

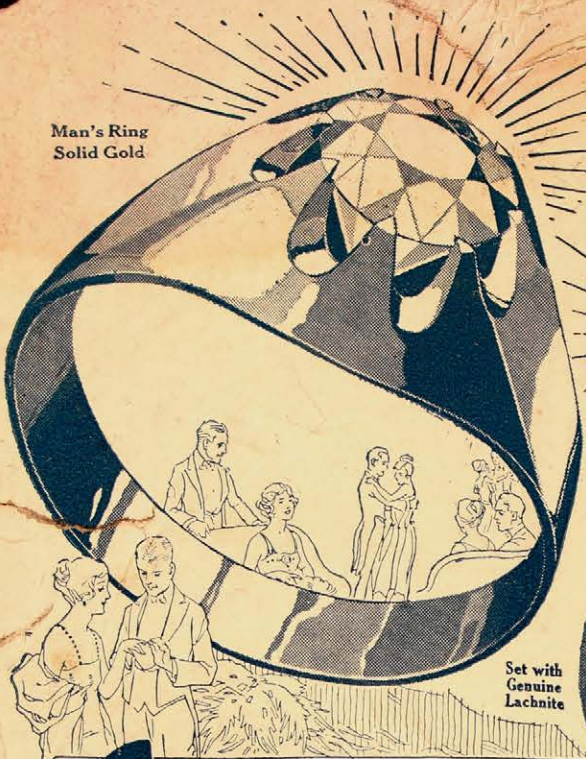
AUGUST, 1922

THE BLACK MASK



A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE STORIES

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THE BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, THRILLS AND SURPRISE

Contents

BLUEBERRY PIE (complete mystery novelette)	Thyra Samter Winslow	3
THE PHANTOM CHECK	George Bruce Marquis	19
THE VAULT	Murray Leinster	30
MURDER IN HASTE	John Baer	37
A WEAPON OF THE LAW	George W. Breuker	44
THE MONOLITH HOTEL MYSTERY	Lloyd Lonergan	47
EXTERIOR TO THE EVIDENCE (Part V)	J. S. Fletcher	55
THE FAILURE	Harold Ward	72
THE EXPLOSIVE GENTLEMAN	J. J. Stagg	75
THE WEIGHT OF A FEATHER	Carl Clausen	81
HIS THIRTEENTH WIFE	Herbert Raymond Carter	89
THE MISTAKEN SACRIFICE	Howard Rockey	98
THE POLICE SOMETIMES GUESS WRONG	Harold Ward	107
THE CATSPAW	Ward Sterling	114
THE FINGER PRINT BUREAU	J. H. Taylor	123

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. . . before she was through, the strange woman had clipped blonde hair, instead of her former long tresses. . . .—Page 16

Blueberry Pie

[Complete Mystery Novelette]

By Thyra Samter Winslow

I

THE Laurence Martins were at breakfast. It was a most charming domestic scene. The dining-room, though small, was one-fourth of the Martin's North Side Chicago apartment.

The table of black enamel was set daintily with a blue and white runner and with blue and white Canton china. In the center was a vase holding four jonquils. The blue and gold cretonne curtains made the thin March sunshine seem almost as gold as Irma Martin's smooth bobbed hair. The Martins had been married just four months.

Irma Martin turned the toast in the electric toaster at her elbow. She poured coffee. Then, her hand trembling a little, she picked up the morning paper and started to read. Martin was already scanning the headlines of his own newspaper which he would read more thoroughly on his way to the office. He glanced at his wife.

"Irma," he said, and then, as she didn't answer, "Irma."

"Speak to me?" she looked over at him.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked. "You look pale. I don't believe you slept well. I heard you tossing."

"You're a darling to worry," she smiled at him. "It's really nothing. I was—a—a little restless. Not sleeping makes me pale, I suppose."

He looked at her hand, holding the paper.

"Why, child, you're trembling."

She got up, then, went over, put an arm around his shoulder, her cheek against his hair.

"You are nice," she said. "I think it's just nerves. But I'm lots better than I was. You said so, too. You watch—I'll improve. I'm the nervous sort—all my folks were, too."

"What have you got to be nervous about? A beautiful Spring day. . . . I honestly believe, Irma, if you didn't read the papers so much—got your mind on other things—reading things like this, now . . ." he pointed to a glaring headline.

"I know. I shouldn't have read it. I suppose that was it. I'll forget it in fifteen minutes. It does seem—awful, though. I'm going downtown with Lois Britton. We're going to look at bedroom curtains and slippers."

Martin looked at his paper again.

"That'll be fine," he said. "I can't blame you—reading a thing like this. An awful thing. That was a terrible murder. Glad the papers will be through with it, now. How that beast ever went on proclaiming his innocence to the end—I see he did—is more than I can figure out. I don't believe in capital punishment, as a rule, but in a case like that—when a man deliberately murders an innocent little woman—electrocuting is none too good for him. He deserved all he got."

"I—I suppose he did," agreed Irma.

"Of course. You're the softest-hearted little thing in the world, or you wouldn't be trembling, now. I

ought to have kept the paper away from you. Though I can't blame you, if a thing like this gets on your nerves. You were in New York when it all happened?"

"No, it was just a few weeks after I got there. I remember reading it in the papers. Just coming from New York and the woman having light bobbed hair and all, I felt terribly interested."

"I suppose you did. That's right, you came here in July, didn't you? I bet you never thought, when you left New York, that you'd meet the man you were going to marry within a month, did you?"

"You bet I didn't. Nor that I'd marry him six months after I did meet him. Marry in haste, you know. . . . You sorry, yet?"

"I should say not. Marrying you is the one best thing I ever did, Irma. You know that. Now sit down and finish your toast. I'm late again."

Irma went back to her seat across the table. They talked about little things, about Irma's coming to Chicago, when the aunt with whom she had lived in New York had died, how she just happened to pick out Chicago because she had never been West, how she had met Martin's cousin at the Y. W. C. A., where she had taken a room, and how the cousin and she had found a place to live together and had gone job hunting, and how Irma had met Martin a few weeks later, with "love at first sight." ". . . and here we are, with a little apartment and married and everything. . . ."

Martin looked at his watch. He grabbed his paper, his hat and his coat and said, cheerfully:

"Now put that awful murder case out of your mind, won't you?"

"You bet I will." Irma kissed him and the door slammed.

But little Mrs. Martin did not put the murder case out of her mind. She sat there, with the paper before her and read over that awful headline:

**DENNISON PAYS
PENALTY FOR CRIME
Electrocuted at Sing Sing Yesterday
For Murder of Irene Graham**

Then, under an Ossining date line, followed the full details of the electrocution, the crime and the trial.

Irma shuddered as she read the story to the end, the last day of the condemned man, the résumé of the brutal deed. It was enough to make anyone shudder.

II

THE details of the Dennison case are well-known to the average American. For the average American is a newspaper reader, and no reader of newspapers could neglect the fruity details of that tragedy. It contained all of the elements that make newspaper readers.

A fairly well-to-do young man of around thirty, just before an announcement of his engagement to a young woman in his own social set was to have been made, murders the young woman—hardly more than a girl—with whom he had shared an apartment for two years previous. The details, the murder itself, the plan to make the murder look as if a burglar had committed it, the little things which the murderer could not foresee, but which proved his guilt; the trial, and now the electrocution, were all spectacular, fascinating, in a morbid, gruesome way.

The first the public knew was on a morning in July. The people in the apartment building in the West Hun-

dreds were told by their sense of smell that something was wrong. Horribly unpleasant, right from the start. The janitor and then a plumber visited several apartments, found nothing. The plumber decided the unpleasant odors came from an apartment on the third floor. This was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Dennison. At least, they were supposed to be Mr. and Mrs. Dennison, though the acquaintances of Mrs. Dennison, who was a friendly little soul, knew that no marriage existed, that the girl was really named Irene Graham. Realizing that the irregular relations were but one of the incidents of city living, the neighbors thought none the less of Miss Graham. On the contrary, their own regular lives bored them, and they rather welcomed her. She was a pleasant, frank little thing, always telling them little confidences, asking advice. Until just a few months before, she had been awfully happy, full of gay little stories. Since then, she had been wistful, sad, because Dennison was no longer kind to her.

When the plumber wanted admission into the Dennison apartment, the janitor, a fellow by the name of Schmidt, told him that there was no one at home, there. He, himself, had been told by Mrs. Dennison that she and Dennison were going away for a vacation of several weeks. Mrs. Dennison had been quite excited over going. In fact, Schmidt had brought up from the basement two trunks and several suitcases. One of the trunks had left in the morning, a whole week ago. He had seen it leave. The other one had gone away later in the day, and then Mrs. Dennison had had it sent back from the station. She had met him in the hall, he remembered, and told him that the second trunk had contained bedding which

they weren't going to need, after all. Mrs. Dennison had gone on up into her apartment—had said that Dennison would come for her and they were going to leave together, later. No, he hadn't seen them leave, but there hadn't been lights there since, nor the noise of anyone walking around. So they had evidently left that night, as they had planned, and not returned. He knew that. When the plumber insisted, Schmidt handed over his master's key.

Half an hour later, excited tenants were rushing to and fro, the most daring of them even venturing into the apartment. Someone telephoned for the police. Three policemen arrived within half an hour, asking questions and ordering folks to be silent, simultaneously. In the closet of the bedroom of the apartment the body of Irene Graham had been found. She had been strangled with a towel. She had been dead just about one week. There was no sign of any other occupant of the apartment.

One trunk was in the apartment, half full of bedding. An empty suitcase stood nearby. The window of the bedroom was partly open. The window led to a fire-escape. The drawers of the chiffonier and the dressing-table were pulled out, their contents scattered, chairs were overturned. Evidently a struggle had taken place.

At first glance, the police said that a burglar had committed the crime. But only at first glance.

Little things began to creep out. After one day there was enough evidence to hold Dennison. In three months more he had been convicted. Now his electrocution had followed. To the end, as is frequently the case, Dennison had pleaded innocence, but there was not one single person in

the city of New York, perhaps, who believed him innocent of the crime for which he paid with his life.

Those who looked into the affair admitted that Dennison had planned carefully enough to make it seem as if a burglar had committed the crime. There was the woman, bound, gagged, dead. There was the window, on the fire-escape, by which the thief could have entered and escaped. There were the rifled drawers. Miss Graham's jewelry—all but one piece, that is, and even a burglar might have overlooked a small wrist-watch—was gone. What more natural than that a burglar should enter an apartment, start rifling its contents, see a young woman, struggle with her, finally strangle her with a towel and make his escape?

Dennison had evidently left the apartment for good the day the murder was committed. He said he had gone out a day or two before the murder and had never returned, that, when he left, he had planned not to return. Several things pointed to the fact that the murder was committed on a Thursday evening. Miss Graham had planned to go away that evening. She was never seen alive again. A letter was found in the letter-box. It had been delivered the next morning. It was from Dennison, and in it he told her he hoped she would be as sensible as she had seemed, when they parted. He enclosed a check. It was a generous check, his lawyers pointed out. It could well afford to be, the district attorney answered, when Dennison knew his victim could never cash it.

Just at first, the thing did look as if a burglar had done it. Then, little things—

Neighbors gave proof that helped convict Dennison. Little Mrs. Peterson, who lived across the hall, had

been glad to tell her bit. It was the first time Mrs. Peterson had ever got into the lime-light, and she rather gloried in it. She was a slender woman with a thin nose and rather beady eyes.

Mrs. Peterson had been a friend of Mrs. Dennison—Miss Graham, that is. She had always liked her—had known her for two years. The Dennisons—well, the two of them, had been awfully happy for a long time, happier than most married couples. Then, a few months before, things had changed. She had found Miss Graham crying. Finally, Miss Graham admitted that Dennison was no longer kind to her. He was cruel—awfully cruel. He threatened to leave her. He said he was in love with another woman. Miss Graham had done all she could, cooked the things he liked best. She was a good cook, a nice little woman, quiet, well-bred, pretty, too, with short light bobbed hair. Mrs. Peterson would never forget how she looked—when she saw her there, dead—her blonde, bobbed hair—her poor stained fingers, her little stained apron. . . .

Yes, the quarreling had gone on—got worse all the time. Then a couple of days before—before the end, Miss Graham had cried all the time. But that morning, things had changed. Miss Graham had come to her, awfully happy, to say that Dennison and she had made up, that they were going away on a two week's vacation up in Westchester. They'd have a lot of fun. The janitor brought up the trunks—she didn't know just when—Dennison's trunk and Miss Graham's—of course, the very one in the apartment. Miss Graham and she had gone down at the same time to answer the postman's ring and later, Miss Graham had called her in as she packed and

she had stood and watched her. Miss Graham had packed blankets for use in the cottage—Miss Graham had told about using a cottage belonging to a member of Dennison's firm. The other trunk was packed, then. It left early Thursday morning. Miss Graham had gone out into the hall with the boy, and coming back had said she had told him to come later for the other trunk.

Later, Mrs. Peterson remembered, the square trunk had gone, though she had seen it come back, too. Miss Graham had opened the door for it and she had spoken to her, again.

"Just think," she had said, "we won't need this trunk, after all. There are plenty of blankets at the lodge and as we have got a long automobile trip at the other end, there's no use taking it. All that bother for nothing."

Mrs. Peterson had stepped into the Dennison apartment for a moment. Miss Graham had been—yes—she had been baking blueberry pie. The pie was just finished. Miss Graham had said that blueberry pies were Dennison's favorite dish—Miss Graham didn't care much for it, herself. Dennison wouldn't have a homemade one for a couple of weeks and blueberries might be gone by the time they got back, so Miss Graham was making one for his dinner. She didn't want to cut it, now, but she'd bring Mrs. Peterson over a piece, later. Miss Graham had worn that little gingham housedress, with the blue apron over it—the clothes she had been found dead in—and her fingers, even then, had been stained with the berries from the blueberry pie.

Mrs. Peterson never saw Miss Graham again. Never, that is, while she was alive. She had looked at the body to identify it—if identification were needed. She had seen the

bobbed blonde hair, the little, berry-stained apron—the terrible berry-stained fingers—after a whole week. She had seen the pie again, too, there on the kitchen table, with its one piece missing.

Mrs. Peterson's evidence was important. But there were other things. The watch, for one. Another neighbor, a Mrs. Grant, had told, eagerly, about the watch. She, too, had seen Miss Graham that very Thursday—that afternoon. She, too, had heard about the promised vacation. Miss Graham was coming in and in the lower hall, they had stopped and talked. Miss Graham's arms were full of bundles.

"I'm going to bake a pie," she had said.

Miss Graham had asked the time—and mentioned that Mr. Dennison was having her watch repaired—would bring it home that night—she was lost without it. Miss Graham usually wore a small wrist watch—yes, Mrs. Grant had seen it frequently. Yes—the one they found on the dressing table. Miss Graham had glanced at her bare wrist, instinctively, Mrs. Grant remembered. She had said how she would have hated to be away two weeks without a watch. Mrs. Grant hadn't seen Miss Graham again. But she had seen the watch again—there on the dressing table—and later in the court-room. Yes—she had glanced at the body with its tumbled light short hair, its familiar little apron—a terrible thing—you can't tell what your neighbors will do, these days—Dennison had seemed like such a nice fellow. . . .

Another neighbor testified—a fellow named Felix, who lived on the floor above. The evening that the police decided the murder had been committed—Thursday—he had been

coming upstairs to dinner about half-past five—he had left the office early—when he had heard furniture falling, heard a woman scream. Her screams did not sound as if they were those of a woman being attacked by a stranger. On the contrary, he had heard, distinctly, “Oh, God, what are you doing, Stuart!” and then “Oh, Stuart—oh God!” He had told his wife that, when he got upstairs. They had decided it was a family quarrel, not serious enough for a stranger to interfere. They had talked about the Dennisons, what a nice little thing she was, how she had been crying, lately. Yes, he had seen the body—mere curiosity, of course—a gruesome sight. Of course he had recognized it. He’d have known that bobbed hair any place. Of course—the state the body was in—he hadn’t looked long—but that was the least—identifying the body—poor little girl—it just shows—the wages of sin—

The evidence hedged Dennison in, closer and closer. If it hadn’t been for Margaret Harrington, though, he might have pulled out, somehow.

Margaret Harrington had been engaged to be married to Stuart Dennison. She was ready to announce the engagement. She had expected him to call on her that Thursday evening. He was to come about six and they were going out to dinner. Dennison arrived a little late and she had noticed immediately something odd about his actions. One thing, especially—his mouth and teeth were stained blue—as if from blueberries. She had teased him about it. He had seemed nervous, and, instead of laughing it off, hadn’t even admitted eating pie, but had changed the subject, quickly, instead. The evening had passed as they had planned.

She had seen Dennison several

times during the week that followed. He had seemed about as usual, but nervous, too. Then, a week later—when Dennison was arrested—when she had read that on the kitchen table of his apartment had been found a blueberry pie with a piece cut out of it and the slice missing, she had felt that to her had been given the last link in the chain of evidence. So she had gone to the district attorney with her knowledge.

She had given up Dennison, of course, as soon as she heard of the murder. It was not only on account of the murder that she had given him up; it was on account of the whole, ugly affair. He had never told her about Miss Graham—about another woman. She might have forgiven him in the beginning, if he had confessed. But to have kept on with the other woman while he was calling on her—making her think he cared only for her. That seemed quite as bad as the tragedy, itself. So she had felt that she must not shield her former sweetheart. Her own conscience demanded that she tell what she knew about the pie.

III

No one was surprised at the jury’s decision, at the judge’s sentence, when the trial took place. Smug citizens shook their heads with satisfaction, young girls, about to err, shuddered and chose less easy paths. It worked out quite well, morally—there was a crime—a motive—apprehension of the criminal—punishment.

What did it matter that Stuart Dennison repeated over and over again the same story. He told it to the district attorney. He told it to his own lawyers. He told it to reporters. He seemed dazed, almost, at the lack of response his story

received. All he could do was to go over and over his version of the affair.

Stuart Dennison's story was, to say the least, amazing. That he couldn't prove anything seemed the least amazing part of it. For Dennison maintained that he hadn't been near the apartment the day of the murder. He couldn't offer an alibi for every moment of his time. He had been in and out of his office and his club. But he was always going in and out. He had occupied his room at his club. But then, he had always kept a room there and used it more or less. Most of the club members had been away. Those who had been at the club could not testify when they had seen him. His story was simple; too simple even for those who wanted to sympathize with him. He hadn't been near the apartment, that was all. The watch? Yes, he had given it to Miss Graham on a previous Christmas. To his knowledge it had never been broken nor mended. How could he prove that? He couldn't. He maintained that he had left the apartment the evening before—that Miss Graham definitely knew that he was not going to return. He had packed his trunk before he had gone—had sent for it. It had been taken to his club as he said. Vacation trip? He knew of no vacation trip; had planned none. He couldn't understand Miss Graham saying anything about that. The second trunk—the same thing. . . . The little woman with the blonde bobbed hair, the one person who could have proved him wrong—or right—was buried long before the trial began.

Dennison did explain about the blueberry pie in a way—a peculiarly ineffective way, everyone thought. On the way to Miss Harrington's he

had passed, he said, a small pastry shop. In the window he had seen some blueberry pie. It was near dinnertime. He knew that. But he was fond of blueberry pie. He had gone into the pastry shop, eaten a small piece of pie. Later, when Miss Harrington had asked him, he had been embarrassed, had denied eating the pie. He hadn't remembered, he explained, that his teeth and lips would look blue. At the pastry shop no one remembered him nor the pie. One waitress had gone—no one knew her name—no one else knew anything about it—so many people came in to eat pie. . . . The pie in the apartment? He had never seen that, of course. . . . A burglar must have come in—

The cold-blooded fact—that just before or after he had killed the woman who had been everything to him for two years—he had eaten a piece of pie that she had baked as a surprise for him, turned people against Dennison more than any other one fact of the tragedy. That much is certain.

It was a clear case, as the district attorney sketched it. The two, Dennison and Miss Graham had lived together. He had fallen in love with someone else, had threatened to leave her. There had been scenes. Then, he had promised her that things would be better—had planned the vacation trip to prove it. He had packed his trunk, had gone away. Miss Graham, all eager for his return, had packed the big trunk, sent it away, had probably telephoned to him, found out the trunk was not needed, got a wagon to call for it and bring it back, then had returned and had baked the blueberry pie. Coming in about five, on Thursday, Dennison had found her waiting. They had quarreled. He had murdered

her, perhaps without meaning to do so.

The deed done, he had tried to get out of it, had disarranged things, tumbled the dressing-table drawers on the floor and bed, opened the window, taken the simple jewelry. Sometime, during the hours he spent there, he had taken the watch out of his pocket, then had forgotten to "steal" it. Before or after the murder, he had eaten the pie. He had thrust the body into the closet, washed his hands, straightened his hair—had left the apartment to call on his fiancée, Miss Harrington. A terrible, brutal deed. No wonder he was electrocuted for the crime. No wonder people shuddered as they read, avidly, details of the affair. It was brutal. It was a remarkable case, too. Perhaps it was most remarkable, though, because it happened not to be true in any particular.

IV

It was over. When Irene woke up, she realized that. When Dennison packed his trunk, the day before, and told her that he was not going to return, she knew that he would keep his word. She hadn't been able to hold him. That was the truth of it. Now he was going to marry a society girl. Margaret Harrington! Irene had seen Margaret Harrington's picture, even—a beautiful girl, really beautiful. There was absolutely nothing Irene could do. Dennison was gone.

"Buck up . . . be a good sport," Dennison had said, and, "you have known for a long time this couldn't go on." Things like that.

She had been a good sport. That is, she had tried to laugh, tried to pretend that it didn't matter. It did

matter. It meant more than anything else in the world.

Not that the thing was unexpected. From the first—from two years ago when she had started—and come to Dennison's apartment—she had known that the arrangement couldn't last. But she had hoped—prayed—that it would. She had even thought, lots of times, that maybe Dennison would marry her, that they could settle down without this everlasting subterfuge and this constant explanation, have a home, really. Now Dennison was gone—was going to marry someone else.

She really loved Dennison—had loved him, that is. Why, she had loved him from the first time she had ever seen him there in McNally's. She wondered how he had ever happened to notice her. He had never been in a department store since, as far as she knew. He had come in, that day, to match a bit of silk for the head-dress of a Persian costume for a charity play, and she had waited on him. She had liked him, had gladly broken a rule when he asked her and had given him her address, the address of that lonely little room in that cheap rooming house on Lexington Avenue.

He had come to see her, then. The six months that followed had been the happiest she had ever known. She had been in New York for over a year, ever since her aunt died in Ferrisville, and nothing had happened to her, nothing that is, but long hours of work or longer and wearier hours of searching for work. The men she had met had been stupid, impossible creatures, mostly friends or brothers of the girls who worked next to her. Then she had met Dennison and he had altered everything.

She remembered, now, those first six months she had known him. He

used to call for her in his neat little car, after work. The last half hour in the store she would spend surreptitiously arranging her hair, powdering her face, applying her lip stick, though she didn't make up a great deal, those days. At twenty-one one doesn't need artifices. Then they'd go to funny little restaurants Dennison knew about, Italian places where you'd get awfully good things, little French places, a Swiss restaurant uptown. Sometimes, Dennison would take her home, then, if you can call a rooming house home. Sometimes, they'd go to the theatre. Then, Dennison had an accident with the car and sold it. After a few weeks there would creep into his talk the desire to be with her when no one was around, his want to "have her to himself."

"How can I talk to you," he'd say, "in a movie theatre or in restaurants or parks. Am I never to have a minute of you to myself?"

It seemed not. Then he suggested his apartment. Until then, it seemed, Dennison had shared an apartment with another chap. Now the other man had left New York.

"You'd feel more at home up there," Dennison had told her. He'd beg her to come up, fix him a cup of tea, be comfortable, where he could hold her hand if he felt like it.

She had hesitated—she had been a simple little thing, then. She had gone, of course. They would get dinner, together, after that, bringing in a hot roasted chicken and crisp fried potatoes from a rotisserie and preparing a salad, themselves. Dennison could make a couple of salad dressings. They would buy French pastry and make coffee. Evenings were happy, though always over them hung the fact that Irene had to hurry away, had to be up early the next

morning, was afraid of kisses that frightened her.

"Why do you want to go?" Dennison would ask. "You know I love you. Can't you let me take care of you? I hate to think that my girl has got to go to a horrid little room, when she could stay here with me, instead. I don't want my girl to work all day.

That was it—his girl. She had cared for him. She knew that. With his arms around her, the soft lamps, the pot of hot coffee, the occasional cocktail, it hadn't been easy to go.

One night it began to rain. She could have got a taxi, of course. She had gone home in taxis, other nights. But Dennison's arms were around her, his lips pressed to hers. She was comfortably drowsy and awfully happy and young.

The next day she went back to her room, packed the square trunk, told her landlady she was going to share an apartment with another girl. She gave up her position at McNally's. Two years ago. . . .

Dennison had been all she had dreamed he would be, that first year, tender, affectionate, thoughtful. Then little things began to creep in . . . he would object to things she'd say, to the way she laughed. He corrected errors of speech rather impatiently. But even then, he was good.

It wasn't until this last year that he didn't come home, every evening. He took a room at his club. It was lonely, then. If she had been another girl—another sort—Irene felt she might have gone with other men. She didn't. She stayed in the apartment, waited. Dennison was no longer thoughtful nor affectionate. He found fault, didn't like the way she did things. She tried hard to arrange the table daintily, pored over

cook-books, spent hours preparing foods he was especially fond of.

Then he told her about Margaret Harrington. He was going to marry Miss Harrington—a suitable match in every way. Irene should have known this wouldn't last—he had been fond of her, of course—he would do what he could.

Then, Irene knew she hated him. She knew that all the love she had had for him had disappeared—had turned into one huge hatred. She wanted to get even. She wanted to leap at him, pound him with her fists . . . why . . . kill him, even. That was it—kill him! She remembered something she had read—in the Bible she thought it was—"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." She thought that was it. Well, he had scorned her. She wanted to get even.

V

Now, Dennison was gone. Lying in bed, now, Irene thought of him. How could she get even. Of course—she could kill him. But she'd be found out—sent to the electric chair. She might get off, of course—most women did—but she mightn't be lucky. The chair! She shuddered. Someone had told her, once, that a few hours before a person was electrocuted, he was doped so that when the time came he was scarcely conscious of what was happening. That was the reason cowards appeared brave at their death, her informant had said. Maybe that was true. She didn't know. Even so, she didn't want to be electrocuted. She'd be found out, of course, if she killed Dennison—or if she killed Miss Harrington. Anyhow, it wasn't Miss Harrington she wanted to get rid of, after all. Miss Harrington was just a part of a game, as she was part of a

game. No, definitely, it was Dennison. She must get even. Kill him? She knew she couldn't actually kill him, though, at that.

How could she, a poor, friendless little thing, get even with anyone. She didn't have any influence of any sort. She had lived so entirely for Dennison, these two years, that she hadn't kept up with her acquaintances from the store, even. The only people she ever talked to were the neighbors. They couldn't do anything to help her. She felt helpless, trapped. She must do something.

She thought of killing herself. She couldn't quite do that, wasn't brave enough. Why should she die, anyhow? She was too young to die, not twenty-three, yet. No, she wanted to live—she wanted to live and get even—to kill Dennison.

Dennison was gone—never to come back. The rent for the apartment would have to be paid in a few days. She couldn't even keep on living there. She had a little money, though—. What could she do?

She got up, went to the door, found the newspaper there, brought it in, sat on the edge of the bed reading it.

She glanced at the usual headlines; politics, world affairs. They didn't interest her. She turned to the inside pages, listlessly. What did anything matter to her?

Little scandals, divorces, deaths. She read them all, all seeing. What was this? She read a small item:

Woman Takes Gas

Miss Grace Trummer, about twenty-five years old, a pretty little blonde seamstress, committed suicide at a rooming house in — Street, last night, by inhaling gas. Miss Trummer left no reason for the deed, and, as far as is known, she had no relatives—

Irene dropped the paper on the bed. There, that was a way out—gas. She could do that—could end things that

way. What if she did? That wouldn't hurt Dennison. He'd be glad she was out of the way, really. If she could be found dead! If Dennison could be blamed! That would be something. He would be electrocuted for her murder! Of course! That would be clever!

In her mind, now, she went over the whole thing—how she could kill herself—and leave little evidences about, so that it would look *as if Dennison had killed her*. She'd have to be careful, of course. Why, of course. She would have to make it look *as if Dennison had planned to make it look like suicide or burglary!* Burglary would be best. Dennison would die! She laughed almost wildly over that. She dressed and laughed all the while. She felt sort of funny. Was she mad? She didn't think she was. Of course not. Yes, that's the way she'd do things.

But—then she would be dead. She didn't want to be dead. She wouldn't know about Dennison. She had to know. No, that wouldn't do either. She wanted to live. She was too young to die. She must get even with Dennison!

That woman who had died—a blonde woman, too, nearly her age. She wondered about her.

Then *the thought* came to Irene. It came to her, suddenly. It enveloped her, left her weak, dizzy. Could she get that body? If that body could be found—here—instead of hers!

The woman had no relatives—surely that would be easy enough. She would try. That was it. She could do her best. It was the only way—a way to get even. . . .

Her heart started to sing in a wild way, a way it hadn't sung for a year—more than that. If she could—if she could fix things so that it would look as if Dennison. . . .

She thought it over. If things went right! If not . . . well, she'd have to take some chances, anyhow.

A ring at the door-bell. She trembled. The mail man. She went downstairs, a plan already formulated in her mind. She met Mrs. Peterson in the hall, started right in on the plan—talked with her . . . the vacation . . . a holiday with Dennison.

She telephoned to Schmidt to bring her trunk up. He brought it and the bags up almost immediately. She talked with him eagerly, nervously.

Another ring at the bell. It was the man for Dennison's trunk. She trembled as the man took it out. Mrs. Peterson, again. Dennison's trunk gone.

She finished dressing, went out, the clipping about the woman suicide in her purse.

Mrs. Peterson's door was still open. That prying little woman. She'd keep on talking—prepare her—in case things went all right.

VI

SHE hurried out of the apartment building, took a subway train, went to the address mentioned in the news story. It was a cheap rooming house. She hurried up the stone stairs, remembering to sniffle a bit.

A weary looking woman with red eyes answered the door.

Irene's voice trembled. She really was nervous.

"I—I read in the paper just now—" she began.

"Yes?" the woman looked at her, suspiciously.

"My sister—her name—she disappeared from home. I just happened to be here, visiting in New York—she could sew—she was blonde—like me. . . ."

The woman's expression changed.

"Your sister?" she asked sadly, but with a certain eager curiosity.

"Yes—I—I think so," said Irene. "Is—she—the body—here?"

"No," said the woman. "They came last night—took her right down to the morgue. You can see her down there."

Irene hesitated. Her mind leaped on.

"I—I—we want to take the body home—if it is my sister," said Irene. Then,

"Do you know what I could do—how to get it?" She started to cry.

"It's too bad," said the woman. "I'm Mrs. Figg. She's rented a room of me for over six months, now. Never talked much of herself. And yesterday morning—come in, dearie. . . ."

Irene went in, saw the cheap little room of the other woman, listened to stories of her. No one cared for her. It seemed the woman was herself, in a way. That didn't matter. She wanted—the body.

"I'll go, now—to the morgue," she said.

"I'll go with you, if you like, dearie," Mrs. Figg volunteered. Irene shivered a little more at that. Then she nodded. After all, she didn't know how to get a body at the morgue. With this woman, who believed her story. . . .

She sat, quiet, while the woman dressed. They took a cross-town car. The morgue. . . .

It was a big, gloomy building, smelling of disinfectants, clean, solemn.

They went into a bare room, with wooden chairs about. A man asked questions. Irene sobbed. Mrs. Figg answered. The woman had died—no post-mortem had been necessary. Irene suddenly remembered those. What if there had been. How would she have got out of this?

Yes, they could see the body. If Irene could identify it there would be no objection to her taking it away. She must get an undertaker, of course—she could sign, authorizing him—he could take it to his shop, embalm the body—have it shipped to her home out of town. . . .

Irene didn't want an undertaker or embalming. All she wanted was that body, untouched, in her apartment, without a coffin, without anything—that body. She must get it. What could she do? She must get it. Her mind raced on.

Well, she'd do her best. A new cunning seemed to come to her. If things would only go on. . . .

The man led the way down a row of narrow stairs into a big room, with walls of white tile, clean, like a kitchen. There were huge drawers in the walls—drawers that pulled out. . . .

"Here," said the man, and pulled out a drawer, a long drawer with a woman on it—a dead woman. Was that the woman? She looked, covered her eyes. A dead woman—a woman she had never seen before—a blonde woman with a sad, thin face—not like hers—and yet—in a way—if there was enough time before the body was found. . . .

She glanced at Mrs. Figg through her fingers. She had to be sure that this was the woman—that they were not testing her.

Mrs. Figg nodded.

"The poor, poor thing," she said.

"Yes," said Irene, "that—that's my sister—two years older than I am—and she'd dead—all alone. . . ." she sobbed. They were real tears, now. She was thoroughly frightened.

The man turned away. He was accustomed to scenes.

They went up the narrow stairs. Another man filled out a blank slip,

gave it to Irene, told her the details about getting an undertaker.

She and Mrs. Figg walked out of the morgue. Another step was finished. She couldn't fail, now! What should she do?

Irene was sobbing again.

"I wonder," she said, "if—if I dare ask you another favor. Could I bring her—the body—to you? Could she be embalmed there? I could go out and buy her a new dress—so—that, when we got her home . . . I'll get something right away. I can't bear to think of her in an undertaking shop. She wouldn't be in your house very long. I'll have my trunk sent there, too, with some things in it. I live in the country—I've been here a week—I'll go right home with—with her. To think that Grace. . . ."

"That's all right, dearie, don't carry on," said Mrs. Figg. "Of course, if it would make you feel any better—have it sent right out. . . ."

They stopped at an undertakers, near the morgue. The undertaker, it seemed, preferred embalming the body right there—get it ready for shipment. But, of course, if the lady—

Irene bought a coffin, paid in advance for that and the embalming—asked the undertaker to send the body at once and come later in the afternoon for the embalming, when she'd have the clothes there. He promised. Yes, that would be all right—the body had been on ice in the morgue.

Irene left Mrs. Figg. She wanted to get the dress and to have her trunk sent, she said. She thanked that good lady again and again—in a little while she'd be back.

VII

ANOTHER subway ride. In her own apartment, Irene threw a couple of

blankets into the big trunk, moved it into the hall, so that the expressman could get it if she were not there, spoke to Mrs. Peterson again. That woman! Still, if she were careful, it might work out all right.

Irene went to a corner express office and gave an order for the trunk to be called for at once and delivered to Mrs. Figg's.

The subway again. A block from Mrs. Figg's, she passed another undertaker's establishment, and this gave her a new inspiration. She went in. She told the man a story that he accepted, though she was quite afraid he wouldn't. She had bought a coffin for her sister, she said. The body was to arrive there—just a block away—quite soon. Now, her brother had bought a better coffin. Would the undertaker buy the one—give her something for it. She told him what she had paid. He offered five dollars. She agreed, told him to call later—she would step in and let him know. It was taking a big chance. She had to get rid of the coffin if she could—had to keep Mrs. Figg from getting suspicious. Well, she was trusting to luck, anyhow—one thing more or less.

At Mrs. Figg's, again. Neither the body nor the trunk had come. Irene sat there in that poor room, her handkerchief over her eyes. The trunk came first. It was put into the room. She paid the express man, didn't open the trunk. The body came a little later, in the poor, cheap coffin. The man opened the coffin. She asked him to. She was afraid she wouldn't know how. She said she wanted another look at her sister.

Mrs. Figg came into the room, went out again. Irene closed the door, locked it—she wanted to be alone with—with the dead.

She opened the trunk, worked hur-

riedly. Nervously, tears streaming down her face, her teeth clenched, she managed, somehow, to get the stiff body out of the coffin and into the trunk. She locked the trunk again, closed the coffin. That was done. She sunk exhausted, ill, on a chair. She couldn't stop, now. What next?

She left the house. She hailed a passing express wagon. She had a trunk to go away. Could the driver take it at once? He thought he could.

Mrs. Figg was not in sight. That saved some explaining. She watched the man as he moved the trunk out of the house onto the wagon. She gave him the address of her apartment, stood looking at him until he drove off.

Irene stopped at the undertaker's again, the one on the corner. She told him to get the coffin now, at once. Yes, she would come back for the money, later. She couldn't, of course—but that. . . .

She went into a drug-store, opposite, called up Mrs. Figg. She had got the telephone number from the telephone in the hall.

"I'm—I'm sending for—for the body, after all," she explained. "The man is on the way. I—I couldn't stand to have things done there, after all. I'll write a note. Thank you. . . ."

She hung up the receiver dizzily. That was done. If the undertaker could only get the empty coffin out without Mrs. Figg suspecting—connecting things. . . . Mrs. Figg might wonder. Even so—she'd never do anything, if the coffin was taken away. Well, there was nothing she could do about it.

She took a taxicab, this time. She was too weak for the subway. She sat there, on the edge of the seat, her fingers clenched.

She stopped the taxi on the corner,

got out. She had left her watch at home. She wondered about the time. The wagon would be slow—he had two other trunks to deliver, she knew. She must do something to kill time—until the trunk came—until dark, even.

What could she do? Why, she'd bake a pie. Of course. She stopped in at the grocer's. She saw some blueberries, bought some of them. A blueberry pie—Dennison's favorite pie. Why not? It would look so domestic.

With the bundles in her arm, she came into the apartment building. She met Mrs. Grant and talked with her. She thought of the watch—put that in. That was a good bit!

She put on her housedress and an apron. She got to work with the pie. It was comforting, working in the dough. The pie was finished—in the oven—when the trunk—the body—came. When it was safely in the apartment she sat down, trembling.

It had worked out! She had the body! Here—now! If only things kept on. . . .

Mrs. Peterson in the hall! She showed her the pie—promised her a piece, later. What a fool!

Schmidt, the janitor, passed. She talked to him, too.

She was alone in the apartment—with the trunk. Irene was afraid of corpses. She had never touched one except a few minutes ago. She opened the trunk. She had to stop, start again. She was quite ill. But, before she was through, the strange woman had clipped blonde hair, instead of her former long tresses, and was dressed in Irene's own clothes. That was done!

She shivered. Was she going to be caught? She prayed to her God, a God she had rather neglected during the past years. Her prayers

were sincere enough. Why couldn't she get away with it? Dennison—Dennison would get what was coming to him—if things went right.

That was over. She could get ready, now. Irene started to change her clothes. She looked at her fingers and her apron, stained with blueberries. Yes—it had to be done. She dressed the corpse in her own house-dress, her own berry-stained apron. Then, her fingers wet with berry juice, she stained the fingers of the dead woman. Now, she covered the face, knotted a towel around the throat, thrust the body into the closet of her bedroom. She heard a noise in the hall. She sat in a chair, shuddered, for half an hour before she dared move or wash her hands. She washed them thoroughly, then. She was afraid you caught things from dead people.

Irene cooled herself under a shower, made rather a careful toilet. It was after five o'clock. There was something else to do, now.

She heard someone in the hall. She hoped it was someone she knew—but not too well. It was a man's step—a man coming home.

She threw a chair against a wall, pushed a table, kicked another chair, said, "Oh, God, Stuart," threw another chair.

That was done.

She adjusted the window, packed her bag—not forgetting a little bundle of things she would destroy, later. She took her jewelry. She put her wrist watch on the dressing-table, to one side, so it wouldn't be too noticeable. She hated to lose it. Still, with her other things. She had been economical. She could sell her jewelry later. She could get a job, maybe meet some young man, marry, even. Why not? Women did worse things than she did and got married.

Worse? Well, she hadn't been so bad—so really bad—if things would work out. . . .

She turned the dressing-table drawers out, disarranged the other things.

She sat at the window behind the white curtain, watched the traffic. She couldn't be seen, she knew. She couldn't light a light. She was hungry. She couldn't go out for fear of meeting someone, until dark. She hated the apartment—memories—the closet. . . .

She tiptoed around. Yes—everything was right. She repacked her bag to make sure. She could take only a few things so it would look as if all of her things were there. No one knew just what she had. The bit of paper in the corner of it—the woman's hair—her clothes—she touched it gingerly. She could get rid of that easily enough.

Yes—the signs of disorder—the window. The police wouldn't think it was a burglar—they were just clever enough for that—yet, she hoped, not too clever. . . .

She felt around, felt the familiar things. She could see a little from the street lamp, outside—. It was nearly time to go. Dennison—would things come out the way she had planned? The apartment! The closet! Did she dare? Dare? She had to, now. There was nothing else to do. She started in to sob, kneeling at the side of her bed.

"Oh, Stuart," she sobbed, "come back to me, come back to me. Oh God. . . ."

She could leave, now. She could get a ticket, go on to Chicago. That would be best. She didn't know anyone in Chicago. It was surprising how few people she knew any place. In Chicago, she'd go to the Y. W. C. A., take a new name, find

a position, even let her hair grow, maybe.

A new name? Any name. She'd think one up. Only she mustn't change her initials. That would be bad luck, unless she got married. Any name but Irene Graham. . . .

She pinned on her hat. She could go, now. She was hungry. She went into the kitchen. Where, in the dim light, she saw the pie she had made. Why not take a piece? She didn't care much for blueberry pie. She wondered, now, why she had bothered—how she had had the nerve to make it. Why not eat a piece, as long as it was there. They might blame a neighbor—the police, anyone. She cut a piece of pie, ate it. It was good pie. Too good for what it was made for. To think of all the pies she had made during the two years, for Dennison. Stuart—she had loved him—really had. Well, he'd get what was coming to him. She'd

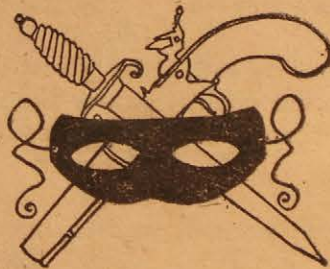
forget it all—these two years—Stuart Dennison—the apartment—the—inside the closet. . . .

She opened the front door, carefully. There was no one in sight. She closed the door after her, quietly, and, suitcase in hand, went out to catch her train.

VIII

THE newspaper dropped from Irma Martin's fingers. So—it was over. Really over. Dennison was dead. He had "paid for his crime with his life," as the newspapers had said.

Mrs. Martin shuddered. She must get over being so nervous. She knew that. She stood up, began to gather together the blue and white breakfast dishes. Funny! She laughed, a bit mirthlessly, to herself. Funny, that she had happened to eat that piece of blueberry pie.



The Phantom Check

By George Bruce Marquis

I

IT was nearly six o'clock, and yet James Hackett, teller number one of the Wallula State Bank, tarried in his cage. Again and again he cast up his totals, recounted his cash, and thumbed over the big pile of checks which littered his counter, and still his columns refused to balance.

The cashier of the bank, Thomas Ector, passed down the aisle on his way out, but noting the teller still at work paused.

"What's wrong, Hackett?" he inquired.

"My cash simply won't balance, Mr. Ector," Hackett replied.

"Throw it into the Over and Short Account, Hackett," Ector advised him. "A few cents more or less won't matter."

"A few cents!" And Hackett turned his flushed face toward the cashier. "I wish it were only a matter of a few cents. I'm short *one thousand dollars!*"

"A 'one' is the easiest mistake in the world to make," Ector smiled. "Unlock the door and let me run over your figures."

"Well, here's hoping," Hackett sighed. "I've run those columns up and down, crossways and slanting till I honestly couldn't add two and two and be sure of the result."

"You've just got excited," Ector declared as he picked up the ribbon from the adding machine and began to compare it with the stack of checks.

"How much cash did you start with this morning?" he presently inquired.

"Five thousand dollars. Mr. Gray counted it out and I rechecked it before I opened my window. It was correct."

The cashier ticked off the deposit slips, and last of all counted the cash. Then he began to cast up the final results, humming a little tune as he did so. Presently he ceased humming, while a puzzled frown crept gradually over his features.

"What's wrong here?" he argued with himself, "you're off, too."

"How much?" Hackett asked a little unsteadily.

"It looks like a thousand dollars," Ector admitted reluctantly, "but I must have made a mistake. Here, wait till I run it over again."

But his second checking was as fruitless as his first. Hackett was undoubtedly short one thousand dollars.

Ector stood drumming on the counter for a bit, lost in thought. Then he had a sudden inspiration.

"Did you cash any thousand dollar checks or drafts today?" he asked suddenly.

"A dozen, maybe," the teller answered. "You know I handle most of the big accounts, a number of real estate firms, besides the business of half a dozen of the biggest stores. A thousand dollars in change with them is nothing uncommon. Often they draw out more."

"Then you've simply mislaid or lost one of their checks," Ector declared with certitude. "Dump out that waste paper basket and let's go through it."

The basket was duly emptied and its contents examined with microscopic

care, but without results. Besides, Hackett got down on his hands and knees and poked and prodded in vain under the desks and filing cabinets in a vain hope that a check was hidden there.

"A draft of air may have carried it out through your window," Ector suggested finally, "but that's hardly likely. Still, I'll tell the janitor to look sharp when he sweeps up."

"But what shall I do?" Hackett asked in despair.

"Do, what can you do?" the cashier answered. "You couldn't make that big a mistake in change and you haven't duplicated a deposit of that size. The only thing I can think of is for you to try and make a list of all the thousand dollar items and see if you have overlooked one."

"I won't be able to sleep a wink to-night, Mr. Ector."

"Well, you may be able to ferret it out, then," so the other consoled him. "I've often done that, I know. I'll bet you that in the morning you'll have the laugh on yourself for some foolish oversight or other."

"Well, I certainly hope so," Hackett ejaculated fervently. "Twelve years in that cage and never anything like this before."

"Forget it, Jimmy," and the cashier slapped him on the back in friendly fashion. "We all make them, and generally find them, too. That's the best part."

But the morning did not bring the promised relief. Instead, Hackett entered his cage pale and shaken and the other six tellers were in little better frame. The phenomenal loss had been whispered about the bank and each man wondered if it would be his turn that day. The result was that all the tellers worked over time that evening adjusting numerous little mistakes that under ordinary circumstances would never have occurred.

All of them, however, were able to eventually reduce their errors to a matter of a few cents, except teller number one.

Ector walked down the passageway back of the cages at five-thirty to find them all empty save Hackett's. Here he paused.

"How's it coming, Jimmy?" he called out.

Teller number one turned a face ashen with terror toward the cashier.

"Short again," he croaked.

"You don't mean it?" Ector ejaculated.

"Yes sir—" Hackett faltered. "Five hundred dollars. I'm all in, Ector. I've checked and rechecked, and it's lost, that's all there is to it."

With shaking fingers, the teller unlocked his door and allowed the cashier to enter. But Ector's efforts were as fruitless as the day before. Five hundred dollars had taken wings and disappeared.

"Jimmy," Ector said finally, "you're up against a mighty smooth game of some sort."

"It must be that," Hackett nodded. "I wouldn't make two mistakes like that hand-running."

"No," Ector agreed. "It's not a question of mistakes. It's a lot deeper than that. Some shrewd scheme is being worked on you. Why, they could wreck a bank in a little while unless somebody cut across their little game."

"I don't believe that I can stand it another day," Hackett declared. "I never endured such a strain, not even when they made the run on the bank eight years ago."

"And I guess I remember *that*," Ector said feelingly. "Well, let's go home. Staying here won't help us any, I imagine. Besides, lightning won't strike *three* times in the same place, Jimmy."

And therein the cashier erred, for the evening of the third day disclosed

the unbelievable fact that teller number one was again short, this time in the sum of one thousand dollars!

A hurried meeting of the bank directors convened at nine o'clock the next morning in the office of President Wines. With them met Thomas Ector, the cashier, who quickly unfolded the inexplicable series of robberies to which the bank had been subjected in the past three days.

"Do I understand that all the losses have occurred in Hackett's cage?" one of the directors inquired.

The cashier nodded.

"How do we know, then," the director asked bluntly, "that he didn't take the money?"

"Hackett has been with us twelve years," Wines, the President, answered, "and is one of our most reliable men."

"Even at that," the director insisted, "he ought to be investigated: quietly, of course."

"I have already done so," Wines assured him. "I put Hayes, the Bankers' Association detective, on that job immediately. He has failed to uncover anything in Hackett's doings that offer even a suggestion that he's guilty. Personally, I am confident that he is above reproach."

"Then we're up against a mighty clever swindler," another director growled, "and we've got to oppose him with someone just as clever or shut up shop. This thing's bound to leak out among our customers, and then it's 'good night' to us."

"What do you suggest," Wines inquired.

"Why, get a new detective on the job, a detective with brains, too. I assume Hayes hasn't accomplished anything from what you say."

"He has done as much as a man with his limited experience could be expected to do," the President assured him. "I quite agree with you, Mr. Koontz, that

we need a man who has had dealings with the shrewdest criminals and who knows where to look for a thing of this sort. If the Board are of the same mind, I'll wire Pinkerton's at once to send us their best man."

The Board were of a mind with Director Koontz, and in a few minutes a Macedonian cry was speeding over the wires to the Pinkerton Agency at Chicago.

II

It was Thursday morning, and the message reached the Chicago office just as Dan Cheever entered the room to inquire what assignment awaited him. The chief tore open the yellow envelope and read the message, then turned to eye the detective.

"Ever been in Wallula, Dan?" he asked shortly.

"Why Wallula, chief?" the detective countered.

"Because that's where your bill of lading will land you," the other grunted. "Some outsider is declaring dividends on a bank of that city by the sea, and the stockholders are jealous. I haven't one of the office boys loose," he chuckled, "so I nominate you."

"Thanks, chief," Cheever said dryly. "I suppose they didn't exude much information in that telegram."

"No, Dan. It's chiefly compounded of yells for help. Guess you can get there in a couple of days if you gallop around."

"You telegraph the gazelles that I'll be there, chief—" He paused to skin over a railway timetable, "on the nine-fifteen Saturday morning. So long."

"So long, Dan, and your usual good luck to you."

When Cheever swung down from the nine-fifteen that Saturday morning, he found Director Koontz on the lookout for him.

"They sent me down to meet you," Koontz explained, "for fear the criminals might be on the lookout and spot one of the regular men from the bank."

"Good idea that, Mr. Koontz," the detective chuckled. "I infer from that that the papers haven't published the good tidings that you've called in an outside man."

"Not yet, Mr. Cheever," Koontz nodded emphatically. "We're going to wait till you catch the criminals."

"Be patient," Cheever counselled him. "Maybe we'll never catch them."

"You'd better," Koontz growled, "if the bank is to be kept solvent."

Koontz let the detective into the bank by a private door, and introduced him at once to the President, Samuel Wines.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Wines?" Cheever inquired.

"If we knew exactly," the other answered earnestly, "we'd be in a better position to end it. Your presence here proves our utter helplessness."

"Well, suppose you tell me everything from the very start," Cheever suggested. "Give me the facts, I'll fill in the theory by and by."

Wines was a man accustomed to brevity and he was not long in laying the main features of the remarkable series of robberies before the detective.

"Some mighty clever person is at work," Cheever declared thoughtfully. "Don't believe I ever struck anything that on the surface, at any rate, gave less indication as to the *how* of the robbery."

"You don't despair at the outset?" Wines inquired in some little alarm.

"No," the detective answered, "but it's a good rule to not underestimate your foe. Somebody with brains is engineering this job." Abruptly he turned to the President: "How about your employees?"

"They are reliable, I think," Wines assured him. "At least we have nothing

to indicate the contrary, Hackett in particular."

"Remember, Mr. Wines," Cheever suggested dryly, "that only good men abscond. The others don't get the chance, and even if the stealing is done from the inside, Hackett may be innocent."

"How are you going to proceed?" the President asked.

"Well, first I'll look over the bank in a general way."

The President conducted him over the building and finally led him along the aisle back of the tellers' cages. Here he halted and quietly pointed out Hackett at window number one.

He was busy sorting out his cash preparatory to the day's work and Cheever could not fail to note his pallid features nor the nervous twitching of his slender fingers.

Teller number one was plainly at the limit of his nervous energy. He might snap at any moment.

Just off from his cage was a room with a big table in the center practically occupying its entire space.

The moment the detective glimpsed this very private room and noted its proximity to Hackett's cage, he turned to Wines and asked quickly:

"What's this room?"

"The Directors'," the other answered.

"I'll use it," Cheever informed him. "Now, Mr. Wines, I want the checks from Hackett's window all brought in here. Have one of the clerks do it quietly, let's see, every half hour."

"What are you going to do with them?" Wines asked in surprise.

"Play solitaire," Cheever grinned.

"Don't you want to look over the bank any farther?"

"No, Mr. Wines, I'm satisfied. I like this room. It's private and handy, though not a good listening post. Don't let any one bother me, and don't forget to send me Hackett's checks, all of them too, every half hour. And Mr. Wines,"

he added, "the clerk won't need to open the door very wide. Just let him knock and then stick them in through the crack."

He entered the directors' room, turned on the light and closed the door, while the considerably mystified President proceeded to carry out his rather remarkable orders.

III

"WHAT do you make of him?" the cashier inquired as Wines returned to the front office.

"He puzzles me," the President answered frankly. "Right now he's preempted the directors' room."

"He's spying on the customers," Ector hazarded.

But the President shook his head doubtfully.

"He's gathering in the checks that pass through window number one; asked me to have a clerk pass them through the half-opened door, mind you."

"What's the idea?"

"I can't guess. However, he told me that he was going to play solitaire with them, or maybe he said solo. I take it from that that he didn't care to tell me just exactly what he did propose to do."

"I believe he's just beating the air, hoping that he will stumble onto something," the cashier sniffed.

"It may be," Wines agreed wearily, "but we'll give him a fair chance at any rate."

In the meantime, Cheever lighted his pipe and then quite leisurely examined the directors' quarters. It had but one door, though windows opened out, both into the lobby and onto the President's room. All were covered with tightly drawn blinds, so by switching off the light and lifting a curtain slightly Cheever was able secretly to observe the

string of customers lined up before window number one. By similar methods he could spy equally on the President's office, he also ascertained, though he tarried there but long enough to demonstrate that fact.

A knock at the door announced the arrival of the first batch of checks, and now the detective took them from the clerk's fingers and proceeded to lay them out separately on the table, face up. They formed two tolerable rows pretty well across the length of the big mahogany table, proving that Hackett's job was at least not a sinecure.

A cursory inspection showed that he was dealing with people accustomed to think in considerable sums, for Cheever found checks among them ranging up to five thousand dollars.

"Handles the big bugs," the detective grunted. "No penny-ante bunch this time, Dan."

With the checks laid out end to end, Cheever, beginning at the upper left hand corner, subjected each in turn to a careful and exacting scrutiny. To use the legal phrase, "all four corners," were examined both with the naked eye and later with the aid of a powerful reading glass. He had scarcely completed this, when the second handful of checks arrived. These in their turn were treated in the same manner as the first. By noon the top of the table was carpeted with long lines of checks, as if so many giant snowflakes had fallen and lay there still unmelted.

"Mr. Cheever," a voice which he recognized as that of President Wines called from the passageway.

The detective opened the door, and the thick eddying tobacco smoke which poured out made the President fairly gasp.

"I work best under the cover of smoke screen," Cheever grinned.

"Well, you've got a real one if I'm any judge," Wines declared with con-

viction. "I dropped round to take you to lunch."

"I'm not eating lunch, today," Cheever assured him dryly. "All I want is a drink of water."

"There's a drinking fountain back in the cloakroom yonder," and Wines jerked a thumb toward an arched doorway in the rear of the bank. "But how's this? Do detectives subsist solely on smoke?"

"When I'm on a job, I'm on the job," Cheever answered sententiously. Now he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, found a skeleton that fitted the door, locked it nonchalantly, and sauntered along to the cloakroom whistling a medley of popular airs. The President watched him in undisguised wonder till he passed out of sight, if not of sound.

In a few minutes he was back and, re-entering the room, closed the door behind him. Quite mechanically his eye swept the table with its long lines of checks, then paused abruptly in its roving contemplation. *One of the spaces was empty!*

It was the first check in the seventh line, a check for five hundred dollars he remembered, though the name of the maker eluded him. An odd name though, and one he would know if he chanced to glimpse it again. The door was locked when he returned after his brief absence. How, then, had it been removed?

Then it occurred to him that it had probably been blown from the table by the draft caused by opening the door, but a careful search failed to bring it to light.

Cheever stood up and considered the perplexing problem. After a moment he began to try the windows in turn, to at last discover that one opening out on the President's office was unlocked, though closed. Without doubt a person could have entered the room by that window.

And now as he stood there lost in this

most amazing mystery, his glance wandered again to the empty space and lingered there. A bit of ash was visible, as if flicked from the tip of a cigarette, a pale thin drift, and yet visible on the mahogany background. With a heavy glass he studied it long and carefully, finally testing it gingerly with a wet finger-tip. Then with a puzzled frown he swept this bit of evidence into an envelope and stowed it away in an inside pocket.

The bank closed at noon on Saturdays, and now Cheever, gathering up the checks, stepped out into the corridor and halted back of cage number one. Hackett was struggling with his figures, and now he turned about at the sound of the detective's footsteps, showing a pale, twitching countenance, the face of a man well gone on the road to a nervous collapse.

"Mr. Hackett," said Cheever, "you'll be short again."

"Again?" the teller stuttered.

"Yes, again, five hundred at least."

Hackett buried his face in his trembling hands.

"Is that all you can tell me?" he moaned bitterly.

"Well, not all perhaps—" But before the detective could finish he was interrupted by President Wines who had appeared unnoticed along the corridor.

"What's that you were saying, Mr. Cheever?" he broke in impulsively. "Do we stand another loss?"

"Only five hundred this time," Cheever assured him coolly. "You're getting off-lucky today."

"Lucky?" came the explosive reply.

"Yes, it might have been five thousand instead of five hundred."

"You don't seem very badly cut up over it," Wines remarked pointedly. "We could have determined that fact without bringing you clear from Chicago to tell us."

"Mr. Wines," Cheever said coldly,

"there are trains running *back* to Chicago even from Wallula, I understand."

"I didn't mean it that way, quite," Wines apologized hastily. "Of course we want you to go ahead in your own way."

"Well, I will then. I've an idea, too, that Monday will see the end of this business."

"Why do you say that?" Wines inquired hopefully.

"A thing or two I've run onto today. And that's about all I care to say about it now. Mr. Wines, I'm going to think this thing through, and I don't mind telling you that I've some things to think about."

"You won't tell us what your opinion is now, I infer," the President remarked regretfully.

The detective shook his head.

"I don't like to make guesses," he replied. "If wrong, they only occasion regret, and if correct—well, sometimes they're premature."

"Meaning that there might be a leak that would serve to warn the criminals?"

Cheever nodded. "An injudicious remark might ruin everything. I will say this, however, we're dealing with a mighty smooth article in the way of a crook."

"I can believe *that*, at any rate," Wines assured him feelingly.

"I'm going into retirement at some quiet hotel until Monday morning," Cheever informed him. "If we have luck, we'll plug the leak then. So long."

IV

AT ten o'clock Monday morning, Cheever entered the bank and strolled over to the President's room. He found that gentleman in a fine fury. He was holding in his hand a copy of the *Wallula Gateway*, the only morning paper published in the city.

"Look here, Mr. Cheever," and he

laid his trembling finger on a front-page article.

Cheever took the paper and calmly perused the article which under heavy caps hinted at certain mysterious losses suffered in the past week by the bank, ending with the information that the bank had secured the services of the great detective Cheever, who would arrive from Chicago on Tuesday to undertake an investigation of the affair.

"Why the agitation, Mr. Wines?" the detective inquired mildly.

"Why, they've given the criminal the very information that you insisted must be kept secret," Wines sputtered. "It *simply* lets the cat out of the bag."

"Nay, rather spills the beans, Mr. Wines, only they're not *our* beans this time."

"I don't understand how they got the information," Wines continued indignantly.

"Well I do," Cheever grinned. "They got it from yours truly. And now wait a minute, Mr. Wines, before you blow up. You'll notice that the paper says that I'll be on the job *Tuesday*. Well don't forget that this is merely *Monday*."

A sudden light dawned on the banker at this point.

"You're going to hurry up their final effort," he exclaimed. "I see it now."

"Just so, Mr. Wines, and somebody's due to stub a toe in the rush."

He passed on into the aisle behind the row of cages, and paused at the door of cage number one.

"Same instructions as Saturday, Hackett, except bring all checks to me every fifteen minutes," he said in low tones, "but especially watch for any large checks drawing out entire accounts. Send any of that character to me at once. And keep up your courage, Hackett," he counselled the badly shaken teller. "I think this will be your last day on the grill."

Up till the noon hour nothing out of the ordinary happened. An assistant, one Dykes, relieved Hackett for the coming hour and to him Cheever repeated the instructions already given to his predecessor. President Wines decided to imitate the detective as to luncheon that day and presently joined him in the directors' room.

"Anything of importance?" he asked.

"Not yet, Mr. Wines," Cheever answered, "but remember that the day is still young."

Soon after, Dykes knocked at the door and passed in a dozen or so checks. Cheever with methodical exactness began lining the bits of paper across the table, but paused abruptly at the fifth check.

There was nothing about it to attract attention aside from the amount, five thousand dollars, and even that was not unusual for teller number one to handle every day. But the moment the detective read the name appended to the check, Wines, who was watching his every move attentively, noted that he suddenly gripped the table with his free hand until the knuckles showed white through the brown skin.

"What is it, Mr. Cheever?" he asked quickly, but the detective instead of answering countered with another question.

"Know him?" he shot back.

"Oh yes," Wines answered, somewhat puzzled by the abrupt interrogation. "What do you find—"

But again Cheever cut him off.

"What do you know about him, Mr. Wines," he demanded. "Give me facts, not fancies, remember."

The President, somewhat ruffled, answered just a little stiffly.

"He is one of our largest individual depositors and deals in real estate largely, though I believe in a modest way buys and sells stocks and bonds."

"Know him long?"

"Three months possibly, Mr. Cheever, though I fail to see—"

"You will presently," the detective grunted.

"See what?" the other queried.

"The end of a perfect day," Cheever answered shortly.

Then he handed the check to the now thoroughly perplexed President with this surprising injunction.

"Put that away in your desk, Mr. Wines, in a very private drawer, and lock it up. Also don't let anybody see you put it away."

As the dazed banker started to obey, the detective stopped him to add:

"And I want to see the bank detective at once."

"He's in the lobby, I think," Wines replied. "I'll send him in."

When teller Number One returned from lunch Cheever met him at the door of his cage.

"I'm going to work in the back of your little shop this afternoon, Hackett," he informed the teller. "I'll be pretending to check over some figures or other, but in reality, Hackett, I'll be listening to your chatter at the window. Get me?"

"I don't know that I do entirely," Hackett admitted frankly.

"You will, presently at any rate," the detective assured him grimly. "And now Hackett, one thing more. Talk loud enough for me to hear everything, and don't let any customer leave the window without pronouncing his name loud enough *so that I can hear it distinctly.*"

Cheever busied himself in the back of the cage, while the mystified teller turned to his duties at the counter. But while the detective checked and rechecked phantom errors, he was listening with alert intentness to the bits of conversation that floated back to him.

"What's my balance, Mr. Hackett?" a man inquired presently. "I'm going over to Prescott this afternoon to pick up a block of city improvement bonds

and guess I'll have to wreck my account for a day or two."

"Just a moment, Mr. Esseltine," Hackett replied, "while I glance over our balance index."

At the name, Cheever, with well simulated carelessness, dropped a pencil to the floor, and as he straightened up with it in his fingers glanced casually at the customer framed in the teller's window.

He was a big, well-groomed man, with a keen, alert air, and that indefinable something that denotes a thorough knowledge with the world and its devious ways.

Hackett had now returned to the counter.

"A few cents over five thousand dollars, Mr. Esseltine," he informed him respectfully.

"About what I had thought," the other said as he pushed a check over to him. "I'll leave the few cents for a nest egg."

Cheever, without seeming to hurry, left the cage, passed along the aisle, and picking up his hat reached the lobby just as Esseltine turned from the teller's window, stowing a sheaf of bank notes into a big morocco-covered wallet.

Cheever, noting with satisfaction that Hayes, the bank detective, was loitering in the lobby, reached the street door a deliberate step ahead of the man with the plethoric wallet.

Here he turned suddenly and confronted the big man.

"Mr. Esseltine," he asked pleasantly, "didn't you overdraw your account a trifle just now?"

"Who are you to ask so insulting a question?" Esseltine asked coldly.

"Who am I?" the detective replied evenly. "Oh, I'm Dan Cheever of Chicago. Lucky that I got here Monday instead of Tuesday, eh, Esseltine? I see that we understand each other, which simplifies matters. You'll come quietly of course, which proves your good breeding. Hayes and I will step down

to your office with you for a little friendly chat."

V

JUST at closing time Cheever re-entered the bank and sauntered over to the President's office. Entering, he seated himself leisurely in a leather chair and, waving aside the tumbling questions with which the excited President bombarded him, asked for teller number one.

"Sit down, Hackett," the detective said genially when the teller appeared.

Then he turned on him a quizzical eye as he asked:

"How much were you short last week, remember?"

"I'd think so, Mr. Cheever," Hackett assured him gloomily. "A man isn't likely to forget four thousand dollars."

"Four thousand," Cheever mused, "plus five thousand today, makes nine thousand dollars. A tidy little sum, Hackett?"

"Five thousand today," Hackett gasped.

"Sure enough," the detective grinned amiably, "You didn't expect anything but a grandstand finish, did you?"

"I'd say," the irascible Wines flared up at this point, "that your levity is just a little misplaced, Mr. Cheever. Losing nine thousand dollars may seem a huge joke to you but most emphatically it's *not* to me."

"Losing it is not so hard," the detective chuckled, "if you get it back. See what Esseltine returns with his compliments."

Then with deliberation he drew from his pocket a roll of bills wrapped about with a bit of string and tossed it carelessly across the table to the teller.

With an inarticulate cry, Hackett seized the roll, untwisted the string, and with feverish haste thumbed over the bills.

"About nine thousand there?" Chee-

ver inquired when the count was finished.

"Just," the teller nodded, "though I can hardly believe it. It seems too good. I'm certainly a grateful man, Mr. Cheever."

"How did he get five thousand dollars today?" Wines asked excitedly.

The detective leaned back in his chair and lighted his pipe before he answered.

"Simplest thing in the world, Mr. Wines. He drew out his account twice, that's all. Once at noon, when Dykes was at the window, and a little later when Hackett got back from lunch. You see," he continued, "he was probably about ready to quit—a game like he was playing can't go on forever—and when he read that little article in the paper this morning he figured his day's work was done. And if I hadn't interfered," he added, "the bank would have been short nine thousand, permanently."

"What makes you think that," Wines inquired.

"Because it's a hundred to one bet that you'd have never even *suspected* Esseltine of the crooked work."

"With *two* of his checks in our hands, *both* of them drawing out his entire balance?" Wines sneered. "You fail to give us credit for even average intelligence, Mr. Cheever. Why, we'd have had the wires hot all over the United States within an hour after the bank closed its doors tonight."

"Provided you had two checks," Cheever said quietly.

"Why, what do you mean?" the banker exclaimed excitedly. "Didn't you say that he cashed one with Dykes and one with Hackett? When did *one* plus *one* cease to be *two*?"

"Mr. Wines," Cheever grinned cheerfully. "Your arithmetic is above par, but the simple fact remains that you now, at this present writing, have but *one* check for five thousand dollars signed by Gabriel Esseltine. And now

don't go into apoplexy just yet," he advised the banker, "but listen a moment while I propound a simple question to Hackett here."

"Hackett," said he, "a man carrying an account with this bank cashes a check at your window for one hundred dollars. Now suppose you *lose* that check in the course of the day, where would you be at night?"

"A hundred dollars short, of course," Hackett answered promptly, "but there's so little chance—"

"I said suppose you *do* lose it?" the detective cut in. "You'd be short, wouldn't you?"

Hackett nodded, dimly conscious that back of this simple question lay a whole realm of mystery which this calm-faced man had already explored.

Then with startling suddenness he turned to President Wines.

"Let me see that check I gave you for safe keeping," he demanded.

Mechanically the banker arose, unlocked an inconspicuous drawer in his private desk and reached within, then turned about slowly, empty fingers working spasmodically.

"It's gone," he croaked.

"'Where the woodbine twineth,'" Cheever quoted softly. He sat there a moment before he continued:

"Naturally you want to know how I unraveled this thing. Now you'll remember that I took the checks which passed through Hackett's window and lined them up on that table in the directors' room. And, Mr. Wines, you'll recall that when I left the room at noon Saturday, to get a drink, I locked the door after me?"

Wines nodded his remembrance.

"Well, when I came back not more than ten minutes later, I found that one of the checks had disappeared."

The President started to ask a question at this point but Cheever forestalled it.

"Wait a moment," he protested. "A careful and thorough search proved conclusively that it was not in the room. Now the door being in plain sight, I discarded it as a probable means of entrance, but I did find that this window here, which leads into the directors' room, was unlatched."

"Some employee then," Wines exclaimed, but the detective again cut him off.

"I think that is the conclusion the average man would come to," he said enigmatically, "and there was but one bit of evidence, a tiny rift of *ashes* on the spot left vacant by the removal of the check."

Abruptly he turned to Hackett.

"Ever notice any ashes mixed up in your checks?" he asked sharply.

"No—yes, I have too!" the teller fairly stuttered in his excitement.

"Mr. Cheever," Wines said with finality, "the employees of the bank are not allowed to smoke in the building, so—"

"Where there's ashes there's fire," the detective assured him dryly. "Now that little drift of ashes on the table interested me. I collected it carefully, and Sunday spent some anxious moments over it. Of course a novice can tell pipe ashes from cigarette ashes—"

"Which was it?" Wines cut in eagerly.

"Mr. Wines, it was neither."

"Neither?" the banker echoed.

Cheever leaned nearer.

"Not tobacco ashes at all, Mr. Wines, but the ash left when *paper is eaten up with certain chemicals!* You see it now of course. Esseltine cashed with you, among his others, some checks treated with powerful chemicals, whose mutual reaction was so timed that in a brief while, at least within an hour, the check literally disappeared. Hayes and I tried

the mixture at his office just before I came back this afternoon and it's odorless and colorless, with absolutely no sensation of heat or cold. It was certainly uncanny to sit there and watch a piece of paper disappear before your eyes. That explains the losses at Hackett's window. Esseltine cashed checks that were converted into ghosts of checks in short order."

"But Dykes and I by comparing notes likely would have remembered an amount as large as five thousand dollars," Hackett remarked. "He could hardly have got away."

"My guess is that he would," Cheever replied. "His flivver was at the office, and also a grip well packed with disguises and clothes, mostly workingmen's stuff. We found that his hair was false, in reality he's as bald as a cook, and he's not as fat as he pretends. A lot of that's padding! And of course he'd have treated himself first of all to a shave. At the least he'd have been out of here three hours before you'd have fixed on him as guilty and three hours is a long time for a man of his shrewdness. I think not many small-town marshals would have picked up a smooth-faced, bald-headed, not over-fat man in greasy overalls and denominated him as Gabriel Esseltine. No, Mr. Hackett, give him an hour's start even, and Gabriel would have been on his way."

Cheever glanced at his watch and knocking the ashes from his pipe got leisurely to his feet.

"I've got about half an hour to pack my collarbox and hit a train for Chicago," he remarked.

At the office door he paused.

"A dealer in phantoms, I'd call Esseltine," he chuckled. "The old boy is certainly there with bells. So long."

The Vault

By Murray Leinster

I

THE window slid up easily—too easily—and Mike waited a long time, listening, before he made a move. The whole huge pile of the factory was still. There were no lights anywhere, except that dim one by the gate through the stockade. Lying quite still in the darkness, Mike waited. There was no sound, no ringing of alarm bells, no bustle of activity anywhere. The manufacturing plant of the Whitney Jewelry & Watch Company remained as it had been before, a vast, still pile of brick, with empty-eyed windows staring blankly at the night.

And yet. . . . That window had opened very easily. Mike meditated, his little eyes gleaming in the darkness. Then he saw a tiny flicker of light in the distance. The window he had opened was at the end of a long corridor, and he saw the watchman walking unhurriedly away from him. The watchman's legs threw monstrous shadows from the lantern he carried, Mike could not see his face, but he could see the uniform and note the absolute leisure and confidence with which the man was moving. He paused, as Mike watched, and inserted his key in a watchman's clock. He turned it, registering his presence and vigilance on a strip of paper within the mechanism. Then, casually, he went on his way. In a few moments he turned a corner and was lost to sight.

Mike grinned to himself in the obscurity. With monkey-like agility he

scrambled through the open window, making no sound. Once within the walls of the factory he waited another long minute for a noise. Distant and hollow, he heard the watchman's footfalls, unhurried, methodical, as he made his round.

Then, softly, Mike lowered the window. He wore rubber-soled shoes. His eyes were those of a cat, and his ears were attuned to the slightest warning of danger, but he heard no faintest sound—not even his own footfalls—save the distant, regular steps of the watchman. The watchman wore creaky shoes.

Like some night-flying moth the intruder slipped through the corridors of the untenanted factory. All about him there were smells. Oil—that would be the delicate lathes where precious metals were worked. Once he smelled fresh paint. And there was that curious odor of freshly mopped floors. The scrub-women had come after the closing of the factory and done their work. Then he smelled faded flowers. Someone had brought them and put them in a glass of water, and they had been left.

Mike paid little or no attention to smells. The place he sought was on the second floor, in the rear—the colossal vault where all the precious things in which the factory dealt were gathered for safety during the night. He made his way there, silently. Every little while he stopped to listen for the unvarying footfalls of the watchman. They went on, unsuspecting and confident.

Through an arduous and twice inter-

rupted apprenticeship in his chosen trade—interruptions spent perforce behind stone walls—Mike had had drilled into him just two things. One was the fatality of haste. The other was the necessity for scientific, painstaking attention to detail. Therefore, Mike let his flashlight slip over the huge surface of the vault door with barely a pause. He knew the watchman would look in on it as he went downstairs. Primarily, he was looking for a place to hide during that moment.

There was a door in the room which contained the vault, but Mike was not certain but that the watchman would return through it. He swept his light around the room—keeping it low, lest it flash out through a window—and regretfully decided against remaining. He went out again, swiftly and silently, looking for a hiding-place.

He found it in a washroom, and listened from there while the watchman retraced his steps, coming downstairs again, going to the vault and throwing the glow from his lantern against it, then clumping off heavily to the lower part of the factory.

Mike emerged from hiding. He inspected the vault room with greater care. He would have to work in snatches, between visits from the watchman, and he did not want to have to tap the man on the head. There are a great many systems of burglar protection, and one very popular one signals the nearest police station when a watchman fails to ring his time clock at the appointed intervals. Mike did not desire the intrusion of the police, but he wanted a nearby niche to hide in.

The watchman's footsteps died away. Mike waited to be sure, then opened the door he had noted. To be exact, he did not quite open it. He merely turned the knob, and a heavy weight leaning against it thrust it the rest of the way open. caromed clumsily against him, and

fell with a curiously cushioned crash to the floor.

Mike's hair stood on end. In the fractional part of a split second he knew what had struck him, and he bounced into the air to alight noiselessly a full five feet away, ready for anything. But the thing lay still upon the floor, breathing.

Slowly and cautiously Mike sent a momentary dart of light at it. What he saw at once reassured him and frightened him, because it was the last thing he could possibly have expected. It was a man—which he had known—but it was a man with his hands and feet bound together with leather straps, and so entwined with ropes that he could not even writhe. There was a gag in the figure's mouth, and its eyes were staring wildly about.

Mike was still for perhaps two seconds, while his brain raced. Then he sent a tiny pencil-beam at the vault door. It was closed, solidly. No one had been before him. But there was a man bound hand and foot. . . .

The light played upon him again. He was a young man, dressed as if he were a clerk or a bookkeeper in the factory. His eyes blinked and stared imploringly at Mike. There was some message, some terrible message, that he struggled to convey, but the gag prevented him. Mike watched him for an instant in mounting uneasiness and suspicion. That window had slipped up too easily. . . .

Suddenly there was a tiny creaking, as of a board stepped upon. Mike heard it, catalogued it and had dismissed his obvious refuge in an instant. Someone was coming, softly, toward the spot. Perhaps the watchman, alarmed by the crash. He would certainly find the bound man, but it might be that he would waste precious time releasing him.

Tensely Mike swept the walls again.

He could not go out the main door. He would run into the watchman. The one door he had noted was that of a closet. There was another, close beside the back of the vault.

Dense blackness fell. A shadow but little deeper than the darkness about him, Mike flitted across the room. He vanished, utterly without sound.

Then a faint scratching sound. The bound man was struggling to release himself, struggling with a terrible desperation and a horrifying futility. Mike, crouched down in a tiny book-closet, heard it. He was keyed up to an incredible pitch, every nerve quivering like a tightly strung wire. Mike was no longer intent upon robbery. One of the first rules of your old-time safe-cracker is to go through with a job only when everything is right. Mike was as suspicious of the unexpected as any wild animal. Just now his only desire was to get away—peacefully, if possible, but to get away.

He lay still. The scent of books and dust came to his nostrils, but he did not dare make a light to see. He smelled, too, that curious, rubbery smell of new electric insulation. There were wires in the closet somewhere, newly placed. Mike lay still.

Then he felt, rather than heard, someone enter the vault-room. There was a door between him and the newcomer, but he knew the instant that the other man entered. There was a moment of silence. Mike saw an infinitely faint glow through the keyhole. Someone was using a flash.

II

FROZEN in utter stillness, Mike listened for the watchman's exclamation of astonishment at sight of the bound man on the floor. Instead, he heard only a faint murmur. Then he caught words, faintly amused.

"Just got out, Jack, eh? I heard you fall. Out of luck, though. The watchman was in the other building. I saw him go in. He didn't hear you."

Then little noises as if the helpless man were being turned over—inspected to make sure the bonds were firmly in place. Then Mike felt that the last-come man was somewhat relieved.

"Don't know how you got loose, Jack," said the voice, as before kept lowered, "but you didn't do any harm, anyhow. And the watchman won't be back for an hour yet. I'll be getting to work."

There was a sound like a groan, as if the bound man were trying to make some sound or plea; but footsteps crossed lightly to the vault.

"Wondering, Jack, who I am, or did you recognize me?" The second man had stopped before the vault door. Mike heard an infinitely faint rustling, as of thin rubber being manipulated. He guessed at rubber gloves. "I think you must've recognized me when I slugged you. Anyway, since I asked you to wait a minute after office hours and then hit you with a sandbag, you must have guessed, while you've been waiting, that I was responsible for the matter."

There was a little pause and a slight snapping sound, as if an elastic had been flicked into place.

"Yep, Jack, I'm Saunders, your boss. Don't mind telling you, now, because you're not going to split on me. I'm going to loot the same—clean, this time, and quit. By the way, Jack, I'm putting on rubber gloves, but, rather curiously, they'll leave your finger-prints on the safe knob. You see, I've done this twice before. Once I got away with a lot of bullion and a few indifferent stones. That was a year and more ago and everyone's grown careless since then. I managed to plant it so the watchman was suspected. He's in jail now. And then, once, I fixed up the

matter so that a theft of some finished stuff was discovered while I was on vacation. They never suspected me. But this time I'm going to clean out the works, all the bullion, all the stones, and tomorrow's payroll."

The unknown's voice changed, and grew intent. Mike, in the dusty little closet, could hear a muted, musical tinkle, as he spun the combination knob.

"Got your finger-prints some time ago, Jack, when you knew nothing about it. I brought 'em out, photographed them, and contrived to fix them on the ends of these rubber gloves. I've run 'em through my hair, so they'll be slightly oily, and they'll convict you completely of opening the safe. I'll have to use a microphone, myself, to hear the tumblers fall."

Mike was listening with a curious mixture of fear and indignation and curiosity. He, himself, had a microphone apparatus in his pocket, which he had intended to use. The other man had beat him to it. Mike began to revolve a misty scheme for following the other man and taking his loot away. There was a clanking as of tiny bits of metal being fitted together.

"I rather think, Jack,"—the voice became amused,—“that you're thinking of the trap that's fixed for any man who breaks into the safe. Aren't you?”—A moment of silence—“So that even if someone gets inside the vault, when he touches one of several things he'll set off a switch, have the doors swing shut and lock on him, and ring a loud bell in police headquarters? I suggested that, Jack, and I was the one who was strong for the bell. I told 'em a burglar would be smothered in here in two hours, but with the doors closing fast on him to catch him, the police could get here, let him out and save his life, and catch him with the goods. But you forget there's a switch to run that burglar-trap on.”

Mike, listening, found himself sud-

denly cold all over. If he had opened the huge vault,—as he was confident he could do,—he would never have thought of anything like that! He would have gone in, only anxious to secure his loot and depart before the watchman's return. With luck, he would have been able, he thought, to get the big doors closed so his burglary would have gone unnoticed until morning. But when he went in, he would have touched one of a number of concealed springs. The huge doors would have swung to, relentlessly, upon him. He would have been trapped in an air-tight tomb, to batter futilely at the armor-plate barriers until the police came.

He was to get another shock.

“This afternoon, though,” said the soft voice outside, interrupted now and then by the infinitely faint musical sound of the spinning knobs, “I did a little work on that wiring. The doors will work, but the alarm won't. The police will not be notified that a burglar is caught in the vault.”

Sweat came out, cold and clammy, on Mike's skin. He would have been caught in there! He would have strangled! Hunched upon the floor of the smelly little book-closet, he shivered in uncontrollable terror from sheer horror at what he had escaped. Again he longed to get away from the factory, at any cost.

“Most through,” said the abstracted voice, outside. “Wonder why I'm telling you, Jack? You see, I need the stuff in there. Need it in my business. I'm going to take it, but I don't want to have detectives chasing around to try to find the thief. With your finger-prints on the knob, they'd look for you, of course, but you might have proved an alibi to make 'em look farther. And also, Jack, you're too damned fascinating. I was getting along pretty well with Ethel, until she met you. I want to get you out of the way. With

you dead, she'll marry me, sooner or later. I'm going to tap you on the head again, Jack, and put you in here. The doors will close on you. In the morning they'll find that you opened the vault, passed out quite a lot of stuff to a confederate, and then by accident touched off the alarm that closes the doors. A sandbag doesn't leave any sign, and I used straps to tie you up so there'll be no marks on your wrists. I've thought of pretty nearly everything, Jack. I've even taken out all the pencils and fountain pens from your pockets. I've no notion of your writing an accusation of me while you're in there; also I don't want to kill you before you go in there. I want you to show the signs of dying from—er—the natural cause of being locked in an air-tight vault. . . . Ah. . . ."

There was a series of tiny clicks, then a faint creaking. Mike, in his hiding-place, with the smell of dust and books and new-placed rubber insulation in his nostrils, knew that the great doors had swung open.

There was a pause, and the little snap of a watch-case.

"Watchman's due in half an hour. Plenty of time."

The voice stopped.

The man seemed to be listening. That was what Mike would have done. He lay utterly and completely motionless, barely breathing. He was queerly afraid of the man he had not seen. Perhaps because of that, Mike felt a sudden cramp in one of his legs, a sharp, tingling, shooting pain. He could not run on a leg like that. It might give way beneath him.

"All clear," said the voice, with a certain ghastly cheerfulness. "But in case you're thinking that I might set off the trap, Jack, I'd like to mention that after I had you neatly trussed up, I pulled out the switch. It's in that little closet back there. I shall turn it on after I've

got the stuff out—and then the doors will close on you. But first I'll tap you on the head, and put you inside."

Mike shivered. The smell of insulation. . . . The switch was in the closet in which he was hiding! In a little while more the unknown would come in where he was! Sheer panic came over Mike. It was with a terrific effort that he calmed himself, trying to figure out an escape from the inevitable struggle. The other man would open the door. He, Mike, was inside. At best there would be a struggle. At worst. . . .

III

MIKE'S whole body was bathed in sweat at the thought of himself thrown inside the vault with armor-plated doors inexorably shutting out every atom of fresh air. He clenched his teeth to keep them from chattering. The man outside took on the aspect of a monster. To Mike, he was something more or less than human. Mike might be a criminal, and could visualize,—shrinking,—the thought of killing a man in making a getaway, but not the deliberate strangling of a man in cold blood, for the covering of his tracks. That was the other man's plan.

There would have to be a struggle, a fight of some sort. Mike's leg throbbled horribly. He doubted that it would support his weight. And in an instant or two more he would inevitably be fighting. One way or another, he was bound to be in terrible danger. If he shot the other man, the pistol-shot would raise an alarm. If he did not shoot. . . .

He heard a faint thump on the floor.

"One load," said the voice outside. "Two or three more, Jack, and I'll skip." The voice, already soft, became muffled as its owner went into the vault. "Here's the payroll. Nice packet, in itself. I've a good twenty minutes left. You realize what will happen, Jack?"

I loot the vault, tap you on the head, take off your bonds and put you in here. Then I push on the switch, the doors close on you, and I get away with the stuff. In the morning they'll find you inside, and the stuff gone. Your fingerprints will be on the knobs. Inference will inevitably be that the trap got you as you were handing out the stuff to a confederate. Pretty scheme, isn't it Jack?"

The man seemed to be gloating a little over the agony of his prospective victim. Mike, struggling to massage his leg into some semblance of life and to make no noise in doing so, heard the infinitely faint sound of the bound man struggling upon the floor. He made a curious moan, utterly despairing.

"Just one more trip, Jack," said the voice, filled with a terrifying amusement. "Then I'll come back for you."

Mike's throat was dry. He feared that man he had not seen; feared him with the ultimate of terror. And in a moment or two more he would have to fight him, struggle with him.

Cold to the marrow, dry-lipped with fear, his little eyes staring, Mike started to raise himself to his feet as he heard the other man enter the vault. His leg was numb. It would barely hold his weight up. Mike's teeth began to chatter. He heard the man rummaging about inside the steel tomb. And then Mike felt a sudden agonizing pain in his back. Something jabbed cruelly into his backbone, hurting horribly. And then, with a spitting flash of bluish light, the pain ceased. But outside, there was a sudden rumbling and a cushioned crash. Then a distant, muffled scream, barely audible.

Glassy-eyed with terror, Mike flung open the door, to run. He saw a small electric lantern upon the floor, its beam directed at the two huge doors of the vault. *And they were closed!*

In the fraction of an instant Mike

knew what had happened. Rising, in the closet, he had jammed his back into the knife-switch that turned on the current for the burglar-trap. It had closed the doors, imprisoning the unknown Saunders in the air-tight vault. And he, the imprisoned man, had cut the wires that would have warned the police of his predicament.

Uttering a little gasp that was compounded of horror and fear, Mike started forward, only to have his numbed leg give way beneath him. The fall sobered him to a curious, fictitious calmness. He flashed his lamp on the bound, still figure. Its eyes were closed. The face was utterly white.

"Fainted," said Mike to himself, shakily. "Safe enough, though. . . ."

He suddenly scrambled to his feet again and ran. Through the dark hallways and down the steps he fled. He was possessed by an unreasoning terror. The window through which he had entered was open. Evidently the other man had arranged it for his own ingress. Mike fairly fell outside, and suddenly was in complete possession of himself again. With the quiet, dark night all around him, he felt secure, and he abruptly became conscious that he was carrying something in one hand. He had picked it up when his leg gave way.

He let a faint ray trickle through his fingers upon it. Then he grinned uncertainly. Evidently he had happened upon a portion of the payroll. He saw yellow backs, at any rate, with the bills in the bundle he held.

"M-my Gawd," said Mike, unevenly. "That was a shock. There've been shocks all around tonight. That feller in the vault. . . . An' the feller that fainted. . . . Say"—a thought struck him—"wonder if he'll come out of that faint in time to tell about a feller bein' in th' vault. M-my Gawd! Maybe he don't know!"

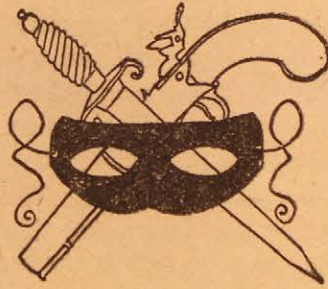
He looked back through the window he had left, his breath coming hurriedly, uneasily. He saw a faint glow a long distance away. The watchman was making his rounds again. Mike saw the confident, assured steps of the man by the light of his lantern. His legs threw monstrous shadows on the walls. He went on his way unhurriedly, reached a time-clock and extracted a key. He inserted and turned it, registering his presence and vigilance upon a strip of paper inside the mechanism.

Then, casually, he went on his way.

"Brother," Mike apostrophized the unconscious figure, "I just hadda shock. Two other fellers had their shocks. An' now, ol' top, you're in for yours. Here's hopin'."

The watchman turned a corner and was lost to sight, but his steady, even footsteps came dully to Mike's ears. He was climbing the stairs, and he wore squeaky shoes.

Mike slipped quickly and quietly away.



Murder in Haste

By John Baer

I

OF the thousands of dentists in the city, Detective Carr chose to visit Dr. Raymond K. Perry on East Forty-eighth Street. A friend had recommended Dr. Perry; that was the only reason for the detective's choice.

The doctor was a small, bald, roundish, amiable gentleman with a pleasing personality. "Harmless" was the word which immediately occurred to you the first time you saw him. Nevertheless, the detective's eyes contracted rather sharply when he shook hands with the doctor. And a momentary expression of mingled doubt and surprise clouded his face. But he resumed his nonchalance immediately.

The detective's teeth were in a very bad condition. He had several cavities and a mild case of pyorrhea. The doctor made an examination and took an X-ray photograph. An appointment for two days later was made.

The intervening day was an extraordinarily busy one for Detective Carr. He spent the time running down the history and official record of the Kirven murder case, a crime which had been committed some ten months previously. The details of this case, with which he renewed his acquaintance, may be summed up briefly as follows:

At about ten-thirty in the morning Mr. Kirven was found dead in his room with his throat cut from ear to ear. A blood-stained razor was lying beside him. The body was discovered by his housekeeper, who had come to his house to do the cleaning.

That it was murder was plain, for there were signs of a furious struggle. Nor did the identity of the murderer remain long a mystery. William Lesser, the business partner of Mr. Kirven, disappeared, and for apparent reasons.

The books of the firm of Kirven & Lesser, brokers, appeared at first to be in good order. But an investigation revealed that several transactions involving large amounts had not been recorded. Bonds and securities which had been intrusted to Lesser by the firm's clients never reached the bookkeepers for entry. It was estimated that Lesser had absconded with some two hundred thousand dollars.

The direct cause of the murder was not known, but it was assumed that Kirven had discovered his partner's treachery, had accused or perhaps threatened him and had thus brought on a quarrel.

The police, in tracing Lesser's history, discovered that three years previous to the crime he had entered Kirven's office as a clerk. He made good so quickly that Mr. Kirven took him into partnership. No clue to any fact of Lesser's life before he entered the employ of Mr. Kirven could be found.

The heirs of Mr. Kirven, a sister and a nephew, offered a reward of five hundred dollars for the capture of Lesser. But months of zealous searching bore no result. The police had only an old photograph (found among Mr. Kirven's effects) and the descriptions given by employes and clients to guide them. After several months, official interest in the case smouldered and finally lapsed altogether.

Detective Carr was one of the depart-

ment's famous camera-eye men. No disguise had as yet fooled him. He was able to penetrate almost immediately any artificial changes of appearance. He had never met the missing Lesser personally, but he had, of course, seen the pictures which had been published in the papers.

His first glance had convinced him that the man who was running a dental office on Forty-eighth Street under the name of Dr. Perry was the man who had disappeared under the name of Lesser.

And this in spite of the fact that Dr. Perry's appearance differed from Mr. Lesser's in several important respects. Lesser, to judge by his picture and the descriptions of him, was a man about five feet six in height, normal weight, clean shaven, light complected, with a thick crop of blond hair.

This description corresponded with Dr. Perry's in only one respect, the height. Dr. Perry was stout and at least thirty pounds above normal weight. He had a black mustache and goatee and was dark complected. Further, the hair on his head consisted only of a black fringe, which ran around his temples and the back of his neck. Under the circumstances, it was not strange that Detective Carr's conviction was a bit shaken and that he decided to keep his suspicions to himself until he had made a thorough investigation on his own account.

Neither of Mr. Kirven's heirs had ever seen the missing Lesser. However, the detective dug up two Kirven & Lesser employees and two of the firm's clients who had met Lesser personally a number of times. One of these men agreed to go up to Dr. Perry's office and have his teeth cleaned. The other three were posted by the detective at different times in the restaurant where the doctor took his lunch.

Three of the men were positive that

Mr. Lesser and Dr. Perry were not the same person. The fourth said:

"Well, the shape of his head is a little like Lesser's, but you couldn't get me to swear in court that they were the same person. No sir, not me."

Detective Carr then tried to get at the mystery from a different angle. He looked into Dr. Perry's past history. He discovered that Dr. Raymond K. Perry had graduated from the Horn Dental College in New York in 1914. The doctor, in accordance with the State law, had renewed his license every year. All of which was perfectly regular.

But—the doctor had rented his office on Forty-eighth Street ten months ago—or at just about the time that Mr. Lesser disappeared—and Detective Carr could find no record of his having practised his profession any time before that. Further, the records in the city bureau of taxes disclosed that Dr. Raymond K. Perry owned real estate to the value of one hundred and forty thousand dollars on East One Hundred and Fifty-seventh Street and that the property had been purchased at about the same time the doctor opened his dental office.

Dr. Perry lived on Claremont Avenue. No one at his address could shed the faintest light on his past career. He had rented the apartment ten months ago and had always been prompt in the payment of his rent. He never had visitors. When he rented the apartment he had remarked that he was living in Yonkers, but desired to live in the city in order to be closer to his office.

The detective consulted the city directories and the telephone books for the last seven years. He examined the membership lists of all the city and State dental societies. He telegraphed the national organization. He visited all the dental supply houses and manufacturers of dental instruments. The investigation yielded the name of Raymond K.

Perry but twice, and these Perrys proved to be senior and junior, with an office in Brooklyn. The Raymond K. on Forty-eighth Street was not related to them.

All this would not have been unusual if there had been evidence that Dr. Perry had lived in another State before opening his office on Forty-eighth Street. But the doctor had said he had moved down from Yonkers. That a man practising the profession of dentistry and worth upward of a hundred and forty thousand dollars could leave an absolutely recordless existence did not seem probable, and yet the most painstaking search had revealed but one fact in the career of Dr. Perry previous to his opening the Forty-eighth Street office. That fact, as has been stated, was his graduation from the dental college in 1914.

Detective Carr's weaknesses did not include the lack of persistence. He had great faith in his camera-eye quality and Dr. Perry's past—or seeming absence of a past—only stimulated his activities.

The detective began the tiresome task of canvassing those dental offices of New York City which were large enough to employ additional dentists. Carr spent eight hours every day for seven weeks at this work; but finally his quest bore fruit.

The payrolls in Dr. Kiekbush's office showed that in January, 1918, a Dr. Raymond K. Perry had been discharged for drunkenness. Nobody in the Kiekbush office recalled the appearance of Dr. Perry. Detective Carr, however, considered it significant that only one month later—February 1918—Mr. William Lesser had entered the employ of Mr. Kirven.

The chain of evidence, though circumstantial, removed all doubt from the detective's mind.

Still, although Detective Carr was perfectly convinced of Dr. Perry's guilt.

he knew that his evidence was not conclusive enough to persuade a jury. The fact that he could offer no direct identification was the weakness of his case. He felt that he had two lines of attack open to him. There was a chance that he could find some person or persons whose memory for faces was good enough to enable them to identify Dr. Perry as Mr. Lesser. His other hope lay in a direct attack upon the doctor himself.

This attack, of course, would have to be subtle. The doctor would have to be "squeezed," prodded and annoyed by a series of seemingly innocuous questions and insinuations into betraying himself by some word or act. The work on the detective's teeth was to be finished in three weeks. There were to be two appointments, each of an hour's duration, every week. Detective Carr was to have six hours more of personal contact with the suspect.

II

DETECTIVE CARR was keeping his last appointment with Dr. Perry. The doctor was putting a root canal filling into the first molar on the upper left-hand side. The "nerve" or dental pulp had been removed and it remained only to seal the cavity with gutta percha and insert the amalgum filling.

The detective was seated comfortably in the dentist's chair. Dr. Perry was standing nearby preparing his instruments.

"Not at all, Doctor," said Carr in answer to a question by the dentist. "Detective work is not nearly as exciting as it is commonly supposed to be. It's mostly dull, routine labor. Of course there are exceptions.

"I was working on a case not so long ago—quite an ordinary affair. A murder had been committed and the suspect had disappeared. My job was simply to

tramp the streets and keep my eyes open. Hard work, Doctor, and not exactly exciting. I met the fellow by accident and arrested him. But when at headquarters the man removed his hat, I received the shock of my life. The prisoner was almost completely bald and yet it had been definitely proved that five days previous—when the crime had been committed—he had a crop of long, thick, brown hair.

"But this circumstance which at first seemed to ruin our case—the prisoner of course denied he was the wanted man—eventually proved his undoing. Men don't usually lose a thick crop of hair in five days, we were sure of that. We consequently deduced that the prisoner had made himself bald by some artificial method. Rather unique, eh? You frequently hear of men disguising themselves by putting on wigs, but they seldom effect a disguise by pulling out their natural hair.

"Well, while the entire department was trying to puzzle out a way of proving that the suspect had removed his own hair, nature herself solved the mystery for us. The man was held in jail without bail. After three weeks the entire top of his head blossomed out like grass in the spring. That clinched it, of course. He confessed that he had first cut his hair short and then removed the hairs with an electric needle. This process required a couple of days, but his trick would have worked, if he could have applied the needle again on his hair as soon as it grew."

The doctor, keeping his back turned to the detective, replied:

"A unique case, Mr. Carr. You might call it a bald murder."

The detective laughed.

Then after a pause:

"We were talking last time of the murder of Mr. Kirven. Have you changed your mind and accepted my theory that the missing Mr. Lesser in all

probability remained in the city and made the bold stroke of adopting some mode of life which brings him into contact with many persons daily?"

The doctor stiffened perceptibly. "An ingenious theory, Mr. Carr. But to judge from the newspaper accounts of Mr. Lesser, he was probably not clever enough to work out so subtle a scheme."

There was little conversation after that. Dr. Perry worked in almost complete silence on the tooth until the task was completed. The detective noticed that the dentist's hands were a trifle unsteady.

Detective Carr left the office determined to proceed quickly and openly against Dr. Perry. He had reached the conclusion that he had succeeded in tormenting the doctor into such a state of "nerves" that he would be unable to stand up under a grilling at headquarters. It was Carr's intention to consult the district attorney about the advisability of obtaining a warrant for Dr. Perry's arrest.

While Carr was on his way to the district attorney's office both of his shoe laces became loosened. He bent over to tie them. He held his head down for several minutes.

Then, just as Detective Carr entered the district attorney's office, a strange phenomenon occurred. The detective was suddenly seized with a convulsion; he fell to the floor and his body became rigid.

A doctor was immediately summoned, but although Carr lived for almost an hour and a half, he could not be again brought to consciousness.

The symptoms—the rigid muscles, the stiffness at the back of the neck, the asphyxia, the wide open and fixed eyes, the *risus sardonicus* (drawn aside mouth)—convinced the doctor that Detective Carr had been poisoned with strychnine. The post-mortem investigation, however, only added another

element of mystery to the tragedy. A chemical analysis of the stomach contents showed positively that no strychnine was present.

If the doctor's diagnosis proved to be correct, it followed that strychnine must have been injected by a hypodermic syringe. But no needle was found on the dead man. It was also not clear why Carr—assuming it was suicide—had gone about it in this queer fashion. Symptoms of strychnine poisoning usually appear within twenty minutes or less after the poison is taken. Where had Detective Carr been before he came to the attorney's office? Before the mystery could be solved that question had to be answered.

III

DR. RAYMOND K. PERRY experienced a queer feeling even during the first visit of Detective Carr. He had the premonition that the detective had penetrated his disguise. When, a few days later, the dentist was visited by a former client of Lesser & Kirven—who came ostensibly to have his teeth cleaned—Perry's fears increased.

A short time after, three of the former clients of Lesser & Kirven were in the restaurant in which the detective took his lunch. Dr. Perry was then certain.

Detective Carr had identified him as the missing William Lesser. Dr. Perry knew that his arrest was imminent. Had any doubts remained, the actions of the detective himself would have cleared them away. The detective began referring—casually—to the Kirven case. He somehow managed to bring up this matter during every consultation. And he spoke of artificially induced baldness as an effective means of disguise.

The doctor was aware that in the beginning the detective was a trifle uncertain, but with each visit the uncer-

tainty gradually resolved itself into conviction. Dr. Perry was in a continuous state of suspense.

It became obvious finally that the detective would arrest him. The dentist knew that an arrest would be his ruin. He would be unable to account for any of his actions previous to the last ten months. And if they held him in jail without bail—as is customary in murder indictments—his hair would start growing and that would expose him.

The dentist, of course, could have fled. But that would be equivalent to a confession of guilt. He would invite a man hunt. Also he would have to sacrifice all the money he had gained by the murder of Kirven. This money was tied up in real estate. If he attempted to make a sale, he would be merely inviting immediate arrest.

There seemed to be but one other alternative. From the fact that he was never shadowed, the dentist reasoned that Detective Carr had not mentioned his suspicions to any other police officials. There was every indication that only Detective Carr was privy to the secret.

If, therefore, a way could be found to dispose of Detective Carr, the *status quo* would be maintained and Dr. Perry could keep living in comfort the rest of his life. As the dentist figured it, nothing could be lost by a second murder. They can't do more than electrocute a man. The murder certainly seemed to be an absolute necessity. . . .

During the detective's last visit, the dentist made him an amalgum filling for the first molar on the upper left-hand side. The dental pulp or "nerve" had been killed with arsenic and removed previously. It remained only to put in the gutta percha point, seal it with liquid gutta percha and close the top of the cavity with amalgum.

But the dentist did not use gutta percha. *Instead he inserted a paste made*

of strychnine and rammed it into the root canal. Strychnine acts rather rapidly, especially when it may be absorbed easily into the blood. The dentist was consequently in somewhat of a hurry when he put in the amalgum. He was a trifle nervous and anxious; cold-blooded murderers exist for the most part only in fiction.

He managed, however, to get the detective out of the office alive, and when that was accomplished most of his worries were over. For there seemed to be not the slightest chance that the murder could be proved against him. There would indeed be no way of proving that it was murder and not even the most careful autopsy would be likely to probe into the cavities of Detective Carr's teeth.

The X-ray pictures which Dr. Perry had taken of Detective Carr's mouth showed that the apex of the root of the molar in question extended into the antrum, which is a "pocket" extending from the nasal cavity into the bone. This is not at all an unusual condition. Dr. Perry knew that the strychnine would be absorbed into the blood by way of the antrum. Death would then be a matter of minutes. Under normal conditions it would take several hours for the action to start. By then the detective would no longer be near the dental office and the chances were that even if he lived long enough to give information, he would not associate the tooth filling with the poison.

The next morning's papers, perhaps, would have the news of the detective's death. It looked safe—absolutely safe.

IV

As Dr. Perry expected, the next morning's papers contained the news of Detective Carr's strange death, and according to the accounts, headquarters was at a loss to explain the mystery.

It was difficult to reconcile the known facts with either a murder or a suicide theory. The doctor smiled as he read the reports; they were very satisfying—to him.

He had been in his office about an hour when three men, who introduced themselves as Detective Sergeant Elm, Detective Mosher and Medical Examiner Richards called on him.

"From one of Detective Carr's friends we learned that you have been treating Carr's teeth," said Detective Sergeant Elm. "Was Carr in here yesterday for an appointment?"

Dr. Perry, afraid that a trap was being laid for him and that he would betray himself by lying, was slow to reply. "Why—I'm not sure—that is he may have been—I'll have to consult my records."

"Never mind. The point is you have been treating Detective Carr. And in that case it is extremely unlikely that Carr was receiving treatment from another dentist also."

Then after a pause:

"Do you know that Detective Carr died yesterday from strychnine poisoning?"

"No. Well, I did read something in the papers—"

"It was very mystifying—at first," interrupted Detective Sergeant Elm. "A most careful chemical analysis discovered no strychnine in the stomach. However, we found the strychnine. Does that interest you?"

The dentist flushed.

"It evidently does," said Elm. "You're a mighty clever man, Dr. Perry. However, you overlooked the fact that *strychnine poisoning causes convulsions*. You made a mighty sloppy job of filling Carr's upper molar. Murder in haste and repent at leisure; that will be a good proverb for you to remember. During Carr's fit of convulsions the amalgum filling was jarred loose and fell out of

his mouth. Detective Mosher found it this morning under the desk in the district attorney's office."

Detective Sergeant Elm took a small glass vial out of his pocket and held it out toward Dr. Perry. "Your amalgum filling is in this bottle, Doctor, *and there are traces of strychnine on it!* Also the medical examiner here afterwards found traces of the poison in the root canal of the tooth. That makes it pretty conclusive, doesn't it?"

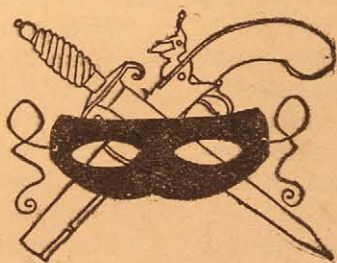
V

DETECTIVE CARR'S story of the man who had disguised himself by artificially inducing baldness was a myth. However, the official records now include the case of one Dr. Raymond K. Perry, alias William Lesser, who grew a beautiful crop of hair while awaiting his execution. Furthermore, the doctor's dark complexion paled noticeably under the regular prison baths. As for his stoutness, he had been one of those not

altogether uncommon men who can put on or take off an appreciable amount of weight by change of diet.

It was thus that Perry, after murdering Mr. Kirven, had been able to effect a great change in his appearance within a week. He had then made the bold stroke of opening a dental office and practising the profession right under the eyes of the police. Perry, it must be explained, was actually a dentist. After graduating from a dental college, he failed to make good with Dr. Kiekbush and was discharged. He then applied for a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Kirven and assumed the name of Lesser because he intended to re-enter the dental profession again and did not want it to be known that he was an ex-clerk.

Detective Carr, it transpired, had not mentioned his suspicions concerning Dr. Perry at headquarters. But after the doctor had been convicted for murdering the detective, he confessed his former crime.



A Weapon of the Law

By George W. Breuker

IT was very still in the library where Judge Lathrop sat reading. The lamp on the table at his elbow shed a soft circle of light in the centre of the room, leaving the outer edges dim and shadowy. The house was quiet. A small clock in the room had already struck one. The Judge's wife and daughter had been in bed for some hours.

At last the Judge put down the legal tome and sat thinking over what he had read. He became so lost in meditation that the door at his left was quietly opened and closed without his hearing it. Then a low cough brought him out of his abstraction. He turned and gazed at the intruder.

The man he saw standing near the door in the semi-darkness was about his own age—that is to say, somewhat over forty years. He was dressed in shabby clothes that seemed a trifle too large for him. A slouch hat was pulled down over his eyes. His right hand was thrust in the side pocket of his coat. Even in that subdued light the gleam of triumph in his eyes was only too apparent. Judge Lathrop stared at him blankly without moving a muscle.

"Well, Judge," said the man with a short, hard laugh, "can you place me?"

"We've met before, then?" asked the Judge calmly.

"Met before? That's good!" The man chuckled evilly. "You bet your life we met before!"

"Then I beg your pardon. You see, you're standing in the shadow. If you'd be good enough to turn that switch—"

The man eyed him distrustfully.

"None of your tricks, now!"

"The switch is directly behind you. You can find it without turning," the Judge went on in an even voice.

Without removing his eyes from Judge Lathrop, the man groped for the switch, found it, and flooded the room with light. Then he pushed his hat back and planted himself brazenly before the Judge, a sneering smile on his lips.

"Maybe you remember me now!"

The Judge looked him over carefully and coolly and as he turned away his eyes a look of contempt spread over his face.

"Humph! Jack Dodd, I believe you call yourself. A cheap crook, a low-down thief—scum of the earth!"

Sudden anger flared up in the man's eyes.

"You be damned careful what you say!" he said between clenched teeth.

"Five years ago I sentenced you to ten years imprisonment," continued the Judge, as if he had not heard.

"Yes," hissed the man, "and I swore then if I ever got the chance I'd get you—and get you good!"

"I suppose you escaped from jail."

"You suppose right. And I got these duds—well, never mind where I got them. Hell, we're wastin' time. I come here to get even with you, you dog!"

The Judge folded his hands and smiled.

"I hope you brought a revolver." He spoke anxiously.

The man stared at him a moment, and then brought an automatic out of his coat pocket.

"I got a gun, all right."

"And I hope you're going to kill me," said the Judge in a lifeless tone.

This time the man's jaw dropped a little. It was plain he was puzzled. Then he brought his jaws together grimly.

"That's why I'm here," he said roughly.

The Judge looked at the man with a smile of thankfulness on his face.

"Jack Dodd, fate has sent you here at the right moment!"

"Say, what are you driving at?" demanded Jack Dodd uneasily.

The Judge leaned back in his chair with his chin on his breast.

"I have a nasty, cowardly job on my hands, Mr. Jack Dodd. Now, you can do it for me."

"Dirty work, eh?" sneered Dodd. "When I'm through with you, you won't have to worry about that."

"You promise me that?" said the Judge, looking at him earnestly.

"Cut out the mystery," snapped Dodd impatiently. "What's in your bonnet?"

Again the Judge dropped his eyes to the rug. There was a pause before he spoke.

"When you entered this room," he said slowly, "I was on the point of—taking my own life!"

"What!" said Dodd in an astonished whisper.

The Judge nodded.

"Suicide is always a low thing—a coward's trick, Dodd. But now I'm saved that. You can kill me, Dodd!"

Dodd stared at him, a little taken back.

"You mean you want me to kill you?"

"If you will, Dodd," answered the Judge pleadingly.

The other made an impatient movement.

"That's bunk! Why do you want to pass out? You got everything to live for."

"Dodd, my son was arrested tonight

for embezzlement. Tomorrow the papers will be full of it. My name has never been tarnished before. The disgrace of it will be more than I can bear. I prefer to die rather than face it."

Dodd gave a laugh.

"So the Honorable Judge has a crook in his family! No wonder you ain't got the nerve to face it. The upright Judge Lathrop, all for law and order, no mercy to criminals! Cripes! that's the best revenge I've heard yet."

"Don't, don't!" moaned the Judge as he hid his face in his hands.

"Go on, suffer! Go on!" chuckled Dodd. "I'm eatin' it up."

The Judge suddenly sat up and extended his arms sidewise.

"Shoot me, Dodd!" he begged. "Put an end to it! Dodd, for God's sake—"

"Shoot you!" laughed Dodd. "I guess not! I got half a mind to stick here and make you face the music. I'd go back and do my bit with a smile on my mug if I could see you dragged in the slime."

The Judge's manner suddenly changed. He flashed a dark look at Dodd.

"You're afraid to shoot," he said in sullen anger. "You haven't got the nerve, you yellow pup!"

The prison pallor of Dodd's face went whiter, still. He pressed his lips together, but said nothing.

"You low-livered, degenerate skunk!" the Judge flung at him. "I wish I had given you twenty years."

Dodd's hand tightened on the automatic. His mouth began to twitch.

"Look out, you—" He ripped out a stinging oath.

"That's it, Dodd!" cried the Judge. "Shoot! Shoot!"

"So that's it," snarled Dodd. "Tryin' to egg me on to shoot, eh? It won't work, mister. I wouldn't shoot you now if you called me a dude!"

"Is that final, Dodd? You won't do as I ask?"

"Surest thing you know. You're going to live and get your dose o' misery."

"Then I'll do it myself!"

The Judge turned to the table at his elbow and pulled open the drawer. There in the front of the drawer lay a blued-steel revolver. Dodd, who was watching him narrowly, sprang forward with a cry as he caught sight of it. Before Judge Lathrop could get his hand on the gun in the drawer, Dodd had clapped his own hand, that held the automatic, over it.

"I tell you you got to live!" he cried, frowning down at the Judge.

The Judge returned this gaze, and for a second they measured each other with their eyes. Then, with his eyes still fastened on Dodd, the Judge suddenly gave a mighty push and jammed the table drawer shut. There was a howl of pain from Dodd, and the drawer was deep enough so one could hear the automatic fall on the wood bottom. The

Judge eased the drawer a trifle, at the same time shoving at Dodd with his foot. Dodd staggered across the room, where he stood wringing his hands in an agony of pain. The Judge quickly opened the drawer, picked up the automatic and covered Dodd with it.

"Jack Dodd," said the Judge, "the crime for which I sentenced you is one of the filthiest, vilest deeds on the criminal calendar. It will give me great pleasure to return you to your keepers."

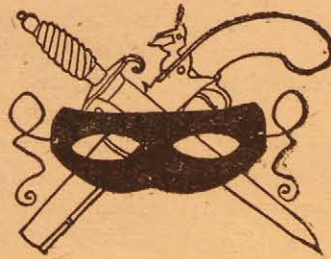
"You—you—" Dodd sputtered. "A trick, a damnable trick!"

"Yes, a trick, Dodd. There are other weapons beside firearms."

Dodd's lips curled back from his teeth with venom.

"I hope that son of yours ends in the electric chair!" And then followed a string of vile oaths.

"My dear Dodd," said the Judge as he took up the receiver to telephone the police, "I have no son."



The Monolith Hotel Mystery

By Lloyd Lonergan

IT was almost eleven o'clock on a Tuesday night, and the stately room clerk of the Monolith Hotel stood yawning behind the desk. The lobby was practically deserted, for the majority of the guests had either retired or were still at the various theatres and restaurants.

"Excuse me, but I want to pay my bill, and I'm rather in a hurry," were the words that brought Pennington Wilson out of his day dreams—or, rather, his night musings. Facing him, and tightly clasping a large handbag, was a little old man, a worried expression on his face. The clerk recognized him, smiled and bowed.

"Certainly, Mr. Henderson, certainly," he replied, in cordial tones, "The cashier will fix things up for you in a jiffy."

He crossed to the adjoining compartment, and gave the necessary orders.

"We are always Johnny-on-the-spot when it comes to taking in money, Mr. Henderson," he continued with his ready laugh, as he returned, "but I didn't know you were leaving us tonight. Thought your liner sailed at noon tomorrow."

"Of course, of course," was the nervous reply, "but, you see, some friends of mine, in—in—Brooklyn, phoned me, and naturally, of course I had to—"

The cashier came forward with the bill at this moment. Wilson glanced at the total, and then passed it over.

"Because you are checking out so late, we had to charge for the night," he explained. "Sorry, but that's the usual custom."

"Perfectly satisfactory," retorted Henderson.

He reached into his pocket and extracted a roll of bills, riffled them over, and extracted several, which he shoved across the desk. "Here you are. Don't bother about the change. Give it to the bellboys," and, with a nod, he hurried out. Wilson looked after him perplexedly, then showed relief as a husky, middle-aged man entered from the street. The clerk beckoned to him, and he approached the desk.

"Spencer, there's something queer about that chap who just went out," he whispered. "Name's Henderson; Daniel Henderson, of Minneapolis. First visit here. Booked to sail for Europe on the *Cardalia* tomorrow. Heavy baggage has all gone to the dock. Just now he ran down, checked out in a tearing hurry, with some silly story about having to go to Brooklyn. Nobody in Brooklyn is awake at this hour of the night. What do you think about it?"

"How much does he owe?" demanded the house detective alertly. "Perhaps I can head him off." He took a step toward the door, but Wilson detained him.

"He paid in full—and in cash," which caused Spencer to snort with disgust and retort, "In that case, why should we worry? What does it matter to us where he has gone, or why, so long as he is straight on the books?"

"Guess I'm more nervous than usual tonight," said the clerk apologetically. "Just the same, I didn't like the way he acted. Seemed as if he was trying to hide something. You can understand

how a man in my position gets hunches at times, but can't explain them."

"Sure thing," yawned the house detective, whose interest in the matter had now entirely subsided. "Guess I'll turn in. Had a hard day, and bed sounds good to me. Nighty-night," and he went toward the elevator, and from it directly to his room. But Spencer soon found that he was out of luck. Sleep was something he was *not* going to get. For before he had even removed his shoes the telephone rang, and an agitated voice directed him to report at room 817 as speedily as possible. He complied, and in the doorway of the designated number found Wilson awaiting him. The clerk beckoned, ushered him into the room, followed, closed the door and stood against it, gasping.

"My hunch was right!" he hysterically cried. "I know now why Henderson acted so queerly. But I never suspected! It is horrible—horrible!"

He half collapsed, and seemed on the verge of fainting. Spencer jumped to his side, put an arm about him, and led the clerk, now babbling incoherently, to a settee, where he made him as comfortable as possible.

"Pull yourself together, man," commanded the detective. "Take it easy, but tell me what's going on."

He patted his frightened companion on the shoulder. Under his ministrations the clerk regained his self-control, sat up and essayed a feeble smile.

"I'm all right now," he said. "The shock of the thing was what got me. You see, as soon as Henderson checked out, the night maid was ordered to put the room in shape. She went to the bathroom and on the floor she found—but you'll have to look for yourself. I—I—can't go on," he concluded, as he sank back again.

Spencer, absolutely devoid of nerves, crossed to the inner door, opened it, and peered into the bathroom, uttering an

exclamation as he did so. On the floor was the body of a well-dressed young woman, and a bullet wound in the side of her head showed clearly the cause of death. Spencer satisfied himself that life was extinct, emerged into the main room again, closed the bathroom door, went back to the settee, and roughly shook Wilson to attract his attention.

"The first thing to do," declared the house detective, "is to start a hue and cry for this man Henderson. The matter of motives and ways and means can wait. You'd better wait here until I can send some reliable person to relieve you. I'll attend to the important part of the work."

And he hurried out, while the clerk, a bundle of nerves in his most placid moments, moaned and sobbed, but did not dare to desert his post.

Fifteen minutes later Spencer was holding a furtive conversation in the lobby with a man who had "city detective" marked on him as plainly as if he carried a sign. Marty O'Donohue was a Headquarters sleuth and possessed the additional distinction of being a cousin and pal of Hotel Detective Spencer.

"It's lucky I located you at the club, Marty," whispered Spencer. "Here's your chance to make good, big, but you've got to cover me, of course. Remember, you just dropped in for a chin-chin on your way home, and found me about to notify the police. So you told me that while you wouldn't interfere, you'd just scout around while waiting for the precinct men. See?"

"Naw, I don't see," was the sulky response. "What's the use of letting the station guys in on this? If they fool around they may get some of the credit."

"It would cost me my job to let Captain Mahoney and his sleuths know I played favorites," Spencer retorted impatiently. "You'll get the gravy, all right, for I'm going to put you wise to a line of stuff that you must seem to find

out for yourself. Get me? Well, I happened to be at the front door when this guy Henderson left, and was lucky enough to see which taxi he picked out. 'Slimy' Foley, who's always hanging around here, was the chauffeur, and he's probably out there now, unless his trip with Henderson was a long one. Dig Foley up and you ought to get on that murderer's trail in no time."

"Thanks. That's good dope," whispered O'Donohue; then, in a louder tone, for the benefit of the loungers in the lobby, "Call up the precinct, Spencer. It's their job. Good-night."

And he walked off.

II

THE late editions of the morning papers carried brief reports of the "Monolith Mystery." The victim's identity had been established. She was a guest of the hotel, Mrs. Kenneth Johnson, who, with her husband, occupied suite 819. Johnson, it appeared, was down in the writing-room on the mezzanine floor and had known nothing of the tragedy until long after the discovery of the body. The accounts concluded with the statement that Detective Desmond, of the West Forty-seventh Street Station, was trying to locate Henderson and had several clues as to his whereabouts.

But the afternoon journals carried scareheads narrating the unusual sleuthing of Marty O'Donohue, of Headquarters. O'Donohue, it appeared, had dropped into the hotel by accident and, learning of the murder, decided to institute an immediate search for the fugitive while the trail was still hot. Scouting around, he found a taxi driver who had taken a fare from the Monolith at about 11 P.M., and left him at the Grand Central Station. Most luckily the chauffeur—his name was Foley—remembered that the red cap who had taken the passenger's baggage was a

black individual known as "Limpy Sam." "Limpy," it developed, had gone with the man to the ticket office, and recalled that he had purchased a ticket and Pullman accommodations on the 11:20 express for Buffalo. Also, an additional piece of luck, "Limpy" was ready to swear that the berth was lower 7 in car 11. This was not surprising, for "Limpy Sam," being a devotee of craps, would naturally remember the "lucky numbers."

The train had departed long before O'Donohue arrived at the station, but the detective acted with promptness and intelligent decision. He got the Albany police on the long-distance telephone and the suspect was dragged from his berth, handcuffed and led to a cell. O'Donohue hustled up to Albany on the early morning newspaper train, claimed his prisoner and got back to New York with him by noon.

The District Attorney, then in office, saw a chance to make a grandstand play. Too long had the people spoke in praise of "Jersey justice." The Monolith case was clear-cut and conclusive. It afforded a chance to establish a new record. So, while the prisoner was being arraigned in a police court on a short affidavit, the necessary witnesses were taken before the grand jury, then in session, and Daniel Henderson, indicted for murder in the first degree, was in the Tombs awaiting trial, less than eighteen hours after the body of his victim had been discovered.

It was the day of days for Marty O'Donohue and the District Attorney. Everybody forgot about Detective Desmond, and it was not known that he was still busily engaged on the case, a problem that, to all appearances, had been most brilliantly cleared up. The only person who did waste any thought on the energetic precinct detective was "Big Jim" Mahoney, the captain at that time in command at West Forty-seventh

Street. When Mahoney reached the station that Wednesday morning he found a note from Desmond saying he was working on a startling new lead in the case. Mahoney waited impatiently for his subordinate's return, scowled when he read the newspaper eulogies of Marty O'Donohue, and cursed bitterly when the extras came in with the news of Henderson's indictment. The captain went out for supper at six o'clock, and when he came back, Desmond, all one broad grin, was waiting in his office to report to him.

"Desmond, there's some tall explaining coming from you," Mahoney began savagely. "Headquarters has put it all over us on this case, and is giving us the merry laugh. What have *you* done? Nothing! What has this big stiff, Marty O'Donohue, done? Everything! Located the murderer, pinched, arraigned and indicted him, all in jig time. I wonder at your nerve in coming back here at all. A detective who falls down as bad as you have done ought to jump into the river."

"Just a minute, Cap!" interrupted the happy detective. "O'Donohue thinks he put something over on me. That false alarm at the hotel, Spencer, tipped him off, I guess. I'll attend to Spencer later. O'Donohue doesn't know he's alive. Never did know. And the joke of it is that, in this case, he's pinched the wrong man.

"Anybody with common sense would know that this poor boob, Henderson, is telling a straight story. He claims that after dinner Tuesday night he went to his room, snoozed on his bed until late, then got up, went to the bathroom, found the woman's body, got scared and beat it. That was the theory I had all along, Cap, that Henderson was just the innocent goat. And why did I feel that way? *Because, right off the bat, I suspected the victim's husband.* The story he told me when I first hit the hotel

sounded fishy, mighty fishy. He claimed he had been in the writing-room on the mezzanine floor for several hours—his wife was taking a nap and he didn't want to annoy her. That's his story. But, if Mrs. Johnson was taking a nap, why did she have on her hat when the body was found? Did you ever hear of a woman lying down and going to sleep with her hat on—unless, of course, she was drunk?"

The captain's rage had departed. He was giving close attention to the story being told him, and his interest was growing all the time.

"Your dope sounds good," he admitted, "but still," he frowned, "this Henderson bird has been indicted. Don't forget that."

"Just listen a little more, Cap," pleaded Desmond. "I'm giving you this case in order. Nailing Johnson's first lie, I naturally looked for others. On the desk at which he sat were a number of addressed and sealed letters. There were so many that it would look as if the man had been writing for hours and hours. Well, I took a peek at the top letter and read the address. It was J. M. Devereau, 95 West 46th Street. Does that suggest anything to you, Cap?"

The captain shook his head; then, as a thought struck him, he knitted his brows. Looking at Desmond, he grinned.

"I get you," he said. "The last number east of Sixth Avenue is 79 West 46th Street. That address is phony. Good work!"

"Knew it would strike you," the detective went on cheerily. "You can see, as I did, that this fellow Johnson was just *pretending* to write letters, planning in that way to establish his alibi. I didn't let on, of course, but saw to it that Johnson gave those notes to a bellboy to mail. Then I got them away from the kid, steamed them open, and found,

as I suspected, that *the sheets inside were blank.*

"Of course, even then, I hadn't any clear case—just suspicions; but my side partner and I have kept a close shadow on him ever since. This afternoon Johnson came down to the desk with a big valise, told the clerk he was going to visit his lawyer, but to keep his rooms, as he would be back. We trailed our man out to the Bronx and pinched him when he got near the Sound. What do you think we found in his grip? *A floor rug, just sopping with blood stains.* And it came from the Monolith Hotel. Better than that, from Johnson's own room. The murderer is now resting in one of our best little cells, and we have all night to chat with him, for we don't need to take him to court until the morning."

"Did he confess?" asked the captain with interest.

"Not fully," was the reluctant reply. "His story is that he went into the room and found his wife dead upon the rug. Like Henderson, he lost his nerve. Strikes me both of those birds have skeletons in their mental closets. Anyway, Johnson didn't dare to raise the alarm. He remembered that the room back of their suite was one that could be thrown in with his if desired. In fact, the clerk had tried to make him take them both when he registered. The doors between the two bathrooms have locks on both sides, and on Henderson's side the lock had not been thrown on. Johnson discovered this, opened up the connecting door, dragged the body into Henderson's bathroom, locked his own side of the door, and then went downstairs to establish his alibi.

"These hotel people never like to talk, but I got some good stuff out of one of the clerks. It seems Johnson and the woman had a row during the last afternoon she was alive, and jawed so much that other guests complained, and it was

necessary to give them a quiet calldown. Don't know the nature of their spat, but in the evening the woman dined alone and went out in the street by herself, returning shortly after nine. Couldn't get any line on Johnson's movements, but it is safe to assume that he was hiding up in their rooms all the time, waiting for her to come in so he could kill her. Neither of the elevator boys remembers taking him up or down to the writing-room on the mezzanine floor. Yes, his yarn is fishy; no one will ever believe it, but it was probably the best he could think up on short notice. When we've put him over the bumps I think he'll come across all right."

III

THE above conversation took place early on the Wednesday evening. Before noon the following day Inspector of Detectives James Dineen went to the Criminal Court Building in response to an urgent call from the District Attorney. He found that official in a most unhappy mood.

"Say, Inspector, this Hotel Monolith mystery is getting all balled up," he complained with bitterness. "Captain Mahoney, of the Forty-seventh Street Station, has pinched another man and seems to have built up a fine case against him. What do you think about it?"

The Inspector grinned.

"It's got me winging, too," he admitted. "And what makes things worse is that *I* have just put a third bird in a cell, and I'd bet a lot of money that *he* is the guilty man."

"What! Another!" gasped the District Attorney.

"Correct!" replied Dineen. "Ever heard of the Beaumont Detective Agency, a snide concern run by one Buckingham Beaumont, real name Isidore Polinsky? Well, Beaumont blew into Headquarters at daybreak with a yarn that sounded good. The wife of

one J. H. Brotherton, of Toledo, Ohio, ran away some weeks ago, and Izzy was hired to locate her. Found the dame and her paramour at the Monolith, registered as Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. Yep, Johnson's really an alias. Guy in real life is James Willoughby, a rich loafer of Toledo. When Beaumont ran them down he notified Brotherton by wire, and he took the first train east. The surprising thing is that he immediately paid off the detectives, saying he would attend to the rest himself. Wouldn't listen to arguments that he would need corroborative evidence if he meant to sue for a divorce. Beaumont is a wise guy, though, and he had Brotherton shadowed. At ten-ten the night of the murder the wronged husband was seen to slip quietly into the Monolith. Presumption is that he stole up to the room and killed his erring wife.

"We pinched him, of course; found him at the Astor, and he said he'd never have been dragged into the case if he had paid Beaumont the blackmailing sum he demanded. Guess that part of his story is true. Quizzed about the tragedy, he admits going to the hotel, but says that when he found the door unlocked and entered the room the place was empty, so he figured that the couple had gone to some show, and went outside to wait for them.

"There is one very strong point against him, a point that will send him to the electric chair. In his pocket we found a revolver, loaded, but *with one used cartridge, and of the same calibre as the one that killed the woman.* He says he fired the cartridge, and a lot of others, at some shooting gallery over on the East Side, but he couldn't remember the location. I've had Brotherton in my office, grilling him all the morning, and was convinced that it is a dead open-and-shut case against him. In fact, I was just about to send him to court when you called me up."

The District Attorney gasped, and sank back into his chair.

"I don't know what to do," he finally confessed. "To tell the truth, it looks to me as if *all* of these three men are guilty, but it is also equally clear that if one of them is the murderer, the others are innocent. I don't know who to hold or who to set free. Haven't you any suggestions to make?"

"The only thing to do is to let matters drift," was the reply. "We'll keep all of them in jail until things clear a little."

"But we can't," protested the District Attorney. "They'll be suing out writs of *habeas corpus*, with a chance of going free when a hearing was held."

"These birds haven't a Chinaman's chance of getting out of jail," declared the Inspector with emphasis. "Because why? Because we have other charges against them. I understand now why Henderson ran away as he did. Wasn't afraid of the murder charge, but didn't want to attract police attention. You see, we identified him this morning. Henderson is Dwight Harrison, the fugitive cashier of a National Bank in Osoto, Iowa. Left the bank's depositors in mourning and without funds some weeks ago. I'm keeping his identity a secret until we decide we don't want to try him on that murder indictment. Then as for Willoughby, alias Johnson, he can't deny that he ran away with a woman in Ohio and brought her to New York. The Mann White Slave Act covers his case. Brotherton has trouble ahead, too. He carried a revolver without a permit, so is liable under the Sullivan Law. Yes, they'll all stay with us for a while. In the meantime I'll get everybody busy and see what we can dig up."

IV

As they say in the movies, the scene

shifts to "One Week Later." Inspector Dineen, in his office, received word that Tom Halloran wanted to see him, and promptly ordered that he be admitted. Halloran was on the retired list of police captains, and Dineen, in his younger days had served under the veteran and always respected and admired him. So he greeted his caller cordially and then looked inquiringly at the young man in civilian clothes who accompanied him.

"My nephew, Neil Mooney," explained Halloran. "A harness bull in the Forty-seventh Street Station. Brightest youngster in town, Jimmy. You need him on your staff. He's a real, honest-to-God detective."

The inspector shook his head.

"Sorry, my staff is full, Cap," he replied. "I'd make an exception to oblige you, if I could, but it isn't possible. I'd be panned by the Commissioner if I let personal friendship sway me."

"But, Jimmy," protested Halloran, "I'm not asking you to do me a favor. I'm doing *you* the favor. Listen, now. Have your bright boys solved that Hotel Monolith murder case?"

"Not yet," admitted the Inspector; "but we are working hard on it."

"Your worries are over on that particular case," declared Halloran, his face one broad smile. "This bright young nephew of mine has cleaned it up."

Then, turning to his companion, he commanded: "Tell him all about it, Neil. I know Jimmy. He'll be glad to listen to you."

"Well, Inspector," diffidently began the young man, "I've always been ambitious to become a detective, and with that end in view I have tried to cultivate a memory for faces. Until I went on vacation a week ago my beat took in the Hotel Monolith. Had the trick from 4 P.M. to midnight. I saw the newspaper pictures of this Mrs. Johnson, and they looked familiar, although I couldn't place her at first. I puzzled

over the matter for a while and then I remembered. From the street one can look into the hotel dining-room, and I had seen this Mrs. Johnson eating there on several occasions, for she nearly always had a window table. And, as I tried to recall more about her, the fact struck me that she always wore a display of jewels. They looked as if they were worth a lot, but after her murder there was no mention of them."

"None of my men ever got onto that fact," interrupted the Inspector.

"It wasn't their fault—just my good luck," was Mooney's generous response. "Had they known as much as I did, undoubtedly the idea would have struck them that some clever crook had seen the jewels while she sat in the dining-room, just as I had seen them. So I decided to test the theory that a criminal had forced his way into the room, been surprised by the unfortunate lady while at work, and had killed her to make a getaway. Of course this was only an idea of mine, based on the assumption that all three of the men under arrest had told absolutely true stories.

"From the brief glances I had secured at this jewelry, I was aware that several of the pieces were odd and unusual designs, and I sketched them out, roughly, from memory." He reached in his pocket and produced a few sheets of scratch paper with rudely drawn designs. "Of course, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but I spent my vacation in going around to the various hangouts where crooks congregate—coffee houses and saloons during the day, dances at night. Last evening I dropped into the gathering of the 'Jolly Merrymakers' and spotted a woman who was wearing this piece of jewelry." (Indicating one of the designs.) "Well, I kept her under close observation and found that her steady was that Wop second-story worker, 'Scar-Faced Pietro.' The rest was easy. I trailed him

to his home, down in Hell's Kitchen, forced my way in when he had gone to sleep, knocked him out after a fight, found the jewels hidden in the bed and, when Pietro saw I had the goods, he came across. The Wop had spotted the dame, just as I figured it, slipped into her room when he thought she was at the theatre, and, when she came back unexpectedly, shot her down, pocketed the jewels and walked out. All of which goes to prove that these men now under arrest are innocent and told the exact truth when they were questioned."

"Now, Jimmy, where does Sherlock Holmes get off?" gloated Halloran. "Hasn't the boy here got it all over him?"

"The most marvelous piece of brain work I ever heard of," was the Inspector's reply. "Forget what I said a while ago, Captain. Do we want him at Headquarters? I'll say we do. Young man, there's a great future for you in this department. Shake!"

V

THAT same evening, after dusk, one of the benches in Central Park was occupied by a couple apparently much interested in each other. The young man was talking, the girl listening.

"And then the Inspector took me in to see the Chief," the speaker went on, "and the Chief said all kinds of nice things. Made me a lieutenant of detectives on the spot. It's wonderful, but—Nora—I hated to do what I did. Never could have done it, only you made me promise. But all the time I wanted to tell them that the credit didn't belong to me, but to Nora Riley."

"Don't be stupid, Neil," retorted the girl. "I didn't do anything bright. Just played in luck. It was luck that I happened to be maid on that floor in the hotel; it was luck that I made a hit with that poor, lonely woman and that she showed me her jewels and talked about

them. Then, more luck, you and I happened to drop into that dance, and when I saw a girl wearing one of Mrs. Johnson's gems, why, I just gave you the tip, and the hard work that followed was all done by my Neil."

"But it wasn't fair for me to take the credit," protested Mooney.

"Why not? You and I are going to be one, and what helps you, helps me. The only way to get ahead in this world is to make people think you are smart. If you'd done as you wanted to, and told the Inspector that accident had been responsible for the solution of this crime, he would have mumbled thanks and left you to yarn away your life as a harness bull. But look what *my* way has accomplished. You're famous overnight, and in a position to do something and be somebody."

"But I'm afraid," confessed Mooney. "They're sending me to Headquarters to associate as an equal with a crowd of big, worthwhile men. How can I ever expect to make good?"

The girl bent over and patted her sweetheart on the shoulder.

"See here, Neil," she said gently, "what did these 'big men' do on the Monolith mystery? I'll tell you: The District Attorney fussed, the Chief fumed, the Inspector barked out orders, and a score of frightened detectives ran around in circles. Perhaps it isn't modest to say it, but the whole bunch were out-classed by one little Irish chambermaid and one big Irish policeman. I'm not afraid you'll fall down, dear. You've got the brains, they'll give you the chance, and you're bound to make good."

"With you to help me, Nora," replied the young man, as he put his arm about her, "with you to advise, I'm sure I'll be a captain some day."

"Captain, nothing," responded the girl laughingly. "The stars tell me I will be Mrs. Inspector Mooney before I am an old, old woman."

Exterior to the Evidence

(A Detective Novel in Five Parts.)

By J. S. Fletcher

(Author of "The Middle Temple Murder," Etc., Etc.)

PART V

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

SIR CHEVILLE is found dead at the foot of a precipice from which he was apparently hurled. Etherton, a manufacturer, who owed Cheville money, and Mrs. Stanbury, his sister-in-law, who opposed his approaching marriage to a governess because it threatened her son's inheritance, were seen near the scene of the crime by Pike, Etherton's secretary, who tries to use his information to force Letty, Etherton's daughter, to marry him. She is secretly engaged to Marston Stanbury, Cheville's heir, and scorns the clerk's advances. Two documents bearing on the motive of the murder are missing, one from the dead baronet's pocket, is the plan of Etherton's valuable invention, and the other is a will executed on the day of Sir Cheville's death in which he bequeathes 100,000 pounds to his fiancee and the rest of his estate to Marston. Marston's growing suspicion of Birch, Sir Cheville's lawyer and a former lover of the governess, is strengthened by the report of a moor ranger who saw the couple many times late at night on the moor, and on the night of the murder in particular. Pike overhears this conversation and pretending to have been an eye witness, demands 5,000 pounds of Birch for his silence. Birch, frightened, complies, but Pike who plans to hasten to America is seen entering a steamship office and is detained by the police who suspect him. He pretends to make a full confession, which implicates Birch. Meanwhile, the lost will is found in Sir Cheville's locker. The police go after Birch, who is found with the governess. She frankly confesses they were lovers and had met on the night of the murder for a last good-bye. She further tells of leaving her lover and on her homeward way of passing two men, wearing black masks, coming from the direction of the precipice!

CHAPTER XXII

The Secret

WHILE Sindal became greatly excited on seeing Bradwell Pike enter Birch's office that afternoon, and Marston showed a certain amount of curiosity, Weathershaw manifested no interest whatever. He glanced carelessly out of the window when Sindal pointed across the street, and then remarking, almost indifferently, that he must be attending to his own affairs, went off.

The first thing he did was to turn into a hotel and borrow a directory; out of this he copied in his note-book the names of certain tradesmen in Hallithwaite, some eight or nine in all, and that done he proceeded to call on one after another with the clockwork precision of a commercial traveller. It was not until he called on almost the last man on his list that he got what he wanted: with this man he was closeted for some time, and when he left him he had to race to the station to meet the express due at six o'clock from Manchester. It came

in as he hurried up the platform; a moment later, a keen-looking fellow, whose dress and appearance were that of a respectable workman in his Sunday clothes, stepped from a compartment and responded to Weathershaw's nod with a scarcely perceptible smile.

"That's right, Hartley," said Weathershaw. "I've a good deal for you to do tonight, so we'll get some dinner together. Let's find a quiet corner and I'll give you your instructions while we eat."

The two men sat side by side in a recess in the station dining-room, while Hartley took in his employer's explanations, suggestions, and instructions in silence, doing no more than nod in acquiescence or understanding.

"So now," said Weathershaw, "you know precisely what to do." He glanced at the clock which hung in front of them. "Catch the 6:45 out to Lithersdale—it's the second station up a branch line. Go straight to the place I've told you of, and make your enquiries in your own way. Later—say nine o'clock—look in at the Stanbury Arms in the village; you'll find me there. No need to tell you to keep eyes and ears open, Hartley."

Hartley responded with a quiet smile and presently went away in the direction of the booking-office; Weathershaw, remaining behind, ordered black coffee, lighted a cigar, and sat for half an hour longer, thinking. Eventually, he left the station and strolled round to Sindal's private rooms, to find the solicitor leisurely eating his bachelor dinner.

"Sir Marston gone back home?" asked Weathershaw as he dropped into a chair.

"Just after you left," answered Sindal laconically.

"Hear any more of Pike and his visit to Birch?" enquired the agent.

"Nothing!" said the solicitor. He was becoming almost as reserved as

Weathershaw himself. Nevertheless, his curiosity asserted itself. "That man of yours turned up?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Weathershaw. "Came at six o'clock."

Then, seeing that Sindal was inquisitive, he added, with a smile:

"He's already at work."

"Well, you do your work in a pretty quiet and underground fashion, I must say!" remarked Sindal. "I hope it's going to mature. I wish to goodness I knew what that infernal Pike was after this afternoon.

"If you've nothing to do this evening," remarked Weathershaw, "will you come with me up to Lithersdale? I'm going to meet my man at the Stanbury Arms at nine o'clock—he may have some news to give me. If so, I'll let you know what it is."

Sindal immediately showed interest.

"News!" he exclaimed. "Of course I'll go—I'm jolly anxious to get hold of any news relating to this affair, I can assure you!"

"All right," agreed Weathershaw. "We'll get a car about half past eight; they'll run us out in half an hour."

It was just nine o'clock when these two turned into the Stanbury Arms, an old wayside inn which stood a little way outside Lithersdale village. It was one of those places which had originally been farmstead as well as hostelry, and in it were a number of low-ceilinged, wainscoted parlors; into one of these, Sindal and his companion turned. Sindal rang a handbell which stood on the table.

"They keep particularly good ale here," he said. "Better try some—for the good of the house, anyway."

"Anything you like," answered Weathershaw indifferently. "I daresay my man will do with a glass when he comes in."

The landlord, who presently brought in a foaming jug of ale and clean

glasses, looked knowingly at Sindal as he felt in his pockets for change.

"Owt more been heard about things, Mr. Sindal?" he asked familiarly. "I expect all you lawyer gentlemen's up to t' neck in enquiries, like. It's a queer business, an' all—and theer's some strange things bein' said about it, my conscience!"

"What's being said?" asked Sindal, with a glance at Weathershaw.

"Nay, all sorts!" answered the landlord. "You know how folks talks when they come and sit i' houses like this—ivvery man 'at comes in's gotten some theory or other. Theer's them 'at says 'at neither t' police, nor t' crowner, nor any o' you lawyers hes gotten t' stick be t' right end yet—'at theer's a far greater mystery about owd Sir Chevile's death than anybody's aware on. And that's what I think."

"Does anybody suggest what the mystery is?" asked Sindal.

"Well, no, sir, I couldn't say 'at anybody does exactly that theer," answered the landlord. "But theer were a man in here this afternoon 'at laid t' law down pretty dogmatic. 'Yon owd feller weren't murdered ower that will he'd made!' says he. 'He wor made away wi' for summat at hed nowt to do wi' no wills!' 'Well, an' what?' says another man. 'Never ye mind!' says t' first chap. 'What I'm sayin's reight—ye'll see what he was slain for, i' due time—ye mark my words!' That's t' way 'at they will talk, you know, Mr. Sindal," concluded the landlord as he left the parlor.

Sindal glanced at Weathershaw when the landlord had gone.

"That's it!" he said with a grim laugh. "Talk, talk!—and never anything at the end of it. Well, going to try this fine old ale?—cold as snow!"

Weathershaw, who had been looking out of the window, suddenly moved to the door.

"A moment!" he said. "Here's my man!"

He went swiftly out to the road, and Sindal, looking after him, saw him meet Hartley, who came quietly along as if he had no other business in hand than to call at the inn. Together, the two men turned aside, and became absorbed in what was evidently an important conversation. Suddenly Weathershaw, motioning his companion to follow, turned and strode swiftly back.

"Sindal!" he exclaimed, as he came in, with Hartley on his heels. "The time's come for action! Will you ring up the police at Hallithwaite, and say that you—they don't or won't know me, so you must take responsibility—want them to send up superintendent, inspector, and a couple of men, plain-clothes men, here to the Stanbury Arms, at once. Tell them it's most urgent—I'll tell you why, after."

Sindal, carried away by Weathershaw's emphasis, started for the door. But with his hand on it, he turned, for one word.

"Arrest?" he asked.

Weathershaw was pouring out a glass of ale for Hartley. He answered with equal brevity.

"Probably!" he said.

He glanced at his man when Sindal had hurried off; Hartley, cool and unperturbed, was lifting his glass to his mouth.

"Two of 'em, then?" said Weathershaw.

"Two!" replied Hartley.

"In the same house?"

"In the same house."

"And—both at the same game?"

"So I found out!"

"We're on the right track, without doubt," said Weathershaw musingly. He pulled out his watch. "Those fellows can get up here before ten," he added. "It'll be about dark by that time, and so—"

Sindal came hurrying back.

"I say!" he said. "Marrows, the superintendent, and Calvert, the inspector, are here in the village now—they're at the vicarage. I'll run along there and fetch them. Two other men are coming straight up. Look here!—am I to tell Marrows anything until—"

"Leave it to me!" broke in Weathershaw. "Get him and Calvert here, if you can, at once. Then—I'll explain. Where's that telephone?—I want to ask Sir Marston to run down here."

Sindal led him into the hall, pointed out the telephone at the end of it, and then leaving the house ran along to the vicarage. And in his excitement on bursting into the Vicar's study, he did not at first notice that Birch was there, and when, turning to look round, he saw him, he was still so engrossed by the needs of the moment that he failed to connect the presence of his brother-solicitor with that of the police.

"Come away at once, Marrows!" he repeated. "Both of you!—you're wanted."

But Marrows was as cool as Sindal was excited.

"What are we wanted for, Mr. Sindal?" he asked. "We've business here, yet."

Even then Sindal made no guess at what was happening. His sole concern was to get the police to Weathershaw.

"The fact is," he said, seeing that an explanation was necessary before the superintendent would move—"the fact is, Sir Marston and myself have been employing a private detective in this business—Weathershaw, of Manchester. He's made a discovery—I can't tell you what it is, but I know him well enough to know that it's highly important. And he wants your official help—just now. He wants you to arrest somebody. Two of your men are coming up now, from town."

Marrows, who had listened to this

with evident astonishment, glanced at Calvert and then turned again to Sindal.

"Just step outside a minute, Mr. Sindal," he said. "We'll join you presently. Now, Mr. Birch," he went on, when Sindal had gone out into the hall, "you've heard that? I hope there's something in it, for your sake—for to tell you the truth, I was just going to tell you and Mam'selle there that you'd have to go back to Hallithwaite with me! But, as things are—will you give me your word that you'll stop here until I've seen what this new business is?"

"With the Vicar's permission," answered Birch.

The Vicar waved a hand, implying consent, and Marrows, after a moment's hesitation, signed to Calvert to follow him and joined Sindal.

"Do you know any more than you've told us, Mr. Sindal?" he asked, as all three hurried down the road toward the inn. "I know this Weathershaw by reputation, but, of course, I'd no knowledge that you were employing him. What is it he's found out?"

"I've no more idea than you have," answered Sindal. But I know that he's had a theory about this affair from the time of his arrival, and I'm confident that he wouldn't want your help unless he felt sure of what his line is."

"Well, let's hope we're going to have the thing cleared up!" said Marrows. "Matters were beginning to look queer for more than one person, Mr. Sindal."

Sindal made no answer and asked no question. He hurried on and presently led his companions into the parlor at the Stanbury Arms. There, Weathershaw, Hartley, and Marston Stanbury, the latter evidently in a state of high surprise, stood whispering together on the hearthrug. All three turned as Sindal entered with the police officials, who looked with professional interest at the man who had already made his mark

as an investigator of crime. And Marrows went straight to the point.

"So this is Mr. Weathershaw, is it?" he said, with good-natured curiosity. "Pleased to meet you, sir—I've heard a good deal of you, one time or another. You want our assistance, Mr. Weathershaw? Well, now, what's the exact line you're taking?"

Weathershaw looked round at the door, which Sindal made haste to close. "This!" answered Weathershaw, as the three newcomers closed round him. "I've just explained it to Sir Marston. There's a man in this village whom I've suspected of having a good deal to do with Sir Cheville Stanbury's death ever since I began to investigate matters. I've found out certain things about him—quite sufficient to warrant his arrest. And by a piece of rare good luck, I've found out within this last hour, from my assistant here, Mr. Hartley, that the man's, on the point of leaving the neighborhood, in company with another man who is very probably his accomplice. Now, I want you to come with me to the house where these men lodge, where I'll put some questions to the man I chiefly suspect. And if things go as I think they will, I believe we shall get at the full truth before the night's over."

Marrows, who had listened with close attention to Weathershaw, glanced at Calvert when the second man was mentioned.

"You think—if your conclusions are right—that there were two men in it, Mr. Weathershaw?" he asked.

"Two, yes!" said Weathershaw. "And of the identity of one I'm pretty well certain—in fact I am, personally, quite certain. Of the second man, I'm not certain, but I'm not doubtful."

"Aye?—and who's the man you're certain about, now?" enquired the superintendent. "I know most of the folk about here. Who is he?"

Weathershaw lowered his voice as he looked round the circle of faces.

"A man named Madgwick—one of Mr. Lucas Etherton's foremen, or overlookers," he answered quietly.

There were one or two exclamations of surprise—and the most surprised man was Calvert, who, as a resident of Lithersdale, knew all its people.

"Quiet and steady a man as there is in the place!" he said. "If it is so—well, I could scarcely believe it!"

"Just so!" observed Weathershaw drily. "I think you'll have no room left for doubt, though. Well—this man lodges at a certain cottage in Marriner's Fold, and I want to get up there at once."

Marrows nodded, and the little company set out—to be joined outside by the two men who had come post-haste from Hallithwaite on Sindal's urgent summons.

CHAPTER XXIII

Marriner's Fold

By this time, night had fallen over the valley, not a clear, starlight night, but a dark, gloomy night wherein the lights of the little houses and the distant mills shone but faintly. All was quiet on the road and on the hillside up which Hartley and Calvert presently led them. Ere very long, these two, walking in advance, paused, and Calvert pointed to a group of houses lying a little off the path in a depression of the ground. Utter darkness lay over the houses, save where the glow of a lamp shone feebly through a red curtain.

"That's Marriner's Fold," whispered Calvert, as the rest came up. "That cottage where the light's showing is where Madgwick lodges—the woman's name is Beckett—widow-woman. There's a front entrance, here before us, and a back door, opening on the moor."

"Somebody must go round to that,"

said Weathershaw. "Don't let's have any attempt at escape."

Marrows came forward and took charge. Dividing his party into two sections, he sent one under Calvert to the rear of the cottage; with the other he approached the front door.

"Don't bother to knock, Calvert," he commanded. "Walk straight in, quietly, and make for that room where the light's burning. We'll do the same at this side. If there's any attempt to bolt, stick to whoever makes it."

Marston, following closely upon the heels of Marrows and Weathershaw, in company with Sindal, was struck by the strangeness of the scene on which the two parties presently converged. There had been no difficulty about entering the cottage; both doors had been open; before the occupants had time to realize that strangers were at hand, the men had stepped quickly down the low-ceilinged hall and were in the living-room. And it required but one glance to see that such a visit as that now in process had never been expected.

The room, half-parlor, half-kitchen, comfortable and warm, furnished in the homely style common to the valley, had three occupants. One, a placid-faced, elderly woman, sat in a hooded chair by the fireside knitting a gray stocking. At the table in the centre of the room sat two men quietly eating supper. One of the two men was in the act of carving the beef; the other was fishing out onions from the jar of pickles; each paused in his act, open-mouthed, as the captors crowded swiftly in. And Weathershaw, swift to note impressions, saw that while one man's face was instantly drawn into a scowl of anger, the other's grew white with fear.

Marrows went straight to the matter in hand. Before Madgwick could drop the carving knife the superintendent and Calvert were on either side of him, close to his elbows; before the other man

could put down the pickle fork the two detectives were close to him. And the first sound was a cry from the woman by the fire, who hastily dropped her knitting and rose to her feet.

"All right, missis!" said Marrows. "No harm intended to you. Now, Madgwick, my lad!" he went on. "We want some information out of you. I'd better tell you straight out—you're suspected of having something to do with this affair at Black Scar the other night. Now—keep your hands there on the table!" he exclaimed peremptorily, as Madgwick pushed the knife angrily away from him and made a show of plunging his hands into his pockets. "I don't want to search you, just yet, but I shall if you don't keep quiet. Put your hands on that table—and keep 'em there while you answer my questions."

Madgwick laid his hands on the cloth in front of him. They were steady enough, but the hands of the other man, just then bidden to do the same, trembled badly, and his face began to work. Marrows pointed to him.

"You and this man!" he said, "the two of you—here, Mrs. Beckett, what's the name of this other lodger of yours?"

"Stones, sir—Ben Stones," answered the woman, who was obviously much upset. "And a quiet enough fellow. Oh, Madgwick, whatever have you been doing with him—it's ye 'at's led him off, if—"

"Where's he work?" demanded Marrows.

"At t' Old Mill, sir; Mr. Etherton's," replied the landlady. "Same as Madgwick there does. Oh, dear me—"

"Keep quiet, missis," said Marrows. "Here, I'll ask you a few questions first. These two have been lodging with you for some time, haven't they? Aye, just so—well, now, aren't they going to leave you a bit suddenly?"

Madgwick turned his head and gave the landlady a warning frown.

"Tell him nowt!" he growled. "He's no power to ax you questions; now, at any rate. Say nowt to him—I shan't!"

"We'll see about that, my lad!" said Marrows. "Come now, missis!"

"Tak' no notice on him, I tell yer!" exclaimed Madgwick. He gave a glance of disdain at Stones and changed it to one of sullen anger as he regarded Weathershaw, who was watching him from across the table. "Ye've no power to ax questions, Marrows!" he said insolently. "I know 't' law as well as ye do. It's that theer damned feller 'at's setten ye lot on—I thowt he wor a spy when Etherton browt him into t' mill. And ye're on t' wrong game—we've nowt to do wi' t' owd man's death, and nivver had. So theer!"

"What were you and this chap doing on the moor on Monday night, with bits of cloth over your faces?" asked Marrows quietly. "That's a question you'll find it difficult to answer, my lad!"

No one knew better than Marrows that this was a shaft drawn and discharged at a venture. But it went home—Madgwick's face fell, in spite of his bravado; as for Stones, he grew paler still, and a cry half-escaped his lips. Madgwick twisted quickly in his chair and glared at him.

"Ho'd thi damned whist!" he growled. "Who says we were on t' moor wi' cloth on our faces?" he demanded, turning to the superintendent. "Ye've invented that—I know your ways!"

"Now then!" said Marrows, suddenly changing his tone to one of peremptory decision. "You were both of you packing up your clothes and things an hour ago. Where are their things, missis? Upstairs? All right—if that's the attitude you're going to take, Madgwick, I'll have your things and you taken straight off to Hallithwaite. But—I'm giving you a chance to speak because I think there's somebody behind you!"

"Tell you we've nowt to do wi' t' owd

man's death!" asserted Madgwick. "I know no more of how t' owd chap came to his end at them rocks than Sir Marston does!"

"Aye, but there's something you do know," retorted Marrows. "Come, now!"

"I know this!" said Madgwick. "I know 'at t' law doesn't allow t' police to threaten folk!"

"If there's somebody behind you, as I believe there is," said Marrows, "I'm giving you a chance to save your own necks. But if—"

A sudden strange interruption came from the other side of the table. Stones, who had never ceased to show signs of a nervousness almost amounting to terror since the entrance of the police, suddenly lost control of himself and burst into tears.

"I tell'd thee it 'ud all come out!" he blubbered, letting his head drop on his folded arms. "Tha'd far better own up, and hev done wi' it."

Madgwick's cheeks paled at that, but the pallor swiftly died away, to be replaced by an angry flush.

"Ye damned white-livered rat!" he hissed. "If I could—"

"But you can't, my lad!" interrupted Marrows, keeping a watchful eye on his man's movements. "And you'd better realize that the game's up—you're going to Hallithwaite, both of you, anyway. But if there's somebody else—"

Madgwick turned his angry face on Stones. It was evident to everybody that the younger man's nerve had gone; he continued to moan and sob and to roll his head about between his arms.

"I wish I'd brokken thy neck, Stones, afore ever I took thee on for a job like this!" said Madgwick, after a long look at his accomplice. "Damn thee for a coward! Well," he went on, raising his voice and looking defiantly at those around him, "I reckon 'at if I don't tell what there is to tell, this here feller will!

But there's not so much to tell as ye'd like to hear, Marrows, and if I do start on I shall tell nowt but t' truth. Ye can eyther believe it or not, as ye like, but—it will be t' truth. And I say again—neyther me nor Stones theer—damn him!—knows owt at all about what happened at Black Scar."

"What do you know about?" demanded Marrows.

"Pour me out a glass o' that ale!" said Madgwick coolly. "And I'll tell you. But I'll say this first, Mr. Spy!" he added, when he had drunk the ale which Calvert handed to him, "when I've finished wi' this job, whether it's at ten year end, or five year end, or twelve month end, thee look out for thisen! It's thee 'at's done it!—I mistrusted thee as soon as Etherton browt thee into t' mill! Thou'rt a sharp 'un, thou art!—thou went straight to t' root o' t' matter. He's more brains nor all ye police put together, hes that feller, Marrows," he continued, pointing at Weathershaw. "He varry soon saw where t' secret lay!"

"Well, where?" asked Marrows.

Madgwick stared defiantly at his listeners.

"Why, i' yon invention o' Lucas Etherton's!" he exclaimed. "If he hedn't started inventin' that theer machine 'at's in t' strong-room at t' Owd Mill, all this here 'ud niver ha' happened. Damn t' machine!—I wish I'd niver heerd tell on it!"

"Nor me eyther!" sobbed Stones. "What'll my owd mother say?"

Madgwick gave his accomplice a glance of scorn, and turned once more to his captors.

"Ye see," he said, evidently not displeased to be in the position of narrator, "when Etherton started makin' yon machine, t' news filtered out. Not about t' machine itself, but about t' fact 'at he wor agate o' makin' summat, and he'd hed a strong-room built for to mak' it

in. And of course it wor known 'at he did try at a similar invention some years ago, and gev' it up, so it were concluded 'at he wor makin' another start. Anyway, there's one man i' this valley 'at's known about it for some time, and he's t' man 'at's behind all this."

A dead silence followed on Madgwick's last sentence—broken at last by a groan from Stones and a question from Marrows.

"What man? Who is he?"

"I shall n't tell you till I've telled all t' tale," retorted Madgwick. "But—a man 'at iverybody knows reight well, an' all! Now then, this man began tryin' to get round me some time ago, wantin' to know what I knew about Etherton's machine, and so on, and he started hintin' at what he'd pay for t' knowledge. T' fact o' t' case is, this man hes an idea of his own, and he believes 'at Etherton's on t' same idea, and he wants to be first i' t' field, does this man, not only here, but ower yonder i' t' United States. An' it come to this—he offered me a rare lot o' brass if I could do two things. T' first wor to get into that theer strong-room secretly, and get a careful look at t' model; t' second wor to get hold o' t' drawings and specifications. Well, now, I did manage, not so long since, to get into t' strong-room, and I hed a varry careful look at t' model. But I saw it wor no good—nobody could tell exactly what that machine wor, nor how to mek' it wi'out t' papers—t' drawings and so on. And of course when I telled this man that, he wor all the more anxious 'at I should get 'em, and in t' end he made me an offer for 'em 'at nobody but a fool would ha' refused."

"How much?" demanded Marrows.

"Niver ye mind!" retorted Madgwick defiantly. "I gotten it, and it's wheer neyther ye, nor t' spy theer, nor all t' police i' t' world can get at it, whether I iver do or not! And now

I'll tell yer how I got ho'd o' t' papers. That Monday afternoon, I hed to go to Etherton's private office i' t' mill. But I heard voices in Etherton's room, so I listened a bit, and I heard talk between him and owd Sir Cheville. An' it wor just what I wanted, d'ye see?—Etherton wor talkin' to t' owd feller about t' machine, and he said he'd have to let him into t' secret. So I slipped away, and hid misen where I could see 'em go in and out o' t' strong-room, and by and by they come there, and they wor some time in it, and when they come out, Sir Cheville wor puttin' a docket o' papers in his inside breast pocket. An' I saw then how t' thing could be done."

Madgwick glanced round the ring of interested faces with something of an air of triumph—one listener, at any rate, saw that, like all criminally-minded persons, he was intensely vain and proud of his achievements.

"Nowt could be easier!" he continued. "I heerd Sir Cheville say that he were goin' into Hallithwaite for t' evenin', and 'at t' papers 'ud be safe enough in his pocket till he could look at 'em at home. Now I knew his habits—I knew he'd come home by t' last train and walk ower t' moor. An' I knew where he could easily be waylaid and relieved o' t' papers, and in such a fashion 'at nobody ud ever know who'd done it. But I wanted help—and I paid that their snivelin' hound for it—paid him well for t' job!—he's five hundred pound i' his pocket now! We went up t' moor about half past eleven, and waited for t' owd man this side o' Black Scar: waited behind a bit o' old wall, and when he came along, I gat him by t' arms, fro' behind, and Stones there took t' papers thro' his pocket. He fought and kicked—but it were all over in a minute, and we left him. We went straight away and delivered t' papers—all 'at we found, will an' all—and I arranged about payment o' my re-

ward—and I tell you 'at that's all 'at eyther me or Stones theer knows! We know nowt about how t' owd man come to fall ower Black Scar—when we'd done wi' him, we went our way, and we left him to go his. Neyther on us meddled wi' him, except to take t' papers—that's t' Gospil truth!"

"I never laid a finger on him!" blubbered the accomplice. "Nowt but snatch t' papers out o' t' inside pocket while Madgwick theer held him!"

"An'—that's all," declared Madgwick.

"Except this," said Marrows. "The man behind you! Now then, out with it!"

Madgwick looked round the group with an evil smile on his face.

"Aye!" he said. "I'll tell now! Ye'll be astonished. Sir John Arncliffe!"

CHAPTER XXIV

The Neighbor's Hearth

WEATHERSHAW, to whom the name which Madgwick has just pronounced conveyed nothing, was immediately aware that to the rest of his companions it meant more than he could account for. From Marrows, grim and official, to Marston, excited and eager, every man started and stared as if a bomb had fallen on the supper-table; each caught his breath sharply. A curious silence fell on the room, broken at last by an incredulous, contemptuous exclamation from Sindal.

"Rot!" he said.

Madgwick gave the solicitor a significant look.

"I'm tellin' yer!" he answered. "Ye'll see! That's t' man 'at's been at t' bottom o' t' job—him and no other."

Weathershaw nudged the superintendent's elbow.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"Biggest manufacturer in the district—chairman of our bench of magistrates—great man altogether," muttered

Marrows. "And—a client of Mr. Sindal's."

"And I say it's all rot—utter rot!" exclaimed Sindal, who was obviously much perturbed. "This fellow's lying!—to save himself."

"Looks like savin' myself, wi' all you chaps round me, doesn't it?" sneered Madgwick. "I'm telling you reight. Sir John wor t' man 'at set me on to this here, and 'at paid me an' all!"

"You've proof of this, Madgwick?" demanded Marrows.

"Proof?—aye, plenty o' proof if it comes to it," replied Madgwick. "I can prove it before and behind!"

"When were you paid?"

"This very day—at noon!"

"Where—and how?"

"I met him i' Hallithwaite—never mind wheer—and he paid me i' notes, accordin' to t' stippylation 'at I'd made."

"Got any of them?"

"I hev some—not so much," replied Madgwick. He pointed to Stones, who was still whimpering and bemoaning his fate. "He hes more—hes 'em on him now. Proof? Aye! An' now 'at ye know, I don't care what I tell about Arncliffe, nor what becomes on him! He were t' main agent—I wor nowt but t' cat's-paw. An' ye can do nowt much at me—nor at Stones theer. We'd nowt to do wi' t' owd man's death—we way-laid him, and took t' papers thro' him, it's true, but we did no more. It's nowt but common assault, or highway robbery, or summat o' that sort, at t' warst. An' ye'll hev to put Arncliffe i' t' dock wi' us, when all's said and done. Damn thee, spy!" he suddenly broke out, turning fiercely on Weathershaw. "If tha'd niver come on t' scene, pokin' thi nose into t' affair, nob'dy 'ud iver ha' foun' it all out!"

Marrows turned to one of the detectives.

"Run down to the village and get the two local police," he said. "And

bring those cars up here, as near as you can to this place. Calvert!" he went on. "Take these chaps and their belongings down to the town when you've got this extra help—one in each car. As for the rest—"

He motioned Weathershaw to come close to him.

"I believe what this fellow's let out!" he whispered. "It explains everything, to me. Wait till these men are off, and then—then we'll tackle the man that put them up to it."

Ten minutes later, when the captives had been carried off, Marrows led his reduced party outside the cottage. The moon had risen over the shoulder of the moors while they were busied inside, and in its light the superintendent's face showed itself unusually grave as he turned to his companions.

"This is a bad business!" he said in a low voice. "Worst business I've ever known since I came here—and I've been here thirty years. Sir John Arncliffe, of all men!"

"It's all bosh, Marrows!" exclaimed Sindal angrily. "I don't believe a word of it! That fellow's invented it."

Marrows quietly tapped the solicitor's arm and at the same time gave a knowing look at Marston and Weathershaw, standing by.

"Mr. Sindal!" he said, in a voice full of conviction. "Yon fellow wasn't inventing anything. He just knew the game was up, and naturally, he turned on the originator. I believe every word that Madgwick's told us. Look you here, Mr. Sindal," he went on, as the solicitor showed signs of impatience, "some of us have pretty good memories. And—this isn't the first time I've heard of Sir John Arncliffe's trying to pick other people's brains! You've heard something of that sort, too, if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Sindal—come, now! What about that affair of poor young Wilson's, some years ago?"

"Nothing but rumor!" said Sindal.

"A good many folks, in a position to know, say it was more than rumor," retorted Marrows. "They say it was fact!"

"What was it?" asked Weathershaw.

"I'll tell you," replied Marrows. "Sir John Arncliffe, as I said, is the biggest manufacturer in these parts, and he's always been known as an inventor, too. Now, some years ago, he'd a very smart, promising young chap in his mill who, in his spare time, invented a machine out of which he expected to make his fortune. He was fool enough, when he'd got the thing finished, to take it one day to Sir John in his private office—Sir John bade him leave it and he'd see what could be done. Time passed—the lad never heard anything. Then it came out that Sir John had calmly patented that machine as his own, and he told Wilson that as he was in his employ he considered his brains were his, and threw him a cheque for some two or three hundred pounds with the remark that he ought to feel thankful for it. Now, this Wilson was a high-strung sort of chap—and he went home and shot himself! That's that story, and it makes me believe—"

"It's only one side of it!" said Sindal. "Sir John had another."

"Aye, well!" remarked Marrows. "I'm going to know what Sir John's got to say to what we've just heard. Yon's his house," he continued, pointing to the lights of a large mansion which stood a little beyond Low Hall. "I'm going there at once. There's going to be no trifling in this, Mr. Sindal."

"Stop a bit!" said Sindal. "Look here!—we don't want such a scandal as this'll cause, if there's any reasonable explanation of it. Now, let me go to him—quietly. Then—"

Marston suddenly came to the front.

"No, by George!" he exclaimed. "None of that, Sindal! After what

I've heard, I agree with Marrows. Come on, Marrows!"

"Yes, I'm going, Sir Marston," assented the superintendent. "What do you say, Mr. Weathershaw?"

"If you want to know what I say," answered Weathershaw, who had listened in silence, "I say this—I don't know what we're waiting for! I haven't the least doubt of this man's guilt."

"Come along, then," said Marrows. "It's only a stone's throw."

But Sindal hung back.

"Please yourselves, then!" he said, suddenly. "I'm not going! Sir John Arncliffe's my client, and—"

He turned and walked away in the direction of the village, and Marrows glanced at his companions.

"Bread-and-butter!" he remarked significantly.

"Look here!" said Weathershaw, as they approached the gates of a big house built amidst groves of trees on a shelving edge of the moor. "A question before we go in: Is Sir John a member of the club?"

"Yes!" answered Marston. "In and out every day—spends half his time there."

"That explains it, then," observed Weathershaw. "He put Sir Cheville's will in the locker. Deep!"

"Oh, he's deep enough!" muttered Marrows. "Deep and sly. Well, now for it. See!—you gentlemen just stand back a bit while I ask at the door for him. If he's in, I'll make an excuse for all three of us to see him."

Marston and Weathershaw drew back under the trees of the avenue while Marrows went up to the front door. It opened; a man in livery appeared; after a brief conversation with him Marrows came back, a curious smile on his face.

"Not in!" he said in a whisper. "And where on earth do you think he is? At Mr. Etherton's, at Low Hall! Gad!—"

that's the height of impudence, I'm thinking. To go and call in neighborly fashion on the man whose ideas he's been thieving!"

"Come on!" growled Marston, with a certain grim determination.

Half-way up the path to Low Hall, Weathershaw called his companions to a halt.

"If Mr. Marrows has no objection," he said, "I'd like to take this part of the game in hand."

"No objection whatever," replied Marrows. "But—give us an inkling."

"Let Sir Marston take us in," continued Weathershaw. "Let him—if we find Sir John there—just say, casually, to Mr. Etherton that we've been making an enquiry or two up this way, and that we thought we'd just drop in to give him the latest news. Then—leave it to me to talk. And, while I talk, you keep your eyes on Sir John and see how he takes it."

"Aye, aye!" agreed Marrows. "I see—you'll lead up to the climax, eh? Good notion! Well, Sir Marston, you'll take us in then."

Marston quietly opened the front door, and led his companions down the thickly carpeted passage to a door at the rear of the house. He opened this without ceremony and walked in. Marrows and Weathershaw, at a sign from him, followed close on his heels and were in the room, with the door closed behind them, before its occupants had realized their presence.

It was a peaceful, domestic scene on which they entered. In his own easy-chair Etherton was smoking his favorite briar pipe; near him Letty, in another, was busied with some fancy-work; on the opposite side of the hearth a short, stout, consequential-looking man, whose mutton-chop whiskers gave him something of an aggressive air and whose eyes were small and sly, lolled back in a big lounge, fingering a long,

recently-lighted cigar. Weathershaw's glance went to him at once; somewhat to his surprise, the man showed no sign whatever of either interest or astonishment at his sudden invasion.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Etherton, looking round as the three men advanced. "What brings you here?"

"Oh, nothing particular," answered Marston, playing up to his part. "We've been making an enquiry or two round about, and we thought we'd just drop in and give you a bit of news."

"News, eh!" said Etherton, handing glasses to his guests, and pushing the cigar-box near to them. "Aye—anything fresh?"

"Weathershaw's made a few discoveries that he might tell about," said Marston, nodding at the agent.

"We were just talking about it, Sir John and I," remarked Etherton, resuming his seat. "Sir John's not so very hopeful about a complete solution. He thinks there's a good deal deep down."

Marrows gave Weathershaw a quiet kick under the table.

"A long way beneath the surface, you think, Sir John?" he asked.

"Deeper than most of you fellows would fancy," asserted Sir John, in a half-confidential, half-knowing voice. He looked round the half-circle of faces, from Marrows at the table to Marston in the corner, and winked his small right eye. "Deep business!" he said. "My impression—somebody wanted—badly—to know contents of that will? D'ye see? Somebody—clear away from the surface view of things—outsider! Eh! Will!—that's it. Will at the bottom of the whole thing. My decided belief—that!"

"You think Sir Cheville Stanbury was attacked for the sake of the will, sir?" said Weathershaw.

Sir John favored the stranger with a lofty, supercilious glance, and nodded his head.

"I do!" he answered. "Just said so!"

Weathershaw reached for the cigars, selected one, quietly lighted it, and began to smoke. He let a minute pass—in silence.

"Well, I know he wasn't!" he said suddenly, in sharp, staccato accents.

Etherton twisted round in his chair, and Letty looked up from her work. But Sir John, who, it was evident to Marrows and Weathershaw, had dined pretty freely, and was in a state of great confidence, smiled disdainfully.

"Ah, you do, do you?" he said. "Well—no offence—don't know you at all, you know—you're young! Young—and confident, eh?"

"Confident about what I know," retorted Weathershaw.

"And what's that?" asked Etherton. He was watching the detective keenly, and as he watched, he fancied that he saw a certain glance, which might have been a signal, exchanged between him and Marrows. "Sir Marston says you might tell us something?"

"Yes!" answered Weathershaw. "I can—now. But"—he paused and waved his cigar in Sir John Arncliffe's direction—"as this gentleman thinks I'm young and—as he puts it—confident, perhaps you'd better tell him, Mr. Etherton, that I've been on this job—professionally!"

"Mr. Weathershaw is a private detective," said Etherton, looking at his guest. "With a reputation!"

Sir John nodded—indulgently. Then he shook his head again.

"No good!" he said. "Too deep—deep down!"

Etherton smiled at Weathershaw.

"What do you know?" he asked.

"To start with, this," responded Weathershaw. "I know—for a fact, now—why Sir Cheville Stanbury was attacked on the night of his death. It was not for any reason but one. What

his assailants wanted was—your papers!"

CHAPTER XXV

Denounced

WEATHERSHAW let his gaze wander round to the consequential little man on the lounge as he made this announcement. And he immediately realized something which at that moment was sorely puzzling Marrows and arousing astonishment in Marston. There was not the slightest sign of surprise in Sir John Arncliffe's face, and Weathershaw suddenly knew why. Here before him was another of those men who, born schemers and plotters, cannot believe that their plans can miscarry. Sir John Arncliffe, said Weathershaw to himself, was at that moment assuring his own mind that the secret was safe between Madgwick, Stones, and himself, and would never, could never be revealed. From that point Weathershaw began to take an almost malicious pleasure in unfolding his story in the presence of the man who as yet had no suspicion that he was concerned in it.

"When I was called into this case," continued Weathershaw, "I began my work on it by reading every available account of the inquest held on Sir Cheville Stanbury. And I very quickly came to the conclusion that the true object of whoever it was that assailed Sir Cheville on his homeward way that night was, as I have just said, the papers relating to your invention. I had heard, more than once, of the efforts made by men who wished to steal the secret of a really important invention, and I was sure that in this case there was somebody, behind the scenes, who wanted, ardently, to rob you of yours!"

Weathershaw paused for a moment and looked round. He had already got the attention of his audience. But he was chiefly interested in two of its

members. Etherton had twisted round in his chair and was watching him with a puzzled frown on his face; Sir John Arncliffe was lying comfortably back against the padded lounge on which he lolled, placidly complacent, and evidently sure of his own safety.

"Now that," resumed Weathershaw, "that pre-supposed that somebody—one person, or two persons, or even more—knew that you were busy with an invention. It seemed to me that such persons must be in close touch with you; persons, probably, who were employed by you. Well, there was your clerk, Pike—from what one could gather of the evidence at the inquest, Pike seemed a likely person to suspect. And I was suspecting Pike when I called on you, heard your story, and got you to show me your strong-room, and to lend me the key of it. But at that stage, two things happened in quick succession. The fact was this—my first proceeding on getting into that strong-room was to closely examine the key you had given me, and the lock into which it fitted. If you have that key on you, Mr. Etherton, please hand it to me for a minute."

Etherton drew a key from his pocket and passed it across in silence. Weathershaw held it up.

"Now, you'll all notice," he continued, "that this key is of very intricate workmanship. As you see, it is cut out of the steel in a fashion which left what we will call niches and crevices. And I'm sure you'd never noticed it, Mr. Etherton, but in one of those crevices I, immediately on making a close inspection of the key, discovered a tiny, almost minute, fragment of wax—green, soft wax. I knew, then, that the key had been out of your possession, and that whoever had had it possessed it long enough to take an impression of it, in wax. A fragment—the merest fragment—of wax had adhered in one of the crevices—there it was!"

Once more Weathershaw paused. And now he noticed that the man in whom he was particularly concerned had removed the big cigar from his lips and was listening more attentively.

"The next thing to do," he went on, "was to find out who had taken that impression. Clearly, it was somebody who very much wanted to get into your strong-room—to see the machine. That somebody was a person about your premises. I recognized that it would probably be a very difficult matter to fasten on the right person. But here again chance favored me. You'll remember that when you took me to the floor where that strong-room is situated, you called one of your overlookers, a man named Madgwick, to you, and told him I was seeing about some alterations and was to look round where I liked. Well, after coming out, I saw a man's coat hanging on a peg. I slipped a hand into the inside pocket, found some odd scraps of paper, and some letters addressed to Madgwick, at Mrs. Beckett's, Marriner's Fold. And on at least three of the odd scraps of paper there were rough pencil sketches of the wards of a key—the very key which I held in my possession!"

"God bless my soul!" muttered Etherton. "A fellow that I'd have trusted—"

"I saw through the whole thing, then," continued Weathershaw, holding up a finger to bespeak silence and attention. "This man had got your key at some time, and had taken a wax impression of it. But he didn't dare to take that wax impression to any locksmith!—that would have been too dangerous. So what he'd done was to make a drawing of the wax model, practising it over and over again until he'd got something sufficiently accurate to work upon. And just as the cleverest and most careful criminals invariably forget some slight detail in their schemes, so

he, whose first crooked job this probably was, had forgotten to destroy the results of his practice!"

"The unexpected!" muttered Marrows. "Will come in!—many an instance of it!"

"I was certain I was on the right track then," Weathershaw went on. "And the next thing to do was to find out all I could about Madgwick. It would never have done to do this myself—I couldn't go openly, or, indeed, in any way, about Lithersdale. So I telephoned to my office in Manchester for an assistant of mine, Mr. Hartley, who's very clever at making himself up as a working man. I told Hartley to join me in Hallithwaite at once. And in the meantime, while I waited for him in the town, I went round the locksmiths there—working locksmiths, you know, some nine or ten of them—to try to find out if Madgwick had had a key made by one of their number. I hit on the man at the end of my round, a man named Nicholson, in Back Lane. I had to tell him who I was and what I was after before I could get any information from him, but he gave it freely in the end."

Weathershaw held up the key which Etherton had handed over, and professing to look at it, glanced at the man on the lounge. Sir John's cigar had gone out, but as yet Weathershaw saw no sign of fear or of anxiety in his face.

"Nicholson," continued Weathershaw, "made a duplicate of this key for Madgwick not so very long ago. Madgwick went to him with a pencil sketch of a key and asked him if he could make a key from it. He said it was for Mr. Etherton. Nicholson made a key from the drawing. Madgwick took that key back twice, to be filed at one or two points. He called again, said the key was then all right, and paid for it."

"Bless me!" said Etherton. "Couldn't have believed it!"

"But now," Weathershaw went on, "I had to think out the probable course of events. I'd no doubt that Madgwick had looked over your machine carefully. But I know that a man can't get at the secret of a machine by seeing a model. And Madgwick wanted more—he wanted the papers!—the drawings, the specifications. Now, I had a theory. It occurred to me that possibly Madgwick was in collusion with Pike. Now Pike, as I had learned, had been present, hidden behind a curtain, at the interview between you, Mr. Etherton, and Sir Cheville Stanbury, and had probably heard your talk about the machine and, further, had heard you say that you would give your papers to Sir Cheville to look through. I figured that Pike had told Madgwick of this, and that the two, knowing Sir Cheville's habits very intimately, had agreed to waylay him on his way home, and to take the papers from him. That was my theory, up to a certain time this evening."

Weathershaw paused for a moment—to take a mouthful from the glass which Etherton had placed before him on his first entrance. His movement seemed to remind Sir John Arncliffe that he, too, had a glass near him; as if mechanically, he took it up, drained its contents, and then sat, empty glass in hand, staring at Weathershaw as the agent resumed his story.

"At that point," continued Weathershaw, "my man Hartley arrived, dressed like a respectable artisan. I gave him certain information and instructions, and sent him on to Lithersdale, where, in the rôle of a man seeking lodgings, he was to go to Marriner's Fold and see if he could find out anything at all about Madgwick's movements. In company with Mr. Sindal, I followed Hartley to the village, later. He came to me at the Stanbury Arms, and told me that he'd had the best of luck already. He'd gone to Mrs. Bec-

kett's, professing that he'd heard she might have lodgings to let—she'd told him at once that she would have in a day or two, for two of her lodgers were leaving, and were at that moment packing up. She showed him the room he could have—Madgwick was even then putting his luggage together in it. Hartley had a bit of talk with him, pretending to ask how he'd liked the place; he gathered that Madgwick might be leaving next day—he'd got a much better job, he said, elsewhere. So Hartley returned to me—and I determined to act at once. Mr. Sindal had heard that Superintendent Marrows and Inspector Calvert were in the village; he fetched them to the inn; we were joined there by two detectives, and in company with Sir Marston Stanbury, for whom I'd telephoned, we all went up to Marriner's Fold."

Etherton was getting excited. He had risen from his chair and was following Weathershaw's story with approving nods of the head. And from time to time he turned to Sir John with a smile as if to invite him to join in his own approval; but Sir John by that time was watching the narrator as if something in Weathershaw's speech and manner fascinated him.

"We went straight into Mrs. Beckett's," continued Weathershaw, becoming more terse and emphatic. "Two men were there at supper: one, Madgwick; the other, a younger man, Stones. Madgwick was defiant, insolent, even certain of himself. But the other man suddenly gave way—nerves! Then Madgwick—as cool a scoundrel as ever I saw!—made a full confession. All," added Weathershaw, with a meaning look, "all but one thing!"

"What—what?" exclaimed Etherton excitedly.

"The name of the man who had been behind him!" replied Weathershaw. "I knew well enough that Madgwick

had not started this affair himself. He'd been bribed. He admitted he'd been bribed. He admitted the truth of all that I'd suspected. He and Stones had waylaid Sir Cheville, not at Black Scar, but on the moor; had taken the papers from him; had handed them over to the man who wanted them; had received their pay! They were, in a sense, cats-paws. But there was a hand behind—a man, Mr. Etherton, who was willing to do anything, pay anything, to get at your valuable secret!"

"In God's name, who?" demanded Etherton.

Sir John looked across at Weathershaw. And Weathershaw, in that glance, learned another lesson in psychology. Even now, the rich man was trusting in his riches to deliver him!—Weathershaw realized that the chief culprit was still so confident of the power of his money that he believed that the price he had paid, the price he might pay in the future, had kept and would keep his name out of the matter. And suddenly he spoke and those who knew the secret felt a sense of disgust to hear a note of sneering self-satisfaction in his voice.

"He's just told you that they wouldn't give any name!" said Sir John. "Naturally Madgwick wouldn't! Likely thing is, Etherton, my lad, that there's no name to give."

Weathershaw found Marrows's outstretched foot under the table, and gave it a quiet kick with one of his own. He rose slowly to his feet, and Marrows rose, too. So, also, did Marston.

"No!" said Weathershaw, looking across, past Etherton, to his guest. "I said Madgwick wouldn't give the name in his confession. But he gave it when his confession was finished! And—full proof! Do you want to hear it? Your name, then!—Sir John Arnelcliffe! Mr. Etherton, that's the man who has your papers! That's the man who put Sir

Cheville Stanbury's will back in the locker at the club! That's the man who's responsible—how far, God only knows!—for the old man's death! Now—let him speak!"

Etherton, as soon as Sir John's name had fallen from Weathershaw's lips, had drawn away from him; Letty had stolen up to her father's side and slipped her hands through his arm; their eyes were fixed on the accused man; so were the eyes of the other three.

"Now then?" said Etherton, at last. "You hear?"

Sir John got to his feet. There was no natural dignity in his short and stout figure, but he endeavored to look stern and magisterial.

"I'd best be going," he said. "It seems as if there was likely to be naught but insults and accusations under this roof! However, there's some of you'll hear something from my lawyer tomorrow, and—but I'll bid you good night."

"Not just yet, Sir John!" said Marrows quietly. "I know my duty! You'd far better answer a few questions, Sir John—you had, indeed! Now, about those papers?"

Weathershaw suddenly laughed; something in the sound made the ac-

cused man start and look at him with the first signs of real fear.

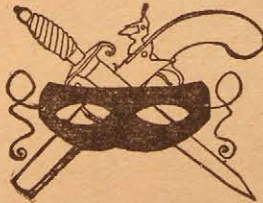
"I shouldn't wonder if he has the papers on him!" said Weathershaw. "Pity you can't search him here and now, Marrows!"

He had forgotten that there was young and impulsive blood at his elbow. Before any of them could move, Marston, whose fingers had been itching for the last few minutes, had thrust a hand into the inner pocket of Sir John's coat. Drawing out a quantity of papers, he flung them on the table, and Etherton, a second later, held up three folded documents.

"Here they are!" he said quietly.

A few minutes later, when Marrows and Weathershaw had taken Sir John Arncliffe away, and Marston and Letty had slipped off into the adjacent drawing-room, Etherton, with a look round the scene of recent action, drew back the curtains of his window, opened the casement, and leaned out to look over the moonlit valley beneath his house. His heart was full of loathing and bitterness—until he suddenly remembered that close behind him was youth and love, and that it was better to think of both than of the treachery and greed which had just been led away from his door.

(The End)



The Failure

By Harold Ward

AMOS DUNCAN paused for a second beside the time clock in the hallway just outside the offices of Carney & Kirk. Then, his heart beating like a trip hammer, he mustered up courage enough to push open the swinging doors and peep into the gloomy interior.

He was frightened—scared to the point of hysteria. Yet for thirty years he had stopped in that selfsame place in the hallway morning and noon on his way to work. For thirty years, fifty-two weeks in the year, six days a week and twice each day had he sought his number on the time clock and pushed the button which registered his comings and his departures. Instinctively—for figures were one of his hobbies—he made the calculation in his head: Eighteen thousand, seven hundred and twenty times had he pushed his way through those doors.

And never before—except possibly the first time when he had applied for a place with the firm—had he been as frightened as he was now.

For this was the first time he had ever come to rob!

Getting a grip on himself, he entered the big office on tiptoe—an office covering nearly one-fourth of a city block—yet he knew that old Bill Judkins, the watchman, would be making his rounds out in the factory at that particular hour. It was a part of his daily work to check up the dial on the night watchman's clock; he knew that the old man traveled as true to schedule as a mail train.

He halted just inside the doors and listened, his eyes taking in every one of

the familiar details. From where he stood he could discern the dark shapes of row after row of desks, each identical in size and finish with its mates. Around two sides of the big room were innumerable cubby holes of offices divided from each other by ground glass partitions extending two-thirds of the way to the ceiling. During working hours they housed the *elite* of the office world—the men and women who had pushed their heads above those of their fellows.

His own desk was second from the front in the second row from the right just inside the cashier's cage—a huge affair of wire netting and glass. It gave him renewed courage for the task ahead as he gazed upon its outlines staring at him out of the darkness. For twenty-seven years—since the day of his promotion from the office boy ranks—he had occupied that desk, or one like it, in Carney & Kirk's office, giving to Carney & Kirk the best of his manhood for starvation wages and two weeks' vacation yearly on pay. Others had gone over his head—scores of them—men no better fitted than he—young cubs with "pull" or a college education. He had long since given up hopes of promotion. He had reached the point where he was a mere cog in the machine—a fizzle and a failure.

In ninety-nine cases out of every hundred when a man goes wrong a woman is responsible. In Amos Duncan's case the woman was—*Mrs. Amos Duncan!*

A downtrodden cog in an office machine—a man with little force of character in the beginning—henpecked at

home and abroad, Duncan held to the firm opinion that his wife had conferred a favor upon him by marrying him. The fact that he had rescued her from a life of drudgery in the shipping room of the factory changed his opinion not one iota. Nor did Mrs. Duncan fail to keep his memory refreshed whenever opportunity offered itself.

Amos Duncan longed to appear as a hero in the eyes of his wife. It had taken him two years to screw up his courage to the point of robbing Carney & Kirk. Yet he had planned the affair so often that he knew he would be absolutely above suspicion. And with the money once in his hands, he could hide it until all memory of the affair had blown over and then, with a carefully concocted story of a lucky speculation on 'Change, resign and migrate to some distant city to spend his declining years in ease with the lady who had assumed his name.

Carney & Kirk always paid off in cash. Duncan knew that there was close to fifty thousand dollars in the vault ready to go into the pay envelopes in the morning. As assistant cashier and one of the old timers with the firm he had been entrusted with the combination. He had read that skilled burglars are able to open vaults by listening to the whirl of the mechanism. A rag saturated with alcohol would do away with tell-tale finger prints. The police would think the robbery the work of a professional.

Still walking on his toes, he worked his way through the maze of desks to the big vault in the rear of the office behind the cashier's cage. Taking a tiny flashlight from his pocket, he pressed the button and allowed the stream of light to play over the dial, while he manipulated the affair with fingers that trembled as from the ague. It refused to work. . . . In his nervousness he had gone past the number. He

took a deep breath and with the sweat standing out in great beads upon his face, attacked the job again. . . .

Someone was entering the office through one of the rear doors leading from the factory!

He stopped for a second. Then, as he heard the footsteps coming toward him in the darkness, he leaped outside the cage and drew his revolver. He had never fired a gun in his life. He had bought this one—a cheap, second-hand affair—merely as a matter of precaution and because he knew that burglars always carried such weapons.

From out of the darkness came a flash! A report! A bullet sped past his head and flattened itself against the vault door! It must be that Judkins, the faithful, had heard something suspicious and had entered. He longed to call out to the watchman his name. . . . The realization of his mission in the office at that time of the night stopped him. Involuntarily, he gave a little squeak of fear. A second bullet passed unpleasantly near.

Instinctively—just as a cornered rat will fight—so his finger pressed the trigger of his own gun. He fired aimlessly in the general direction of the other, dodging from desk to desk, knocking over chairs. . . . He was in a panic of fear.

The other's fire ceased suddenly. From out of the darkness across the great room came a dull, throaty cry. Something metallic jangled against the tiled floor. An instant later it was followed by a heavier body—a body that crashed against a desk as it dropped.

Duncan leaped through the folding doors and out into the hallway again. To unlock the outer door and dash out onto the sidewalk was but the work of an instant. . . . Around the corner he heard the shrill whistle of the policeman on the beat as, attracted by the

shots, he came lumbering along signaling for his mate. . . .

He dodged into the shadow and turned into the alley. Behind him he could hear the policeman hammering on the office door with his night stick. From two blocks down street came the sound of another whistle. In the distance a third shrilled, proving that reinforcements were on the way.

Mrs. Duncan was sleeping soundly when he arrived home after a round-about trip through alleys and side streets. Letting himself into the house with his pass key, he hastily sought the security of his own room.

So far as he knew no one had seen him either going to the factory nor leaving it. But, God! What a fizzle he had made of the affair. And there was blood on his hands—the blood of poor old Judkins. What had he gained? Nothing—absolutely nothing.

He paced the floor, every nerve tingling. He wondered. . . . Poor old Judkins. . . . And he had a crippled wife, too. . . . With Judkins gone she would have to go to the poorhouse. . . . It was something that he had not foreseen.

He was still pacing the floor when the sun came up in the east. In the other room he heard Mrs. Duncan getting up. In less than two hours he would have to go to the office. Of course no one would suspect him, but—

He could hear Mrs. Duncan rattling the pots and pans in the kitchen when the door bell rang. He opened the bedroom door a crack and peeped through as she answered the summons. A gruff voice was asking for him. He heard her admit the visitors—there seemed to be two of them—then she called shrilly up the stairway for him.

He knew that they were detectives from their heavy tread. They were after him for killing Judkins. His brain was

in a whirl. Yet he wondered how it happened that they associated him with the crime. He had been so careful, too. Probably he had dropped something in his mad rush to the outer door.

He could never face the music. . . . And Mrs. Duncan! What would she say? He couldn't tell her that he had gone to the office to rob the vault for her sake and had made a failure. . . . The gun lay in the bureau drawer where he had tossed it. He picked it up and broke it open. The chambers were all empty. He had used every cartridge in killing poor old Judkins. . . .

From downstairs came a buzz of conversation. Mrs. Duncan shrieked. . . . He heard his own name mentioned. . . . God! They had told her what he had done! . . . He must move rapidly.

His glance fell upon a bottle of carbolic acid. . . . Mrs. Duncan was at the bottom of the stairway now, shrieking his name. . . . He placed the bottle to his mouth and emptied it at a gulp! . . . With the fiery liquid eating into his vitals—his throat afire—he reeled across the room and tumbled in a heap upon the bed. . . .

Outside, Mrs. Duncan was pounding at his door.

"Amos! Wake up!" she was shouting between sobs—for Mrs. Duncan was a hysterical woman—"an awful thing's happened. There are two detectives here. *Old man Judkins went home sick from the factory last night and while he was gone somebody broke into the office! The robbers had a fight 'cause one of them was found dead when the police broke in after hearing the shots!*

"*Enwright, the cashier, is out of town and they want you to come down and open the vault and see if anything is gone. Oh, isn't it awful?*

"*Amos, why don't you answer?"*

The Explosive Gentleman

By J. J. Stagg

I

THE steak was ordered well done and the waiter served it rare. This incident gave the initial impetus to a most terrible catastrophe. That so small a matter could lead to such appalling results was due entirely to the character and temperament of Ralph Kremp.

That young man was of the hyper-neurotic, tempestuous type. That is, he was easily excitable and given to acting on impulse rather than on reason. Little provocation was needed to drive him into a rage. His temper once aroused, soon got beyond his control and frequently led him into deeds of passion and even violence. His anger at times was sustained through protracted periods, a feature which sometimes induced those with whom he came in contact on such occasions to doubt his sanity.

The affair in the restaurant was characteristic. Kremp made a caustic remark concerning the waiter's attentiveness. The waiter who was an extra, and indifferent to the prospect of losing his job, commented slurringly on the fastidiousness of diners who "couldn't tell a sirloin steak from an oyster fry anyway."

A less combative person would probably have reported the waiter to the management. Ralph Kremp began a spirited denunciation and in his excitement he rose from his chair. The waiter a bit frightened, put out a hand as in a calming gesture. His movement was a trifle too hurried and forceful. He had the ill-fortune to touch Kremp on the chest while he was slightly off balance.

The light push was sufficient to upset Kremp altogether and to topple him back into his chair. It was a ludicrous fall and caused several other diners to laugh.

That was the spark which ignited the consuming flame of Kremp's fury. He seized a heavy water tumbler and hurled it at the waiter. The aim was a trifle high. The glass tore a piece from the waiter's scalp. A few women screamed, several men jumped up and other waiters came running from different directions.

Kremp threw himself in a low tackle at the object of his wrath. They hit the floor together and rolled around. Fists, elbows, knees and feet were used as weapons. A table was overturned. The struggle continued beneath the debris.

The waiter eventually fought himself free. He staggered to his feet and retreated. Kremp attempted to renew the assault but was set upon by several diners and restaurant employees. With a madman's strength he tried to fight them off. Before he was finally subdued, two waiters and three diners bore unmistakable marks of severe maltreatment. In the confusion someone had telephoned to the police. Kremp and the waiter were placed under arrest.

At the police station Kremp affected great indignation and was insulting in his manner and language to the lieutenant. He claimed to be connected with one of the best families in the city. He demanded the privilege of calling up Mr. Walter Boyer on the phone. Walter Boyer, he bragged, was his cousin and he had pull enough to break any man on the force. None of the

officers appeared to worry any over the threat of being broken. Nevertheless the mention of Boyer's name did create something of a stir. The Boyers were shipbuilders, multi-millionaires and for several generations prominent in the social and political life of the city.

Owing to Kremp's extreme nervousness and agitation, he could not control his voice. He was finally compelled to request the lieutenant to speak for him.

The lieutenant spoke for some five minutes and then listened for some twenty seconds. Then turning to Kremp, he said:

"Mr. Boyer asked me to tell you that he thinks you are a lunatic and that he has tired of helping you out of your foolish scrapes."

Kremp was found guilty of disorderly conduct and sentenced to six months. Thus his exaggerated ego was humiliated beyond forgetting or forgiving. He suffered all the persecutory delusions of a madman. He imagined the Boyer family to be the central moving figure in the conspiracy against him. Every day he hated the Boyers more till at length he could think of nothing but revenge.

And in his anger and hate he accomplished that which in his saner moments had been beyond him. His entire character seemed to change. Formerly irritable and irascible, he now became patient and forbearing. This change was his first step in his yet indefinite plan for vengeance.

Kremp's mother had been the sister of the older Boyer. After she died Boyer's sons and Kremp were the only blood relatives.

Old Mr. Boyer accepted Kremp's postures of repentance as being sincere. After Kremp had behaved himself for three months after his release, Boyer offered him a clerical position. When Kremp made good at the work, the old gentleman again invited his nephew to

his home. It was then that Kremp's criminal plans began to assume a definite outline.

He plotted with a madman's cunning and patience. Scheme after scheme was discarded because it was not safe enough or not cruel enough. And several ideas were dismissed because they were not inclusive. It would have given him no satisfaction to hurt one of the boys. His feud was with the family.

It came to him at last—what he considered an inspiration. He realized that a set of circumstances could be utilized in a crime of a sweeping, all-destructive nature. With one stroke he could annihilate the entire Boyer family. Besides being emotionally gratifying, it would also be a profitable venture. If the Boyer family were destroyed, he, as the only blood relative, would inherit the family fortune of over twenty million.

This is the scene which had become impressed on Kremp's mind: The elder Boyer was an old-fashioned gentleman and had retained many of the customs and habits of his parents. Among his idiosyncrasies was the one of using candle lights. In the music room four silver candlesticks ornamented the mantelpiece. Red candles, about an inch in diameter, were used.

After dinner the Boyers generally spent half an hour in the music room. The electric lights were extinguished and the elder Mr. Boyer lighted the four candles. This act was something in the nature of a ceremony. A soft light was thrown on the room and a quiet, domestic atmosphere was created.

How Kremp intended to use this setting for his crime will be clear from the rehearsal of his actions.

II

MR. LEWIS BROPHY was a highly respected man—in some circles. He was

a man of many and variegated accomplishments all of which were conducive to inconvenience or ill-health, and sometimes even worse, to those on whom Mr. Brophy practiced. Mr. Brophy seldom sought acquaintances outside of his own set. Sometimes, however, he was sought. He could supply necessities of a certain kind and he was not particular whom he served so long as he was paid well for it.

A pickpocket whom he had met in jail had introduced Kremp to Brophy. On his third visit to the room of the thug the latter passed over a small glass bottle filled with yellowish liquid. Kremp was highly interested in the contents of the bottle and listened attentively to Mr. Brophy's recital of the peculiar properties and characteristics of the contents.

"I boiled it down from dynamite," explained Mr. Brophy. "And now you better be careful how you handle it. Nitroglycerine is a damn tricky stuff. And don't get the fool idea that it always explodes on concussion. That's what a lot of story writers think—that any jar is bound to set the stuff off. It might explode on concussion—and it might not. Now for instance, suppose you put a couple of drops on a stone and hit it a straight downward blow with a hammer. The chances are—mind you I say chances—that only that part which you hit will explode. But if you sock it a *glancing* blow the whole thing will go up. Then again, to judge by what happened to some of my friends, the stuff can be exploded by just looking at it kinda hard. It seems to have whims. Sometimes it will stand for a lot of monkeying and sometimes it'll get all het up and blow you into a psychic plasma without no reason at all. Sudden heat will explode it; that's one thing you can be pretty sure of."

A few hours later Mr. Brophy was remarking to one of his friends:

"That guy Kremp sure gimme the creeps. Stewed mackerel, but he was nervous! I wouldn't be surprised if he loses his head entirely and drinks the stuff. I got a feeling he's going to be an angel soon."

III

Two nights later Kremp dined with the Boyers. He purposely arrived a little early. While waiting for the Boyers to come down, he sauntered into the music room, switched on the electric light and played a popular tune on the piano. Thereupon he rose and stepped noiselessly to the door which opened on the hall. He could hear the Boyers moving about on the floor above. From the dining room to the rear came the sounds of the servants who were setting the table. He went quickly to the mantelpiece and drew a glass bottle from a coat pocket.

Candles generally burn to a saucer-like hollow at the top. This is because the tallow near the wick becomes hotter and consequently melts more rapidly than that around the edge. Into the cavity of each of the four candles Kremp poured about a spoonful of nitroglycerine. Then he turned off the electric light and went back into the library.

After dinner old Mr. Boyer invited him to the music room to listen to a few new records. Kremp pleaded a previous engagement—he had tickets for the theatre—and regretted that he had to leave at once. He was already a trifle late. He took his leave in a perfectly calm and natural manner.

But he had no sooner reached the street when the excitement which he had suppressed so long got the better of him and he began walking hurriedly with no attention to his direction. He kept going till the geography of the city impeded his further progress in a

straight line. That is he reached East River. Then he became conscious of his surroundings.

He retraced his steps a few blocks. Then he hailed a passing taxi and had himself driven to the theatre. During the performance his excitement subsided somewhat and he began reflecting on the results of his plan.

There was always a chance, of course, that the Boyers might change their minds and not go into the music room that night. That, however, did not affect his scheme. They would go some night and Mr. Boyer would light the candles. That is, he would light only one of them. There was no reason to believe that he would notice the liquid. The action of lighting a candle is a casual one and requires no concentration. In all probability the old man would be talking to one of his sons while engaged in the process.

Nitroglycerine, Mr. Brophy had told him, is almost certain to explode when sudden heat is applied to it. There were four candles, four chances. He did not see how his scheme could fail.

He expected that in the morning he would be notified that an unfortunate accident had occurred in the Boyer home.

IV

THE Boyers had not intended going into the music room that evening; they had offered to entertain Kremp as a social courtesy. After Kremp had gone the old man went to the library to read. The boys went up into their own rooms. Later all three of them went to a directors' meeting. None of the household went into the music room that night.

At about ten o'clock next morning—Boyer's sons had already gone to business—Mrs. Nolan began her house-cleaning duties. Mrs. Nolan, it must be said, was an energetic lady. Her

favorite polish was Elbow Grease: when she worked she raised a dust and a sweat. The windows of the room in which Mrs. Nolan was carrying on were always thrown wide open. And Mrs. Nolan was fastidious; she cleaned under as well as around the furniture.

Outdoors, the temperature that morning was below freezing. Mrs. Nolan generated considerable heat when she worked. As long as she was busy she was more or less indifferent to temperature. Now Mr. Brophy in his elucidation of the properties of nitroglycerine, had failed to inform Kremp of one peculiarity. Nitroglycerine freezes at 34.04° F. and when it freezes it changes to long whitish crystals.

Mrs. Nolan kept the windows in the music room open for almost an hour so the nitroglycerine which Kremp had spilled into the hollows at the top of the candles, froze. And Mrs. Nolan, making her final inspection of the room, noticed the whitish crystals at the tops of the four candles.

With reference to what happened next, we call to your attention the following proverbs: "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." "Death may meet us everywhere." And, "Innocence is no protection." The first two of these wise cracks we admit. The last we intend to prove in the easiest way—by citing the exception.

The whitish crystals, each one of them potentially able to transform Mrs. Nolan into a sudden if rather clumsy angel, aroused that lady's curiosity. She picked up one of the candles and poked at the top of it with a hair pin, but the crystals clung rather tenaciously to the tallow, so she finally used her fingernails. Scratch, scratch, scrape!

What was it they used to say at the old motordrome down at Coney Island? Oh yes,—“Come in and see the motor cyclists race neck and neck with death!” These fellows had nothing on Mrs.

Nolan when it came to taking chances. As Mrs. Nolan dug the crystals off the third candle, a small piece broke off one of them and fell to the floor. And as she stepped to pick up the fourth candle she placed most of her two hundred and twenty pounds on the frozen nitroglycerine. My! That crystal could have played a nasty trick on her!

She found it a moment later, crushed to powder on the carpet, swept it up and spilled it with the rest of the crystals into a brass ash tray. . . . Well anyhow, in that respect, Mr. Brophy was right; concussion will explode it sometimes, sometimes it won't. This time it didn't.

We also know a proverb to cover the succeeding events: "With God nothing is accidental."

Mrs. Nolan decided to carry the stuff out into the kitchen and throw it in the waste pail. For no reason at all she changed her mind and carried the ash tray with her across the hall and into the reception room. She placed it on the center table and then threw all the windows open. She had just started cleaning when a cry and then the sound of a body falling, came from the floor above.

She rushed into the hall. The old Mr. Boyer lay on the stairway near the landing of the floor above. Mrs. Nolan saw him seize the bannister and try to pull himself up. But when he was half erect, he collapsed again. Now Mr. Boyer was ordinarily a mild-mannered gentleman, but under certain condition he was given to the use of colorful language. He got Mrs. Nolan and the butler and the chambermaid, all of whom had rushed to his assistance, rather excited.

It occurred to all three of them, at different times, that in case of accident it's a good idea to telephone to somebody. Three doctors, Mr. Boyer's office, a hospital and his lawyer were called up.

No one thought of an undertaker or the fire department. Verily, a sprain in the ankle maketh of man an unreasonable wretch.

Neither of Mr. Boyer's sons happened to be in the office when the three telephone calls brought the news of the old man's injury. They had gone to transact outside business without leaving word of their movements. A secretary finally became alarmed and went out to the clerical department to notify Boyer's nephew, Mr. Krempe.

"There's been a terrible accident up at the Boyer home," said the secretary. "The old man has been hurt. . . . Well no, I couldn't make out how. They're sure awful excited up at the home. Perhaps you'd better go there."

Accident . . . terrible . . . awful excitement—these were the words which kept ringing in Krempe's ears as he hurried up to the Boyer home. But why had only the old gentleman been hurt? Had he gone into the music room alone? . . .

Krempe was admitted by the chambermaid. That young lady was still in the grip of her excitement. She led him to the reception room door and then, stating somewhat abruptly, that she would inform Mr. Boyer that he had come, turned and ran upstairs.

Now, from the hall it was apparent that the music room was not a wreck. This was puzzling. Still, something was not in order. That was clear from the maid's actions.

Krempe went into the reception room. He was too preoccupied to notice that the windows were open and that the room was quite cold. He stood leaning against the center table. After a few moments he absently laid his lighted cigar into a brass ash tray.

Just how much nonsense do you expect nitroglycerine to stand for? It had been scratched, scraped, tossed

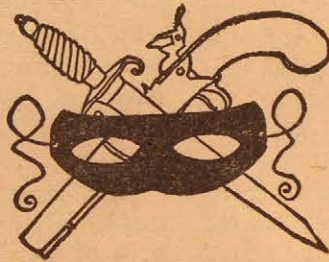
about carelessly and stepped on. Now the hot end of a cigar was being applied to it. Can you blame it for raising a splutter?

It was a terrible mess for Mrs. Nolan to clean up.

V

"It was a most peculiar case," Mr. Boyer will tell you. "The reception

room was blown right out of the house and yet the most careful investigation could not disclose the original cause. It seems cruel to say so, but it would appear that Mr. Kremp's torrid temperament, which was long suppressed, suddenly exploded from spontaneous combustion. He used to have a sulphurous disposition, that gentleman. He was, you might say, an explosive fellow."



The Weight of a Feather

By Carl Clausen

I

THE State had completed its case. The conviction of the prisoner seemed certain, in spite of the fact that the evidence was purely circumstantial.

The attorney for the State was gathering up his papers at his table, upon which, facing the jury, stood a massive bronze bust of Beethoven, the composer. Beside the bust lay a cowboy's lariat. Nothing else.

The attorney was a square-jawed, deep-chested man with cold blue eyes set much too wide apart and a bristling gray pompadour brushed back from his massive, corrugated forehead.

He had handled the case well. It had been a difficult one. The method alleged to have been used by the murderer savored of dime novels. The appearance of the prisoner, too, had been hard to overcome.

The attorney admitted grudgingly as he let his cold, hard eyes rest for the fraction of a moment upon the boy sitting erect on the bench beside the girl, with his head thrown back, that it was hard to believe him guilty of a cunning, brutal murder, and harder to convince a jury that he had committed it.

The lad raised his eyes for an instant to the face of his accuser, just then, but there was no look of malice in them. He seemed merely to be endeavoring to fathom the reason for the vindictiveness that had just been directed against himself by this man whom he had known since boyhood.

He was not the conventional, beetle-

browed murder suspect. Indeed, he was the one person in the crowded court-room who seemed out of place there. He was a little above average height—the dark head of the girl seated on the bench beside him came just above his shoulders—and slender; not slight, but slender with the vigorous slenderness of youth. His eyes were blue, large and very clear, and his hair was crisp, and sandy from habitual exposure to the elements.

It was early afternoon. A hush lay over the crowded court-room following the closing announcement of the attorney for the State. It was the court-room of a small Western city at the foot of the snow-clad Sierra-Nevadas. A ray of the wan winter sun entering through the grimy window lay upon the judge's silvery hair. The judge raised his watery eyes and glanced out at the snow-covered court house square where a gang of men with shovels were making a path for himself and his court to walk home upon. It had been snowing steadily all morning.

During the pause in the proceedings the constable left his post at the door to replenish the fire in the stove. He was a young man and big, a typical Western small town constable, broad-shouldered and ruddy-faced. His uniform was painfully new. He moved with clumsy momentousness on tiptoe across the floor, opened the door of the stove and placed two pine knots upon the bright embers with slow deliberation, as if to invest this simple act with some of the importance he felt.

Then he closed the door of the stove,

softly, and started back on tiptoe to his post. As he passed the table of the defendant's counsel, the lawyer looked up and said to him:

"Take the stand, Ed, please."

The constable glanced at the prosecuting attorney as if for permission. Then he mounted the steps of the witness box, slowly, and upon being sworn in by the clerk, sat down. For several minutes he remained in his seat without movement, his elbows on the arm of the chair and his stubbled chin resting in the hollow of his great, hairy paw, waiting for the attorney for the defense to begin.

All eyes were turned upon the prisoner's counsel, seated at his table near the accused and the girl, slightly in advance of them.

The attorney was a heavy, ponderous-looking man. His face, the color of putty, was full and shaven smoothly. His eyes were large and china blue, and his coarse hair lay plastered, untidily, about his temples.

His garments were obtrusively comfortable. His coat fitted him like a sack hung over a gate-post and his trousers bagged, scandalously, at the knees.

The short, stubby fingers of his right hand rested on the edge of the table. His attitude was serene and unruffled. He did not seem in the least disconcerted with the task before him—the task of discrediting the avalanche of circumstantial evidence that had piled itself upon his client.

He sat relaxed in his chair looking at the constable on the witness stand as if he were bored at the task of having to cross-examine him. He seemed in no hurry to proceed, but at the impatient movement of the judge, he finally said in a soft, lazy drawl:

"I'm going to ask you to re-construct the crime as you *think* it was committed, Ed."

The witness blinked his eyes. He

glanced, inquiringly, at the prosecuting attorney upon whose face a sneer of contempt rode. The attorney nodded, reassuringly.

Arising, counsel for the defense crossed to his opponent's table and took from it the cowboy's lariat and the bronze bust of Beethoven.

"With your permission," he drawled, blandly, to the prosecutor.

Walking to the witness-box, he placed bust and lariat on the broad railing before the officer.

Then he returned to his seat at the table.

"Now, then, Ed, show us how you *think* it was done," he said.

II

THE witness ran his heavy fingers through his hair with a helpless sort of motion. He was painfully flustered, but pulling himself together, he rose, picked up the lariat and uncoiled it.

"Well, it was something like this, I think," he began vaguely.

His embarrassment was painful. With a twist of his wrist he threw the noose of the lariat over the head of the bronze bust, and pulled the noose tight.

"The window of *his* room," he said with a jerk of his head at the prisoner, "is twenty feet from the ground directly above the spot where I found his uncle's body. I figured that he dropped this bust on the old man's head from the window, then pulled the bust up with the lariat—afterwards—like this."

The witness let the fifteen-pound bronze drop over the railing of the witness box, then raised it again with the lariat, and placed it once more on top of the railing.

Counsel for the defense smiled, approvingly.

"Not bad for an amateur detective, Ed. That thing dropped twenty feet would cave a man's head in, all right.

What, may I ask, suggested this ingenious method to you?"

Counsel's tone was pleasantly interrogative. There was no hint of ridicule in his voice. Nevertheless, the witness shot him a quick, suspicious glance.

"When I examined his room, I found this lariat coiled on the bust," he explained, gaining confidence. "As there wasn't any window or door on the ground floor at that end of the house from which he could have struck the blow that killed his uncle, nor any foot-prints in the snow except the old man's, I figured that this was the way he must have done it."

"Very clever, Ed," the prisoner's attorney drawled. "Very!"

He stuck his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest and surveyed the officer, head cocked to one side.

"Let me see, Ed—you've been constable of Cardinal for nearly a year now, haven't you?" he asked.

The witness nodded.

"A year on the twenty-fifth of this month," he replied.

"You'd like to be sheriff of Cardinal County, wouldn't you, Ed?"

The witness looked about with a vague smile.

"Well, yes, Colonel," he said. "Who wouldn't?"

The attorney smiled back.

"Your chances are pretty good—now, Ed, ain't they?" he asked ungrammatically, but with the merest shade of emphasis upon the word "now."

"I suppose so! Everybody knows me. I was born and raised here," the witness replied, with due modesty.

The attorney nodded acquiescence.

"I know, Ed. Your chances are particularly bright now—since you have so ably assisted the State in this prosecution, I mean."

He was still smiling but a sort of grating edge had crept into his drawl.

A barely audible titter ran through

the crowded court-room. The prosecuting attorney was known to have political ambitions. A successful conviction of murder—the first murder in the county in twenty years—would count greatly for him in the coming election. This star witness who had aided him so ably was sure not to be forgotten by him.

The witness moved uneasily.

"I don't know about that, Colonel," he snapped with a sudden show of resentment. "I did my duty, that's all."

The prosecutor was on his feet, his hard eyes flashing.

"I object to the discrediting of the witness by personal and irrelevant observations," he stormed. "The officer is known to us as a reputable citizen."

"There you go again, Warren," the defendant's counsel drawled, querulously. "Losing your temper over nothing."

The judge frowned. He glanced from one to the other and sighed. Both men, prosecutor and defender, were his friends—outside the court-room. The three of them had seen Cardinal grow from a collection of miners' tents to a city of some importance. He had proper respect for his profession, but he was not going to permit mere court routine to shatter a friendship of thirty years' standing, so he said in a tone of diplomatic deprecation to the defendant's counsel:

"I'll have to sustain the objection, Colonel. Please proceed."

Before the attorney for the State sat down, he said in a withering tone to his opponent:

"If you don't lose *your* temper a dozen times before you're through, I'll miss my guess, Melvin Edgerly."

"Gentlemen! You're in the court!" the judge reminded them, with some show of severity.

The prisoner's counsel did not reply to the observation of his opponent. He

glanced back at the dark-haired girl on the bench beside the prisoner, then turned to the witness again.

"I was just trying to bring out, Ed, how sure you are that you're going to be our next Sheriff." He jerked one stubby thumb over his shoulder at the girl. "If you had been half as sure of getting Laura, there, there'd be wedding bells along with your inauguration, I guess."

A wave of suppressed amusement passed through the crowd. The young constable's unsuccessful wooing of Laura Hamilton was common knowledge. Someone in one of the rear seats emitted a loud guffaw.

The judge pounded his gavel.

"Another such disturbance and I'll order the court-room cleared!" he thundered.

The face of the witness burned a dull red. The girl on the bench beside the boy dropped her eyes. Her long, dark eyelashes lay like two crescents of jet against the clear pallor of her skin. The prisoner's hand stole out in protecting reassurance. His eyes were fastened upon the broad, untidy back of his attorney as if he were trying to read, there, the motives responsible for the man's ill-timed digression.

The counsel consulted his notes.

"Were you alone in your office, Ed, on the morning of the fourteenth when the accused called up on the telephone and informed you that his uncle had been killed?" he asked, after a pause.

"I was," the witness snapped.

"It was eight o'clock when the telephone rang, I believe you stated before?"

"Yes."

"You are sure about the time?"

"Yes, sure."

"Looked at your watch, I suppose?"

"No, but I get down to the office at a quarter to eight every morning. I

had been in only a short time when the telephone rang."

"I see. You went directly to the place?"

"Yes. I closed my desk and left at once."

"I don't suppose you can tell us exactly to the minute when you arrived at the scene of—the tragedy?"

"I can. It was ten minutes to nine," the officer asserted with snappy positiveness. "I looked at my watch as I walked across the field to the house."

The attorney glanced at the ceiling. He seemed to be thinking.

"The distance from your office in the city hall to the house is about one mile," he said. "Am I right?"

"Yes, Sir."

"It took you from eight o'clock to ten minutes to nine—fifty minutes, to cover the distance of one mile?"

"The road was in a bad condition," the witness explained, tersely. "It had been thawing heavily all night. I had to stop every little while to stamp the snow off my boots."

"I see. If it hadn't been thawing so unusually hard all night, you could have made the distance in much less time—in say twenty-five minutes?"

"Twenty minutes, easy," the witness corrected. "I'm a fast walker."

The colonel pursed his lips. He glanced at the judge, then transferred his gaze to the jury. When he spoke again, he seemed to be addressing no one in particular.

"The weather records show that it started thawing at ten-thirty the night before. I guess the canyon road must have been in pretty bad shape, all right. It was the heaviest thaw on record for this time of the year, since 1912."

He paused and leaned back in his chair and regarded the witness, musingly.

"After you had taken charge of the

body," he resumed, "you looked around the house and found to your surprise that with the exception of your own foot tracks, there were no tracks leading to or from the house in any direction. That was what first directed your suspicion against my client, wasn't it?"

"It was. It stopped snowing at five o'clock the night before. He,—” here the constable pointed a heavy finger at the prisoner—"told me that the last time he saw his uncle alive was at ten o'clock the night before, when the old man was walking up and down outside the house, smoking. It did not snow after that," he added, triumphantly.

"So you jumped to the conclusion that my client had murdered his uncle because there were no foot-tracks in the snow?"

"I didn't jump at nothing," the witness asserted with asperity. "It was clear that the man who killed old Sargent had never left the house—unless he came and went by aeroplane," he added with sarcasm."

"And then, being that my client was the only other occupant of the house, besides the dead man," the colonel went on, imperturbably, "you decided that he had killed his uncle, and arrested him on the spot, on your own responsibility, and without a warrant?"

"Well, I wasn't going to give him a chance to make a get-away," the constable defended.

"Very thoughtful of you, Ed." the counsel drawled. "That'll be all."

III

WHEN the witness had resumed his post at the door, the colonel said, turning to the court:

"It has been pointed out by the prosecution that my client was Mr. Sargent's only heir. That an estate of something like a hundred thousand dollars would come to him upon his uncle's death. That he is engaged to be married to a

girl whom his uncle objected to, strongly, because of an old grudge against her father, which I think we are all familiar with," he added, with a glance about him.

"My client has admitted that Mr. Sargent had forbidden him, under pains of disinheriting him, to even see the girl again. It has also been proven beyond a doubt that the two men quarreled a great deal of late—presumably over my client's choice of a wife."

The prisoner and the girl exchanged glances of blank amazement. Even the prosecuting attorney moved, restlessly, in his chair. The judge frowned, ponderously, and a murmur of disapproval passed over the spectators. The counsel for the defense was apparently throwing up his hands and convicting his client all over again instead of defending him, and he, the counsel alone, seemed oblivious of this fact. He paused briefly, then went on in his lazy drawl:

"Did it occur to the court that a man with as many good reasons for committing this murder as my client had, would be a fool—nay, insane—to do so? He would automatically sign his own death-warrant by such an act, and that if he was cunning enough to employ the method suggested by the prosecution, he would not possibly have overlooked the necessity of making a trail in the snow to and from the house. A trail would have been absolutely necessary to the success of his plan. By not doing so, would you have us believe that he deliberately planned that suspicion be directed toward him? It would have been an easy matter to have slipped on a pair of old shoes, and have walked down to the road and back again, and destroyed, or hidden the shoes afterwards. Even destroying the shoes would not have been necessary. The thaw would have enlarged the foot-prints to such an extent that identifica-

tion would have been impossible."

He paused and regarded the jury through half-closed lids.

"It has been established by the prosecution that my client is a man of ordinary intellect. Such a man would not possibly have overlooked the most vital part of his scheme. He might have overlooked some trifling detail, as the brainiest of criminals do at times, but that he should have forgotten to fake a set of tracks when the snow was there, as it were to order, for a perfect alibi, is utterly absurd."

The attorney for the State arose.

"I object to generalities and far-fetched presumptions being used to discredit established facts," he insisted, coldly.

The colonel interrupted him.

"You have established no fact, if you please, Warren, except the fact that Mr. Sargent is dead. Anyone can assure himself of that by visiting the morgue." He turned to the court. "I ask your Honor to overrule the objection on the ground that the State is basing its conviction on circumstantial evidence, and that we of the defense are endeavoring to present the court with as strong a chain of circumstantial evidence for acquittal. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

The attorney for the State emitted a harsh laugh. The court frowned, perplexedly.

"You're out of order, Colonel," the judge said, "still, I'll let it stand if you can show good reason for it."

"I will show—good reason, presently," counsel asserted, mildly.

He turned about in his chair and nodded to a very tall and very old man, seated, chair tip-tilted, a short distance to his right, directly under the witness-stand. The man brought the front legs of his chair to the floor with a thump, arose and mounted the three steps to the witness box. He did not sit down,

but remained standing waiting to be sworn in. Even before the clerk had fully finished administering the oath to him, his clear "Yes" rang out as a challenge upon the still court-room.

The attorney for the defense leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes for a moment, as if to select his words carefully before addressing the witness. Then he said:

"Dr. Shale, will you please show the court what you found when you performed the mortual examination upon Mr. Sargent?"

Without replying, the witness took from his pocket a leather wallet. Opening it, he took from it a small object, which he held up between his thumb and fore-finger.

"This," he said, briefly.

IV

NECKS were craned in his direction. The jurymen leaned forward in their seats, and the judge adjusted his spectacles. The prosecuting attorney stared at the object with a frown, half of annoyance, half of contempt—then transferred his gaze to the face of his opponent, who sat slumped in his chair, seemingly the least interested of anybody.

The prisoner and the girl exchanged glances.

The tension was broken by the Colonel saying in his soft, crooning voice:

"Please tell the court where you found that—*pigeon's feather*, Dr. Shale."

"I found it imbedded in the dead man's brain, three inches below the skull."

"That'll be all, Doctor, thanks," counsel said.

When the witness returned to his seat he leaned over and laid the feather upon the table beside the prisoner's counsel. The colonel picked it up and placed it upon his blotter in plain sight of the court.

The prosecuting attorney scowled at Dr. Shale. The coroner's verdict had been: "Death from blow upon the head. Cause unknown." He had refused point-blank to return an indictment for murder upon the evidence submitted, so Attorney Warren had gone ahead on his own account.

"Pigeon's feather!" he scoffed. "Nothing of the sort! Swallow's feather, that's what it is."

"I beg your pardon?" There was irritation in the colonel's voice for the first time. "It's a pigeon's feather."

The jurymen looked at one another. Most of them knew a pigeon's feather when they saw one and all of them were positive that the object on the colonel's blotter—a slim, steel-blue feather—was *not* a pigeon's.

A cynical smile played about the corners of the prosecutor's thin lips.

"If you expect to win this case on ornithological decisions, you'd better take a week off and study up on the subject, Melvin Edgerly," he sneered. "I'll stake my reputation, legal and otherwise, that the feather on your blotter is a swallow's feather. I think I know what I'm talking about. I didn't get my degree in ornithology at Stanford for nothing."

"That's so," the colonel admitted, suddenly. "I remember now, you used to be bugs on birds' nests, and eggs, and things, when you were a kid, Warren."

"It was my hobby, if that's what you mean," the prosecutor replied, stiffly.

The colonel might have observed here that robbing the nests of inoffensive songsters for the purpose of studying them was more of a cruelty than a hobby, but he forebore. Instead he leaned forward in his chair, and, fastening his china blue eyes on the prosecutor's face, said calmly:

"For the purpose of securing expert testimony on a question of ornithology, I hereby subpoena you, Robert Warren,

as a witness for the defense. Take the stand, please."

The prosecutor's jaw dropped.

"What!"

He looked about him appealingly, at this unheard of procedure.

"It's unethical, I know, Warren," the colonel sighed, deprecatingly, "but I'm within my rights." He turned to the judge. "How about it, your Honor?" he asked.

"I—I suppose so, Colonel," the judge replied, helplessly, "but—but—" he ended lamely.

"I won't—be made a monkey of before the court," the prosecutor stormed, shaking his fist at the colonel. "I refuse—!"

"Gentle—men!" the judge admonished. He turned to the outraged attorney. "Better take the stand, Warren, before I'm forced to fine you for contempt of court."

"All right—!" the attorney snapped, subsiding.

He stalked to the witness chair, suffered himself to be sworn in, then shot his opponent a baleful glance. The colonel looked up, blandly, and handed him the feather.

"Please tell the court in your own terms—scientific terms—if you wish, how you know that this is a swallow's feather."

The witness cleared his throat, and pulled himself together.

For three minutes steady he explained to the court how he knew that the feather in his hand was a swallow's feather. Warming up to his subject, he forgot, momentarily, his anger at his opponent's unethical conduct. He went into details about the differences between the feathers of birds of prey and those of song-birds, and the comparative wing-power of the different species. He even touched upon the subject of protective coloration.

When he was through there was not

a man in the court-room who doubted for a moment that the feather in his hand was a swallow's feather, and when the prisoner's attorney excused him he went back to his table conscious of having won another victory over the defense.

He replaced the feather upon his own table beside the bronze bust and sat down. A smile rode across his heavy jowl. A verdict of guilty seemed a foregone conclusion, now. By his rambling digressions the prisoner's counsel had strengthened the case of the State, instead of weakening it, and now the counsel seemed to realize it for the first time. He sat slumped back in his chair with his stubby fingers interlocked across his loose-fitting vest, his putty-like face sunk deep in apparent gloom.

Only his china blue eyes were alert. Those who sat near him noted the odd, veiled look that had crept into them.

"Please proceed, Colonel."

The judge's voice roused him to action. Running his hand into his pocket, he pulled out an old thumb-marked note-book, opened it and took from it a feather identical with the one on the prosecutor's table. Leaning over he laid the second feather beside the first one.

"I took this one from a swallow's nest under the eaves of Sargent's house just above my client's window," he said, in a flat, colorless tone, as if it concerned no one.

The jurymen looked at one another, then at their foreman. They sensed that something momentous was about to be presented to them. The colonel glanced their way, but not at them. He seemed to be regarding some point above their heads, beyond them.

"Upon one of the wooden brackets supporting the eaves, I found a deep gouge, torn out of the soft redwood by some hard object striking it." His voice rose to a slightly sharper pitch as he went on. "The bracket is two feet above my client's window and four feet below the lowest point of the eaves."

Arising, he walked to the window near the judge's bench, opened it and ran down the upper sash. The window was in direct line of vision of the jurymen. Pulling an old-fashioned Colts forty-five from his pocket, he raised the pistol and fired it upward through the half-open sash.

The entire court-room was on its feet before the report had died away. The judge towered, menacingly, above the man who had dared to disturb the tranquillity of his court in such an unheard of manner. His eyes were flashing, but they grew wide with amazement when a heavy, transparent object shot by the window and struck the cement pavement outside, with a report louder than the discharge of the pistol.

Judge, prosecutor and jury crowded about the window and looked out. Upon the sidewalk under the window lay the shattered remains of a huge icicle.

The counsel for the defense was speaking. His voice was no longer flat, nor colorless, nor even drawing.

"The feather which my learned colleague so obligingly and correctly classified as a swallow's feather became frozen to the point of a giant icicle that dropped from the eaves near the swallow's nest, and struck Old Sargent on the head, killing him instantly. The icicle in its downward course struck the redwood bracket, hence the gouge in the wood. The feather was driven three inches into Sargent's head by the force of the impact. The strong thaw which dislodged the icicle melted it away by morning, thus obliterating completely the weapon—if I may term it a weapon—by which Mr. Sargent met his death. I ask the court to instruct the jury for acquittal."

The jurymen glanced at one another and nodded.

"I don't think it'll be necessary," the foreman said. "Still, as a matter of routine, I suppose—" He smiled. "You win, Colonel."

His Thirteenth Wife

By Herbert Raymond Carter

I

WITH Jonas Bruckner, marriage had become a habit—and a highly profitable one.

Under various aliases, he had led a dozen different wives to the altar—and later followed them to the grave. In each instance he had survived to find himself a wiser and richer man.

Naturally, the statutes concerning bigamy had never troubled him. In every venture he had been legally free of his previous bride before contracting the responsibilities resulting from another wedding. And by uncanny good fortune, the laws against murder had left him unscathed and unsuspected.

Since the days of his youth, Bruckner had worshipped Bluebeard as his hero. In his teens he had devoured newspaper accounts of the doings of such modern maniacs. Invariably their unskilful slaying of successive spouses, in order to collect insurance, had ended in their intimate association with the scaffold, the electric chair or the guillotine. Bruckner would smile in his sleeve over their clumsiness, and in choosing his vocation, resolved that he at least, would never be so crude.

Insurance companies, he had learned, were customarily curious, and the profession which Bruckner proposed to enter made inquisitiveness on the part of others extremely undesirable. In the first place, he determined never to give his name to any maiden or widow who carried a policy on her life. Should his prospects be insured they must allow that protection to lapse upon

the assurance that the bridegroom possessed plenty for two. Thus he eliminated one source of suspicion as to his motives. If, however, those who ensnared his accordeon-like heart happened to be wealthy, Bruckner certainly could not be blamed. Besides, he always made it a rule to state to the license clerk that he was a bachelor, casually adding that he was well-to-do and retired.

This knowledge was also the bait he persistently dangled in order to catch his intended victims. The plan had been remarkably successful, to which Bruckner's worldly possessions bore mute testimony. Frequently money talks—but Bruckner's was as silent as the graves from which it had been obtained. Under each new alias, he maintained a modest bank account for current expenses. None of them had been large enough to cause him any regret if he suddenly found it inconvenient to cash another check or present himself in person to claim his balance. The bulk of his fortune he kept in cash in several widely separated safe deposit vaults. To the banks where these sums were stored, he was known under various names, and was understood to be an eccentric man who traveled extensively.

The names he assumed for this purpose were never employed for any other form of his activities. His long absences and semi-occasional appearances caused no comment, and had never resulted in any undue curiosity. In fact, the officials of these "reserve" institutions, as he termed them, were not

aware of the contents of the boxes Bruckner rented. Probably they imagined that he used them for storing papers.

One, however, did contain something vastly different. In it were the tools of his trade—poisons of varying natures which he picked up at intervals in infinitesimal quantities in various parts of the world. Being versatile, he liked to vary his method of operation and took a genuine pride in his work. Mad he undoubtedly was—but the man was an artist, and no manufacturer or financier or creator of beautiful things ever took more satisfaction in his accomplishments than did Bruckner.

The one fly in the ointment was the fact that he could never confide to anyone just how clever he really was. To atone for this, and by way of diversion, he occasionally indulged in criminalities of a totally different nature, in fields where he might share his triumphs with others. He had a smattering of medicine and knew much chemistry, both of which he studied with sinister intent. He had played at being an amateur cracksman and had been complimented upon his skill in opening safes. Likewise, he had participated in several notorious Black-hand outrages and was well and favorably known in those circles. That is, the personality he assumed for this purpose, was known to such associates. Thus Bruckner had broadened his knowledge of ways and means of producing death in secret, and had familiarized himself with other branches of the trade, upon which he might fall back in case wife murder ever became an unhealthy occupation.

Bruckner flattered himself that during the whole of his career he had never made a single mistake. Not once had he been regarded as anything but a sincere mourner at the biers of his dear departed. Never had he run afoul of coroner or police. At times he chuckled

over his remarkable capabilities and congratulated himself upon his caution and truly exceptional foresight. Perhaps his success was due to the fact that he concentrated upon crime in its more subtle branches, and had never been addicted to any vice, either petty or great.

Nor had a pretty face ever tempted him. During the whole of his marital adventures, Bruckner had never once been in love—not even the victim of a passing infatuation. Business before pleasure was his motto and he adhered to it strictly. Because he found the courtship stage of his engagements a trying ordeal, marriage usually followed his proposals swiftly. With grim humor, he often boasted to himself that he had no heart, and in view of this fact, he was reluctant to indulge needlessly in silly lovemaking.

The women of his choice were invariably rather mature and usually unromantic. The more homely they might be the better satisfied he was. A young and attractive wife might have admirers who would interfere with his plans. She would also be more likely to have relatives who might have too much to say and to whom her death would be a real bereavement. Widows with children were banned. He had an aversion to stepsons and daughters about the house. Instead, this pseudo lonely bachelor always sought a matron similarly situated—each with a tidy sum to support them, and both desiring a quiet comfortable home.

There was method in his rule. Not only was he assured of privacy in the domicile about to be established, but he could not be accused of the unpardonable crime of marrying for money. Bruckner was both sensitive and proud. He valued the good opinion of the community—because it was an asset in his curious business. To pick out a bride of great wealth would mean

additional difficulty in collecting his inheritance after the obsequies. Such details would be bound to be annoying and Bruckner loved simplicity in this respect.

A few thousand dollars—always less than his own little nest egg—and perhaps a small property upon which no other heirs had any claim—were to be readily gathered in without the formality of court proceedings or the advice of counsel. After each deal, he cashed in his gains, opened a new bank account under a new name, and stored his net profits in one of his safety deposit boxes. This had been going on for years.

It was true that such gradual means of accumulating wealth necessitated many marriages. None of his wives had lived more than three years after the wedding, but in no case did he cause a death under twelve months. He remained prudent rather than avaricious or hasty. He never sought a rapid denouement at the risk of personal safety. Moreover, his wives all died seemingly natural deaths and were fittingly interred. Bruckner would not countenance anything so crude as to savor of murder. Also, Bruckner had a certain sentiment about proper burials. As a result each simple ceremony was marked with unostentatious respect, while the countryside was dotted here and there with nicely cared for graves and tastefully adequate tombstones. Everything he did was done very well.

II

WHEN analyzed, Bruckner's plan was as simple as it was practical and resultful. He would go to a small town and take a comfortable room at a cheap hotel or boarding house, frequented only by men. Without undue heraldry, he would announce that he was seeking a suitable place to end his days. After he had attained the age of fifty, this

sounded reasonable, so he discarded the various fantastic stories so successfully circulated during his youth. These had been ingenious, but rather more risky. In fact, he now looked back with concern upon the chances he had taken in connection with his first alliance—contracted when he was twenty. His initial venture had culminated admirably, however, and his four successive ones—covering a scant ten years—also paid him neat profits.

Now, when he was installed in a new and temporary residence, Bruckner would make it a point to scrape up a speaking acquaintance with a few substantial but humble souls in the neighborhood. He never associated with those who were prominent or overly endowed with worldly goods. He could not afford to make a permanent name for himself. He was always fading out of or into a picture. He was but a passing incident in the life of each community. To his chosen cronies, he would casually state that he was a plain man without frills. He regretted that he had not settled down and taken unto himself a life companion before he had grown too old to think of matrimony.

Frequently this observation would bring forth good-natured chuckles and sly winks. Male matchmakers would pass on the word to their romance-hatching wives, and soon several no longer young hopefuls would begin to preen themselves and press Mr. Bruckner to drop in for tea. Reluctantly, he would accept, and begin to judiciously sound out the situation. If all seemed well, he would guardedly hint of his state of mind and eventually suggest a married partnership on the basis of mutual contribution to costs and common connubial convenience. If the proposition met with a favorable reception, and the recipient of his attentions appeared pliable, the marriage would be solemnized at no distant date.

When this portion of the program was over, Bruckner would bide his time before springing the climax of his little drama. There were several phases of the stage setting to be considered. If his newly acquired wife was not possessed of real property, and there seemed no reason for their remaining where they were, he would find some good incentive for moving to another city. The death of a middle-aged matron causes less comment in a neighborhood where she is a stranger. Such a move made, he could proceed at his leisure, without engendering gossip or unwelcome sympathy.

Of course, where a wife possessed valuable lots and houses, or perhaps a little business, he must gradually make excuses to dispose of these, or else remain on the spot and wait until he could do so as sole executor. Practice had made him perfect, no matter which course he was forced to take.

In any event, no sooner would the funeral be forgotten, than Bruckner would move on. Invariably those who had known him expressed their regret and felt genuinely sorry for the lonely, broken-hearted man. Once or twice a second candidate had coyly sought his attention, but such women had no chance whatever. Under no conditions would Bruckner marry twice in the same town, or even under the same name. His various ventures were widely separated as to scene.

He would shake his name together with the dust of the deserted community, and assume a new and equally commonplace one upon his arrival in the section selected for his next proceeding. That little matter of choice of names indicated his extreme cleverness. Never was he known by a distinctive cognomen. His surname was likely to be the most numerous mentioned in the local directory.

Fortune favored Bruckner in that he

was a man whose appearance made his age seem uncertain. As he pleased, he was readily able to subtract or add ten to twenty years from the truth. Then, too, he made a careful study of personal appearance, and without resorting to artificial means of disguise, had in his box of tricks several methods of altering his looks. Little niceties of dress—a different manner of brushing the hair—and the time-worn cultivation or destruction of moustaches, beards, side-whiskers and imperials all served his purpose upon occasion.

Possessed of an excellent memory, a perfect capacity for forgetting the past, and a penchant for looking into the future, Bruckner was well equipped. He was devoid of conscience—insensible to sentiment—and looked forward to the day when he might safely write his memoirs—to be published posthumously.

III

SUCH was the man who found himself a widower for the twelfth time last Fall.

Upon casting up his accounts after the final ceremonies of that funeral, Bruckner (as he then elected to style himself) discovered that his total fortune amounted to some two hundred thousand dollars. It was safely stowed away in his safe deposit strongholds. He had remaining—under the new name of Bruckner—sufficient capital to see him through his next adventure. The surplus he did not mean to touch—as usual.

Yet in the weeks that followed the death and the settlement of the estate of his most recent wife, Bruckner seriously considered the idea of remaining single. Like many another prosperous man—after years of striving—he longed for a life of indolence—broken of its monotony by such pursuits as might please him. He hated the very thought

of a home. He had no wish to settle down. He had possessed a surfeit of wives that he did not want in a personal way. Bruckner had married them in the casual course of business.

And this gave him a thought—in the nature of a vacation. Suppose he should seek a spouse who actually pleased him. Thus far he had not experienced such a genuine pleasure. For a man married as much as he, the situation was silly. Yet Bruckner had his doubts. If he paid court to a young and beautiful girl—one whom he really admired—he might, even after the passage of all these years, fall in love with her. That would prove fatal. He had heard of idiots, drunk with love, who told their wives everything.

That would never do. In the first place, the lady might not prove sympathetic. Also, he was certain that sooner or later he would desire to kill her—from sheer force of habit or perhaps from ennui—since he no longer needed money. Such a situation would be awkward if he became devoted to her—for then he would break the heart which had been proof against Cupid's darts through all these years of many marriages.

So he relinquished the thought and went to New York to rest up a bit and think the situation over. As usual, he went to a modest hotel. Yet the days he spent alone were tedious, and like a fish out of water, he longed to plunge once more into the matrimonial sea. For a time he had whiled away some of his hours in the company of a Russian, who claimed to have been a watchmaker to the late Czar. This gentleman still made timepieces—but he made them to put in bombs, and made them very well. His genius appealed to Bruckner and the two became quite friendly, although Bruckner was slightly nervous lest the police should visit the bombmaker's place while he was present.

However, he had no other company. His safe-cracking friends were all in jail—and the others were safe beyond the reach of the law—or else *had* been reached by it and removed from this vale of tears. So he found himself craving for action and the further exercise of his remarkable talents. Then he met Mrs. Mary Corcoran, a healthy husky lady who was doomed to become his wife from the first moment he saw her.

Mrs. Corcoran was a widow of just the proper age—not too wealthy, Bruckner thought, although she was possessed of a trifle more than her predecessors. She owned a place by the seashore and was extremely fond of bathing. She had a little motorboat, and at the time when Bruckner entered her life, was about to open her bungalow for the season.

The situation appealed to Bruckner. He needed a rest and a change of climate, and a stay by the sea would be welcome. It would do him good and build up his health while he planned how to break down hers. So he mentioned to the widow as much of his plan as was fitting for the lady to know. She proved entirely agreeable—even eager, Bruckner thought. In fact, he was rather afraid that she was in love with him. That might prove awkward, but it could not be helped. So he married her and took a solemn oath that when this adventure was over, he would never again tempt fate.

The bungalow was on a little sandy point, some miles from the nearest town and the railroad station. Mrs. Bruckner, née Corcoran, taxied back and forth from the village in her motorboat when her fancy suggested such journeys or purchases required them. Bruckner spent much of his time sitting on the beach with his pipe and his thoughts, and practically lived the life of a married hermit. They got on

together beautifully, and Bruckner thanked his stars that the woman did not desire him to be eternally complimenting and petting her. Her sole aim was his comfort, and never in all of his thirteen marital ventures had he lived so pleasantly and contentedly. It almost seemed a shame to terminate such an ideal arrangement. In fact, it would be little short of a crime.

IV

BUT just as he knew he would, Bruckner reverted to type. He simply could not resist the temptation to kill the woman. She did not annoy him. He had nothing against her, and he did not wish her money. Just the same he wanted to kill her, and he wanted to do it in some new and original way.

For days he thought it over, and grew more perplexed with the passage of the time. He could not sleep at night, and he found himself nervous and restless. His appetite began to fail—a condition unheard of before—and even his pipe and tobacco failed to solace him. Once or twice he wondered whether it would not be wise if he went out and got drunk. He vetoed that idea, however, for he had always made it a rule to keep his head clear and his brain unfuddled. Drunken men and women, Bruckner always said, are inclined to talk too much—and he was a man of silence. Besides, the hooch lately available, had, in cases, proved fatal.

During all of his meditation and perplexity, Mrs. Bruckner remained in blissful ignorance of the thing which was troubling him. It was true that she seemed to suspect that something was wrong, but when she pressed for an explanation, he naturally put her off. She appeared to be alarmed about his health, and was constantly urging him to go and consult a physician. He flatly refused, and told her he had never

been sick in his life. Of course *he* knew what was the matter, and also knew very well that no physician's prescription would cure his ailment.

His wife made more frequent trips to the little village, and even went to New York to bring back dainty viands to tempt his appetite. Apparently her sole ambition in life was to prepare a dish that would tickle his palate, and Bruckner was not without some appreciation of her kindness and concern. At times, he almost resolved to put away his idea and let the woman live. But impatience to have it over with, and to be at peace with the world, mastered him at last.

His intentions crystallized into action on the morning when she announced her intention of going over to Calder's Point to attend a pinochle party. Bruckner never played cards and said that he would not go. However, he even urged that she indulge in this pleasant diversion.

"You stay around me too much," he pressed her tenderly. "You're wearing yourself out looking after my health. Stop worrying, and have a good time while you may—I mean while you're still young and have your health," he added, realizing that he had almost made an unfortunate slip.

"All right, I will—if you really don't mind," she agreed, and explained that the party would occur on the following Monday night. She proposed to take the motorboat over, leaving at seven o'clock; remain for the night, and chug-chug back again the following morning.

Bruckner was delighted. A sudden inspiration had plunged him into an ecstasy of joy. At last—like a bolt from the blue—he had hit upon a plan to do away with the woman. It was entirely possible that the thing had been done before, but it was new with Bruckner. It could not possibly savor of design and it would happen while she was

away. He would be presumed to know nothing of the accident until the heart-rending news should be brought to him. Then he would be stunned. Bruckner was a past master at registering grief—surprise—anguish.

But after the funeral he could spend the entire summer at the bungalow in undisturbed peace. He was glad that he could accomplish his purpose so early in the spring, for unlike the average man, his thoughts did not lightly turn to love in that entrancing period.

The thought necessitated a visit to his friend, the clockmaker to the former Czar. He made it, and outlined his needs minutely. That is, he told the clockmaker precisely the sort of box he desired—how long and how wide it should be—and explained just how its timepiece was to be set. It was to be put up in a candy box and tied neatly with ribbon. It should weigh five pounds and bear the wrapping of a smart confectioner. On the day he meant to use it, Bruckner would call for the box. It must be ready, and everything must be fixed so that he would not need to unwrap it.

Mrs. Bruckner was going away in her little sea-taxi at seven o'clock. He would arrive from the city an hour before. He planned to reach the bungalow via a hired launch, timing himself to get there a little late for supper, but in time to bid her good-bye. When he did so he would thoughtfully put the candy box in his wife's motorboat, calling her attention to it, and laughingly instructing her not to nibble at its contents during the journey. He wished her to save it for the party and present it to her hostess.

He hoped she would obey. The trip would take her a little more than an hour. She did not mind that, since she loved the sea and could handle her craft as well as any man. But if everything went well, Mrs. Bruckner would never

land at the wharf at Calder's Point. Just about fifteen minutes before she was due to reach that settlement, the little clock would tick its final tick, and Mrs. Bruckner would proceed to eternity instead of the pinochle party.

The complete simplicity of the scheme appealed to him strongly. He would put the bomb near the gasoline tank. Its explosion would destroy that container and everyone would surmise that the blowing up of the fuel store had caused the tragedy. No one but the dead woman would know about the candy box—that is, no one but the clockmaker of the Czar. That gentleman would not be likely to speak. Secrecy was also essential to the success of *his* profession, and in such matters he was strictly honorable and thoroughly reliable. He need not know for whom the box was intended and for reasons of his own he would not inquire too deeply into the matter.

V

EVERYTHING went as planned. On Monday morning Mr. Bruckner announced that it would be necessary for him to go to the city in connection with some business at his broker's. He promised to return as speedily as he could, but told his wife not to wait for him if he should not be home by the time she intended to leave. That was camouflage, carefully planned. He always thought of little details like that in order to turn away suspicion from the minds of his victims. Besides, he wanted to establish an alibi and have it known that he was away all day.

Moreover, he always disliked to be around his victims just before the climax of his cunning. Their very confidence and trust in him always tended to annoy him. But he knew very well that he would be back on time. Otherwise, of course, he could not place the candy box in the little launch.

The clockmaker was ready for him, and the box itself was a beauty—as creditable a piece of work as Bruckner had ever seen. It did not weigh too much nor too little, and while he was assured that the watch was perfect in its mechanism and timing, it did not give forth the slightest sound.

The clockmaker beamed when he saw the look of admiration in Bruckner's eyes and told him that he might trust the little bomb implicitly. "It is worthy to blow up a Prime Minister!" enthused its author. "Unfortunately, these days, kings are few and trade is far from good. The war seems to have caused an unreasoning dislike for explosives on the part of my very best customers."

Bruckner consoled with the man and took his departure. He had received the professional word of the watchmaker that the bomb would not go off if he were to drop it and that it would not explode until eight-fifteen precisely. That was as Bruckner wished. The detonation would be heard just as the motorboat was entering the waters about Calder's Point and would startle those on shore waiting for his wife. In all probability the bomb would tear her to pieces and wreck the boat completely. At least it would utterly destroy itself—and the gasoline tank. That was, of course, essential—for there must be no remaining evidence, even though no clue could possibly point to him.

But because the time schedule of the railroad had been changed without his knowledge, Bruckner did not arrive at the bungalow until almost seven o'clock. It had been a narrow escape from being too late, and the incident made him nervous; yet in a way, he thought, it was fortunate.

Mrs. Bruckner was down at the landing, dressed in her best bib and tucker, and she greeted him with a smile and an inquiry as to his health. "You look

tired, my dear," she sympathized in a motherly sort of fashion. "I really hate to go away and leave you."

"I *am* tired," Bruckner confessed. "I guess I'm not as young as I used to be and I haven't been right pert for the last few weeks. I'll soon be better, however," he added cheerfully. "Just you go on and have a good time, and don't give a thought to me."

Then he produced the candy box and displayed it to her. The boatman who had brought him was gone by this time, and he had not seen the package which Bruckner had kept wrapped in a newspaper until this very moment. Now Mrs. Bruckner took it in her hands and plucked at the ribbon, but he shook his finger at her as he might do to a naughty child.

"Now don't be impatient or selfish!" he reproved. "Keep it until you get to the party. Then offer some to the others with my compliments."

"I suppose I should do that," she agreed with him. "And now I must be going. There's a light under the coffee on the stove, and your supper's on the table. You won't mind a cold snack, will you?"

"No," said Bruckner, and then the one flaw in his plan occurred to him. How could he make sure that she would put the candy box where it would certainly destroy the gasoline tank? He could not, if he left it in her possession. Of course it would kill her, but that was not enough. His plan must work out exactly as he had intended, and the only way to insure its perfect success was to go along in the boat.

That, in a way, was a risk, but Bruckner was equal to the situation. It required quick thinking, but he had a bright idea on the spot.

"Well!" he reproached himself, "if I didn't forget my tobacco! I guess I'd better go back as far as the station with you, and then get one of the public

launches to bring me home. It won't take more than half an hour, and I'll eat supper later."

So he took the candy box from his wife's hands, and helped her into the boat. She went directly to the little engine and started it as he stepped aboard. The bomb would not blow up for about an hour. In twenty minutes he would be at the station landing. When he got out, he would put the candy box by the gasoline tank and lay a tarpaulin over it, with the explanation that he did so to keep it from being wetted by the spray. Mrs. Bruckner would think nothing of his doing that, and would probably forget all about the candy until it reminded her of itself forcibly.

Speedily the little boat chugged away from the wharf and cut the waves like a knife as it shot off toward the station pier. It was twilight, growing gradually darker, and lights began to twinkle from the group of cottages ahead.

"Perhaps," Bruckner suggested to his wife, "I'll stay over at the post office for a while. Maybe I can get some of the men to play a game of pool, and go back home about ten o'clock. Supper being cold, it won't make any difference, and I can make some fresh—"

But he never made it. There was a terrific crash. The little motor launch was rent asunder. When the detonation died away, there was nothing left but a few pieces of floating wreckage, and, curiously, a red ribbon floating on the surface of the sea. Bruckner and his wife had been blown to atoms.

The clockmaker had worked well and the bomb had gone off precisely as he had planned—at the hour appointed by Bruckner himself. But the former creator of timepieces for the Czar was not a man who read the daily papers. In preparing the bomb and setting the clock, he had not known of the fact

that the daylight saving law for the season went into effect at the stroke of two that morning. Hence the explosion had occurred just one hour earlier than Bruckner had expected it would.

VI

BUT simultaneously with the crash that ended the lives of the Bruckners, two strange men appeared before their little bungalow. The visitors on the beach looked out to sea, not knowing that the criminal they sought was now beyond their reach.

"Gosh!" one of them exclaimed. "That gasoline certainly made a thorough job of it! It won't even be worth while to send out a rescue boat."

The other detective shrugged. "I'm more interested in what we're likely to find inside the house," he said. "Since nobody seems to be home, suppose we go right in."

They did, and they made a thorough search, including a chemical analysis of the coffee on the stove and the cold snack on the table. It was a delicious looking little layout of tempting morsels, but the chemist who tested it whistled loudly in amazement when his task was finished.

"The old girl must have been in a hurry to finish *this* chap!" he announced. "She's put enough poison in all this stuff to kill an elephant. Funny, too—because she always worked slowly before—"

"Before?" questioned his companion. "Is she one of those fiends who marry a lot of men and murder them for their insurance?"

The chemist nodded. "She was tried twice and acquitted for lack of convicting proof—but we've been watching her ever since, and her mug's in the Rogues' Gallery under the alias of Arsenic Annie."

The Mistaken Sacrifice

By Howard Rockey

I

JIM HANLEY would never have elected to bury himself in Shanghai from choice. But an early error in judgment regarding New York laws and the course the stock market would take had resulted in his residence there for more than twenty years.

Everybody had liked Hanley and most people liked him still. Ah Fu, his Chinese boy, literally worshipped him. Yet after his initial mistake and narrow escape from a term in Sing Sing, Hanley found that no one but Richard Morely was willing to trust him. It seemed rather unfair. He thought they might have given him another chance without forcing him away from Manhattan; but his wishes in this respect had proved in vain. The onus of his youthful misstep had survived long after the actual circumstances of his defalcation had been forgotten.

It was true that Hanley had not personally profited by his fraudulent act. Badly advised by his tempters, he had lost every penny of the sum he had embezzled. There were also extenuating circumstances, but the men who had been Hanley's friends did not wish to continue their association with him, even though some of them refused to prosecute. Others were not so conditionally forgiving, and he had found himself facing a warrant. The woman he loved gave him his congé. Those to whom he appealed for loans to replace what he had stolen turned from him in cold contempt. He was a social outcast—a fugitive from justice—and a penniless, broken-hearted man.

Only Richard Morely had stood by him. It was Morely who hustled him aboard the train for Canada before the police could arrest him; Morely who arranged his passage on the big P. & O. steamer; and Morely who had given him a job. The whole affair culminated at the time Morely was forming his Yellow Dragon Trading Company. The business was a modest one and demanded but little of its manager besides routine attention. It practically operated itself, yet it was a profitable enterprise and enabled Morely to pay Hanley an adequate salary. That his doing so was little more than charity everyone knew. A local Chinese bank could have handled the matter and undoubtedly would have done so much better than Hanley could.

But for over a score of years Hanley had spent his days in the little office near the Bund and his nights in the adjoining bungalow, just beyond the European quarter of the city. He belonged to no clubs and had but few intimates—chiefly those of his own ilk, who railed at the despicable climate of Shanghai, despite the fact that they found it more healthy to remain there than to go home. He was a man of pleasing personality and pleasant manners, reserved and soft spoken. He did not play the races and he did not gamble, so far as anyone knew. Most of his spare time was spent alone with his books, and if a woman appeared now and then in his life, no one was aware of it.

The only living being who really understood Hanley was his native housekeeper, and even Ah Fu was somewhat mistaken in his estimate of the

man. At first Hanley had been aided by two assistants, but in time the business grew so automatic, and so relatively unimportant to its owner, that Morely directed him to do without any clerks. Willingly Hanley had dismissed them, and when he had done so, Ah Fu laughed in his flowing sleeve. He had seen for some time that his employer had been ill at ease, and he thought that Hanley breathed a sigh of relief when the others were gone.

Ah Fu also knew that Hanley spent very little. He knew that a tidy sum, to which Hanley was ever adding, lay safe in the Manchu Bank. What was more, Ah Fu had gathered that Hanley was discontented, and would welcome the day when his exile might be over—if ever, indeed, that day should really dawn. Hanley hoped it would, and Ah Fu hoped so too; for the Chinaman longed to see the rest of the world. He knew that Hanley had grown so used to him that he would keep him as his servant for the rest of his days. Hence the departure of Hanley from Shanghai would mean the beginning of the travels of which Ah Fu dreamed.

Hanley had taught him English and something of the business. He had loaned him books and told him stories of other countries, as well as making Ah Fu a sort of secretary. By the time the Chinaman had mastered the spelling of English he had contrived to pick it out on the keys of a typewriter. He would make up long statements each January and July, from lists of figures supplied him by his master. These lists Hanley would compile from the private books he kept—books that were always under lock and key and which no one but Hanley ever looked into.

Morely had not been out to Shanghai since the day of Hanley's arrival, and

the letters the two exchanged were formal in the extreme. Morely had not wished to humiliate his friend by referring to personal matters, and Hanley had not presumed upon the other's kindness to make their communications savor in any way of a casual correspondence.

All of which was well enough as long as Morely lived, but shortly after the world war Morely suddenly died. He had not been married and consequently had no direct heirs, but Hanley learned in due time that the estate had been left to a distant cousin. The man's name was Burson and he lived in San Francisco. It seemed that he had never traveled to the Orient and was suddenly possessed of a strong desire to do so.

Hanley dreaded his visit on several scores, neither of which he took occasion to mention to Ah Fu, feeling that the Chinaman could never understand, and that, in any event, it was none of the servant's business. Hanley believed in keeping his own counsel and in living much by himself, although he was aware that Ah Fu as well as all Shanghai knew of the events which had resulted in his coming there to live.

Yet if Ah Fu was honest himself, whether because of virtue, or perhaps from necessity, he seemed to hold no contempt for Hanley on account of his criminal record. In fact, Ah Fu felt that a man who was crafty enough to take advantage of another in the matter of money was a person to be regarded with the greatest of respect. So he typed his letters and made Hanley's bed, and cooked his employer's meals, without concerning himself as to what was written in those mysterious books whose pages his eyes had never scanned. But Ah Fu grew troubled as Hanley's annoyance seemed to increase.

Other letters from San Francisco

caused Hanley sleepless nights, and Ah Fu observed with concern that Hanley no longer relished the food he prepared. He wondered whether something might not be wrong, and whether he could not somehow set that matter right. Knowing that Hanley had once been a thief, the Chinaman supposed that he might be again. He shrewdly surmised that those guarded books would divulge the story, if the actual figures in them were ever to become known. That Hanley doctored the financial statements he sent out twice a year, Ah Fu had no doubt. To be able to do such a thing, and to do it for twenty years, was an accomplishment of which Ah Fu would have been proud. In his estimation, Hanley was a brilliant man.

But be that as it might, he was a obviously worried one. His restlessness grew with the coming of each steamer, and Ah Fu heard him sigh with relief when it was announced by letter that the new owner of the Yellow Dragon Trading Company had decided not to come out. Instead, he was informed, Mr. Burson was sending an auditor over from Hong Kong. The man would look over the books and also look over the ground. He would decide whether or not it would be best to continue the business or to close up its affairs. The latter would mean Hanley's dismissal, if it resulted in nothing else—and Hanley did not know what he would do in that event.

No one in Shanghai would give him a job. The charge which stood against him back in New York was outlawed by time, of course; but the memory of the man and his folly had not passed from the minds of those who still remembered him. He could not go back to the States. He had no money with which to travel elsewhere—and he did not want those books to be examined.

Ah Fu sensed this from his master's

manner rather than from anything Hanley said. He only *knew* that Hanley viewed with apprehension, the arrival of the auditor who was coming from Hong Kong.

At first Ah Fu was puzzled and then grew upset himself. He would gladly have laid down his life for his master, but sacrificing his life would not seem to help in this instance. Yet Ah Fu was far from being stupid. He had a mind that was keen in its Oriental cunning. Now was the time to employ in the service of his master the abilities with which he had been born.

II

AH FU said nothing, but went quietly about his business, and Hanley had no inkling of what was in the Chinaman's mind. He did not even know that the servant suspected him of having been steadily robbing the Morely estate. Yet this was precisely what Ah Fu did imagine, and what he fully intended to try to conceal. With the falsifying of books, he had no familiarity, and no desire to learn. Such methods were utterly foreign to his plan of procedure. His manner of mending matters would be more direct and simple, and by far more effective. All that remained to be done was to await the arrival of the stranger who was en route from Hong Kong.

In the course of three weeks he came. The man's name was Clayburne, and young as he was in business, he had built up a reputation as a financial efficiency engineer. He had faith in the Orient as a place in which to make money, but he was the relentless foe of antiquated methods. Naturally, he assumed that the system of running the Yellow Dragon Trading Company was at least a decade behind the time, and surmised that a lot of red tape and lost motion, and perhaps inefficiency, would

have to be eliminated if the concern was to go on. That was what he had come to Shanghai prepared to find out, at the instance of Mr. Burson.

Hanley, pale and nervous, met him at the dock, and greeted the auditor as cordially as he could. Clayburne pretended not to notice the other's all too evident perturbation, but what he did see, plus what he knew of Hanley, made him decide at once that something was wrong.

Hanley realized his attitude, and resented it keenly. Ah Fu sized up the situation at once, and quickly made up his mind. However, he outdid himself in preparing the evening meal and in making the new arrival comfortable in the bungalow. He served the two Americans in silence and kept them well supplied with liquors and cigars, listening with the sharpest of ears to each sentence the men exchanged.

That the business had fallen off in the last five years, Ah Fu had known before hand. That Mr. Morely had been indifferent to whether or not it paid, he had not known before. Morely, in fact, would never have consented to a discontinuance which might cost Hanley his job. He had been that type of man, and the maintenance of his former friend in this quiet berth was only another one of his many secret and worthy charities. To Mr. Clayburne, the thing which he suspected made Hanley's probable offense all the more reprehensible under such circumstances.

"Once a crook—always a crook!" he mused at the close of the dinner. "There's no such thing as a defaulter ever going straight."

It seemed as though Ah Fu read his mind, but so far as his features indicated such knowledge he might have been a graven image. If Hanley was conscious of the other's mental attitude, he did not outwardly evidence the fact,

but he found himself more restless than ever after dinner when the two sat out on the porch overlooking the harbor and the lights of the city.

"When do you wish to start in?" Hanley asked with a queer sort of catch in his voice.

"In the morning," the auditor said, "and finish as soon as I can. Mr. Burson wants my report to go back by the *Pacifica* and the ship will sail on Tuesday. So there's no time to be lost."

So it seemed, Hanley observed.

"Quite so," thought Ah Fu, but he was not thinking of the task the auditor had to perform, but of the little job he personally had in mind.

In the kitchen, he went about his tasks without so much as a word, and at last, when all was in order, he slipped out into the night. He said nothing to his employer about his going, and naturally did not confide to him what he proposed to do. But half an hour later he was in the shop of Moy Su down in the Nanking Road.

With Moy Su he exchanged a few complimentary salutations, felicitated him upon his ancestors, and requested Moy Su to do him a favor. Moy Su, without the impertinence of asking questions, consented to do as he was requested, and Ah Fu went on his way.

Ten minutes later Hanley was summoned to the telephone in his little bungalow. It was Moy Su who greeted him respectfully and begged a thousand pardons for disturbing him at that hour. He made no mention of Ah Fu, a visitor was in the company of Hanley, nor did he refer to the fact that he knew Moy Su was not supposed to be aware of such things, and Hanley naturally never associated the call with the departure of his servant.

Moy Su wished to know whether Hanley would care to come to his shop that evening to see a shipment of reprehensibly inferior jades he had just

received. The stuff was the merest trash, Moy Su explained, yet it had the appearance of being very good. It was just such merchandise as Hanley sometimes purchased and sent to America in the course of his business. Moy Su wished Hanley to have first choice of the jades, should Hanley wish to buy them, and on the following morning he had promised to exhibit them publicly.

Hanley thanked the merchant for his courtesy and decided to go at once. Normally he would have told the Chinaman to go to the devil. Twenty years in Shanghai had not tended to speed up his methods of business or make him unduly active in matters of this sort. Now, however, under the watchful eye of Clayburne, he thought it might be good policy to show interest and act upon the opportunity at once. He felt that it was incumbent upon him to make a show of enterprise and devotion to duty. So he told the auditor the purport of the phone call and asked whether he would care to accompany him.

"No," declined Clayburne, "I'm rather tired tonight, and I haven't quite got my land legs as yet. I know nothing about the value of such things anyway. I can tell from a set of books whether a business pays, but I couldn't determine the worth of actual merchandise on a bet."

Hanley was just as well satisfied. He would welcome being relieved of the auditor's society for an hour or so at least. The thing he would have to face would be unpleasant enough when he came to it the following morning. Then would take place the interview Hanley had dreaded for years—the inevitable nemesis he knew he must encounter. And Clayburne gave no sign of being likely to be a sympathetic listener to the news which awaited him.

"Then," said Hanley, "I'll run down

and see this man, if you don't mind. Just make yourself at home and I'll return as soon as I can."

"Don't hurry," yawned the auditor, evidently equally willing to be rid of his host. "Sandman's after me and I think I'll turn in soon."

"By all means," invited Hanley. "My boy has gone out, I think, but I'll see myself that everything's in order in your room."

He did; arranged various articles to insure the comfort of his unwelcome guest, and then went out, first slipping an automatic into his trousers pocket. He had hesitated at first to take the gun, and finally did so with the thought of protection rather than with the intention of employing the weapon for any other purpose.

III

THE night was balmy and clear, so he went on foot to the shop where Moy Su was waiting, bowing and scraping and ready to pay him fulsome compliments while he bargained with him. Yet it developed that there was to be no business transacted that night. Indignantly, Hanley spurned the offered jades and roundly admonished Moy Su for even summoning him to look at such trash. He would have none of it. Genuinely annoyed at the merchant and out of sorts with himself, he went out into the night, and retraced his steps.

As he pondered over the situation, his fingers closed on the gun in his pocket. Perhaps, after all, that was the way out. He knew what Clayburne would find when he looked at the books, and he appreciated that nothing he might say would explain away those facts. His previous story was already known by the new owner, and Hanley did not deceive himself that Clayburne would believe him or that Burson would

forgive him. After all, it might be as well to blow out his brains and have done with it. Perhaps he should have done so twenty years ago. Life had held nothing worth while for him since he had left New York, and he supposed it never would. There seemed but little purpose in his carrying on.

But whether Hanley was a coward, or whether it was because he scorned a cowardly act, he took his hand from the gun and resolved not to use it. Whatever the result might be, he meant to go over the books with Clayburne in the morning and confess to him the truth. They might accept his statement or reject it as they pleased. They might do with him as they liked. Hanley did not care—and that was the simple truth. If he could not vindicate himself—and he did not believe he could—nothing really mattered. He had tried his best but fate seemed to be against him.

Then, as he walked up the lonely road, lined on each side with tall trees, he heard a noise just ahead and a great, threatening shape hurled itself at him with a savage snarl. Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he squeezed the automatic, discharging it without troubling to take it out of his pocket.

The bullet ripped his trousers, and flew wild. But a moment later, as he stood with the weapon in his hand, Hanley laughed at himself. Down the road a big, terrified dog was scampering. He could plainly see its shadowy outlines as it rushed through the open.

He was nervous, that was all. There had been no real danger and the animal was only frightened at suddenly coming upon him in the darkness. So he trudged on toward his home at a leisurely pace, until his attention was attracted by a glare in the sky. An uneasy fear came over him and he quickened his footsteps, to pause on the edge of the clearing with an exclamation of horror.

His little bungalow and the shack he used as an office were enveloped in flames. Flimsy of construction, the rickety building was burning like tinder. Situated in a lonely spot upon the hillside, it had not as yet been observed by anyone else.

With a shout he dashed on—but his cries brought neither aid nor any response from the bungalow.

Arriving before the door, he called out Clayburne's name repeatedly, but the crackle of the flames and the roar of their triumph were his only answer. To attempt to enter the building would have been madness, and the roof crumbled in while he stood there helpless.

Now he heard others approaching, and he felt a sickening sensation. The crazy fire apparatus was also on its way at a far too leisurely gait. They might as well spare their pains.

In a daze himself, Hanley tried vainly to answer a dozen questions at once. To each interrogator he told the simple truth—and each one of them smiled. The arrival of Clayburne and his presence in the bungalow had been known. The intention of the owner of the Yellow Dragon Trading Company to wind up his business had been noised abroad; and Hanley's previous record was not any secret to his neighbors. Moreover, he stood there idiotically with a pistol clasped in his hand. People stared at him strangely.

But when the fire had burned itself out and the ruins were cooled with water, the crowd began to search with the aid of lanterns. The Chinese police were darting about like dogs upon the scent, and now they dragged from what had been the office two badly charred, dead bodies. The clothes had been burned from both, but the mystery of it was, why the two victims had been unable to get out. Despite the rapidity with which the flames had spread, a leap

through the door or a window would have brought them both to safety.

Then the police found out why they had died, and they turned to Hanley, who stared at them in return and gaped at the charred bodies in stunned amazement. Buried in the breast of the auditor was a long Chinese knife. Through the lungs of Ah Fu, a forty-four bullet had passed. A policeman relieved Hanley of his weapon and carefully noted its calibre.

Not a vestige of furniture remained in the place. The little office with its books and papers and records of twenty years, was completely wiped out. At the same time the life of the man who had come to examine them had been taken—not by the flames which charred his body, but by the steel which still stuck into his breast. Ah Fu, who also knew a great deal about the business, had passed on to the Terrace of Perpetual Sleep.

IV

OF course they arrested Hanley and clapped him into jail. The examining magistrate smiled at the story of the dog, although Moy Su confirmed the visit of Hanley to his little shop. Moy Su, however, made no mention of the reason why he had telephoned, and only when opportunity came did he slip a note for Hanley into the hands of his lawyer.

That note raised the hopes of the man who was going to defend the accused, even though it told Hanley that his case was hopeless. The communication was from Ah Fu and it was done on the typewriter. Hanley knew, of course, that the Chinaman had written it—but there was nothing to prove this fact to a jury. Even the signature could not be confirmed. None had ever seen it. The Chinaman had never thought of that—nor had he planned as shrewdly as his devotion had prompted.

For a moment Hanley looked at the typewritten text, and then tossed it away with a contemptuous laugh, as its worthlessness and the grim humor of the situation fully dawned upon him:

To Honorable Police, Shanghai, China from Ah Fu now intending to make himself quite dead. Honorable Mr. Hanley know nothing about killing the auditing pig. Ah Fu have plenty cause hate him man Clayburne. Why so nobody business. Ah Fu stab auditing pig and then take poison to go join little lotus flower because why he kill Clayburne.

It was crude fiction. Not even Hanley even pretended to believe it; yet he saw in an instant what the Chinaman had done and why he had done it. He told the lawyer and the attorney understood, but he also realized the utter impossibility of convincing the court.

Figuring that Clayburne would find something wrong with Hanley's books, the devoted servant had planned to not only kill the auditor, but to destroy the evidence of his master's supposed guilt. The pretended reason for his committing the crime was of course absurd invention. Hanley did not even know whether Ah Fu possessed a sister or a sweetheart. If the Chinaman had either, Hanley knew that Clayburne had never even seen such a girl any more than had he.

Evidently, however, Ah Fu had gone first to kindle the fire, and had then intended to finish Clayburne and later still attend to the taking of his own life. Perhaps he feared that if he lived to be questioned, he might break down under the examining of the magistrate and recant his confession, thus at least compromising his master. By dying himself, he had evidently decided, everything would be well. All Hanley had to do, Ah Fu thought, was to hold his tongue, and no one would be the wiser.

And indeed such might have been the case, had it not been for two things

which Ah Fu did not foresee. He had not figured the possibility of Clayburne's discovering him in the act of kindling the fire. The knife he had hurled at the auditor had indeed found its mark, but not before Clayburne's bullet had reached Ah Fu. Thus the two wounded men died in the flames. That in itself would not have convicted Hanley.

But even the wisest of Chinamen, with the best of misguided intentions, could not have anticipated that Clayburne would carry a gun of precisely the same calibre as Hanley's. Nor could he have surmised that a stray dog in the woods would cause Hanley to fire a shot under circumstances which he could not prove.

As it was, everything pointed to Hanley's having fired the shack himself. Evidence indicated that he had murdered his guest and his servant—one because of what he might discover in going over his books—and the Chinese boy because he knew or saw too much. The very fact that Clayburne had been slain with a Chinese knife looked like a clumsy attempt on Hanley's part to direct suspicion against the Chink. That one shell was missing from Clayburne's gun was perfectly natural. It was supposed he had fired in self defense and that his bullet had caused the rent in Hanley's trousers—the tear which he claimed had been caused by his own shot. It was apparently only a miracle that the ball had not lodged in Hanley's leg.

In the face of such supposition, Hanley might plead his innocence as much as he pleased—but he could not contravert the facts as the searchers saw them.

"It's tough, old man," his attorney declared, "but we'll do all we can for you."

"Save your pains!" Hanley said with disgust. "It isn't worth while. You

see, the thing that poor Ah Fu did not know is that I was really honest—"

The lawyer suppressed a smile which Hanley was quick to note. It confirmed his resignation to his fate.

"Of course you think I'm lying—not about the murders—but about the money. Yet it's gospel truth I'm telling. About five years ago one of my assistants got away with some twelve thousand dollars before I learned of it. I only found it out after Morely had told me to discharge him. Then, when he had disappeared, I was afraid to speak—naturally imagining that Morely would think I'd reverted to type and was merely trying to clear myself by telling a fanciful tale. There was nothing but silence left for me, because the fellow had cleverly forged my handwriting in making false entries in my private set of books—"

"Did Ah Fu know that?" asked the lawyer, and Hanley shook his head.

"He couldn't have known—but in some way or other he scented that something was not just right, and he undoubtedly supposed that I was the crook."

"Would those false entries have been discovered by the auditor?" the attorney queried.

"Yes," assented Hanley, "and I would have explained them. In that way I could have shown why the figures and the cash in the bank did not agree. Also that the thefts occurred while I had an assistant. Clayburne might have scoffed at me, but I meant to put every card on the table. With the books to show, I might have been able to make them believe me. As it stands, when they learn that the books are gone, they're certain to consider that I destroyed them and killed Clayburne and Ah Fu in going about it."

"Perhaps," the lawyer agreed. "Is there anything in your private accounts or in your bank transactions that would

suggest that *you* appropriated the money?"

"No," said Hanley. "And nothing to show I didn't. Yet, as a matter of fact, I've drawn only half my salary each month since I made the discovery. I wanted to put the money back and thus prevent all chance of *my* ever being accused. Clayburne arrived about a year too soon. I hadn't quite made it good."

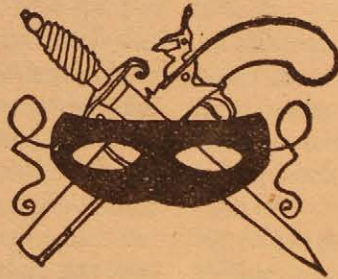
For a moment he was silent, and then he shrugged his shoulders and laughed bitterly.

"As it stands, Ah Fu's useless and foolish sacrifice not only fails to clear me, but establishes a motive which brands me as a crook as well as a murderer. He has even burned up the deposit book, which would show my

honest efforts at restitution. I haven't a Chinaman's chance of proving that I've played straight since my first and only mistake."

"I'm genuinely sorry for you, Hanley," sympathized the attorney. "It's rotten, too, after the devotion which prompted that crazy yellow heathen to give his life for you."

"Be sorry for him, not for me," Hanley smiled. "If the world's going to think I stole Morely's money after all his kindness, I'd just as leave be hung for murder. Poor Ah Fu did the best he knew how when he tried to help me out; but the foolish fellow will be tortured through eternity when he learns—as the dead surely must do—what a sorry mess his good intentions really made of things."



The Police Sometimes Guess Wrong

By Harold Ward

I

MY visitor dropped wearily into the chair across the desk from me, a look of horror on his pale, weak face.

"There's been a murder!" he gasped thickly. "Old Levi Jones—Jones, the money lender! Stabbed! Safe opened and rifled—everything taken!"

"Who killed him?" I snapped.

"I—I don't know." He buried his face in his hands and sobbed softly for an instant. "I went there to rob him. I found somebody had beat me to it and had—killed—him! Oh, God! It's horrible!" he ended, sobbing again.

"Let's get the straight of this," I commanded gruffly. Police chiefs are not usually the sweetest tempered men in the world, and I am no exception to the rule—especially when I have been without sleep for forty-eight hours, as in the present instance. "You say that old Jones is dead—murdered—his safe robbed? I've had no report of it. Now who the devil are you and how does it come that you know so much about the affair?"

My visitor stopped his snivelling abruptly.

"I'm Tompkins," he answered shortly, as if the mention of his name settled the whole affair.

"That fails to enlighten me," I growled. "Elucidate."

"I am—or was until this afternoon—Jones' clerk. We had a racket—a quarrel—and he fired me. Let me go with-

out a second's notice. And he owed me four hundred dollars commission for dirty work that I've done for him. Refused to give me a cent of it. Told me to go to the devil when I threatened to tell the police of some of his crooked deals. Said that I was as deep in the mire as he was in the mud and that his word, because he was rich, would go farther than mine anyway. That's why I—that's the reason I went there to rob the safe tonight—just to get what was coming to me. I swear I didn't intend to take a cent more than he owed me."

I nodded comprehendingly.

"All right. Now go ahead with your story," I said, a trifle more gently than before.

Tompkins dabbed at his eyes with his handkerchief.

"I went to the office tonight just about midnight," he explained, "intending to let myself in with my passkey. When we had our racket today the old man forgot to ask me for it and I was too sore to give it to him—me who's done his dirty work for five years past and then getting fired that way.

"I knew that he hadn't had the combination on the safe changed, and he and I were the only ones who knew it. I knew that if I got the four hundred he owed me he'd never dare squeal. And even if he did I'd be far enough way by morning to be out of danger. You know where his office is?—fifth floor of the Torrence Building. I climbed the stairs

rather than take the elevator, figuring on not taking any chances.

"I didn't meet a soul on the way going up. The office was dark. I let myself in with my passkey, stood inside the door listening for an instant, then pulled down the shade so that there would no light show through the ground-glass panel of the door. Then I tiptoed my way to the two windows and pulled down their shades and then punched the electric-light button. I don't know why I tiptoed. No one knew that I had been fired, and anyone in the building would have presumed, had they noticed me, that I was there working overtime, as I often have in the past. I suppose that it was the natural caution a man feels when he knows that he is somewhere he hadn't ought to be."

He hesitated a second. Then: "I suppose that you'll think I'm a darned liar when I tell you what happened," he finally resumed.

"Go ahead!" I said shortly.

"When the lights flashed on I naturally took a survey of the room. The safe was standing open with a lot of papers that had been in it strewn about the floor.

"I knew then that somebody had been there ahead of me—might be there then. You can bet that I lost no time in making for the door.

"I was scared—scared all over. I had that creepy feeling that a fellow gets at such times. And just as I got my hand on the knob I heard a noise from the private office—the office the old man uses—used, I mean—in which to receive his clients.

"It sounded like a moan—a sort of dull, throaty groan!

"Every hair on my scalp rose straight up. I turned my head involuntarily in the direction from whence the sound came.

"Through the door I saw the old man sitting behind his desk, his head hang-

ing over the back of his chair! The handle of a knife was sticking out of his chest, and his whole breast was covered with blood!

"Right then and there I opened the door and fled. You couldn't have held me in that room with a million dollars."

"Did you see anyone in the corridor as you passed out?" I asked.

Tompkins looked sheepish.

"That's one of the reasons I hurried right here, Chief," he answered. "One of the fellows who cleans the rooms—janitors I guess you'd call 'em—was puttering around in the hallway a dozen doors down. I'm pretty certain that he saw me. They all knew me by sight, probably, and I knew that as soon as the murder was discovered he'd remember seeing me come out and report me.

"My first idea was to beat it out of town. But I'm short on money and I knew that you'd get me sooner or later anyway. So I decided to get to you first, make a clean breast of what actually happened and turn myself over to you for attempted burglary before you got me for murder."

"How long ago did this happen?" I demanded.

Tompkins shuddered.

"Not over ten minutes," he answered. "You know the Torrence Building's only six blocks away and I hurried here as fast as my legs would carry me."

I jabbed the button which brought Moore of the Detective Bureau to my side.

"Get a couple of your best men and come with me!" I told him. "Somebody's snuffed old Levi Jones's light out."

Moore gave a quick glance at Tompkins.

"The old devil's been flirting with trouble for the past ten or fifteen years!" he remarked dryly, as he turned to obey my order. "Meet you in the

hallway, Chief, with Dugan and Miles, in about two minutes."

II

THINGS in Jones's office were as Tompkins—who was shaking as if with the ague when we entered the room—had described them. In the outer office the lights were still burning as he had said he had left them. They disclosed to view a safe rather larger than the ordinary, the door of which was standing wide open. Drawers had been pulled out and their contents scattered about the floor.

Giving Dugan, who was a finger-print expert of more than ordinary ability, his instructions, the remainder of us entered the smaller office.

Jones was seated in a high-back, broad-armed, leather-upholstered chair, his right side turned toward the door. His body was slumped backward, his head hanging over the back of the chair in an indescribable—almost grotesque—position. His eyes were wide open, staring glassily at us. Never a handsome man, with his long hooked nose and thin, cadaverous face surmounted by its thatch of unkempt hair, in death he was positively repulsive.

From his left breast protruded the handle of a knife. It had evidently been driven from behind over his shoulder and with tremendous force straight to the heart. That death had been instantaneous there was not a doubt. A thin stream of blood had flown from the wound, staining the shirtfront a dull brownish crimson.

I took one of the old man's claw-like hands in my own. The body was already beginning to grow cold. I deduced—and Moore and Miles agreed with me—that he had been dead at least an hour.

I turned to Tompkins, who had dropped into the nearest chair and was again sniveling to himself.

"Have you ever seen that knife before?" I asked, pointing to the weapon in the dead man's breast.

Tompkins nodded.

"God! Yes!" he answered. "It was his. Somebody gave it to him once—always kept it on his desk for a paper weight and letter opener."

I called Dugan from the other room.

"Look that knife-handle over for prints!" I told him.

The little detective busied himself with his magnifying glass for a brief time. Then he turned to me with a shrug of his thin shoulders.

"Th' fellow that did this job didn't even go to the trouble of wearin' rubber gloves, Chief. He did the same with this handle that he did with the safe—wiped everything off with a cloth. Maybe used alcohol. There isn't even a chicken track on either one of them!"

I turned to Moore.

"Find the caretaker and have him bring up the janitor who takes care of this floor," I instructed.

Then I commanded Tompkins to make a hurried inventory of the contents of the safe. He skimmed over the various papers inside of the pigeon-holes and on the floor, completing his task inside of five minutes.

"There was over five thousand dollars in there when I quit this afternoon," he announced. "In addition several securities that I have noticed in one of the drawers—valued probably at ten or fifteen thousand—are gone. I know that they were there when I left the office, because the old man had been checking them over, and I saw him put 'em back. It was past banking hours, then, so that the thief must have taken them."

I looked at Dugan.

"How was the box cracked?" I asked.

The little detective grinned.

"'Twasn't cracked, Chief," he answered. "The fellow that got inside that box worked the combination. The only

fellow that I know who's clever enough for such a job is Eddie New."

The sniveling Tompkins let out a lusty squawk.

"I tell you it can't be!" he wailed. "Nobody knew the combination except old Jones and myself!"

I turned to the telephone on the desk and called up Headquarters.

"Lenny," I instructed the sergeant who answered, "look up the records and tell me where Eddie New is right now."

In less than a minute the answer came back over the wire: "Chief, Eddie's laid up with a broken leg—result of an automobile smashup—in Greely's hangout. Got hurt the week after he got out of stir."

I hung up the receiver with a bang.

Obviously the murderer and thief was not Eddie New, the only crook in the city really competent of opening a strictly modern safe such as that before us without damaging the mechanism. Nor was Eddie New the sort of man to commit a murder; he was of the more modern, "Jimmie Valentine" sort—clever with his fingers, clever with his head, planning his work as carefully as a business man plans his deals, guarding every contingency before taking a step.

There was a bare possibility that Jones had opened the safe himself while entertaining some visitor, and that later the visitor had taken his life and made away with the money and securities. But granting that such was the case, why had the murderer gone to the trouble of carefully wiping the finger prints off from the safe? For in such a case the only prints would be those of the dead man himself. Verily the affair was assuming some angles that gave food for thought.

III

MOORE entered with Grady, the head janitor, and a pale, dull-appearing man whom he introduced as Billy Murphy,

who, according to Grady, did the cleaning on the fifth floor. Tompkins identified him at once as the man he had seen cleaning the corridor at the time he made his escape from the office after discovering the murder.

Murphy, readily admitting that he had noticed Tompkins leave the office hurriedly about midnight, came forward with a story which complicated matters worse than ever:

He had been working some distance down the hallway between ten and eleven o'clock. At that time, chancing to pass Jones's office, he had seen a light shining through the ground-glass door. About half an hour later, again passing the door, he had heard the sound of voices—one low and indistinct, the other plainly recognizable as that of the money lender himself.

He imagined that he had heard a cry. Yet he was not certain. At any rate, Jones's voice had stopped suddenly, but inasmuch as he, Murphy, was moving down the corridor at the time, he had given the matter no more thought.

Later he remembered again passing the office and noticing that the light had been extinguished. That was all that he knew about the affair until he saw Tompkins rush out of the place about midnight.

The man was plainly nervous and ill at ease, as is usually the case of the more ignorant when brought face to face with the law for the first time. Yet something about his manner caused me to do some hurried thinking. When he had completed his story I ordered him searched.

Hidden in his inside coat pocket Moore found a package of bills amounting to nearly one thousand dollars!

IV

WHENCE came that money? Hundred-dollar-a-month janitors are not apt to be carrying huge amounts of cash

about their clothes. Breaking down under our questioning he said that he had found the money in the hallway close to the door at the time he had passed the office a third time and discovered it dark. He was a poor man, he said, with a wife and family to support. He had at first intended turning the money in to Grady, his superior, but later decided to keep it, hiding it until the hue and cry which was certain to follow its loss had blown over, when he would bank it a small amount at a time.

There was nothing for me to do but hold William Murphy for the murder of Levi Jones.

He confessed.

Yet after he had admitted to the killing of Levi Jones I felt that he was a liar even though his confession as I had written it and with his rambling signature at the end lay before me. The pieces refused to dovetail together.

Although policemen refuse to admit that there is such a thing as the "Third Degree," seldom is a confession secured without using some method which would not stand the limelight of publicity. The newspaper boys know it and wink at it. It is necessary and, in some form or another, is used the world over. It is part of the price the criminal pays for his war against society. I used the "Third Degree" on William Murphy.

A glance at his peculiar complexion and the nervous twitching of his facial muscles showed that he was a "dope." The presence of a small quantity of cocaine in his pocket substantiated the fact.

It was nearly morning when we arrested Murphy. He had been working all night. Naturally, he was tired and sleepy. For the remainder of that day and half of the following night Moore, Dugan, Miles and myself took turns keeping him awake. We questioned him constantly and from a thousand angles. He refused to tell a different story than

the one he had given us at first—that of finding the money in the hallway.

On the table before his weary eyes we laid a big package of "dope." At frequent intervals we brought into the room other "snowbirds." We gave them free rein to the "snow." The joyous light that overspread their features as they sniffed the poison was enough to break a stronger will than that of William Murphy. He finally gave up.

I read to him the confession as I had reconstructed the crime. According to my deductions Jones had gone to his office to work. He had opened the safe and was in his private office when Murphy entered to do the cleaning. In front of Jones was a package of bills he was counting. The paper cutter lay before him. Naturally he thought nothing of seeing Murphy—a man who was in the office daily—busied about his duties.

Working up to a point close to the money lender, Murphy had suddenly leaped forward, seized the old man by the throat with one hand and with the other plunged the knife into his breast. Even if there had been an outcry, no one would have heard it at that time of night and on that deserted floor. Recalling the stories he had heard of the folly of leaving finger-prints, he had hastily wiped off the knife-handle and the safe dial with his dust cloth—after looting the safe—and hurried back to his work, springing the lock on the door after him.

This was the crime as I reconstructed it and the confession in substance that Murphy signed.

He repudiated it next day at the preliminary hearing, upon the advice of his attorney.

And I, despite the fact that he had confessed to me, felt that the confession was a falsehood. For there was one weak spot in the whole affair.

Tompkins stuck to his assertion that

there had been at least five thousand dollars in cash in the safe and securities amounting to between ten and fifteen thousand dollars. There was every reason to believe that as Jones's clerk he knew what he was talking about. We had found less than a thousand dollars on Murphy when we searched him.

Granted that I was right and that the confession I had forced from the janitor was the truth, what had become of the remainder of the money? Murphy was not clever enough to hide it and keep it hidden in the face of the terrific grilling we had given him. Nor, on the other hand, was he clever enough to act as the tool for someone else, the payment being the money we had found on his person, and keep from disclosing the fact under the "Third Degree."

There was something decidedly rotten in Denmark. I was man enough to admit this fact to Moore and his men during the recess after Murphy had taken the stand at preliminary hearing and to admit to them also that if Tompkins confirmed his statement regarding the amount of money when he took the stand that we would have considerable trouble in getting a conviction when the case came to trial. For the court had appointed to defend the janitor a young attorney of more than ordinary ability—a man who might be expected to do his utmost for his client on account of the advertising he would receive in case of an acquittal.

V

TOMPKINS was the first witness called after recess. He was visibly nervous, yet he retold the story he had told to me almost word for word. The prosecuting attorney was about to turn him over to the attorney for the defense for cross-examination when, like a bolt out

of a clear sky, the truth suddenly came to me.

I leaned across the table and whispered to the prosecutor. A startled look flashed across his face, and an instant later he was on his feet moving for an adjournment. His motion was granted. Five minutes later he, Tompkins, Murphy and his attorney, Dugan, Moore, Miles and myself were closeted in the prosecutor's rooms.

I turned upon Tompkins.

"You cur!" I shouted, shaking my fist under his nose; "you killed Levi Jones yourself, and I, like a fool, almost sent an innocent man to the gallows for your crime!"

He shrank back, while a gasp of astonishment went up from the others in the room.

"I—I—" he commenced to stammer. But I stopped him.

"Let me tell you just what happened," I went on. "You and old Jones were working in the office during the early part of the evening. Murphy says that he saw a light when he passed the door. You lie when you say that Jones fired you during the afternoon. The truth of the matter is that the altercation took place at the time when Murphy says that he heard angry voices as he again passed the door.

"You had probably often quarreled before. Therefore, Jones had no suspicion when you passed behind him. You seized the knife and plunged it into his heart!

"The remainder was easy—for you are a smooth customer—so smooth that you had me hoodwinked all the way through! You rifled the safe, wiped off the finger-prints from it and the knife-handle, and then, watching your chance, tossed the roll of bill out into the hallway where you knew Murphy would find them when he started his cleaning. You knew that he was simple-minded—a dope fiend—knew just what his mental

process would be and that he would admit anything under the terrors of the "third degree." That you guessed right is proved by the result.

"Then you turned out the lights and watched your chance. You probably had the door open a crack. You saw Murphy pick up the roll of money, stuff it into his pocket and, after looking around to see that he was unobserved, busy himself with his pail and mop. Then, when you were certain that he could see you, you rushed from the office and past him to the stairway.

"Your scheme was clever—diabolically so. I'm intensely human—human enough not to suspect a man who openly confesses that he went to a place to commit a burglary and finds that a murder had been committed. I swallowed your story like a veritable boob.

"You realized that, under ordinary circumstances, you would probably be suspected. Therefore, by coming straight to police headquarters, admitting your premeditated guilt and telling of the murder, you threw any suspicions I might otherwise have had to the winds. I went into the investigation firmly convinced that you were innocent. I might have run into evidence against you, but you had it all discounted in advance.

"You made one fatal mistake. I made the other. Mine nearly hanged poor Murphy, here, while yours will hang yourself."

Tompkins gulped. Then: "All right, Chief, you've got me foul, I guess. I put the money and securities in an envelope addressed to myself and dropped it down the mail chute. It should have been delivered yesterday afternoon at

my home address. There's just one question I'd like to ask:

I nodded. "Fire away."

"I'll admit that I thought I had things fixed up so that you wouldn't suspect me. And besides I'm a pretty fair actor and I pulled the sob stuff pretty decently you'll admit. But you say that I made one mistake. Do you mind telling me what it was?"

It was my turn to smile.

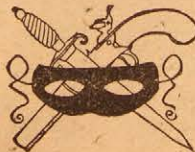
"Tompkins," I said, "your story was too perfect. Remember you told me—and you repeated the same story on the witness stand just now—that you seized the knob of the outer door ready to bolt when you heard a moan. You turned quickly, you claimed, and through the door you saw Jones sitting at his desk, his head hanging over the back of his chair, the handle of a knife sticking out of his chest and his breast covered with blood. That's where you made you big mistake."

Tompkins looked puzzled.

"I'm still in the dark," he declared.

"Because," I answered, "the position of Jones's desk is such that he was seated with his right side toward the door. He was slumped down in his chair—which is leather upholstered with huge arms, his head hanging over the back and side. It was not until you told your story a second time on the witness stand and I visualized the scene of the crime that the truth suddenly flashed over me.

"From the position of Jones's desk and the way he was sitting with his right side turned toward the doorway, a man standing at the outer doorway couldn't see the handle of the knife which was plunged into his heart!"



The Catspaw

By Ward Sterling

I

THE Peck mansion was as carefully guarded as a prison. At the front and rear doors armed operatives from the best detective bureau in the city—all tried men—were posted day and night. Others patrolled the grounds. There was not one chance in ten million for anyone to creep through the network of protection we had thrown about the aged millionaire and his family.

Yet the first murder occurred within twenty-four hours of the time set by Lon Bixby!

Lannagan, the second man, did not report for duty in the morning as usual. Jenkins, the butler, entering the room when he did not respond found him cold in death.

The tragedy had taken place some time during the night. The body was cold and rigid when we rushed into the chamber in response to the butler's frantic calls for help.

Bloated to nearly double his natural size, blackened, the limbs twisted as from convulsions, the face drawn out of shape, the unfortunate man presented a terrifying spectacle.

Doctor Maxwell, Peck's regular physician, who was locked up in the house with the remainder of us, gave as his opinion after a hurried examination that death was the result of poisoning.

Yet Lannagan had eaten nothing, to the best of our knowledge and belief, that the rest of us had not also eaten. That had been a part of our agreement—that we would all partake of the same food—in order to protect Peck from

poison. Nor had anything in the provision line been brought to the house. Prepared to stand a siege, everything—even the fresh meats—had been purchased in advance and stored away in the refrigerating plant downstairs.

Doctor Frye, the coroner, summoned by telephone as soon as the tragedy was discovered, agreed with his colleague that Lannagan had been poisoned. It was his belief, however, that the poison had been administered by injection into a vein.

Both physicians made a careful examination of the body. Just above the knee they found two minute punctures in the skin! Here, too, the swelling seemed more aggravated than elsewhere, while the spot had turned a darker hue.

The body had every symptom of death from snake bite. Yet we knew that there was not a snake in the house nor could there have been one in the room. Lannagan had, according to my instructions, slept with his windows and door locked. They were in this condition when the body was found, for it had been necessary for the butler to let himself into the room with his pass-key. The other servants had locked themselves in in the same way. An alert detective had been posted all night in each corridor.

In spite of the precautions, in order to make certain, we removed every piece of furniture from the dead man's room. There was no possibility of a reptile having been hidden there. Nor could a man have, in any possible way, entered the house.

To make matters more complicated we knew that Lannagan had not left the

house that day nor the day before. For this was a part of the arrangement that we had made.

Ponder as I would, I could think of no possible solution to the puzzle. It was as mysterious as Poe's "Mystery of the Rue Morgue."

Peck, the storm center—the man for whom all these precautions were taken and for whom poor Lannagan had died—was the calmest of us all.

Five minutes after the appearance of the coroner, the millionaire was summoned to the phone. In accordance with my determination not to allow him out of my sight day or night, I accompanied him to the library.

A harsh, metallic voice—a voice so loud that it could be heard all over the big room—informed him that the death of a member of his household had been a warning—a warning sent to prove to him that in spite of all his precautions his enemies were able to strike when and where they pleased. His own death would follow in good time.

Shaking slightly, yet game to the core, he motioned to me and handed me the instrument. The voice died out in a mirthless, diabolical chuckle. Then the receiver at the other end of the wire was hung up with a click.

Jiggling the hook up and down, I succeeded in getting "Central" within a few seconds. An instant later I was connected with my friend, Armstrong, manager of the traffic department, to whom I hurriedly explained the situation and requested that the call be traced.

Armstrong moved speedily. For, in spite of the fact that hundreds of calls go through the Capital Hill exchange every hour, so thorough is their system that inside of five minutes he had me back on the wire.

The call had originated in one of the pay stations at the Pennsylvania depot, ten miles away!

II

PERHAPS in my efforts to hold the reader's attention I have not explained matters as thoroughly as I should. Then, too, like all detectives, I am a poor narrator of my own experiences. What seems to the average person to be an exciting adventure is to us only a part of the day's work—an episode to be forgotten as speedily as possible after it has been disclosed to judge and jury. Yet the Morgan Peck case is so unique in criminal annals as to be worthy of being put in a class by itself.

The reader will recall the sensation in financial circles caused by the appearance of Alonzo Bixby, the South African magnate. For two short years he was one of the king pins of The Exchange.

Then came the battle between Bixby and Peck. It was short, but memorable. Peck, backed by his years of experience, crushed his enemy beneath his heel as a farmer scotches a harmless worm.

Bixby, cornered, his fangs bared, showed his makeup by turning crook. Timothy Owen, Peck's right-hand man, was killed. Over the body of his friend Morgan Peck swore vengeance. One of Bixby's retainers, arrested by the police, admitted the murder, charging Bixby with having instigated the crime. All of Peck's gigantic fortune was placed at the disposal of the prosecution. The trial lasted for weeks, an army of lawyers battling for every point.

In the end the jury sent Bixby to the penitentiary for life.

The day that sentence was pronounced is one that will long be remembered in newspaper and legal circles. Bixby, surrounded by his lawyers, his beautiful young wife at his side, listened impassively to the judge's voice. It was not until the officers seized him to part him forever from the woman he loved that he gave way to his emotions.

Leaping to his feet, his rough-hewn face quivering with diabolical rage, he shook his huge fist at Morgan Peck!

"Damn you! In prison or out, I'll get you!" he shouted. "I'll make you suffer as you're making me! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!"

Raving like a madman, they dragged him away.

Remember, Bixby was still a wealthy man and money will buy almost anything—even liberty. There were those among us who predicted that Bixby would not remain long behind prison walls. We were correct in our surmises.

In just eleven months and three days he was at liberty. With him disappeared half a dozen guards. How much he paid them for his liberty no one will probably ever know for none of them were ever captured. Some of us hold to the theory that after helping Bixby make his escape, they were killed at his orders. But that is another story.

Three weeks after Bixby made his break from prison an effort was made to blow up Peck's office with a bomb. Fortunately the financier was absent when the package was received. The secretary who opened it lost his life.

A week later someone fired a shot at Peck in the dark. Only the fact that the old man moved slightly at that instant prevented the assassin's bullet from finding its mark. As it was, only a slight flesh wound rewarded the attempt.

Then Peck's colleagues took a hand. He was the center around which one of the biggest financial deals ever pulled off was being engineered—a deal that involved governments. His death would have meant a world panic. In spite of his sneers at their fears—for Peck was a battler who fought for the sheer love of the sport—they finally induced him to obey their commands.

He was locked in his own house, surrounded by guards as I have stated. The best detective bureau in the city was

engaged to look after his safety. Half a hundred operatives were put to work combing the country for his enemies.

I—and I trust that the reader will pardon the seeming egotism displayed—as the best man available among all of the detectives in the city, was placed in charge of the guards surrounding Morgan Peck.

Two hours after we had taken our precautions a special delivery letter mailed from a downtown station was received. It read as follows:

Peck: I swore that I'd get you and I meant it. By cooping yourself up like a sick chicken you have opened the way for my vengeance. Inside of forty-eight hours I'll strike! God help you from now on.

"Bixby."

III

MORGAN PECK was said by his enemies to be a man without feeling, nerves or love. A widower, his only daughter dying in childhood, having few near relatives, he had schooled himself against emotion. Yet that afternoon after the body of poor Lannagan had been removed from the house and we sat together in the big library discussing the affair, two things took place which threw a different light on the old man's character.

Gladys Peck, his niece—an orphan and his nearest relative—a girl whom he had raised from childhood, passed through the room. The old face lighted up and, as she passed out of hearing, he turned savagely to me.

"I don't give a damn about myself," he growled. "I'm old enough to cash in—time's coming sooner or later anyway. But God help Bixby if he harms that girl! And God help you if you let him!"

That was all. Yet in his face was an odd light that betrayed the gruffness of his voice. I wondered if his enemies knew of his love for this orphan girl.

I shuddered as I thought of what might happen if they chanced to learn—and struck him through her.

The other incident I mention was when a cat—an ordinary, common variety of feline—entered the room and, with back arched, rubbed purringly against the millionaire's leg.

"Funny little devil!" he grumbled. "Picked him up five years ago when he was a kitten. Somebody'd turned him out to die—freeze to death. Damn such people! Stuck him in my overcoat pocket and brought him home. Never cared for cats—Angoras, Persians and the blue-blooded aristocracy of catdom—but this little cuss made a hit with me. Scrapper! See that spot of red hair on his head? That shows it. He'd fight the Old Nick! Intelligent, too. Makes the servants all stand around. Got a habit of biting 'em on their ankles. They all like him, though. Funny, ain't it? Got a lot of human traits in him. Reminds me a little bit of myself," he added with a smile, reaching down and rubbing the cat's head affectionately.

And this was the man whose enemies claimed him to be without a heart!

That same afternoon the coffin came!

An undertaker's wagon stopped at the front door and two solemn-faced men brought the casket up the steps.

In accordance with his orders, the detective on duty refused to admit them, but called me. Cross-questioned, they knew nothing. The coffin had been ordered from the Morgenstein Casket Company and they were here to deliver it. The address was plainly marked.

Detaining them after ordering the unsightly reminder of the death, that was constantly in our midst, replaced in the wagon, I hurried Holdridge, one of the brightest operatives under my direction, over to the offices of the casket company. He returned inside of thirty minutes.

The casket had been ordered by mail.

A bank draft for four hundred dollars drawn by the First National Trust and Savings Bank—one of Peck's own institutions—had accompanied the letter.

The letter merely stated that a death would shortly occur at the Peck home and asked that the coffin be delivered immediately.

A telephone call to the bank proved fruitless. The draft clerk remembered drawing the draft, which was paid for in cash, but, owing to the large number of similar papers which passed through his hands daily, had no recollection as to who his customer had been. In fact, only the number on the draft recalled the incident to mind at all.

I released the two men from the factory. In my own mind I was convinced that the affair had been pulled off by Bixby merely in an effort to break down Peck's morale.

But they failed to reckon with the old man's fighting spirit.

IV

THE remainder of the afternoon and the night passed uneventfully, everyone, warned by what had happened the night before, doubling his vigilance.

I spent the following morning in going over the reports of the fifty-odd operatives scattered about the city in quest of Bixby. Despite the fact that the former haunts of the big South African had been combed by our men not only could no trace be found of the financier himself, but several of his closest friends—men who at the trial were proved to have done his bidding without question—had also disappeared.

As for Mrs. Bixby, it appeared that she had left the quiet hotel, where she had remained since the trial, nearly a month before her husband had made his escape. And the trail was too old to follow. She had dropped out of sight as completely as though the earth had opened up and swallowed her.

For two hours I sat at the big library table and went over the case from every angle. There were a number of things that puzzled me more than I was willing to admit. In the first place who and what had killed Michael Lannagan?

I had proved to my own satisfaction and to that of Peck that the second man had not been absent from the house an instant from the time that he, like the rest of us, went into seclusion. Eight trained detectives—each an ex-policeman—men with years of service behind them—were ready to swear that no one had entered the mansion. These men had taken turns in watching the place and grounds in shifts of two hours on and two hours off during the entire time since we had been in a state of siege. On the other hand I realized that Bixby had money and that money will buy almost anything. Yet I was not ready to condemn these men on mere conjecture.

Then, too, there was the matter of the special delivery letter. Who was in such close touch with the money-master that they were able to find out to the minute when he had been driven into seclusion? Outside of our own party only his closest friends knew of our plans. And had it been a mere coincidence that the telephone call from the pay station at the Pennsylvania depot had come in just after the arrival of the coroner?

Was there someone in the house who was signaling the happenings inside to our enemies on the outside?

Was one of our own number the murderer? Would he, when the time came, strike down Peck as he had struck down Lannagan?

I reached for the list of those who made up our party and checked it over in the hope that through it I might arrive at the truth. In addition to Peck, his niece and myself, there was Doctor Maxwell, an old friend—a man immensely wealthy in his own name and who had been the millionaire's private

physician for thirty years. All of the servants had been in the old man's employ for periods ranging from over a quarter of a century of service on the part of Mrs. Langtry, the housekeeper, to ten years on the part of Lannagan, the murdered second man. Peck had hired them all and vouched for them. The detectives, as I have stated, were all men with years of service behind them.

No, on the face of it, it seemed like an impossibility. Yet there was the murder of Lannagan to prove the falsity of my reasoning.

It was shortly after noon when Peck and I, smoking in the library, were brought to our feet by a shriek for help from the servants' quarters at the rear of the house. Drawing my revolver and shoving the millionaire, who would have taken the lead, behind me, I rushed in the direction from which the sound came.

Fred Deets, who acted as chauffeur and valet for Peck was lying on his back in the middle of the kitchen in convulsions. Beside him stood Mrs. Mulcahey, the cook, from whose voluminous lungs the shouts for help were emanating. Coincident with my arrival came the others with the exception of the two men stationed at the doors. They, like the veterans they were, remained at their posts.

In response to my orders Jenkins summoned Doctor Maxwell, who was asleep in his room. Inside of a minute the physician, his emergency kit in his hand, made his appearance.

He shook his head as he bent over the stricken man and felt his pulse. For a second there was silence. Then the physician straightened up with a shrug of his shoulders.

"He's dying!" he said quietly, while Mrs. Mulcahey let out a wail of despair.

I turned to the physician. "Do you think—"

"Same as Lannagan!" he answered. "See for yourself how the poor fellow's starting to bloat. After nearly half a century of medical experience it's the first case I ever failed to diagnose—or at least make a fairly good guess at."

He stopped suddenly. A shudder over the body of the man on the floor. Then his jaw dropped.

Fred Deets was dead!

V

I TURNED to Mrs. Mulcahey.

"Tell me just what happened!" I commanded.

"Sure, and that's th' worst of it," she sobbed. "There was nothin' happened at all. He was sittin' here as happy as you please talkin' to Teta when—"

"Teta? Who's Teta?" I demanded.

"The cat," Peck answered grimly. "Deets was one of Teta's warmest friends. The little animal is decidedly emphatic in his likes and dislikes, but poor Fred was one of his favorites."

I nodded. Then to Mrs. Mulcahey: "Go ahead with your story!"

"Well, sor, as I was sayin' he was sitting there talkin' to Teta when all of a sudden I heard him give a little gasp. Me back was turned to him at the time. I looked around quickly—just in time to see him slide from th' chair with th' froth comin' out of his mouth. I yelled for help and you seen th' rest."

Mrs. Mulcahey had been with Peck for eighteen years, my records showed. That she was not the murderer was a certainty. Yet Deets had been killed under her very eyes. I questioned her for nearly half an hour, in the hope that she might recall having seen some other member of the household in or near the kitchen at or about the time Deets was stricken down. But she was emphatic. She and she alone had been with the dead chauffeur.

There was nothing to do but send for the coroner again.

Meanwhile the body had been removed to an upstairs room where Doctor Maxwell made an examination. He called as I passed through the hall. As I entered the room he pointed to the naked body of the murdered chauffeur.

Close to the knee of the right leg the skin was blacker than elsewhere.

And in the center of the dark spot was a tiny puncture similar to the ones we had found on Lannagan's leg!

A detective occasionally gets "hunches." If he is a good one he plays them to the limit. I, as I have stated before, believe—and I trust that the reader will not accuse me of egotism—that I am among the top notchers despite the poor opinion he has received of me through my rambling account of the murders in the Peck mansion. Just now I got a "hunch." I decided to play it.

Hardly taking time to thank my friend, the physician, for his courtesy, I hurried downstairs to the library where Peck was busy reading, the big cat curled up in a ball on the chair opposite.

The millionaire looked up in astonishment at my catapultic entrance.

"Mr. Peck!" I burst forth, "I want to borrow Teta!"

The millionaire elevated his brows. "You *what?*" he demanded.

"I want to borrow Teta—the cat, here. I've an idea that he'd make a first class detective. I'll promise you that I'll not injure him in the least, but I am firm in the conviction that he can lead us to the murderers of Lannagan and Deets—the men who are trying to get at you and, possibly, at Miss Gladys through you."

As I spoke the big cat arched his back and got onto his feet with a yawn, exercising his digits by drawing and withdrawing his claws in the padding of the chair half a dozen times. The action decided the old man. He looked up at

me with a suspicion of a twinkle in his eyes.

"The little cuss is a scrapper as I told you," he chuckled. "Look at the way he girds up his loins for action at the mere mention of taking a part in the scrap. Take him and welcome—but don't let him get hurt."

With a curt nod of thanks, I picked up the cat and carried him upstairs to my own room. For the next half hour the little animal and myself were busily engaged among the retorts and tubes which Doctor Maxwell had brought from his laboratory for experimental purposes during his enforced detention and which I borrowed for my own uses. When I had completed my task I turned to the furred beauty with a smile of satisfaction:

"Teta," I whispered, "this whole affair is a secret between the two of us. I thought that I was on the right track—and now I know it. You're the boy who'll bring home the bacon. It's up to you to get the men who killed your pals—Lannagan and Deets. Will you do it?"

There are some people who claim that cats have no intelligence. I stand ready to swear that Teta, Morgan Peck's cat, understood every word I said. For he rubbed against my leg with a loud pur-r-r-r of satisfaction and immediately took up his station close to the door as if clamoring for action.

We went down the stairs together.

I stopped at both front and rear doors and gave my instructions to the operatives on watch:

"I want to be informed the minute the cat meows to get out," I instructed them. "Pass this word on to the men who will relieve you. Remember, no excuses go. Before he is let out, I am to be called!"

Fifteen minutes later Olmstead, on duty at the rear door, called to me:

"The cat's howling at my station," he said.

I followed the animal to the door and personally let him outside.

VI

ACROSS the lawn I followed the cat with my eyes until he disappeared around the corner of a nearby garage. O'Leary and Cain, the two men on duty on the grounds, had had their orders. As Teta disappeared down the alley I saw O'Leary dodge around a nearby bush and follow him. A second later he reappeared and approached the house.

"Your friend, the cat, went into a barn that's been transformed into a garage at 1424 North Tenth, just five houses below here," he reported with a grin. "And if you'll pardon the joke, chief, I've shadowed darned near everything that walks, but it's the first time I ever trailed a cat."

Stepping to the telephone, I called up my friend Hitchens, chief of detectives, who was cooperating with us in every way possible. Satisfied with the results of my conversation, I sat down to spend the remainder of the afternoon among Peck's books.

Suddenly the phone at my elbow jangled. Turning, I picked up the receiver and answered the call.

The same metallic voice that had talked to Peck the day of Lannagan's murder answered my gruff "Hello!"

"Peck?" he asked.

"I'll call him," I responded.

"Never mind," the other answered. Then as I hesitated for words, the voice went on:

"Tell your boss he can prepare for another killing! It may be him and it may be another, but his time is coming soon!"

The voice died away in the same harsh laughter that I had heard before.

I hung up the receiver with a bang and jiggled the hook to attract the attention of "Central." An instant later I was connected with my friend Armstrong

to whom I again explained matters, while Peck looked on, his furrowed face wrinkled in doubt.

This time Armstrong was speedier than before. Scarcely had I hung up the receiver than he called me back.

"The phone call was from the booth in a drug store at the busiest corner of the city. To trace the person who had called would be an impossibility."

Packard, on duty at the rear door, called me at fifteen minutes past five o'clock.

"The cat just came in!" he yelled.

The afternoon's hunting had evidently been of the best for the cat was purring contentedly as he passed down the hallway on his way to the library. But I was taking no chances of a scratch from his sharp claws, for I protected my hands with heavy gloves as I tenderly picked him up and carried him upstairs to my room. Ten minutes later I was at the telephone with my friend Hitchens at the other end.

Half an hour afterward there came a sudden blast of a police whistle. From a dozen different directions from where they had been stationed hurried policemen and detectives, all centering on the big brick house at 1424 North Tenth.

There was no response to our knocks. A burly policeman hurled his bulk against the door! It refused to give way! He swung an axe over his head! Came a sound of splitting wood! A second later we were inside the hallway.

A revolver spit at us from down the corridor! Another flashed from the head of the stairs! We answered them shot for shot, bullet for bullet. For five minutes the battle waged. Then our superior numbers told.

We dashed through the smoke-filled rooms, gathering in our prisoners. Four men were caught in the net—and one woman. She was Mrs. Lon Bixby. Her husband, suffering from a severe wound

in the shoulder, was one of the four. The remainder were merely his tools.

VII

BATTERSBY, one of Bixby's aids, confronted with the murders of Lannagan and Deets, turned state's evidence and confessed. Slick, one of the others, backed him up in his statements.

Bixby, as I had figured from the first, was the instigator of the whole diabolical affair. How he made his escape from prison, however, is something that he refused to divulge—even when he and his confederates were taken to the gallows to answer for their crimes.

How did they kill Lannagan and Deets? By means of Teta!

Unwittingly, the little animal was the indirect cause of both murders. Battersby, according to his own confession, had been posted by Bixby, who had, while still in prison had him engage the place at 1424 North Tenth Street under an alias in order that he might watch the Peck home.

In his guise as a servant he had got acquainted with Deets while the latter was working with one of the cars. He had noticed Teta come out of the barn at 1424 which, having been empty for a number of years, was filled with rats. As the cat passed Deets, the latter had bent over and scratched it, making a chance remark about Peck's affection for the animal. He had also remarked with a chuckle at a fondness the pet had for drawing and withdrawing his claws in whatever he chanced to be lying on—a habit which all cats indulge in at times.

Battersby, alert to give every detail to his employer, had remarked this fact to Bixby in his report. The latter saw an opportunity to turn the incident to his own advantage. Learning that Peck's cat frequented the barn, he had catered to the animal in every possible way until the animal passed a great deal of its time in and about the Bixby place!

Failing in his attempts to kill Peck, the instant that he had chased the millionaire to cover Bixby seized upon the cat to carry out his own diabolical ends. Covering the animal's claws with a concentrated extract of venom made from the poison of a cobra, he had turned it loose leaving it to Fate as to where death would strike.

Peck was likely to be the first. He was the cat's master and the animal would be more likely to be with him than anyone else. That it was Lannagan who was the first was simply one of those peculiar freaks of chance.

The cat, purring contentedly on Lannagan's lap, had stuck his claws slightly into the servant's knee. Lannagan had worn thick trousers and, as a result, a great deal of the poison was rubbed off as the claws went through. He was therefore not stricken until during the night when the venom had gone entirely through his system.

On the other hand Deets, wearing a pair of thin trousers—and there might have been more of the poison on the cat's claws or it may have been fresher—was stricken almost immediately after the sharp points had penetrated his flesh.

Bixby, a native of South Africa, was an adept on poisons which led to the fact that he finally selected this subtle method of committing his crimes.

Located so close to the Peck home, he was able to see from his window a great deal of what was going on around the mansion. As a result, when the coroner called, he knew that death—through the cat—had struck. But he did not know who. He had a confederate stationed downtown somewhere close to the Pennsylvania station. It was but the work of seconds to call the latter up and instruct him to call Peck to the phone. When the latter answered in person the confederate knew that death had struck someone else and so informed Bixby.

The second telephone call was sent in a spirit of mere braggadocio after Teta's claws had been smeared for the third time with the poison. The coffin was sent for the same reason—and to break down Peck's morale.

How did I know these things? Conjecture, and conjecture only. At first glance I imagined—as did Doctor Maxwell and the coroner—that the two punctures in Lannagan's leg were caused by the fangs of a snake. The fact that the symptoms were all those of snake bite led to this deduction. It was not until after Deets had died and Mrs. Mulcahey had told me that Teta had been on his lap at the time that the idea suddenly came to me.

Coupled with this fact was that of finding a puncture on Deets' leg similar to that on the leg of Lannagan. I had noticed the cat's habit of pressing his claws into everything on which he sat. Peck had told me that the cat was a favorite with the two men who had died. I put two and two together and made four of them.

When I borrowed the cat I took him to my room and, with my hands gloved, I scraped his claws and submitted the scrapings to chemical tests. The results showed snake venom.

The remainder was easy. I had only to disinfect the cat's claws and then turn him loose. When my men reported where he went, I summoned Hitchens and asked him to station his men near the house. When the cat returned, I seized him before he had had an opportunity of killing anyone else and again scraped his claws. The chemical tests showed snake venom in great quantities.

The raid on the house at 1424 followed.

I've often wondered if Teta knows the part he played in the death of his two friends and the detection of the murderers? Who knows?

The Finger Print Bureau

By J. H. Taylor

Beginning with this issue, the Finger Print Department will be conducted by Mr. J. H. Taylor. Mr. Taylor is Superintendent, Bureau of Identification, Department of Navigation of the Navy Department. Readers desiring information or advice on subjects relating to Finger Prints may communicate with Mr. Taylor, in care of THE BLACK MASK MAGAZINE. There is no charge for this service. Mr. Taylor requests, however, that letters requiring replies be accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope. Letters of general interest, together with their answers, will be printed in each issue.

EVER since the world began, someone has endeavored to find two things that are exactly alike, but from a scientific point of view this has never been accomplished. The leaves on the trees resemble each other so closely that it is extremely difficult for anyone not experienced in botany to detect the difference. An experienced botanist can at a glance see that there is no resemblance whatever.

The closest resemblance ever found in the world is believed to have been between twins. Their facial expression is in a great many cases as near alike as it is possible to be; even their mannerisms, likes and dislikes are the same, and if these twins are dressed alike it is practically impossible to tell one from the other. It is a well-known fact in the case of the mother of the twins, who could not tell one from the other, that she washed one baby twice and did not wash the other, as she said that it was impossible for her to tell which was which when they were undressed; their physical appearance being so near alike.

The reason for twins resembling each other so closely has been thoroughly explained in several magazine articles, and it is claimed that identical twins spring from a single germ which is fertile and breaks, thereby producing twins, and it can be clearly understood why the disposition and facial expressions of these children would be exactly alike, but God in His wonderful workings has

made it possible for the scientific world to differentiate these twins by the lines on the soles of the feet, the palms of the hands, and the finger-tips. In identical twins it is known to those who have had occasion to examine the impressions of the feet that the patterns of the right foot of a twin will be very similar to the patterns on the right foot of the other twin. This has confused a great many people, and they are of the opinion that twins are identical in every way, but when the minute ridge characteristics in the finger prints and the soles of the feet are examined, to the finger print expert it is easily shown that there is no more resemblance between the twins than there is between people of different parentage.

Of all the people in the world since the year 400 B. C. there have never been found two individuals who have had the same finger prints, or foot-prints. Photographs and descriptions have been found very misleading to the various Police Departments throughout the country, and at times they have caused very serious mistakes in identity, as it is a well-known fact that there are a great many people, who though they are not related, have practically the same facial expression, walk, or mannerisms, and by a person not experienced in identification, the persons would to all intents and purposes be pronounced the same.

In identification work in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps where they have to deal with thousands of men every year, no other system that has ever been invented would answer the purpose other than the finger print system, as by this system no matter whether they are identical twins, or their facial expressions are identically the same, they are known by their finger prints, and there can never be any mistake as to their identity.

Identical twins are those who resemble each other the most, and unless some system had been devised such as the finger print system, there would never have been any way of differentiating twins, or people who closely resembled one another. In the case of criminals and fugitives from justice, these men will resort to every possible method to change their general appearance, such as using chemicals to change the color

of their hair, and will also at times use pneumatic suits in order to change their appearance from slender to stout, but with all of these disguises there has never been found any plan by which they can change their finger prints, and their identity is forever known once their finger prints have been taken.

Anyone who has had occasion to examine the photographs of a given individual taken at different periods of life will see the most marked changes in each photograph, and a novice would be unable to state whether or not they were taken of the same person. The resemblance in photographs has been so close that some of the foremost Bertillon operators in this country have been baffled. In the case of two negroes in the Leavenworth Penitentiary, both under the name of William West, their facial expressions and measurements

(Continued on page 126)

MEN WANTED for **DETECTIVE WORK** EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY
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When convinced by wonderful results, get a full-sized bottle at druggist or direct.

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Please send me your **FREE** trial bottle of Mary T. Goldman's Hair Color Restorer. The natural color of my hair is
black..... jet black..... dark brown.....
medium brown.... light brown, light auburn or blond.....

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ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF SEMI-NUDES
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Just to advertise our famous Hawaiian im. diamonds—the greatest discovery the world has ever known. We will send absolutely free this 1.4k gold f. ring, set with a 3/4 k Hawaiian im. diamond—in beautiful ring box, postage paid. Pay postmaster \$1.48 C.O.D. charges to cover postage, boxing, advertising, handling, etc. If you can tell it from a real diamond return and money refunded. Only 10,000 given away. Send no money. Answer quick. Send size of finger. **KRAUTH & REED, DEPT 812, Masonic Temple, Chicago**



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New Home Treatment

Send Stamp for Book of Information
DR. QUAYLE'S SANITARIUM, MADISON, OHIO, Dept. P

(Continued from page 124)

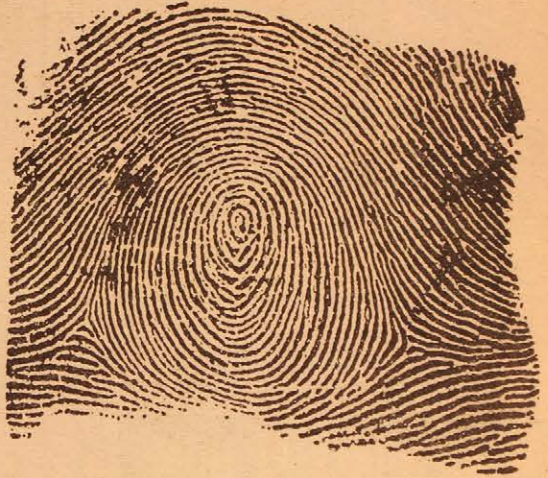
were so much alike that the Bertillon operator could not state positively by their photographs that they were different individuals, but their finger prints showed them to be entirely different.

In the Navy there have been any number of twins who have enlisted, and the only possible way they could have been told apart was by their finger prints, as when they are placed in uniforms of the same rating their general appearance is more marked, and harder

pressions as positive proof of identity, and by this method there is no possibility of a person losing his identity if his finger prints have ever been recorded, regardless of how closely he might resemble someone else.

FINGER PRINT PATTERNS— PART III WHORLS

LAST month, you were told that the Whorl pattern would be explained to



WHORLS

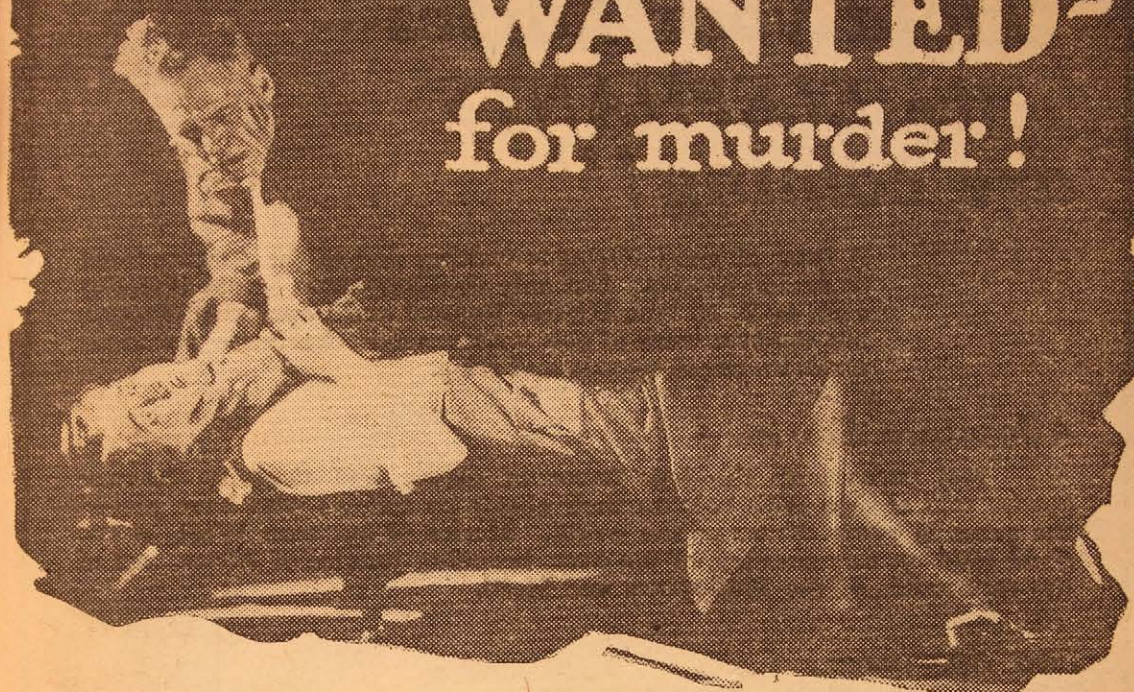
to tell apart than when in civilian clothes.

The finger prints of the human race are divided into four (4) general types, and these impressions will be found in the fingers of everyone, but the ridge characteristics which determine identity have never been known to appear in the same place in a different person's fingers. The possibility of a ridge characteristic appearing in the same place in two different persons' fingers is one in a million, and a great many of the courts throughout the United States have accepted seven (7) ridge characteristics appearing in the same place in two im-

you. The accompanying illustration shows two Whorls. A Whorl is a pattern in which the ridges make a Whorl, or a complete turn, about one central point. You can distinguish a Whorl by the fact that it has two Deltas while a Loop has but one Delta. (A Delta is the outer terminus of a pattern, the point from which we start to count ridges. It is called a "Delta" because it usually resembles the Greek letter "Delta" or a small triangle.)

Maybe you have a Whorl pattern on one of your fingers. Study them closely and see if you can find any Whorls.

WANTED- for murder!



\$1,000 Reward

In a dirty, forlorn shack by the river's edge they found the mutilated body of Genevieve Martin. Her pretty face was swollen and distorted. Marks on the slender throat showed that the girl had been brutally choked to death.

Who had committed this ghastly crime? No one had seen the girl and her assailant enter the cottage. No one had seen the murderer depart. How could he be brought to justice?

Crimes like this have been solved—are being solved every day—by Finger Print Experts. Every day we read in the papers of their exploits, hear of the mysteries they solve, the criminals they identify, the rewards they win. Finger Print Experts are always in the thick of the excitement, the heroes of the hour.

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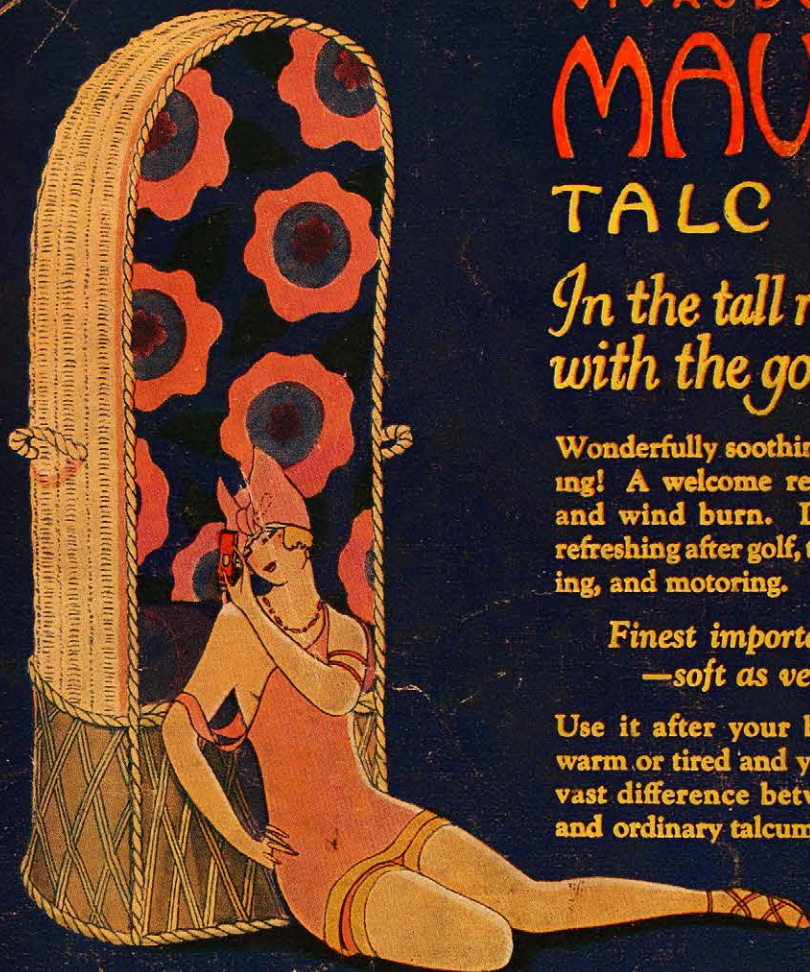
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