Chinaman's yellow face and beady eyes watching me with a sort of sardonic leer.

I tried to speak. I fought the air with my numbed arms, but the words would not come to my lips.

"That is not all," croaked Hong Fat in his weird dialect. "There is more."

The smoke screen flattened again, as though his claw-like hand had stroked it into a semblance of gray velvet. The figures grew life-like on the cursed chart.

This time it showed the guard-room of the fort at Panama—a room piled high with plunder torn from the ravished town. Through the open casements I could see the fires of the burning houses, and memory brought back the shouts of the pirates and the shrieks of tortured citizens.

There were two men in the room—Morgan, with his fierce, wrinkled face and—and I was there. You might think it a trick of the Chinaman's, but as each scene flashed on I recalled it. Oh, yes, I had been there—as vile as any of those blood-stained brothers - of - the - coast. And my punishment was stretching through the ages.

I hung on each succeeding step, my breath whistling through my nostrils like a foundered horse.

Morgan waved his hand, and a woman was led in between two buccaneers. At sight of her the whole tale came back to me. Her face was the face of Mary Logan, dark and proud and beautiful. She wore the dress of a Spanish gentlewoman, and I remembered that back in those fading days of the seventeenth century she bore the name of Donna Isabella de Guayra—and that I loved her then as I loved her reincarnation named Mary Logan.

I had saved her life in Panama before I joined Morgan's crew, and had killed her Spanish lover when he found

me in her garden. They outlawed me, of course, and I became a pirate to come back to her—the only way that was open for me. She swore that she loved me, and would wait. When they led her in my heart blazed. At last the hour of my triumph had come.

There on the smoke screen, Morgan leaned back in his chair, and over the ages I heard his voice ringing in my ears.

"This man says he loves you. S'death, you're worth loving, madame, but why throw yourself away on him when there are better men around?"

I looked at her, my lips moving.

"It is not Harry Morgan's way to stand back when there are women or gold to get," the pirate said. "You can have him if your love is so strong that it will face death for him. So sure as you take him I'll burn you both at the stake."

My hand went to the knife at my hip, but I was helpless. The muskets of the two pirates were leveled at me.

"And—and if I do not choose him, señor?" the girl asked.

Morgan's face wreathed itself in a terrible smile. "If you choose me I'll cover you with diamonds. By my faith, not a ship on the Spanish Main but will contribute to your wealth. So there you have it. Holyoak and death or Sir Henry Morgan and wealth!"

The girl's dark eyes flamed into little golden points.

"He killed the man who loved me," she said. "He took a life for his own selfish pleasure, señor. Is it not possible that he will also take mine if I cleave unto you?"

The buccaneer's pistol was in his hand.

"Stay with me, and Holyoak dies," said he.

Donna Isabella—who, in this century, betrayed me again, looked me full in the eyes. Her own were hard.

"I will stay with you, Señor Morgan," she whispered.

Then I saw in the smoke Morgan's pistol flame. It was the end for me.

II

I CAME to myself with a nervous jerk. The lights of Port Royal twinkled at my back. The *Mary Rose* had disappeared. How long I had been sitting there on the cask, pondering on the strange things Hong Fat had shown me I do not know. My head felt queer. The dragging sensation at the nape of my neck was stronger. I staggered a little as I walked off the wharf.

For how many æons would Mary's treachery be repeated in reparation for my murder of the Spanish grandee? As the Donna Isabella she had betrayed me to Morgan. As Mary Logan she had cast me aside for Benjy Harrison. And as surely as we died and were born again she would repeat that treachery unless—unless—

I knew Port Royal as well as anyone, but tonight it seemed strange to my eyes—somehow smaller and older and more cramped. Why this should be I could not tell, unless Hong Fat's cursed smoke still twisted my senses.

I followed the crooked street until I came to the Blue Anchor Inn, a tavern huddled under the lee of the old Spanish fort—the very tavern, too, where Sir Henry Morgan had planned the sack of Panama. The night was warm, the doors wide flung, and I heard half a hundred rollicking voices roaring out that melody by the poet of London town, so popular among the buccaneers:

*"In frolic dispose your pounds, shillings and pence,
We'll be damnably mouldy a hundred
years hence."*

Why should they sing that seven-

teenth century ballad in the Port Royal of 1920? Controlling, by an effort, the nervous twitch of my muscles, I entered the Blue Anchor.

It was not the room itself, hazy with the fumes of tobacco smoke and smelling strongly of the native rum, that startled me. It was the men sitting around the tables, pounding the oaken tops with their mugs and flagons, and roaring that old care-free ditty. They were Morgan's men—dingy clothed, scarlet sashed, heavily armed. God of battles! was I mad? There sat Peter Harris, with a black patch over his missing eye; here swaggered Dubosc, mustachios bristling, and at the head of the table, Morgan, as savage and ruthless looking as when he had roamed the Main. That had been before the first King Charles lost his head—and this was 1920!

Perhaps I staggered a bit. At any rate, I stood blinking dazedly through the haze. They saw me, raised their flagons and shouted:

"Holyoak! Welcome, old scoundrel. We sail to-morrow for the sack of Panama."

I had eyes for none of them but Morgan. He lay back in his chair, one fist gripping the pewter mug, his gaze riveted on me. I rested my knuckles on the table, and stared at him as I sought to control the quaver that I knew would sound in my voice. My brain hammered like a kettle-drum.

"So 'tis you, is it?" cried the buccaneer captain. "Old Holyoak, as I live!"

"Yes," I said hoarsely.

"And what would you have of me, my bold rover?"

"Your life," said I, "if I can take it. Are you real—real flesh and blood? If you are, 'fore God, I'll have a knife between your ribs for what you did to me and the Donna Isabella."

His voice was dreamy. "Donna Isa-

bella? I call her not to mind. There were many women in my life—many, many of them. Harry Morgan's way, you know."

"At Panama," I shouted. There was a red mist before my eyes. How I hated the man! If I had much to answer for, what punishment could fit his crimes?

"Ah, yes, at Panama. I tired of her quickly, and she went the way of the rest. But what would you do? I died peaceably in my bed, Holyoak, not on the rack as the Spaniards hoped I would. How can you avenge your black-eyed aristocrat? What can you do to a man who has been dead these two centuries and more?"

The pirates laughed, and pounded their flagons on the table.

Something snapped in my brain. The room grew black, save for that lean, sneering face, framed by its gray curls. Morgan had thrust back his chair, and risen, smiling.

I was unarmed, but I rushed at him—all my fear of the man swept away in the passionate urge for vengeance. He carried a long knife in the scarlet sash around his waist. I tore it away—knowing that the man was a ghost and that I could do him no harm. I swung the glittering blade aloft—and then the

blackness of death enveloped me—I felt the salt foam on my lips. I—I—

III

EXCERPT from the Port Royal *Jamaican*:

A most unfortunate occurrence marred the brilliant "Buccaneer Fete," given in honor of the Governor last night. An American sailor, named Holyoak, deserted from his ship, the *Mary Rose*, which sailed yesterday for Boston.

He went to the Blue Anchor tavern, which had been a favorite resort of Sir Henry Morgan's crew, in the old days of the brothers-of-the-coast, apparently much the worse for drink. An old Chinaman named Hong Fat had persuaded Holyoak that he was a reincarnated member of the buccaneers who sacked Panama. Everyone present in the Blue Anchor had heard of the hoax. They deluded the drunken sailor into believing that they were all Morgan's men, returned to life. Holyoak apparently became crazed with fear, snatched a machete from the girdle of Lieutenant Buckenham, who was impersonating Sir Henry Morgan, and stabbed himself. . . .

IV

ON the same day the New Bedford *Herald* told of the suicide of a woman named Mary Logan, who had stabbed herself with a sailor's knife—a curio owned by Benjamin Harrison, and said to have been carried at the sack of Panama by Sir Henry Morgan!



The Best New Mystery Books

By Captain Frank Cunningham

In this department THE BLACK MASK will present every month brief reviews of the best new books of detective and mystery stories, stories of the occult and stories of adventure. Needless to say, the department will be conducted without fear or favor. Only good books will be noticed. There will be absolutely no boosting in the interest of publishers. Every book mentioned may be bought at any bookstore. THE BLACK MASK will NOT receive orders.

I

THE SKELETON KEY, by Bernard Capes—If Hugh had returned from hunting by another path, or if he had left his gun behind him, or if one could have told just when the shot was heard, perhaps the murder of beautiful Annie Evans might have been cleared up without so much effort on the part of the famous Sergeant Ridgeway from Scotland Yard, or so much mutual suspicion on the part of the various guests assembled at the Hall. Baron Le Sage of doubtful fame might have gone on playing chess, and pretty Audrey's love affairs might not have become so tangled. But it's just as well as it is, perhaps, for the result of all these complications is a thoroughly exciting detective story.

II

THE GREAT IMPERSONATION, by E. Phillips Oppenheim—Sir Everard Dominey, in his twenty-sixth year, leaves England, and after ten years of wandering turns up in 1913 in German East Africa, where Baron Leopold Von Ragastein, a military commandant, rescues him from death in the bush. Dominey and Von Ragastein soon discover that they knew each other at Oxford, and that the amazing likeness which existed

between them in undergraduate days still persists. Then Von Ragastein, who has been ordered to London by the Wilhelmstrasse, determines to make way with the Englishman, assume his identity and enter upon his espionage as Sir Everard Dominey. There is a love story of charm and appeal and a mystery that the reader is hardly likely to solve until the last page.

III

SOLD OUT OF CELEBES, by Captain A. E. Dingle—Jack Barry, a seaman stranded in Batavia, and Tom Little, an enthusiastic salesman lusting for adventure, join forces in the employment of one Cornelius Houton, the owner of various interests in the island of Celebes. Thither the two men journey in a boat provided by Houten and commanded by Barry to investigate an agent of whose honesty Houten has become suspicious. On their arrival the two quickly proceed to concern themselves with an effort to save a fair young missionary from the evil intentions of another agent. Things happen swiftly to the two young men, not always pleasantly, and Little's thirst for action is fully gratified, while the perplexing attitude of the charming missionary, who apparently does not wish to be saved, reduces Barry to des-

peration. Bewilderment succeeds bewilderment in their minds as they pass from one puzzling circumstance to another, but doggedly they hold to their purpose. Not until the very close of the story do the incidents link up and the mystery unfold itself to the two adventurous spirits.

IV

THE LA CHANCE MINE MYSTERY, by S. Carleton. Nick Stretton kills time while managing his gold mine up in the Canadian woods by conjuring up a mental picture of his ideal dream girl. Under pressure of unusual weariness and ennui, one cold and dreary night, he decides to "chuck the job," return to civilization where his dream girl must be waiting somewhere, and live a normal man's life. When lo! beside the fire of the mine-house living-room, when he enters, sits his dream girl. The "how" of her coming is easily explained, but the "why" leads into a maze of mystery.

V

THE MYSTERY OF THE RITSMORE, by William Johnston. A bride on her honeymoon opens the door of her bedroom closet in the Ritsmore Hotel, and the body of a beautiful stranger with a dagger thrust through her heart falls out at her feet. The sympathy of Anne Blair, a young woman guest at the same hotel, is aroused by the sad predicament of the bridal couple, since the husband is at once accused of the murder. From sheer love of mystery Anne starts an investigation of her own, helped by John Rush, the private secretary of another guest, multi-millionaire Harrison Hardy. Her quest leads through a labyrinth of clues, among complications of an international character, into most amazing developments. From a simple murder mystery, seemingly solved with-

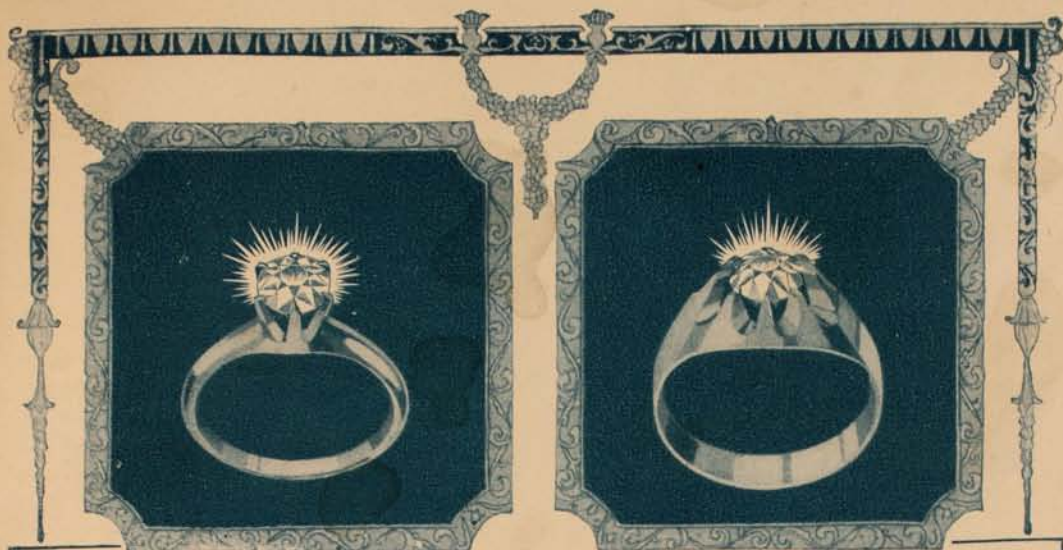
out difficulty by the police, it becomes an affair of such magnitude that its final clearance discloses a plot with almost endless ramifications.

VI

THE QUIRT, by B. M. Bower. This story of the cow country concerns the efforts of the Sawtooth Cattle Company, who number their cattle by the tens of thousands, to eliminate the smaller outfits around. Al Woodruff, the evil eye of the Sawtooth, is efficient in his particular line of work, which is the reason why Brit Hunter of the Quirt ranch calls life in the Sawtooth country "extra hazardous." Hunter's daughter Loraine, a city-bred girl, whose ideas of the Wild West have been obtained in the movies, arrives for a visit just in time to witness an incident of real tragedy, and in her ignorance of conditions she talks enough to arouse the ire of Al Woodruff and thus brings upon her father the necessity of making a fight for his ranch and his life. Action and adventure there are a-plenty.

VII

THE CHINESE LABEL, by J. Frank Davis. When the United States Treasury learns from secret sources that two famous diamonds, stolen from the Sultan's sash, will probably be smuggled into this country, it sets its machinery quickly to work. Napier, of the Secret Service, is the agent chosen, and San Antonio is selected as the likeliest place in which to unearth the plot. Napier's task is a hard one, but with skill he picks up clue after clue from insignificant happenings, implicating Chinese and Mexicans, an American army officer, and an international spy. All are linked with the two diamonds, which are supposed to be concealed in a can of opium bearing a Chinese label.



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