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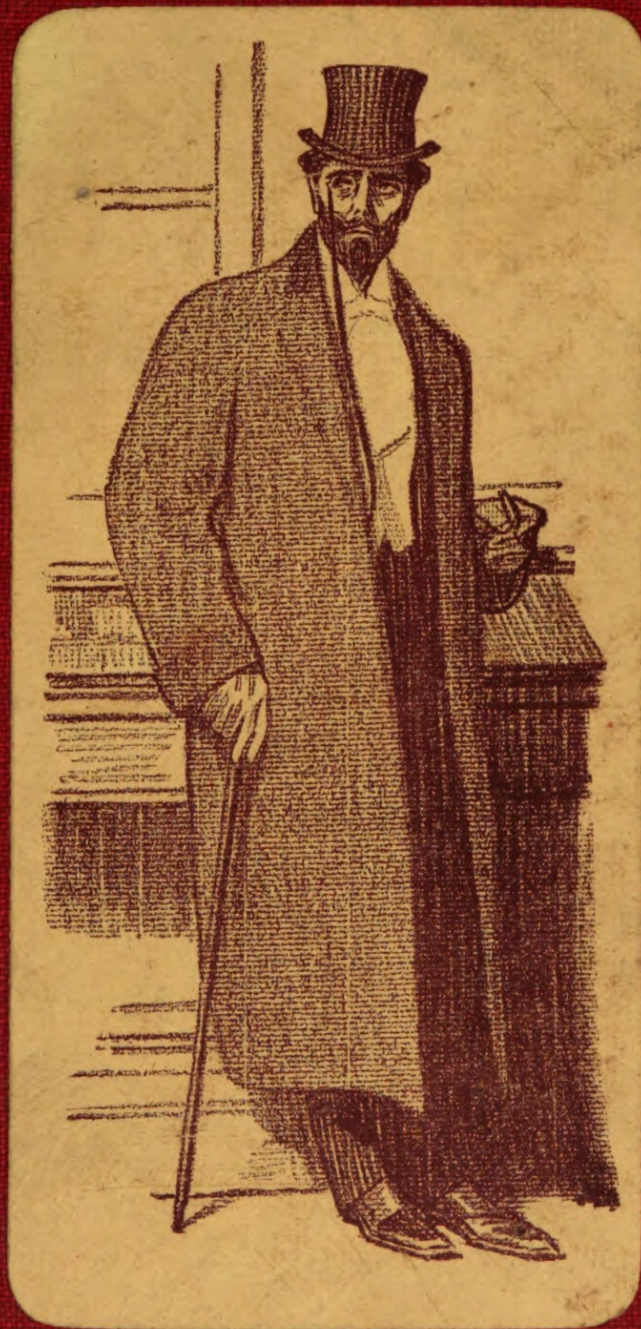
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OUTSIDE THE LAW



JAMES BARNES

**OUTSIDE
THE LAW**

BARNES

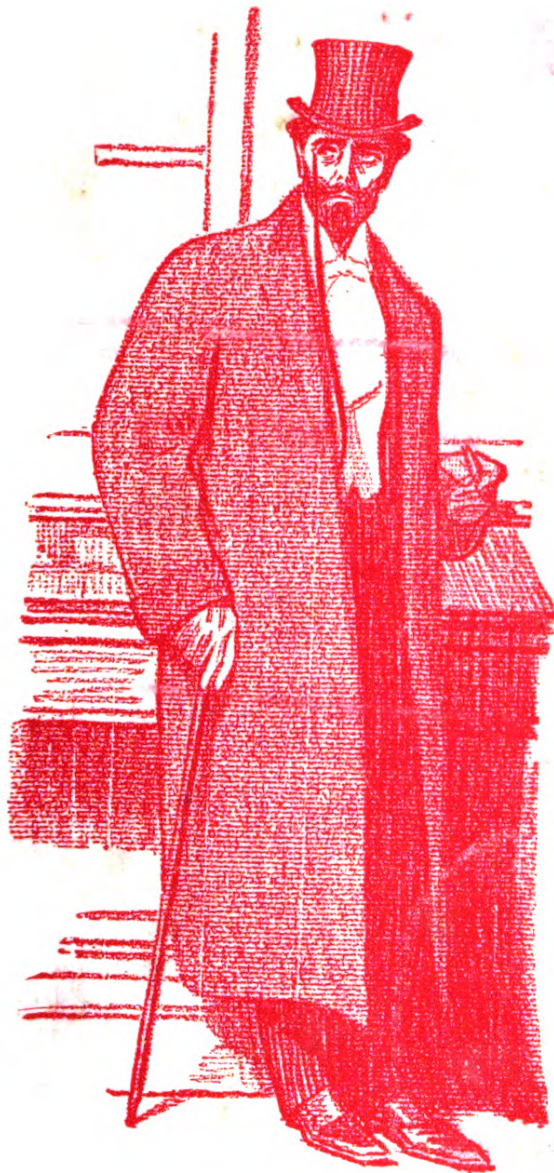
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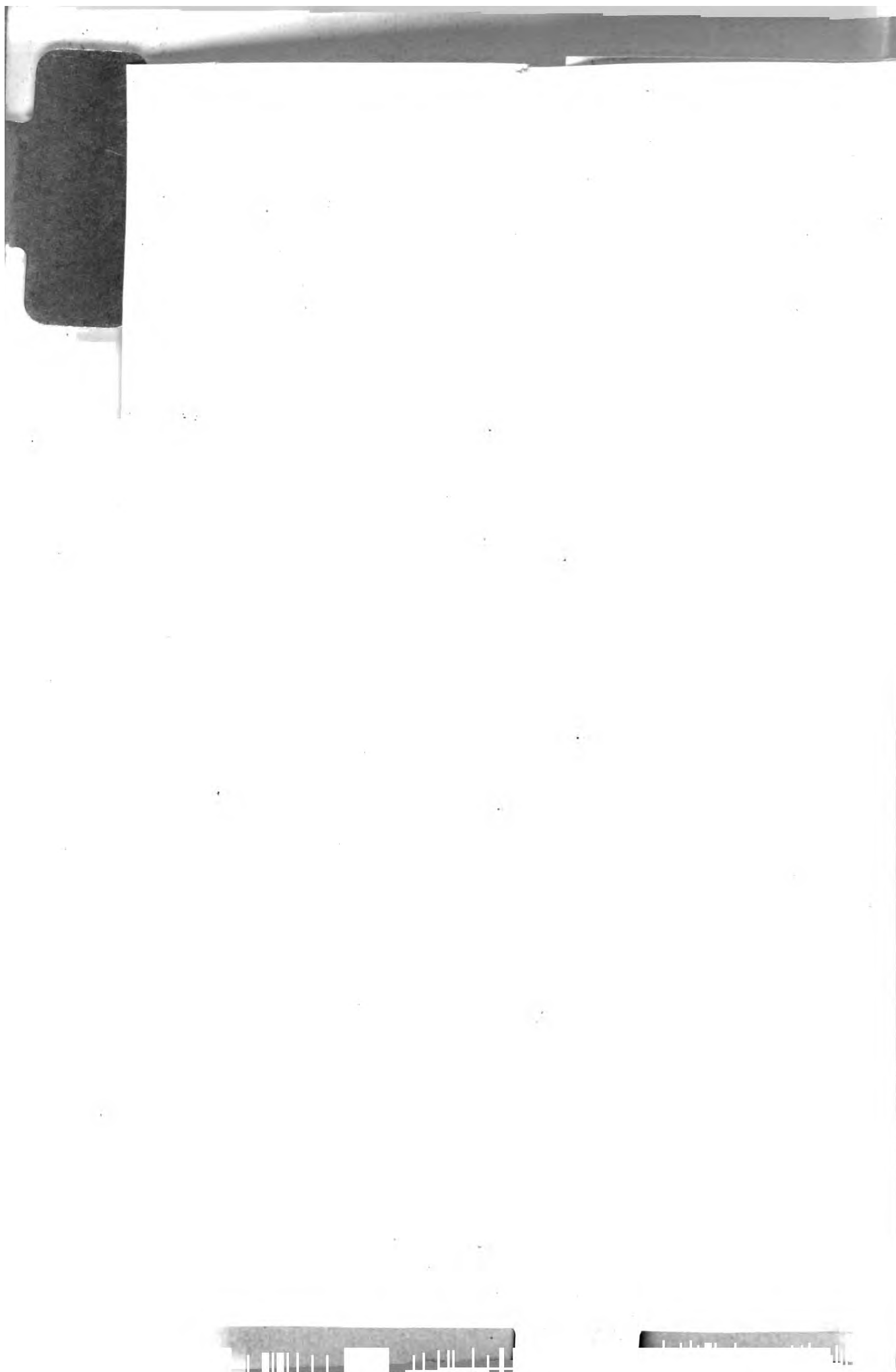
APPLETONS

OUTSIDE THE LAW

JAMES BARNES



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, Publishers
New York





OUTSIDE THE LAW



The man with the eager eyes.

OUTSIDE THE LAW

BY JAMES BARNES



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1906

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CHAPTER I

AT THE CORNER TABLE

THE big *café* was crowded. Waiters shuttled and buffeted to and fro through the narrow channels; the smoke-laden air hummed with the babble of conversation that almost drowned the orchestra in the little gallery. The groups at the tables, reflected in the mirrored walls, laughed and talked, and, for the most part, ate and drank with a seemingly contagious haste.

There were knots of aliens, various as to tongues and frequent as to gestures; there were college boys on vacation, clothing-house gentlemen from lower Broadway, clerks, brokers and bankers, journalists and tradesmen. There were men in evening

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dress, men in frock coats, men in tweeds, sporting individuals in shouting neckties, a pugilist-actor with diamond studs, a visiting bandmaster in full uniform, and a Bronxville scorcher in knickerbockers. It was pleasure-seeking, much-mingled Gotham at its feeding hour.

From the dining-room upstairs and the huge restaurant that reached the avenue, crowds were coming and going. The street at the side entrance was filled with a procession of carriages and motor cars.

Seated at a corner table, on one of the leather divans, was a man alone. The table was set for two; the dinner, long ordered, had not yet been served. The man, unheeding the attention of the near-by diners, sat there bolt upright with a smug, expressionless face and folded arms. Occasionally the head waiter approached and spoke to him; frequently giving a look over his shoulder in the direction of the clock.

In the west corridor, lounging at the cigar stand, was a tall, black-bearded foreigner of distinguished appearance. His long hair,

AT THE CORNER TABLE

waving under the brim of his silk hat, almost covered the tops of his ears. His bushy eyebrows—a blue, shaven spot above the bridge of his aquiline nose—shaded a pair of keen, dark eyes. A broad black ribbon trailed to a corner of his waistcoat.

Two or three times the stranger had stepped to the doorway, regarding the scene before him attentively, and his glance had strayed to the figure of the man at the corner table. The head waiter, to whom the tall stranger had spoken in French, treated him with marked deference.

“They will soon be leaving, monsieur, and you shall have the first table to yourself,” said he. “I am sorry that I could not save you the one you wished, but, as you see, it is taken. He is expecting a gentleman at eight. It is late now twelve minutes—the dinner is ordered. Ah!” he added, turning, “the exodus has begun! The motto of these Americans is ‘Eat and run,’ monsieur. There will be plenty of tables.”

It was the time that the theaters were opening. Already the crowd was moving,

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some of the patrons taking their last sips of coffee as they rose to their feet.

The head waiter beckoned to the stranger to follow, and with a sweeping gesticulation ushered him to a seat, three or four tables removed from where the mysterious individual sat guard over the empty plates and untouched glasses. Just at this moment another man entered through the western corridor. Glancing swiftly around the room, he perceived the lonely one, and hastily approached him. The latter rose deferentially, and before a waiter had stepped to his assistance he had removed the newcomer's coat, taken his hat in silence, and, without a word, bowed and disappeared.

The new occupant of the corner seat took out his watch, compared it with the clock, and then leaned forward on his elbows, his long white fingers lacing and interlacing nervously.

He could not keep those fingers still! When unclasped he pulled at his short brown mustache, in which were showing a few gray streaks, arranged and rearranged

AT THE CORNER TABLE

the knives and forks, stroked his scanty hair back from his broad, well-shaped brow, and frowned impatiently. His face was one that would have attracted attention anywhere; it was refined, purely intellectual, and nervously alert. He might have been close to forty, but doubtless his pallor and nervousness had aged him for the moment—the lines and furrows were not the marks of years. His upright carriage, well-set shoulders, and the clearness of his eye suggested, however, no trace of dissipation.

Two or three times he had endeavored to compose himself, and, as if in search of distraction, had gazed curiously about him. Once, with half a start, he had met the glance of the black-bearded stranger in the opposite corner.

All at once he sprang to his feet, a flush coming to his cheeks as he advanced to meet a short, thick-set man who greeted him with a smile and a cordially extended hand.

“Ah, Lorrimer!” cried the belated one, as he removed a muffler from under his coat. “Here at last, and hungry as a wolf! Sorry

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to have kept you waiting. You know I am generally punctual, but I was unavoidably delayed."

"Never mind, never mind; no apologies," was the return. "The dinner is ordered, and we can begin without preamble."

"I see, nevertheless, you have the usual introduction," smiled the short man as the waiter placed two cocktails on the table. "I thought you abstained from appetizers." He looked curiously at the other's face as he spoke, and the reply came quickly:

"Well, to-night, I dare say, I break my rule. I suppose you think it's strange that I should have chosen this place. It was just a freak—an impulse, as it were—there may be reasons."

"What is the matter with the club?" asked the short man as he unfolded his napkin, "and why aren't you in mid-Atlantic? Until I received your telegram I supposed that you would be halfway over."

"I can't plunge into my explanations just now," was the reply. "They will come in good time, and may account for my somewhat

AT THE CORNER TABLE

—er—erratic behavior—to tell the truth, I could not have gone to the club to-night—there are so many friendly interruptions—so many well-intentioned questions awaiting me. All my baggage went on the steamer, but here I am, Fowler, and God knows when I will get away. My house is closed, too, and the servants gone, otherwise we could have dined there. We'll go up later and—er—you will understand how sufficient are the reasons that—er—have detained me.”

“Well, well!” exclaimed the short one softly. “What’s the trouble? By the way, you are not looking very fit!”

For the first time the speaker’s face lost its look of smiling and rather forced geniality and concentrated into one of keen attention.

“Fowler,” whispered the pale man, leaning forward, “I haven’t slept hardly a wink for nearly sixty hours! I have been counting the minutes, the seconds, until you should arrive.”

“Well, I came as fast as I could,” replied the other, “and if I had not been fortunate

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in my connections, I could not have got in until to-morrow morning. I must confess your first wire startled me, Lorrimer; but now I am at your service, old man. What's up? What is it?"

The pale one extended his hand and grasped his friend's across the table. "I'm glad you came," he said; "another night would have finished me!"

"You need a doctor, not a lawyer. Why haven't you gone to see Higgins?"

"I haven't seen anybody; I have been waiting for you. You've got to be doctor and lawyer both. That's one reason I came here to-night. I didn't think I'd meet anyone, and I——"

"You wanted distraction," put in the other.

"Exactly!"

"Well, don't despise this soup; speaking in my new rôle as a physician, I prescribe it. I insist you take my first advice."

"I have been eating at a dairy kitchen on Third Avenue for the last two days, Fowler. Everybody thinks I've sailed."

AT THE CORNER TABLE

"Well, there's another steamer to-morrow morning; why don't you take that? As I've curtailed my little vacation, I'll run over with you. There are plenty of passages to be had at this time of the year; we can pack up things to-night. There is no reason why I shouldn't go."

The friendliness of the offer had its effect. His friend's lips quivered.

"No, no," he said, "neither you nor I must leave. There's a lot ahead of us. Without beating about the bush—I am in great and serious trouble."

"Well, out with it then. It may lose its seriousness as we talk it over."

"Not here, not here," said the pale man, glancing over his shoulder and then to left and right. "We'll adjourn to the house."

With an effort he sought to change the subject.

"How's the shooting?— Oh, I forgot—you'd hardly time to begin—I'm so sorry!"

"I had just got my gun out of its case when your peremptory summons came. At first I thought of playing possum on you."

"Lord! I'm glad you didn't. As I told you, you're the only man I could rely on."

"Now, look here," said the lawyer, leaning forward, "we'd better begin at once. Any more of this will not only destroy my appetite but give me the jumps. You talk and I'll eat and listen, and then I'll talk and you do the same thing. Come, let's be plain, sane men with appetites. What is it all about? Here now, a glass of champagne first! Let's look at the situation afterwards."

They drained their glasses.

"Somebody might hear us," said Lorimer in a half whisper.

"Bosh and nonsense," his friend retorted. "In your present state of mind, if I went up to the house, you'd probably drag me off to the obelisk in the Park for fear of eavesdroppers. Look; there's nobody but that Frenchman over there and those two college boys, who can hardly hear themselves think—let alone anything *we* might say. Then there's this drummer individual with the lady in the red hat—who're you afraid of? By

AT THE CORNER TABLE

the time we finish our duck, you'll be over the worst of it and be smiling at fate and ill fortune! I will punctuate what you have to say by advice that you must promise to take immediately. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes," said Lorrimer, with a sigh of evident relief, "your advice is what I want, but it will be a long story."

"My turn to eat and listen then," said the lawyer; "so let's begin at the beginning."

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WITH THE EAGER EYES

YOU know how faithfully I have followed my hobby that I began some ten years ago," said Mr. Lorrimer in a voice husky with earnestness, "and that if the necessity had confronted me, it would have been my profession and not a hobby at all. I must have something to do that interests me. Don't you remember how long I labored on my book on the Puranas?"

The lawyer looked mystified.

"Perhaps I do," he said doubtfully. "What were they?"

"Never mind," replied Lorrimer, a little nettled, "you are familiar with my present work and possess a few examples of it, and you know how my secret process has enabled me to reproduce exactly the works of the old engravers and the famous mezzotints of the

MAN WITH EAGER EYES

last three centuries. In fact, you remember my friendly wager with John Cornwalter that he could not tell my imitation Boydell from the original."

"I was at the dinner," said Fowler.

"So you were. Well, you know that none of them, of course, was ever placed upon the market, and that all of those that I have presented—and I give you my word that I never struck off more than ten from each plate before destroying it—were signed and stamped 'facsimile' with the date over my own signature."

"They are more valuable than the old prints themselves, now, aren't they?"

"I dare say, but I never tried to sell any. They represent a deal of patience and labor and embody my secret method of employing photographic etching with dry point and stipple. They are accurately and microscopically correct. You also know that I have had for years an assistant in old Straub, the German engraver, and that I paid him what you chose to inform me once was a ridiculously high figure for his services."

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"By the way, how is the old chap?" put in Fowler parenthetically.

"He's dead; that's just the trouble! If he'd only died before I'd ever met him, I wouldn't be in the position I may be in to-day."

The speaker's voice trembled; he drew a long breath.

"Go on," said the lawyer.

"Never, as long as you live, Fowler, will you listen to such a story of base ingratitude and treachery," resumed Lorrimer. "No man that ever died unhung deserved hanging more than he did; and to think that I went to his funeral, I, the only mourner of that damnable villain, only three days ago, placed flowers upon his grave, shed tears—yes, I did—shed tears, when I thought of the poor, lonely, friendless old man taken off so suddenly and no kith nor kin to care whether he was in the world or out of it. Fowler, if ever there was a man in whom I felt I could have placed my trust, it was that rascally, old, double-faced traitor. Whom can we trust, Fowler? Whom about us?"

MAN WITH EAGER EYES

I'm suspicious of every one of my fellows! I've warped my faith in human nature."

He paused for a minute and passed his hand again over his brow.

"And now," put in Fowler, "it's time for my first advice: Eat that slice of duck and wash it down with another glass of wine."

In the pause that followed the lawyer glanced about him. The Frenchman, four tables off, well beyond earshot, was gazing abstractedly over the top of his paper as he sipped his coffee from a tall glass. The college boys were arguing over the bill, and the lady in the red hat, who was waxing sentimental, was stroking her companion's hand to his evident satisfaction.

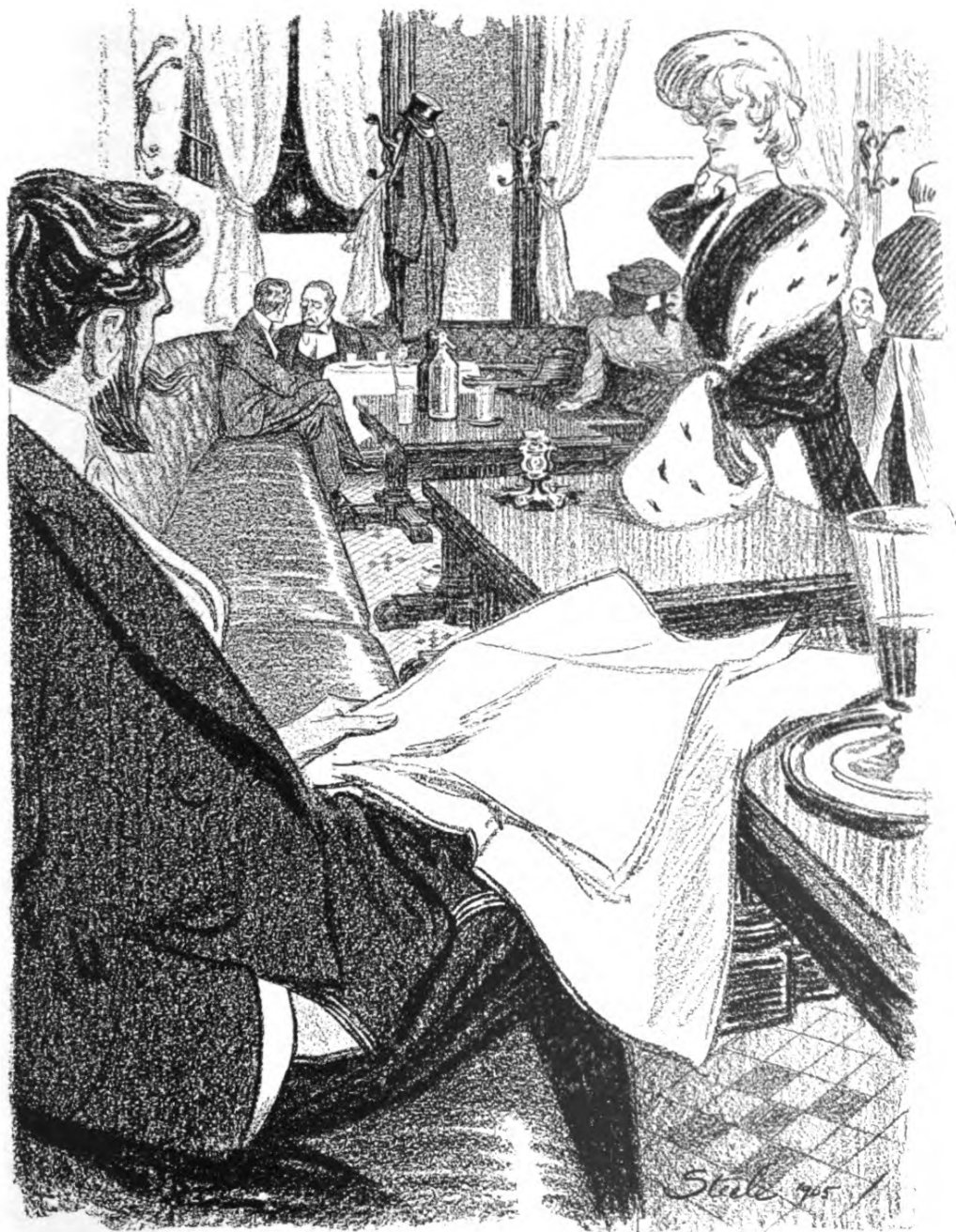
It was with some difficulty that Fowler could conceal a certain irritation that he felt at having been called back by Lorrimer's imperative telegram to listen to what he supposed would be some grievance of small moment, yet his friend and client's state of mind precluded him from showing anything but the kindest solicitude. Lorrimer needed

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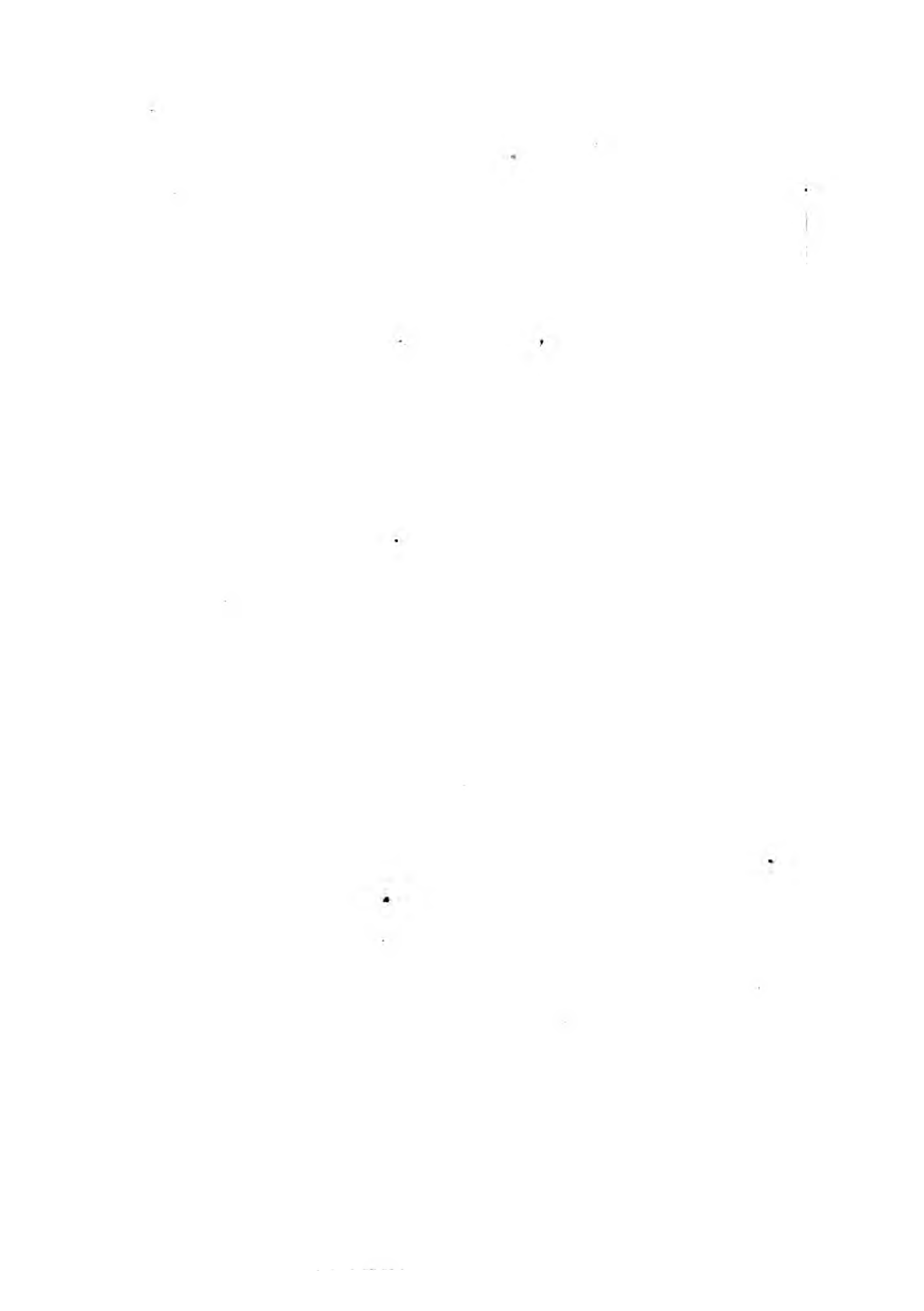
a mental lift over a crisis that, great or small, had borne heavily upon his mind and spirit. And Fowler, despite his reputation as a merciless cross-examiner, and the most successful man in his particular line that ever practiced at the bar of his State, had a kindly heart for those who had touched his softer side.

"Confound that Frenchman over there!" broke in Lorrimer suddenly. "I caught his reflection in the glass just now staring at us as if we were wild animals. Do you think he could be—" and he lowered his voice again, "I mean, do you think he suspects anything? Eh? Could he?"

Fowler looked up, ill concealing his anxiety. Was his friend so urgently in need of a doctor after all! Was this a sign of a bad mental twist? He remembered that Lorrimer's uncle on his mother's side had ended his days in a private sanitarium. But there was nothing that he had ever detected in his client that would give occasion for any suspicion of his proper brain balance, and, even now, the food and the wine seemed to



The Frenchman was gazing abstractedly over the top of his paper.



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have quieted his nerves; his restless hands had stopped their constant flexing.

The lawyer replied to the question with a laugh.

"He couldn't hear a whisper of anything you said, and if he did, probably wouldn't understand it. There now, he's turned his back to us! Go on with the story, which, to tell the truth, you haven't yet started."

"On Friday night, last," said Lorrimer, beginning again, "I intended to have gone down to the steamer and to have spent the night on board, but I concluded to leave in the early morning instead, so I sent down Judson with my luggage—by the way, I had him here just now reserving the table for us—I hope I can trust Judson, but I don't know—I don't know! Well, I went to bed after some work in my studio with old Straub, in fact, I left him there, packing away some prints and preparing the plates for my new catalogue. Incidentally that night we were to destroy the plates of the Sir Richard Pearson, a facsimile I had made of Boydell's celebrated engraving. Often

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Straub had let himself out of the house at night; he had complete run of the whole establishment and came and went when he pleased—he was so much there that I had never thought of his living anywhere else; he often slept there in the little back room. Somewhere I had scribbled down the address of his lodgings that he had given me, but I had mislaid it. He was a close-lipped man; why, for days and days we would work together without a word of conversation! I have my silent streaks, you know, and he fitted well to my moods. About him I knew nothing except that he had come from some little German town not far from Bremen, and I judge had had some family trouble or perhaps some more serious one. He told me he had no relations living. I had stumbled across him ten or twelve years ago by accident; far as I knew he hadn't another friend in the city—so much for him! . . . At about three o'clock in the morning I was awakened by the sound of a jar, and I rose up in bed and listened. I even went out into the hall and turned on the

MAN WITH EAGER EYES

electric light. Hearing nothing further, I concluded that old Straub, staying later than usual, had let himself out and forgetfully slammed the door.

"Judson woke me in the morning early, and as I intended to get my breakfast at the club, there being no other servants at the house, I dressed and rang for a cab, and after waiting, impatiently concluded that the call must be out of order and sent Judson to pick one up on the Avenue. When he had gone, something impelled me to go to the studio, which, as you know, is in what was once a stable extension to the house, but was never used as such since I built up the alleyway and connected the two buildings. Straub and I were the only ones who ever entered there; he had a key as well as I myself, but to my surprise, this morning the door was unlocked.

"I stepped inside, and as I went over toward the window to raise the blind—it was yet very early in the morning and outside dark and rainy—I stumbled over something and fell . . . Man! do you know

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what I did? I fell upon the *dead* body of my assistant, lying there on his back! I was quite sure that he was dead, for my hand had come in contact with his cold face. I almost marvel now at my behavior—I neither shrieked nor fainted. At once I went to the telephone and called up the doctor who lived at the corner of the Avenue. I was so shocked and upset that I didn't know exactly what to do, but I remember, against my better knowledge, trying to do something to bring life back to that cold-stiffened body. As I opened his coat my hand touched something hard; feeling for it, I discovered a long, thin-bladed dirk knife in a leather case.

“Without thinking that the searching should be the coroner's work, I hastily looked through his other pockets; the only thing they contained was a large bunch of keys, among them being a key to my own front door and one to the studio. By this time the doctor had arrived— Oh, I forgot to tell you—the first one I telephoned for not being in, I had sent Judson out to fetch one, when he arrived

MAN WITH EAGER EYES

with the cab. Strange to say, it was Doctor Mahler, the brother of the coroner himself. He made a hurried examination and pronounced the verdict I had expected—heart disease! Without any hesitation he made out the certificate to that effect; but in order that everything should be right, he said that he would call upon his brother and bring him to the house.

“By that time I glanced at my watch and found that it would be impossible for me to catch the steamer. It lacked but ten minutes of the hour of sailing. Without a thought I let it go without me, intending to sail on the following boat of the same line, which, as you say, leaves to-morrow morning at ten o’clock.”

“And now,” interrupted Mr. Fowler, “my advice is another sip of champagne and some of this delicious salad. Don’t think my being so material betrays any lack of interest; I don’t intend— What’s the matter?”

Lorrimer had interrupted him by grasping him by his coat sleeve.

"Did you see that?" he almost hissed in excitement. "That man is watching us! I caught a look in his face just now! Did you ever see such eager eyes? Have I been shouting? Have I been talking loud? For the life of me I cannot help but feel that he is drinking me in—reading my mind—seeing what is in my heart!"

"Oh, come, come!" replied Fowler in the half-irritated and reassuring tone one might use to a person afraid in the darkness; "you certainly will attract attention if you become too dramatic. There! our friend has yawned in his whiskers. He is probably as far off as Monte Carlo. What do you think he would see in your heart?" He essayed a little badinage—"I have heard that there was a woman there once, but they always say that of middle—ahem!—young bachelors."

He glanced at Lorrimer's fast-graying hair.

The latter paid no attention to this attempt at pleasantry.

"Fowler," said he, "he'd see fear! fear!"

"Fear of what, man; what have you to be afraid of?"

"Fear of publicity, talk, scandal, disgrace—fear of—fear of the law!"

Fowler started this time, his ears pricked at the word.

"Have you been accused of anything?" he asked; "anything in connection with——"

The incident of the knife came to his mind; he changed the form of the question.

"Were there any marks on the old man's body?" he continued; "any bruises, contusions, wounds?"

"No; the doctor and the coroner examined him—the diagnosis was heart disease, I told you."

"You could rely upon this evidence?"

"Most certainly."

"Well, go on; I've interrupted you."

"By heavens, I can't go on while that man looks at me. . . . You know, I'm sure I've been followed—what is it they call it?—shadowed?—for a week or more. It was to escape this idea that I had determined

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to go abroad so early. Come, let's go some place else."

"Now, look here, old man," said the lawyer quietly, "that's a very bad sign. One you've got to fight against. So I won't yield to you. As for your friend yonder, we'll settle about him in a minute."

He turned and beckoned to the head waiter at the other end of the room; at the same time he picked up the cigar list.

"You'll let me pick out my favorite brand?" he said, running his finger down the column. As the head waiter bent to listen he asked a low question:

"That gentleman over there with the pointed black beard; it seems to me I've seen him somewhere. Do you know who he is?"

"Yes, sir," replied the waiter, keen to impart information. "He is Monsieur Leon Gautier, an artist, I believe. He is only over here in this country a week. I saw him in Paris a year ago in the Blanda, where my brother is *maître d'hôtel*."

"Ah, that's where I've seen him," said

MAN WITH EAGER EYES

Fowler, as he gave his order. "There," he continued, with a smile at Lorrimer, as the waiter departed, "so much for an over-worked imagination. Now, the rest of the story and we will come to the trouble."

"How far had I gone?" asked Lorrimer wearily.

"The doctor was still in the house."

"Oh, yes. Well, as I said, he sent for his brother, and I found there were no legal difficulties whatsoever, and there was no reason why the funeral should be delayed. There were no relatives; and, so far as I knew, I had never seen the old man speak more than two words to anyone, except to the chauffeur whom I had last year, Fontine. You remember him?—the man I discharged for getting me twice into the courts? I made all the arrangements, young Dr. Mahler was of great assistance, and I put a notice in that evening's paper and one on the following morning. No one appeared at the funeral, and I accompanied the body from the undertaker's to a plot I purchased in the Lutheran cemetery on Long Island.

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It was on my way back that I felt *sure* that I had been followed."

"What made you think so?"

"I can't tell you exactly; but on the ferry-boat, as on several other occasions when I have been in crowded places, it seemed to me that I had seen the same face or faces, among them one like this Monsieur—What-you-call-'m? only he was wearing a soft slouch hat and had short hair, and then there was an oldish, gray-headed man—not very tall——"

"That might describe any number of men. I don't believe you've been followed—why should you be?"

"I couldn't imagine then. But——"

"Do you want a bodyguard? That's easy to arrange."

"No, no, not yet—that would attract a lot of attention. No, no."

"Well, for the life of me, I see no cause for all this worry," said Mr. Fowler, picking up his eyeglasses and glancing at the menu.

"You may see why later. But let me

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continue. As I had not been to the club since Friday night, I determined to avoid my usual haunts, and so miss having to explain the reason for the postponement of my departure. On Sunday afternoon I found the little memorandum I had made of Straub's address, and called there. To my surprise he had not lived in the place for almost two years. They could give me no information as to where he had moved, or even the date of his departure. I intended, of course, to consult you as to what I should do in the matter of disposing of any property he might possess, if I should come across it, and I wrote a letter explaining the whole situation and giving you what information I possessed. According to habit I dressed, intending to dine that night in a Harlem restaurant that had been recommended to me as a place where one might go *incog.* if circumstances might demand it. When I left the house I had the letter in my pocket and also the bunch of keys done up into a packet that I intended to send to your apartment by messenger. As I stepped to

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the sidewalk, a small boy of twelve, who had been loitering at the curbstone looking up at the windows, accosted me:

“ ‘ Say, are you Mr. Brown? ’ he asked, looking curiously at me.

“ ‘ No,’ I said, ‘ that’s not my name.’

“ ‘ Do you live in this house? ’ he asked.

“ I acknowledged that I did and asked him why he wanted to know.

“ ‘ Do you know an old Dutchman named Carl Strauss,’ he went on, ‘ an old fellow with a white beard, who walks like this? ’

“ The youngster gave an exact imitation of old Straub’s shuffling limp.

“ ‘ I knew an old German who answered that description,’ I replied, ‘ but his name was Straub, not Strauss.’

“ ‘ I followed him once,’ said the boy, ‘ but his name is Strauss—he lives in the same place I do.’

“ ‘ Where’s that? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ Over near Thoid Avenue—he ain’t been home for two days, so I thought I’d look for him. My father, he’s the janitor.’

“ ‘ Then your father is the man I’d like

MAN WITH EAGER EYES

to see,' said I, 'and if you'll take me there I'll give you half a dollar.'

" 'I'll take you for nothing, sir; 'tain't so far, the way I came, but the way Strauss went was all over the lot! He first goes down Thoid Avenue, comes up the Sixth Avenue 'L,' and walks up through the Park, and takes a car down. Another time when I tried to follow him I guess he must er knowed, for he lost me in the shuffle. He was a funny old chap—we guessed he was nutty.'

"I led him on to talk as we walked eastward across the avenue. Soon we came to one of those apartment houses that had been built among the older residences and tumble-down tenements. It was a fairly neat place, but the hallways had the stagnant smell of bad ventilation and odors of Sunday cooking. There was no elevator, and the worn-carpeted stairs led up in a narrow well through the center of the building. My little guide told me to wait while he went for his father, and I stood there pondering over in my mind the whole situation.

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"I could not make head or tail of it, but at last I thought it was only one of Straub's eccentricities, and his desire to be let alone, that prompted him to circuitous methods. The boy returned in a few minutes with the information that his father would not be back till eight o'clock, but that old Strauss's room was on the top floor, and his father had the key. It was then I bethought me of the bunch in my pocket, and I hastily tore the packet open without attracting attention. Informing the boy that I was Mr. Strauss's employer, and that the old man had gone away on a long journey, and that I also had a key, I desired him to show me the old German's room. We toiled up five flights of stairs, and I found that the story we arrived at was but half the depth of the apartment itself and had but two doors opening on the narrow landing. I was shown to the one in the front. Just outside of it a narrow stepladder led to a scuttle in the roof. The back apartment, the boy told me, was used as an old storeroom.

"As good luck had it, I picked out the

right key first and opened the door—a feeling actually of sorrow coming over me as I thought of the poor, old, lonely man again. It was a plain little room with a narrow iron bedstead, a bureau, a washstand, a gas cooking stove no bigger than a hatbox, and on the window sill were two or three flower pots with unkempt and sickly looking plants. Tacked on the wall were a few cheap prints from some of the illustrated papers, the kind, moreover, that a man of Straub's artistic sense and knowledge would have utterly despised. With the exception of a china cat, rubbing against a china barrel, that served for a match safe, there was no other ornamentation. On the corner of the bureau stood a small wooden box that when opened I found contained tobacco; it seemed a little heavy as I lifted it, however, and something seemed to slide in the bottom. I dug down with my fingers and brought forth a small gold-mounted mother-of-pearl-handled revolver. Again I was puzzled. This in connection with the knife suggested some fear on Straub's part of an enemy.

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The boy had left me alone as soon as I had opened the door of the room, and had gone downstairs two steps at a time. There was no one to see me. I replaced the pistol and hastily pulled out the bureau drawer.

"Nothing but cheap wearing apparel, but in one corner was a bank book of the Germanic Bank. It might tell me something! But a glance at it only proved that Straub deposited his pay regularly and almost as regularly drew it out. Item after item I followed until I came at last to a deposit of almost three thousand dollars. Strange to say, that also had been drawn against on the third day following, and at the time of his death, according to the book, he must have had less than sixty dollars to his credit. What had he done with the money? My attention was now drawn to the door of the closet. Trying it I found it locked; but one of the keys that I took off the bunch opened it, and there hung a few old suits of clothes and a long, much-embroidered dressing gown.

"There were some things on the shelves

that, in the darkness, I could not see. Taking a match from my pocket I struck it on the wall. Instead of lighting, the match tore a large gash in the wall paper, that apparently hung loose. But as I tried it a second time it flared up brilliantly. There was nothing but some bottles of medicine, some tinned meats and vegetables, and a few odds and ends on the shelves, and I turned to see what damage I had done. As I bent forward I stopped—there, evidently hidden by the flap of wall paper, was a keyhole for a small flat key. Somewhat mystified, I sought the bunch again and chose one by feeling, for the match had now gone out. I inserted it in the lock, and, to my half fear and half delight, it turned, and a small door opened. It was only about two feet wide, fitting at the top and bottom against the surbase and the wooden rack upon which hung the clothes. It was deftly concealed. A draught must have been created, for the closet door closed with a bang. The other key I had left on the outside! For a moment my heart failed me but I found there

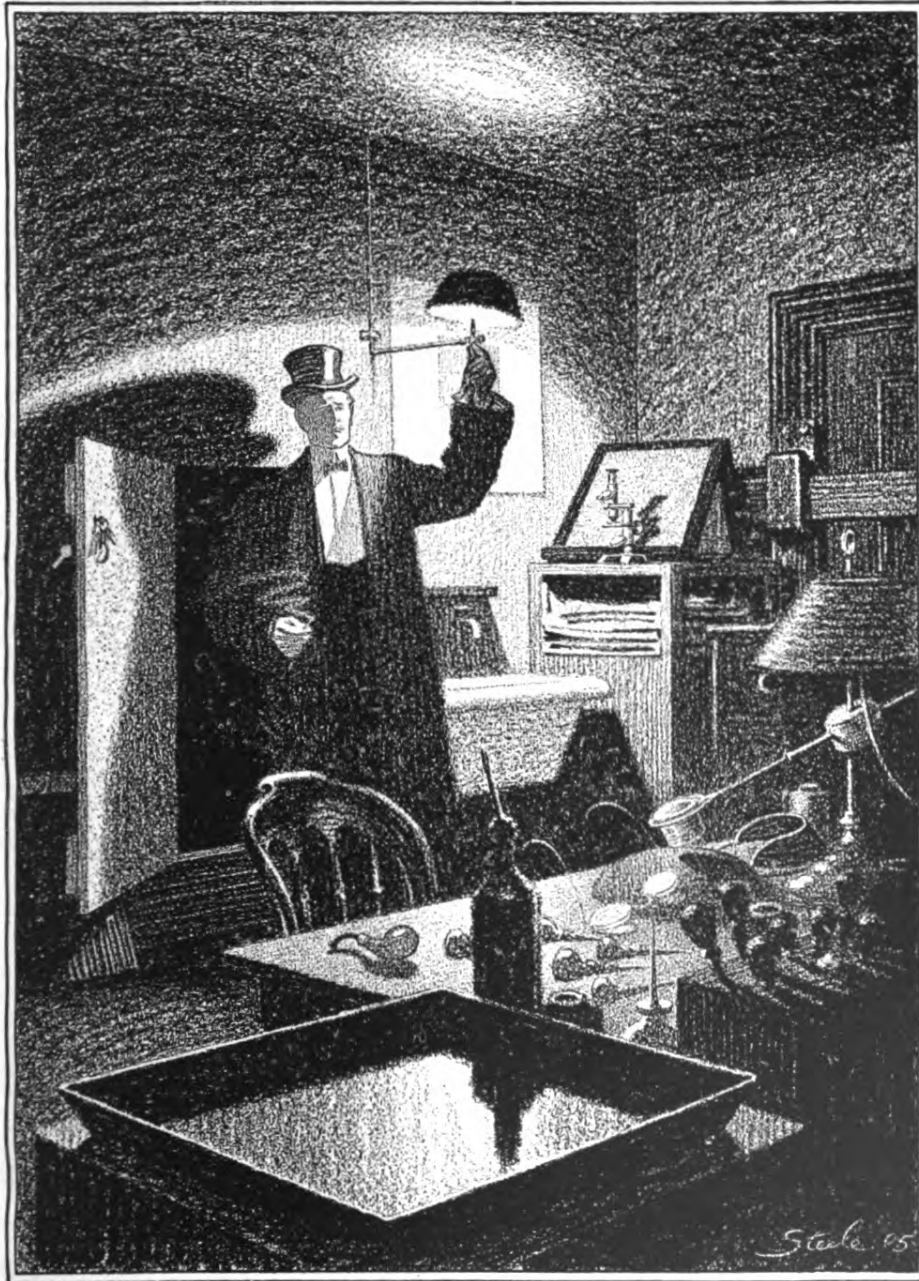
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was no spring lock, and I could easily get out. Cautiously I stepped forward through the small door, feeling with my foot before me. It trod on something soft and yielding——”

“Go on,” said the lawyer, for the first time breaking the silence, a shiver of live interest coursing down his spine. “Go on!”

“I stooped and found that it was a layer of thick carpet. Searching in my pocket I found another match and, striking it, held it above my head.

“I was in a large room, three or four times the size of the one I had left. But the first thing that caught my eye was a gas jet. I turned and lit it. The light flooded the apartment. It was almost a replica of my own studio! In one corner stood a camera identically the same as the one I use and that I call my ‘microscopic enlarger.’ There was my engine ruler, and the skylight in the roof was shaded by double rolling screens, the same I use in moderating the light in my studio. The villain had adapted, practically stolen, all of my pet



“It was almost a replica of my own studio.”

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methods. With his skill he could duplicate any work I had produced. Even the means I employed for aging my printing paper were there. Here was explained the appearance of the bogus facsimiles that had so puzzled Servin and myself. As I looked about me I could almost feel the invisible presence of old Straub. On the etching table lay his glasses and his pipe, his eye-shade and his engraving tools. The press in the corner was as delicate as mine and fully as powerful. The acid trays and all the appurtenances were well chosen, and running water was provided from two faucets that dripped into a porcelain catch-basin.

“The old man’s perfidy was, however, not apparent until I had examined closely. There on a table was a plate of one of my best facsimiles—only my private mark and indentation carefully erased! Strange to say, when this discovery dawned upon me, I grew inwardly most calm. For a moment the humor of the whole situation forced itself uppermost. Here was I, an expert in the detection of fraudulent prints, one whose

judgment was taken as final, training in my own studio a man whose work might even deceive myself. I recollected the celebrated discovery in Paris of three years ago that had staggered most collectors—the sale of the private albums of a ‘Monsieur Duclos’ containing many specimens upon which I had passed judgment. In fact, in my own collection I possess some to-day. Forgeries, no doubt, Fowler—forgeries all of them! My own second-hand forgeries, as they might be called. I pledge you my word I stood there and laughed. But we won’t waste time in dwelling on my sensations.”

“I can well imagine them,” returned Fowler, noticing with some relief that a smile flitted in the corners of his friend’s lips; “but I really don’t see where the trouble comes in. You were the only man competent to judge whether your own work was original or not, and certainly your conscience must free you from any charge of fraud.”

“Well and good,” rejoined Lorrimer, “but let me go on: The door that led into

the hallway was barred by a big oak beam fastened to two iron brackets at the side, and in front of it was a bureau and a few heavy packing cases. The empty boxes round about were ready for the immediate removal of the paraphernalia. I examined further, and now——”

Lorrimer again lowered his voice to a whisper and drops of perspiration gathered on his forehead—“As I moved about, my footsteps were absolutely hushed in the soft carpet. I was amazed at my own stillness. I perceived that the press stood in a bed of sand that must have muffled any jar that might be heard through the building. I tore from one corner to the other and then I came upon the fateful discovery! In a desk in the corner I found some sheets of greenish paper, stiff, crisp, but flexible, and underneath, two plates ready for the press. The paper anyone would recognize in an instant. There is only one place they make it or anything like it—Dalton, Massachusetts. If it is not the real paper, it is the best imitation that ever was made!”

"But the plates, the plates! what were they?" inquired Fowler impatiently.

"They were plates," said Lorrimer hoarsely, "of a one-thousand and of a one-hundred-dollar bill, perfect but for the introduction of the series and the numbers. They might require four printings. Often I have made replicas that required five—not of bills, mind you; I never attempted that!"

"Don't be silly," said the lawyer. "Where are the plates now?"

"At home, in my house."

"You took them with you?"

Insensibly he had fallen into his cross-questioning tone of voice.

"I took them with me, and the paper, too; there were but a few sheets of it. I intended to destroy everything at first."

"Good Lord! but you didn't! Did anyone see you leave the house?"

"Not a soul. But there's something more. In a wallet in a top drawer I found one proof, complete and perfect."

"Of what?"

"Of the one-thousand-dollar bill."

"Where is it?"

"In my pocket."

In reply the lawyer held out his hand.

"Not here, not here!" said Lorrimer, protesting.

"Why not? Don't act as if you were afraid of anything. No one is watching us—let's see it! Hand it over to me."

In response Lorrimer drew forth his pocketbook and, taking out a yellow-backed certificate, pushed it across the table to the lawyer.

"What have you done here?" the latter questioned.

"I have written 'counterfeit' across it in red ink."

"Seems to me you've spoiled a very good one-thousand-dollar bill. What did you do it for?" said Fowler with a much-affected yawn. Then with half-closed eyes he continued, "I'd like to compare that with another."

"I did," said Lorrimer, "and with a microscope. Except for the number and the series, there is no difference. I took them to

the sunlight yesterday morning. I drew a new crisp bill from my down-town bank. I searched every corner, every curve of lettering and engine ruling. As I was doing so a puff of wind blew them to the floor—it was lucky I kept my eye on them or it might have puzzled me. So in order to prevent further mistakes I inscribed this one with red ink. I was going to a detective agency to tell the whole story——”

“Hold on! I’m glad you didn’t do that,” interrupted Fowler curiously. “What did you do with the other bill?”

“I took it to my up-town bank on the avenue and deposited it.”

“Making a note also of the number and series?” asked the lawyer.

Lorrimer faltered.

“Well, that was hardly necessary; it was a real bill, but I think it was either C or G—I’m not certain, it might be B.”

“You could swear that this was the bill you found in the drawer?”

“Why—er—yes, of course.”

“Well,” said Fowler, “now comes my

turn. To-morrow morning you will deposit with a third person, preferably your bank or safe-deposit company, the plates and the paper you found; the bill you had better keep in your possession. To-night I will telegraph to Chief Wilkins of the Secret Service to come on from Washington. He will meet us here to-morrow. I am afraid you will have to tell this long story over again. But, mind you, there's nothing to be worried about; all will be plain sailing."

"And any publicity, any newspaper story will be stopped? You know how I hate notoriety—and, of course, they'd make a lot of it. It would worry me to death. You must see to that."

"We'll do our best."

"Oh, but one more thing! I remembered when I returned home I had noticed that the rooms underneath Straub's were to let. I sent my caretaker—she was an old servant of my mother's, thoroughly trustworthy—to take them. She moved in with her little daughter that very next morning. I told her to watch the floor above and let me know if

anyone entered. So far, no one has been up there at all."

"That's the first wise thing you've done," commented Mr. Fowler, "and saves me some questions. But I wish you'd left everything as you had found it."

"Too late for advice of that kind," snapped Lorrimer. "I want you now to help me tide this dreadful business over, so nothing will ever be heard of it."

"That's my intention. I will go to the Germanic Bank to-morrow and make some inquiries about Straub's account there—I'll take care of that. But let me tell you, old fellow, you've been playing with fire from the beginning. Despite your honesty, to produce anything valuable that is like anything more valuable is a dangerous game."

"But don't you see—" put in Lorrimer excitedly, and there he paused.

"I see, of course, that you have unwittingly almost allied yourself with the schemes of what may prove to be a gang of clever counterfeiters. I don't think old Straub was alone. But you are not *particeps*

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criminis, nor are you too deeply entangled in the unfortunate chain of circumstances. To-morrow evening you'll dine with me at the club just as if nothing had happened. Come, let us laugh at it. No; I don't think I'll go up to your house. I must telegraph Wilkins and then I'm going home to bed. So will you. Cheer up! Telephone if necessary to-morrow and I'll meet you anywhere you say at any time."

Fowler leaned forward and clapped his friend on the shoulder. But his attempt at laughter was a little forced and hollow.

Then, still affecting amusement, he called the waiter, and with Lorrimer at his heels, led the way to the entrance.

As they left the *café*, the man with the eager eyes paid his reckoning and followed slowly after them. But once outside he hesitated and came to a halt at the sidewalk. Taking from his pocket a long black cigar, he lit it from the stub of his cigarette.

"So that's the game!" he said beneath his breath in good English, as the door of Lor-

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rimer's cab closed with a slam. "That's the game he's going to play!"

With a half laugh he tossed the cigarette aside and sauntered slowly down the street. Keeping to the south he skirted two large squares, and came at last to a wide and brilliantly lighted cross-town thoroughfare. Dodging ahead of a trolley car as it rushed down to the curve, he reached the haven of the crowded corner. There he paused and took out his watch.

Apparently he was surprised at the lateness of the hour, but, turning eastward, he moved on again at the same leisurely gait.

CHAPTER III

TWO MEETINGS

THE distinguished stranger had strolled on but a short distance when suddenly his attention was called, with a vivid interest, to a brilliant entrance through which could be seen the vista of a long room filled with people moving about in a silly and somewhat aimless fashion. Occasionally they swooped down on some strange-looking pedestal into which they inserted a coin and then gazed in half-embarrassed amusement through an eyepiece. The results of these operations were more or less amusing—judging from the aftermath of expressions; some were evidently disappointing and not up to the framed samples.

A few of the patrons began at the beginning and sidled down the whole length of the exhibit, with an evident desire to get the worth of their money. Others flitted from pillar to

post, sipping in butterfly fashion the pleasures of the peep show.

A keen-eyed, lantern-jawed little man, in a neat but overcleaned suit of clothes and a flaring red necktie, was one of those who flitted. He had been there a long time—once or twice had gone as far as the door, only to return again. On the last of these attempts to break from the fascinations the place afforded, he perceived the distinguished stranger. Turning back with an air of recklessness, he spent a penny for the experience of watching a pillow fight between several plump and elderly females, labeled “Fun in a Dormitory.” When he looked up the stranger stood beside, viewing the next penny’s worth entitled “The Old Maid’s Last Chance.”

In no place in the world is it easier for people to scrape an acquaintance than at a cheap show. The mere fact that they are half ashamed of their presence excites a bond of sympathy. So it was most natural for the little man in the much-cleaned suit to speak without any overtures to his neighbor.

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"That's a pretty good one," he observed, glancing round quickly while the machinery beside him was busily sputtering.

The reply was startling in its irrelevancy.

"Is there anyone watching us?" asked the black-bearded man in a low tone, his eyes still hidden in the eyepiece.

"Nope," replied the little one. "I had about given you up. Why are you so late? I've been around the whole thing twice. I suppose they think I'm from Hohokus."

"I've news for you, Peters. Trouble's ahead!"

"What's up now?"

"Go to the next machine; I'll come and tell you."

"Oh, you make me tired with all your caution!" remarked the wearer of the red necktie, obeying and spending another penny to see a prize fight between two Chinamen.

Again the tall man joined him.

"Who do you suppose I saw to-night?" he said. "I saw Brown, just by the sheerest luck this time! No wonder he wanted to keep us in the dark! He talked for an hour

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with a man you might know—at least by name—if I should mention him. I saw everything they said to one another.”

“Up to your old tricks, eh? Look here, White, are you playing straight with us?”

The tall man made no reply, but carelessly walked off to another pedestal. The small man accepted the rebuff with apparent good nature. In the course of a few minutes they met again and took up their apparently accidental conversation.

“I tell you what you’re to do,” said the tall one, smiling and standing, as if waiting his turn, to watch a fat lady try to get into a hammock. “You will see the rest to-night, and tell them that the whole thing is off for a while. If you don’t want to hang around here any longer, you can go back to Chicago.”

“What *do* you want me to do?”

“Do what I tell you. Strauss’s death upset everything just when we were ready to begin operations, and now there are other complications. Brown’s got the plates, confound it! But I tell you what, Peters, I won’t give up yet. You’ve all seen the goods

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and know they are the best ever. Lucky I only let Strauss have a few sample sheets of that Rouen paper. You know where to meet me to-morrow night."

As if accepting this as a dismissal, the short man wandered off to the door, hurried eastward, and plunged down into the Subway entrance at the corner. A few minutes later he emerged again some blocks farther north, and boarding a cross-town car that was still drawn by horse power, rode over toward the river. Getting out where one of the elevated roads arched over the juncture of the street and the noisy avenue, he entered a little German oyster house. A man who was leaning against the short, thick barber pole next door followed him in and greeted him familiarly.

"Hullo, Pete; how goes it?" he asked carelessly.

"All to the bad, Red. But I saw the main guy to-night. He's the slick one! He only speaks to me as if by accident; he won't trust the mails or any third party. Where's Reeder?" he concluded.

"He's in Sing Wah's laundry next door, in

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the back room, playing fan-tan with the Chink. He's anxious to get back to San Francisco with the goods. When are we to get them anyhow?"

"That's more'n I can tell," said the one addressed as "Peters" gloomily, seating himself at a table. "Go fetch Reeder—tell him I want to see him. Hey, Frank!" he called to the old German at the oyster counter. "Give us half a dozen Cape Cods, will you?" Then to the other he went on: "Hurry up, Dalton; get a move on you—bring in that crazy gambler."

Suddenly somebody spoke from the entrance.

"Greeting, good friends," exclaimed a musical, well-pitched voice. "Ah, Brother Peters, and how are the luscious bivalves?"

From the sound of the voice one might have supposed that it was a young man speaking, but its owner's appearance belied his accent. His hair was white as snow and his beard also; but his forehead was smooth, and the lines about his eyes showed not age but hard living. He stepped briskly up to the

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corner of the table and now his whole manner changed. His bright eyes went lack-luster and his voice cracked and trembled like a man of seventy. The hat that he had taken off quivered in his seemingly palsied fingers.

"And haven't you got a few pearl oyster shells you could spare for a poor old man who is many miles from home and has lost all his possessions to an unmentionable Oriental?" It was really pitiful; even the exaggerated words could not rob the voice of its intense reality.

"Oh, sit down, Reeder, and stop your monkeying!" growled Peters testily. "There's something we've got to talk over."

"Prithee, chide me not," cried the cheery, ringing voice again, as the palsied fingers stopped shaking and the wrinkles disappeared from the smooth brow under the plentiful white locks. He picked up one of the oysters in his fingers and dangled it in front of the tough young man's face.

"Sit up and beg, Red," he said.

The tough one scowled.

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"If you weren't old and white-headed," he grunted, "I'd give you a bash in the jaw."

"Mock not my white hairs," rejoined the old young man, slipping the oyster down his own throat. "Red, I'll foot-race you, and dance you to a standstill, and if I could get up to your weight, I'd fight you to a finish."

Then he dropped into seriousness as he drew up a chair.

"Well, what's new? When are we to get the somolios?"

"White says," replied Peters, "that Brown's gone back on us—no, I don't mean that"—he lowered his voice—"but Brown's got the plates."

"Brown?" repeated the white-headed one. "I doubt if there ever was such a man as 'Brown.' It has a fictitious sound, my friends. Look here, Peters; I want to see White myself."

"You'd never know him," said Peters shortly; "sometimes I can hardly believe it's him."

"Well, would he know me?" asked the



“Sit up and beg, Red!”

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other. "I was a handsome youth when last we set eyes on each other. We lived near together for six long years. We were so much attached to the place that we couldn't tear ourselves away. . . . I bet you five hundred dollars I'd know him."

"Well, he won't meet you," snarled Peters. "I've pledged my word that I would respect his prejudices. You all have got your money regularly—you've been living off the fat of the land."

The eyes of the young old man flashed.

"Well, he'd better play straight with us or there'll be trouble. I won't put up with any of his nonsense. You can tell him one thing from me, and that is that *I* know a thing or two, and one thing is that I know the real name of Mr. Brown, the old Dutchman's friend; I know who he is and where he lives, and more than that, I know why he didn't sail for Europe on the *Campania* last Saturday. You must know him, too, Pete. On the level, come now, don't you?"

"I'd like to," said Peters, still gloomily. "Perhaps I may, some day."

"You people are too coony for me," observed the tough young man, disgruntled.

"That's right, Red," said Mr. Reeder, "but you study hard and you'll learn a lot more than you pick up at the race tracks. It's a funny little world altogether and a funny little place—this town of New York; and Mr. Quinny White, alias Monsieur——"

"Hush," said Peters softly, interrupting him. "Don't get too gay."

"All right, then. But he isn't the only cautious man in this world who has got into trouble by being too intelligent—and he isn't the only intelligent man who has got into trouble by being too cautious."

"We'll hear from him to-morrow night," said Peters. "That was his message."

"Well, if that is all the news you have for us," rejoined Mr. Reeder, "I move that this jocund meeting stand adjourned. Red"—he turned to the younger one of the party who had been listening with somewhat stupefied astonishment, and tapped him on the shoulder—"you run off to night school, and learn to be a bright little man like your uncle!"

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Without another word he turned and walked out on the avenue. A moment later the other two followed his example, separating under the red light, each going in a different direction.

The man with the white beard hurried westward. He trotted up the worn, brown-stone steps of a palpable boarding house and let himself in with a latchkey. A woman's voice greeted him from the top of the stairs.

"Where have you been, Sam?" she asked. "I've been waiting for you and I'm almost dying of thirst and hunger. I was about to start out alone."

"Well, we can go across the way," said the gray-headed man. "He is a churl who would let his wife starve to death. Prithee, come on!"

"Any of the rest going to be over there?" asked the lady in a low voice, coming down the stairs. "Hold on till I tell Martha to go to bed."

She turned. A short, thick-set colored woman was standing on the landing above.

She seemed to understand the signal waved to her and disappeared without a word.

“Avaunt, deaf imp of Darkness!” said the man dramatically.

“You didn’t answer my question, Sam,” went on the woman, not paying any attention.

“I asked if anyone else was over there.”

“No, no one; but I’ve got a lot to tell you. . . . How did the new turn go to-night?”

“Pretty good,” she replied, stopping to straighten her hat at the dingy hall mirror.

“But I’m just as sick of it as you are! I thought we were all going to be rich by this time.”

As the light fell full upon her, it showed the face of a woman nearly forty, who was still flashily attractive and who had once been beautiful. But the hard look was there to remain forever—the paint and powder and the masses of blond hair could not disguise or soften it. Yet her bold eyes were intelligent, and the strident voice was full of decision. A slight scar from the corner of her eyebrow upward, was partly concealed by an artfully straggling lock.

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The man opened the door for her, and going down the steps, they crossed the street to the family entrance at the back of a corner public house.

It was a cozy little room, separated by a glass partition from the bar. On the floor was a green flowered carpet. On brackets on the opposite corners were two plaster statuettes—one representing a woman holding a child on a pedestal and the other a photographer standing beside his camera.

“There’s a strong bid for your pleasantest expression, my dear,” said the man, touching his wife’s shoulder. But this effort brought no response.

“Well, Sam,” said the woman, drawing a deep-chested sigh, after the waiter had departed with the orders, “when are we going to get rich? I’m tired of supporting you—and that’s no hazy dream! If you’d shave off that Santa Claus effect, you could make as much as you ever did honestly. You can dance as well as ever; we can do our old turn together, and earn real money.”

“Yes, and be recognized as soon as I step

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out on the stage! All the old feeling would come back, my dear; I couldn't help it. Yes, I know. It would be a case of 'What is he up to now?' on all sides. I tell you, Maisie, the pleasure of being able to look all the fly-cops in the face and have none of them know me, instead of being spotted everywhere, is more than I can give up for a while. I'm not going to play the 'Haunted Life,' me child—the river first."

"Oh, come down to cases!" said the woman roughly.

"Well," was the short return, "Peters says the thing has got to be postponed."

"He's been postponing it for two months. Is that all the news?"

"That's all that I know of."

"Well, if that's true, I think it's time you went back to California. You're an expensive luxury, Sam, much as I like your company."

"We've been getting something out of the economical combination," said her husband good-naturedly. "I have an idea where it comes from."

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"But you never know where it goes," retorted the woman; "a lot you know of economy."

The man smiled. "Economy, my dear, is a privilege of the rich. Something is going to happen in a day or two—we may need brains and beauty, too," he said. "Luck may turn!"

"Well, it's got to turn pretty quick," snapped the woman, drumming on the table with her fingers. "We've lived on promises long enough."

"Maisie," said the man, not in the least perturbed and speaking softly, "if I gave you the name and address of a certain important party, do you think you could manage to meet him to-morrow?"

"I've generally been pretty successful," answered the woman. "I succeeded in meeting the governor of a State once, you remember."

"True. I haven't forgotten that," answered Mr. Reeder. "Pardon me."

"He pardoned you," rejoined the lady, still irritated, but with a flash of humor.

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"True again! This is quite as important—perhaps more so."

"I dare say. . . . How about playing the book agent?"

"Never'd do in the world. He wouldn't see you. You've got to meet him by accident; that is, informally, so to speak."

"Have his horses run over me, like the last time I arranged an informal meeting, eh? Not for love or money! No, thank you. Do your own accidents after this."

"No melodrama will be required, my dear—farce-comedy, if anything. Now be reasonable."

"I'm to play the engineeroo, I suppose. I can see myself!"

"That depends on the plot, my dear; at any rate we won't talk any more about it here. But, the play's the thing—that's the fact of the matter—and the position of leading lady is up to you. We'll start a little company of our own."

"What will you do?" asked the woman.
"What part will you play?"

"Oh, general utility," was the reply.

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"Come now, be good-natured. I will explain all I know about everything as soon as we get home."

There was no reply, and a few minutes later the actress and her husband left the *café* and recrossed the street to the boarding house.

Before an hour had passed, however, they had again emerged, each carrying this time a large hand bag. Hurriedly they walked over to the avenue, where they hailed a north-bound trolley.

"Are you sure Red will be there, and are you sure you got the right number, Sam?" asked the lady as they walked down the aisle of the car.

"No mistake about that," said the man. "I wish I was just as sure of a few other things. Red will be there with the cab—he'll get that note by six o'clock to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IV

AN ECHO OF STRAUSS

MR. REMSON, the trust officer of the big bank at the corner of the avenue and a street renowned as the home of clubdom, closed his roll-top desk with an emphatic sigh of relief. The meeting of the board of directors had been held that morning, and on such days Mr. Remson welcomed the closing hour with added gratitude. To-day, especially, he had reason for being pleased; a plan of his for the enlargement of the bank's business had been put through successfully. He could play his rubber of whist at the Nutley Field Club that afternoon without his mind wandering.

The clerks were leaving, the young men heaving into their coats and stamping into their overshoes as if summoned to a fire. Only the assistant cashier was busy over his

books. He, too, was giving occasional fidgety glances at the clock. At last, apparently, he was satisfied. Going over to the door of the big vault, at which the paying teller and the cashier were standing, he put the big ledgers into their places. The doors were shut with a peculiar hissing click; the time lock was put on. It was the formality that ended the day's proceedings.

The watchman was opening the door for the gentlemen to pass out when suddenly a cab drew hurriedly up at the entrance. A man, carrying a large flat bundle under his arm, jumped out and fairly skipped across the sidewalk.

"Am I late?" he gasped to the watchman at the entrance. "I hope not."

The man waved his hand toward the group of officials who were coming down the corridor.

"Afraid you are, sir," he said. "But Mr. Remson hasn't left."

The gentleman with the bundle hurried up to the trust officer, extending his hand and nodding to the others as they passed.

"You must do me a favor, like a good friend," he began breathlessly.

"Anything in my power, Mr. Lorrimer," said Mr. Remson, smiling, "but I'm afraid you're a little late—if it's to cash a check. We're closed for the day. That was the teller just leaving."

"I know, I know," was the hasty reply. "It's not that. I want to place something in my safe-deposit box. It's this," he added, pointing to the bundle under his arm. "I want to leave it in some safe place until tomorrow—maybe for a day or so."

"'Where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal,'" quoted Mr. Remson, taking the flat packet that was wrapped up in newspaper. "Hello! it's heavy, isn't it?" he added, balancing it.

"It's a plate—two very valuable plates, and some—er—papers," returned Lorrimer nervously. "I intended to have brought them down early this morning, but I—well, to tell the truth—I—overslept myself. I've been troubled with insomnia lately and my

man didn't awaken me until a few minutes ago. I just jumped into a cab and rushed down here—I wouldn't have had it happen for a great deal. Do you know," he lowered his voice, "I have an idea some one tried to get into my house last night! Some one called up my 'phone number just before twelve, wouldn't leave any name, just wanted to know if I was in—I'd gone to bed—there were some other suspicious occurrences. It's too valuable to have lying around. I couldn't tell——"

"It wouldn't have gone into your box in the deposit vault anyhow," said Mr. Remson, measuring the bundle with his eye.

"I wasn't sure," faltered Mr. Lorrimer. "I thought it might go in cat-a-cornered. But there must be some place else——"

"Too bad the time lock's been put on the big vault, or we'd give it a secure resting-place," observed Mr. Remson. "However," he continued reassuringly—humoring the whim of a wealthy depositor—"I tell you what I'll do; I'll take care of it. I'll put it in my own little depository in my desk,

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and you can get it to-morrow whenever you like."

Suddenly the loud tones of a woman's voice interrupted the conversation.

"But I'm sure he will see me," were the words. "Please let me speak to him."

A large and flashily dressed lady was addressing the watchman, earnestly and excitedly.

"I am sure, if he would only speak to me—I mean if I could only speak to him—it is really of great importance—really great," she continued, laying her hand on the watchman's arm—her speech evidently intended to go beyond his ears.

"What is it, Patrick?" asked Mr. Remson, turning.

The lady hurried up to him, almost brushing the watchman aside.

"I have a certified check," she said, "on the Fourth National Bank. I intended to have got it cashed before, but I was detained so long at my dressmaker's." She added this feminine excuse most naturally, half extending at the same time a bit of paper.

Mechanically, Mr. Remson reached forward, and the lady, without handing him the paper, went on breathlessly: "My dressmaker would vouch for me; she is just around the corner, and I must leave on the 4.10 train this afternoon for Philadelphia. Oh, oh, what am I to do? It's not for a very large amount."

"I'm sorry, madam," began Mr. Remson apologetically, giving a glance at the check, "but banking hours are over. You might get it cashed at some shop or hotel."

"But I'm a stranger," said the large woman, for the first time flashing a glance at Lorrimer, as if to include him in the conversation. "I live in Philadelphia and know no one here, except Madam—what's-her-name?—and she didn't have enough money or she certainly would have helped me. Oh, what am I to do? It's only one hundred dollars, as you may see. I have some bills to pay, and I must take the 4.10 train. Oh, dear, oh, dear!" She began opening her little reticule; her voice quivered with distress and vexation. "What shall I do?"

Mr. Remson, as if intimating his lack of interest in her immediate or future proceedings, had taken the large flat package and had gone over to his desk. The roll-top seemed to grumble at being opened again. The lady's eyes for an instant had followed him, and then had sought Lorrimer's face—her own brightened.

"Isn't this Mr. Lorrimer," she asked suddenly, "the collector of prints and the maker of those wonderful facsimiles about which the art world has spoken so often? I'm sure I'm not mistaken—my husband, who is much interested in the same subject, once had quite a modest little collection of his own."

"You have my name," replied Lorrimer rather stiffly; "but whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Mine would make very little difference to you," replied the large lady. "We have never met before, but you were pointed out to us once, and my husband *then* did what I almost seem to be doing *now*—forcing myself upon your notice! I really wish to tell you how beautiful we think your work is—I am

quite sure we have some mutual acquaintances. Yes—let me see—who used to speak of you? ”

Lorrimer by this time was interested. As the lady stepped to one side he followed her. Mr. Remson, still standing by his desk, watched the conversation with a smile of amusement.

“ I used to know,” went on the lady, with her forehead wrinkled as if by an effort of recollection, “ an old German who did some work for us—a talented old fellow—it’s very strange, what was his name?—how did I always remember it? ” She lowered her voice almost to a whisper as if testing the sound of a word upon her lips; then she began to hum a little tune—it resolved itself into “ *Am schönen blauen Donau.* ”

“ Strauss! ” exclaimed Lorrimer excitedly, beneath his breath. “ Yes, I knew him. Did you know anything of him, madam? Tell me, tell me! ”

“ Yes I did. But—” began the lady. Then suddenly she stopped.

Her face, that had gleamed with excite-

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ment, assumed an appearance of weakness and consternation. Her eyes, staring at the door, appeared as though reaching themselves out of their sockets. Lorrimer followed her glance.

A slight little man of nearly seventy, with a white beard and white hair, was just entering. The watchman greeted him with a smile.

"Hello, Mr. Marston," he said, "how's the cold to-day?"

"Better, better," replied the old man in a hoarse and muffled voice. "But I still have to be careful. . . . Good afternoon, Mr. Remson," he continued, "good afternoon, sir." At the same time he bowed politely to the lady and Lorrimer.

"Hullo, Mr. Marston, glad to see you," rejoined the trust officer, approaching. "I told you that if you were not well enough to come down I'd have one of the bank's young gentlemen stay to-night in your stead."

"I might as well be here, sir, might as well be here," continued the old man huskily but pleasantly. Then bowing again he passed

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down the corridor with a combination of a bird-step and shuffle.

"Our night guardian," said Mr. Remson, explaining the old man's presence to Lorrimer and ignoring the lady whose perturbation he had not recognized. "A most self-respecting old fellow, but getting almost too old for the work; I'm afraid we will have to retire him pretty soon. He's had quite a history, by the way—been a great scholar." He stepped to the entrance.

The day watchman was still holding the door open, but Lorrimer seemed in no hurry to move. The look on the woman's face had evidently disconcerted him; even now she had not recovered herself. Her lips were open and her tongue was vainly endeavoring to moisten them into flexibility.

"Is anything the matter, madam?" asked Lorrimer earnestly, as he half supported her with a polite but firm grasp at her wrist and elbow. "Can I be of any assistance to you?"

The lady controlled herself with difficulty.

"No, thank you," she replied. "It was

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just a sudden turn I had. And over such a little matter, too!"

She opened the little bag she carried. "See," she said, "my purse is gone; but I remember where I left it—at my dressmaker's. It was very foolish of me to take on so, wasn't it?" She flashed a smile at Lorrimer that found no echo.

They were passing out to the sidewalk as if they had forgotten Mr. Remson's presence. The latter gentleman, still much amused, was watching them closely. The words that Lorrimer spoke, however, were too low for him to overhear.

"I must have a talk with you, madam," he murmured. "It is of great importance that we should have a few moments' conversation. By the way, it would give me great pleasure to get your check cashed for you."

"That's very kind," replied the lady; "very kind indeed."

"If you'll just step across to the restaurant with me," Lorrimer was going on, with the same subdued earnestness, when Mr. Remson interrupted him.

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"Good day, Mr. Lorrimer," said he, politely lifting his hat. "I suppose I'll see you to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes," answered Lorrimer, "or the day after. Good day, good day!"

His mechanical reply was given in the tone of one whose mind was on other matters. He hardly nodded in response to Mr. Remson's bow. As for the lady, she paid no attention to the latter at all.

The avenue was crowded with swiftly moving vehicles. Lorrimer paused on the curb, half extending his arm, as if to escort the lady over. To his surprise he found that she had turned, and was standing with her back to him, looking down the side street! A cabman in a faded green livery and a battered silk hat that fitted down to his ears over his closely cropped red hair was approaching, making energetic gesticulations with his thumb over his shoulder. If Lorrimer had been at all suspicious, and if at that moment he had not given a sudden jump at the blast of a motor horn, he would have perceived that the curtain of the little back

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window of the first cab on the waiting line was lifted. A hand there was repeating the cabman's almost imperative gesture. The lady had noticed, however, and had turned again quickly.

"I forgot to pay my cabman," she said, with rather a forced and nervous laugh, "and my purse is at the dressmaker's. How foolish!"

"Allow me," said Lorrimer, stepping forward.

"No, no," she broke in, almost seizing him by the lapel of his coat in her effort to detain him. "I tell you what to do—you go over there and wait. I'll come and join you in a few minutes. And then, if we haven't time to finish our little talk, you might drive to the ferry with me, for I *must* catch that 4.10 train."

"You'll find me waiting just inside the entrance," Lorrimer replied politely, and lifting his hat, he strode into the narrow channel that the big policeman had opened through the vortex of streaming traffic.

The cabman stepped up to the lady and walked back with her.

"For God's sake, hurry," he said, mumbling through half-closed lips. "He's in the cab waiting for you—almost out of his head! Quick, get a move on!"

He almost pushed her through the door with his shoulder and jumped to the box. The horse lurched forward with a loud clatter of slipping hoofs. A slight figure that had been huddled in a corner of the seat emerged from the folds of the lap robe.

"Lord, Maisie," exclaimed the frightened voice of Mr. Samuel Reeder, "I thought they had you that time, sure!"

"What's come over you, Sam?" cried the woman. "Everything was working out splendidly—oh—oh!"

The cab lurched swiftly around the corner on two wheels.

"What's all the hurry?" she asked, trying to control a desire to scream. "Has Red gone crazy? Wait till you hear what I have to tell you—everything was working out

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fine— Heavens! he just missed that baby carriage!”

“Wait till you hear what *I've* got to tell you,” was the response, with the accent on the personal pronouns, “and you’ll want all the hurry you can get. I’ve got a story to tell that’ll make your hair curl tight up to your head.”

“I wish it would,” said the woman; “it would save me a lot of trouble. Ouch!—if we strike any more bumps like that, most of it will be under the seat! Oh, darn my wig! Go ahead and talk; I’ll hold on to it.”

“I can’t,” said the man; “I don’t know where to begin.”

“Well, take your time,” said the woman, looking at him suspiciously, “but don’t act like a silly gazabe. When you’re finished, I’ll tell you something that’ll have your fairy tale beaten to a light, white froth.”

There was no response. The cab by this time had reached one of the West-Side avenues and was proceeding at a more leisurely gait.

“I’ll begin as soon as I get my breath,”

said Mr. Reeder at last. "Give me a little time—I'll soon be ready." Nevertheless, he continued to prolong the pause as if gathering his thoughts with difficulty.

Back at the restaurant, Mr. Lorrimer was pacing the floor impatiently. The lady had not appeared!

Fifteen minutes, twenty, twenty-five minutes had passed. Mr. Lorrimer vibrated between the main entrance and the marble alleyway, at the end of which were the telephone booths. His nervousness was painful. He tried every settee in the corridor as if playing a solitaire game of "Going to Jerusalem." Then he started to go out to the street, and changed his mind twice while still in the embrace of the circular glass doors; the result being that he completed the turn like a squirrel in his exercising wheel, much to the amusement of the doorman. When, somewhat bewildered, he stepped back into the hall again, he was met by one of the hat-checkers, who joined in the doorman's grin.

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"The gentleman you was waiting for," began the boy.

"Where is he?" gasped Mr. Lorrimer.

"There he is," replied the lad, indicating a short, thick-set man down the corridor. Lorrimer almost staggered up to him.

"Good gracious!" cried he. "You must have flown!"

"Four minutes from my office to the Subway station; eight minutes from City Hall to Forty-second Street, and it has taken me about three minutes to run here. Where's the lady?"

"She hasn't come," said Lorrimer weakly.

"Oh, she hasn't come, hasn't she?" Fowler repeated the words with as near an approach to a sneer as was compatible with extreme politeness. "Too bad! Too bad! Now, tell me all about it. You said you had just met a lady whom you were now talking to——"

"Had been talking to," interrupted Lorrimer.

"All right—had been talking to—who said she knew Straub."

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"No, Strauss!" corrected Mr. Lorrimer.
"Don't talk so loud."

"Well, she said she knew him; mentioned him by name, of course."

"No, she said she knew an old German engraver, and then she——"

"Well, well?" Mr. Fowler tapped his foot impatiently on the marble pavement, and took out his watch.

Lorrimer was floundering by this time in nervous embarrassment. "Then she—then she—hummed one of the Blue Danube waltzes," he added desperately. "I meant to have detained her till you came."

"And you brought me up here to meet a lady—who isn't here—who could hum a Blue Danube waltz, eh! I suppose you thought the fact that she was a hummer would prove of interest to me. What will we call the incident—'An Echo from Strauss'?"

Mr. Fowler's humor did not appeal to Lorrimer in the least. "Well, I'm paying you for your time," he retorted

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angrily—"and we'll call it five hundred dollars."

"Oh, come; don't let's lose our tempers," said the lawyer; "let's sit down and you can tell me the whole thing just as it happened. By the way, where are the plates?"

"They're over at the bank," snapped his client testily. "I gave them to the trust officer. He——"

"Good! Chief Wilkins can't get here till to-morrow afternoon. Now go on and tell me what's happened."

At five minutes of four Lorrimer had concluded his story, but still there were no signs of the lady.

"I don't know why she hasn't returned," he added shortly, after a hurried excursion to the main entrance. "I understood that her dressmaker was somewhere on this street—but she didn't mention her name. It's too late to catch her at the ferry, I suppose?"

"It's too late to catch her anywhere, I'm afraid. What a pity!" commented Mr. Fowler sympathetically. "But I've got an

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important engagement in half an hour, and I've got to get back to my office. I've really got to. You can wait here, if you please; and call me up on the 'phone, if the lady materializes later."

"Well, what do you think of it—what would you do if you were me?"

Lorrimer's hands were shaking as he asked the question.

"I'd go and get a drink," said the lawyer, "and forget it."

Lorrimer glared down at him, stammered something, turned upon his heel, and left without another word.

Mr. Fowler looked after him and gave a sigh of commiseration. "He's shadowed, all right," said he to himself; "shadowed by shadows! Poor old chap! I'll speak to Dr. Higgins."

Another instant the revolving doors had swirled him out into the street and he was heading at a dogtrot down the avenue.

Mr. Lorrimer had staggered into the bar and taken the legal advice, literally, in a glass of brandy and soda.

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So we come back to the cab.

"Maisie," began Mr. Reeder, for the third or fourth time attempting to start his narrative, "you're an exceedingly clever woman—that's 'pon me honor!"

"Cut it out, cut it out!" said his wife shortly, "and tell me just how matters stand."

"Well, you know," began Mr. Reeder, "when I saw from the window of the hotel that our friend 'Mr. Brown,' alias Lorrimer, had left his house, I hurried down to the little front room where you were waiting and told you at once."

"Yes, and I jumped into Red's cab and followed the one that Mr. Brown entered at the corner—you're only telling me things I know! Now, let me tell you something. Did you notice that he had a bundle under his arm?"

"Yes!"

"Well, he had the plates!"

"The plates!" gasped Reeder. "How do you know it?"

"Well, I know. Just listen—" And

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then, womanlike, she changed her mind. "But—but you go on and tell your story first," she added.

"No, you tell yours," rejoined her husband. "How do you know he had the plates?"

They were still disputing as to who should begin when the cab drew up with a lurch and stopped.

"Well, if Red hasn't driven us back to old Schneider's!" exclaimed Reeder. "We can get in a quiet corner and decide who's to relate the next chapter—we can't sit here and talk—and this is no cushion-tired run-about."

They descended hurriedly and stood on the sidewalk.

"You did right well, Mr. Dalton," smiled Mrs. Reeder to the cabman; "you never missed one hole in the pavement!"

"I'll go turn the old skate in, and then I'll come and join you," said the driver, leaning out from the box. "Order me a long one."

"Take your time, Red," said Mr. Reeder.

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"The next time we go out, mind you get a gong."

"Now, Sam," said the actress, as the cab trundled off, "not a word do you get out of me till you've rung down, mind that—then I'll take the center of the stage."

"Well, I'll call my story," began the white-bearded man, as they seated themselves in a cozy and deserted corner, "I'll call my story: 'The Voice from the Past.'"

And forthwith he began it.

CHAPTER V

THE VOICE FROM THE PAST

THERE were two things that I knew," said Mr. Reeder, "when I saw you drive off in the cab. One was that the driver of the other one would have hard work in losing Red, and the second was if you got half a chance you'd brace up to Mr. Lorrimer some place with all your hooks out. But I was mad when I found you had gone off with that hundred-dollar certified check."

"That comes in strong in my first act," said the woman. "I'll feature it when it comes my turn."

"Well, it was lucky I'd sent off our bags," continued Mr. Reeder, "and settled the account for the rent of our little watchtower last night, or I'd have been in trouble! Say, Maisie, that was a great game, wasn't it?"

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—you and I, by turns, never taking our eyes off the door of that house. How many hours was it? ”

“All last night, and all this morning till ten minutes of three this afternoon. It was a good thing I brought the opera glasses, Sam.”

“ Well, you know what I said,” smiled her husband, with a youthful wave of his hand that contrasted strangely with his curling white locks and snowy beard: “ you are an exceedingly clever——”

“ Go on with the story, Sam; quit your kidding! How about ‘ The Voice from the Past ’? ”

“ It’s a voice, Maisie, that’s got a lot to do with the present! I didn’t recognize it at first, but when I did I can tell you I curled up inside that telephone booth like a hair-spring in a watch—I just went like this! ”

“ But you haven’t said anything about the telephone booth yet, Sam. You’ve got the wrong cue.”

“ Perhaps so,” went on Mr. Reeder. “ It’s taken longer to tell this than it’d take

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Mr. Pryde Ritch to write a four-act drama. . . . Well, I go to the door after you leave, when up comes hall boy——”

“ ‘Mr. Saunders,’ says he (good name ‘Saunders,’ Maisie; has a Western sound, hasn’t it?), ‘you’re wanted at the telephone.’

“ Well, it was up to little Sam, I can tell you! We only invented that name last night, just before we signed the hotel register, and we’d never left the place, and weren’t expected to know anybody—so, thinks I, it must be some mistake; but, just to carry out the bluff—me to the telephone!

“ ‘Is this No. 1643?’ asked a voice at the other end.

“ ‘No,’ said I politely, ‘this is No. —’ Well, I forgot what it was, but I read the call number off to him.

“ ‘No,’ says the voice again, just as polite as myself, ‘I think this is No. 1643.’

“ That was the time I did the curling act, Maisie! ‘1643’ was my old number—you know where! And I used to wear it on my clothes, and, by the powers, it’s burned deep down in my mind! For a minute I was

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tempted to hang up the 'phone and run, but I concluded to try the bluff a little further.

" 'You're mistaken,' said I; 'I don't understand,' and this time I tried to speak a little through my nose; but it didn't fool the voice for a minute.

" 'Where did your wife go just now?' was the next question.

" I curled up again and said nothing, but I wouldn't have dropped that receiver for five hundred—I couldn't.

" 'Now, see here,' continued the other end, 'your wife just drove off in a cab and Red Dalton was driving—you needn't answer any more questions; but if you don't want her to get into trouble, head her off if she is trying to make any dates with Lorrimer.'

" Now by this time, Maisie, I caught on.

" 'Are you there, 1643? Are you there?' asked the voice.

" It was up to me again: 'Yes,' said I, 'I'm here,' and I'd given the world to call *his* number to my mind, but I couldn't think of it to save me! So the other end went on

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talking, and this time I recognized every tone so I could have sworn to it.

“ ‘ Sam,’ it pleaded, ‘ play on the level. If your wife meets Lorrimer, it’s all up. He’s blown the whole thing and stands in with the beaks. If you will insist upon me talking plain, Chief of the Secret Service Wilkins, from Washington, is to meet him at his bank this morning.’

“ ‘ What bank?’ asked I. He gave me the name. ‘ Get there quick as you can,’ he ordered; ‘ head her off, for heaven’s sake!’

“ There was a buzz and a click, and the next thing I got was Central inquiring what I wanted. I couldn’t stop to fool around! The quickest way to reach the bank was to take the trolley, and if I had luck I might get to the corner ahead of you and signal Red to haul off before you had a chance to make a break.

“ Well, everything happened! First, it was a coal wagon, then it was a grocery cart, then it was a fat old lady who walked with a stick, then it was a governess with six children who all wanted to get into the car last;

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then it was a drunk who had to be *put* off. I could help there a little. I guess they were surprised at an old gray-headed codger like myself chucking a hundred-and-eighty pounder clean out to the gutter, but I made no bones of it! Before that car got down into the Forties I would have bought minutes at ten dollars apiece, and boosted them a few scads higher in the market, as a big delivery wagon drew out of the express yard and blocked the line again. When we got to the corner, I ran like a real whitehead for the bank—I just slowed up before it was a question of colliding with a 'bus or a policeman.

“Ahead of me was a little old fellow in a brown coat, who walked in a ‘This-is-the-way-the-darkies-used-to-go’ fashion. He skipped across the street and ran to the door of the bank; I looked up, and what do you suppose I saw? There were you with a ‘Save-my-child’ expression and a man on either side of you, one holding you by the wrist and elbow, and up stage I got a glimpse of brass buttons and a uniform.

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“ ‘Pinched,’ said I; ‘quick exit me!’ I side-stepped, ducked, and who do you suppose I ran into but Red, and there stood his cab! I was going in through the window like a Hanlon when Red yanks the side entrance open. In I go and do the human snake, with the blanket in the corner!

“ ‘Cab’s engaged,’ says Red, cool as could be.

“ ‘I’m waiting for the lady you drove down,’ says I, thinking somebody might be within hearing distance. ‘Stand by her, Red, my boy; stand by her, lad!’ ”

“ ‘Ireland still has brave hearts to defend her countrywomen!’ I know the rest of that line, Sam; cut it out and go ahead with your story.”

Mrs. Reeder waved her hand impatiently. Her husband drew a long breath and laughed.

“Well, I looked out of the little back window and there I saw your two friends bowing to you as polite as possible, and one of them I recognized as ‘Mr. Brown.’ ”

“I made a hit with your friend ‘Mr.

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Brown,' Sam—I'm kind of sorry you interrupted us. We were just getting acquainted. Say, but men are soft!"

"Well, if he'd known who you were, he'd have made a hit with me that would have landed me up in Massachusetts somewhere. So, when I saw you had caught on to our wigwag—for in the meantime I'd informed Red what was up—I can tell you I felt relieved; and when we did our daring dash for freedom, I couldn't tap my think-tank. But there you have it! 'The Voice from the Past' was Quinnie White's, king of them all, Maisie, king of them all! As long as he is the business manager, the ghost has a chance to walk."

"Well, here's the hundred-dollar check," said the woman, producing the paper from her reticule. "He walked according to promise this week! Do you know, Sam, I think they're good, even if Peters does sign them."

"Good as gold," said her husband. "Mr. 'Howard,' Mr. 'Peyton,' Mr. 'Leon Gautier' isn't running any risks, and he's keeping

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tabs on friend Peters. You see, Pete never was pinched, although——”

“Leon Gautier!” repeated Mrs. Reeder, unheeding; “that name sounds familiar to me. I’m sure I’ve heard it somewhere.”

“It’s the name that Quinnie White took two years ago in Paris; I know that much.”

“He wouldn’t use it over here?” asked the woman. “Would he?”

“Well, hardly; he never goes into two countries under the same name. Here he’d be Mr. ‘Howard’ probably—he’s the slickest one in the business, and knows as much about printers’ ink and paper as Peters does. Why, that man speaks eight languages! There’s one question I want to ask you, Maisie, before we go too deep on Mr. White: What made you look so scared as you were coming out of the bank that time?”

“I thought I had ’em for fair,” said the woman. “You noticed the little man who just entered?”

“Yes, the little old fellow with the funny walk!”

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"Did you see his face?"

"No!"

"Well, you go up and have a look at it to-night, then you'll catch on. He'll be there—you can see him through the window probably—he's the night guardian."

"Where'll I meet you after the show?"

"At the house; but listen to me," said Mrs. Reeder suddenly. "I think I can arrange something."

"What?"

"For you to meet Monsieur 'Leon Gautier.'"

"You are an exceedingly—but——"

"Cut it out, Sam," interrupted Mrs. Reeder. "Did you see a tall, black-bearded man up at the hotel this morning, standing near the waiting-room entrance?"

"Yes."

"Was his appearance familiar?"

"No; 'tis fortunate I'm not of a jealous temper. He seemed to display some interest in you, Maisie."

"And in you, too, Sam; while you were talking to me, he never took his eyes off you."

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He was stopping at that hotel. I saw him give a key to the bellboy. When I got into Red's cab, he was on the sidewalk; looking back I saw him enter the drug shop next door. He telephoned you from there, not fifty feet away! "

"But, Maisie, Quinnie White had light hair."

"You said his eyes were dark, though," said the woman, "and there are such things as well-made wigs." She pulled at a little curling lock as she spoke. "And hair dyes, too," she added. "They make them both in France."

"But Quinnie White had a broad, up-tilted nose."

"You can have your nose changed any shape you want nowadays," said Mrs. Reeder, running her finger down her own classic profile. "Look what Dr. Goodborough did for me after my accident."

"Quinnie White was shorter by almost three inches."

"Well, did you see the heels he wore? And I believe nowadays you can get your

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spine stretched, too; I read about it in a *Sunday Herald*."

"Well well!" exclaimed Mr. Reeder. "Say, isn't he the slick one!"

"Don't you remember saying how he could read what people said, by their lips? He *saw* everything you said, when you whispered to me in the waiting room."

Mr. Reeder jumped to his feet. Then he stopped irresolutely. "What made you think his name was Gautier?" he asked.

"The other day I was lunching at Martin's and he came in. One of our party said he was sure he had seen him in Paris and that his name was Leon Gautier, but he wasn't sure enough to speak to him. I just happened to remember the occurrence—that's all. And he *is* fine-looking!"

Mr. Reeder reached down his hat from the hook, and placed it on the top of his snowy head with a melodramatic flourish.

"Me for the hotel," said he.

"No use going there; you won't find him, Sam."

"Why?"

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"Because he's left. You can be sure of it; he'll look us up this time."

"What do you think he was doing there?"

"Watching Mr. Lorrimer, the same as we were—or, maybe he was watching us. I'll bet we'll hear from him in a day or so. I wouldn't go near that hotel if I were you. But one thing don't forget—go up and have a look at that old fellow in the bank. It will amuse you sure. Then meet me at the house after the show, as I said before, and I'll have something to tell you about those plates. Don't let's wait for Red—I've got to be getting down to the theater!"

A few minutes later Reeder had helped his wife onto a down-town car.

It was one o'clock that night before Mrs. Reeder put in an appearance at the boarding house. When she came in her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks aglow under their smudge of rouge.

"Had a good time?" asked her husband nonchalantly, looking up from the

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easy-chair where he sat reading a comic supplement.

"Yes," she replied, as she took off her large picture hat and pinned it to the back of the sofa with a stab of an ornate hatpin. "I've had a very pleasant supper with a French gentleman— Has Martha gone to bed?"

"Yes; but don't tell me," cried Mr. Reeder, bouncing upright in astonishment, "don't tell me that you——"

"That's just what I was going to say: that I'd just had supper with our friend Mr. Gautier. That's all! I thought something would happen, Sam. But I almost fainted when I saw him sitting there in the box. He sent a note round to me and had a cab waiting at the stage entrance. Seems to me I've got the cab habit bad! We drove up-town, looked in at the bank, had supper together over on the West Side, and he just left me at the corner. You should have heard him rave about those plates. Says Brown's secret process is the best ever—says if we ever could get hold of 'em Brown would

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never dare peep— Just think! Two days more and we would have been shoving 'em out in the country. I like Mr. Gautier— (Brr-r—but it is growing cold—light the gas stove, Sam)—I think he's a perfect gentleman, and he thinks I——”

“Am an exceedingly clever woman!” remarked her husband.

Mrs. Reeder did not smile. She sat down on the sofa and leaned forward eagerly, emphasizing her words with a pointed forefinger. “Sam,” she said, “if you've got sand enough to carry through a scheme of ours and nerve enough not to renege at the last moment, everything may come our way. Did you get on to his nibs up at the bank? Funny I happened to remember his name—‘Marston.’ That may help.”

“Yes; I see what you mean plain as day—but when am I going to meet White?” asked Mr. Reeder curtly.

“At the proper time,” was the reply, “he'll meet you. That will be all arranged sooner than you expect.” She glanced at the clock. “You and Red have got a job on

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your hands—I'll tell you about that later. Now light the stove and get me a cigarette." Leaning back on the sofa and blowing a smoke ring, Mrs. Reeder continued: "You'll have to remember one thing—we've got a pretty successful combination in our 'Voice from the Past,' and——"

"And an exceedingly clever woman," said her husband. "Don't contradict me. But, nevertheless, when am I going to meet him?"

"Mr. Gautier will be up here in this room in about twenty minutes," answered Mrs. Reeder quietly. "Now, don't get excited."

She rose and went to the window.

Mr. Fowler and Dr. Higgins were just leaving Lorrimer's house.

"I see no signs of hallucination," said the doctor quietly. "But he is in an intensely nervous condition, which was increased, no doubt, by his suspicion of the meaning of our late stay; the next few days, however, may develop some well-defined trouble."

"Yes, the next few days may prove or dis-

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prove some things of great importance," returned Mr. Fowler. "I cannot, just now, tell you what is the supposed condition of affairs. I may later. It was very good of you, doctor, to join our little impromptu theater party—it was all I could do to persuade Mr. Lorrimer to come. We'd had a little business tiff in the afternoon."

"Well, I suspect that we both felt we were there in more or less of a professional capacity," smiled the specialist.

"No," replied Fowler quickly, "it was entirely from a friendly feeling on my part, though I confess that my invitation to you read more or less like a summons. Consider it so, if you like; it certainly was not a very jovial occasion."

"No, hardly that. I hope there will soon be an improvement in our friend's condition. Good night to you. . . . We are going to have more snow."

"Good night— Yes, by Jove, it's chilly. Oh, by the way, he's to come to my office to-morrow afternoon to talk over some important matters."

"Is he? Well, make a note of his general condition and appearance, Fowler. See if you can see any enlargement of the retina."

"Oh, I don't think it's that," returned the lawyer. "He has a hatred of narcotics and stimulants."

"You never can tell," said the physician dubiously, as he mounted the steps. "Good night again."

A wild gust of wind swept across the Park. Mr. Fowler hastened his home-going footsteps, drawing his coat about him and carefully avoiding the danger spots in the now icy pavement.

CHAPTER VI

UP-TOWN

IT was four o'clock in the morning when the storm began. It burst upon the city from the northwest with the sudden flurries of hurtling, icy flakes soon changing to whirling clouds that hid the tops of the tall buildings and eddied furiously around the corners. Before daylight, streets and avenues were shoulder high; doorways were half hidden in upward-slanting drifts. By seven o'clock the sidewalks were almost impassable, the surface lines were blocked; what few pedestrians there were stirring, scudded and tacked, or slowly fought their way from one vantage point to another. The wind was blowing nearly sixty miles an hour.

Standing at the window of a little flat on the third story of a small West-Side apartment house was a young girl. She anxiously

scanned the street below and nervously watched the entrance of the Subway station at the end of the block. She could see the tottering, wind-swept figures of men and women reach the haven of its shelter and disappear. From the depths of her heart she pitied a poor, forlorn horse attached to a milk wagon that was now sprawling its way over the slippery asphalt, and then plunging almost breast-deep through the barriers of the drifts.

All at once the young woman started. A slight figure in a brown overcoat had appeared at the Subway entrance. A little old man, one hand holding on his soft, black felt hat, the other grasped tightly at his throat, stepped hesitatingly out into the storm. He made a little skipping run across to the corner, lost his balance, caught it again with difficulty, and then tripping at last, plunged headforemost into the first big snow-bank. The girl uttered a cry of anguish; but the old man had struggled to his feet, and leaning well forward, faced the blast again, edging along the railings. At last, with a

long, indrawn breath of relief she saw him enter the doorway below her. Quickly she crossed the room and pressed the electric button that set the latchet clattering its welcome in the vestibule. Then she stood at the open door expectantly.

With much stamping of feet and puffing of breath, the little, gray-haired man at last appeared on the landing.

"Phe-ew!" he said, making two syllables of the exclamation, as he slammed his soft hat on the banister. "The worst storm since Eighty-eight! I didn't have time to stop at the library as I intended— Too bad!"

"Come in, come in, father. Don't stay out there," cried the girl. "Gracious, what a tumble you had!"

"Did you see me, Elsie?" he laughed. "Didn't I come down!"

"How's your cold, dear?" She spoke lovingly as she helped him remove the old brown overcoat and untied the muffler under his chin.

"I think it's better, little daughter," said the old gentleman, speaking very hoarsely.

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"But I think it will be still improved by a cup of coffee."

"Here it is for you—and steaming hot," said the girl, "and in a jiffy some eggs, and toast, and cakes. And then your morning paper to put you to sleep—and you must promise me not to stir out of the house to-day. Why don't you stay in and finish your chapter on the Puranas?"

"We'll see, we'll see," responded the old gentleman cheerfully. "We're all creatures of habit, and this night-watchman business . . ."

"Now, please—please—!" interrupting with a laugh, as she pulled up the easy-chair to the little table in the front room. "I always think of you as president and board of directors and angel guardian."

"That's it," said the old fellow; "'guardian!' I believe they call me that."

"I'm sure you're quite as important as anyone connected with the institution."

"Well, I've longer hours than anyone," replied her father; "and while I'm there I'm monarch of all I survey. Despite my work,

it does get a bit lonesome sometimes, and the other night, my dear, I'm almost ashamed to say, I dozed for twenty minutes. Gracious, I wouldn't like to have them hear of it. Sometimes, you know, I worry about myself——"

"That is exactly what you shouldn't do," said his daughter. "Now, when you finish your breakfast, off to bed with you." She placed her hand on her father's forehead. "Why, you've got the least little bit of fever," she went on. "It's good I'm going to be home now, so I can take care of you."

"If you dare come into my room, Elsie, with that little cap and that apron, and a thermometer in your hand, I declare I'll go out and roll in the snow."

"I don't know about the thermometer," laughed Miss Marston, "but I think the cap and the apron are rather becoming—I'm not in the least ashamed of them."

"Nor am I, my dear," replied the old gentleman tenderly. "I was only joking." He tapped his daughter's hand playfully. Then going into the little back room he

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closed the door behind him. The girl cleaned up the dishes and sat down by the window with her work basket.

The bell of the flat rang shrilly and a whistle faintly sounded from below. She rose and looked out. The postman was leaving the steps, his heavy bag held by both hands swung in front of him, his shoulders hitched high, almost to his ears. Miss Mars-ton wished she lived on the ground flat so that she could have asked him in for a cup of coffee. Jumping up, she hurried downstairs to the mail box.

The only letter it contained was addressed to her—she did not open it until she had once more climbed the stairs to the front room. The contents were mysterious. The first thing that caught her eye was a crisp, yellow bank bill for twenty dollars. It took her some time to decipher the writing—the signature she almost gave up in despair. But the address was plain enough, and the summons was imperative—some one was sick, and she had been recommended by Doctor—it might be Headlinger, it might be Heide-

kooper, she couldn't make it out clearly—but she was wanted to take charge of a case in Brooklyn. She was requested not to fail the writer. The inclosure of the money puzzled her; there was no reference to it in the note.

She wondered if her father was asleep. Going to the door of the back room she knocked softly. He was awake, reading by the light of the little lamp on the table by his bedside; the blinds were closely drawn.

"It may have been slipped in by mistake," said Mr. Marston, after vainly trying to decipher parts of the hasty scrawl. "What are you going to do, Elsie?"

"I'm going to return it," said the girl. "I told you that I did not intend to leave you to-day."

"It's no weather for you to venture out, my dear. But if——"

"It isn't that, father; I'm very strong. I could go there; I don't want to leave you. That is all."

"Elsie," said the old man, "I'd go, if I were you—never mind me—the note says it will only be for a day or two, doesn't it?"

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Mrs. Hart downstairs can get me my meals, as usual. If the Bridge cars are running, you can stop at the very door of this place," he added, looking at the address again. "They seem to need you very badly, or they would not have sent you a retaining fee."

"Retaining fees are not customary for trained nurses, but my curiosity is excited. Do you think you could get on without me, father?"

"Certainly, my dear; go by all means."

"I will, if you promise not to go down to the bank this evening."

"All right; I won't—if I don't feel better—I'll telephone from the shop next door. Now, don't you worry—go ahead."

A few minutes later Miss Marston was seated in a Subway express train bound for the Bridge entrance, a little bag on her knees, her forehead wrinkled as she puzzled again over the note and the mysterious inclosure.

In the little back room the old night guardian had fallen fast asleep.



“Do you think you could get on without me, father?”

CHAPTER VII

DOWN-TOWN

DOWN-TOWN some business offices were practically closed; many clerks and employees, who lived in the near-by towns and were dependent upon the suburban traffic, had not yet appeared by ten o'clock. The wires were down; word had come that many trains were stalled, and on some roads the railway schedules had been suspended. But Daniel Fowler, thanks to the Underground, reached his office at his customary hour. A few minutes after his arrival a card was handed him. As he read the name a look of keen interest lit his face—he smiled an anticipatory smile.

“Ah, Mr. Wilkins,” he cried as a tall, good-looking man was ushered into his sanctum, “the storm did not keep you from your appointment.”

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"Well, I wasn't very far off," replied the famous head of the Secret Service. "I sometimes stop at the Astor House—interesting old place, and rather central for some of my interests—I stayed there last night. . . . You wished to see me on important business judging from your message."

"Yes, a very strange case, a very strange case," returned Mr. Fowler, "and one that will hold your attention. Sit down—I will go over a few of the main points before the arrival of my client, Mr. Lorrimer, who is vitally concerned in the matter."

Mr. Wilkins seated himself in the big leather chair and leaned forward expectantly. In a few minutes Mr. Fowler had, in his concise, legal way, told and reviewed the strange story Lorrimer had related to him two nights before at the restaurant.

"It sounds very strange," was the detective's comment at the end of the narrative, "and yet it may be of the utmost importance. Have you seen any of the evidence in the case—the plates, for instance?"

"Not yet," replied Mr. Fowler. "I

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understand they are at Mr. Lorrimer's bank, where I told him to place them for safe-keeping. I saw the alleged counterfeit bill."

"Have you it with you, Mr. Fowler?"

"No; my client was to bring it here with him this morning. I'm expecting him every minute."

"Has he had any strange acquaintances of late; have his habits been irregular?"

"No; he is more or less of a misanthrope—a recluse. Very sensitive and shy. It would be very painful to him to have his name connected with the case. I can see his point, too."

"Is he of—what shall I say—of an imaginative temperament?"

The lawyer pondered for a moment. "Well, just at present I should say he was in an exceedingly nervous condition. I had my friend, Dr. Higgins, spend some time with him last night. By the way, how suddenly this storm came up, didn't it?—and he perceived that Mr. Lorrimer was laboring under great mental excitement—I forget his

technical name for it. As to imagination—yes, perhaps he is somewhat imaginative, but you see, we will soon have proofs, tangible proofs to go by. I would depend more upon them than upon his testimony; in fact, I would depend upon them altogether if I were you. His condition, as I said——”

There was a knock at the door.

“Mr. Paul Lorrimer,” announced the young law clerk, and the subject of the discussion entered the room.

During the introduction that followed, Mr. Wilkins never took his eyes from Mr. Lorrimer’s face. He noticed that that gentleman had unbuttoned his gloves and carefully buttoned them again; that his eyes had a sleepless, half-frightened expression, and his replies to the commonplace questions and remarks on the weather that began the interview were somewhat short and breathless. He refused Mr. Fowler’s offer of a cigar and immediately afterwards, when the other two gentlemen were smoking, drew out his match safe and struck a match, holding the wax vesta still lighted in his fingers.

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Mr. Fowler, in order to relieve his embarrassment, handed him a cigar as if there had been nothing unusual in his actions.

"Now, Mr. Lorrimer," began the head of the Secret Service, launching into business at last, "I have just heard part of this very remarkable story. We may be on the verge of a most important discovery in the unraveling of which, of course, a great deal depends upon you—the assistance that you may give us will count as the first factor in running this crime to earth. Mr. Fowler has very concisely related to me the main incidents as you have told them. Now, what you must show me is all the evidence you possess, and leave the rest to me and to my agents. We will not bother you more than is necessary and your name will not have to be mentioned publicly. I understand that you have the bill which you found in the room of the old German who went by the name of Strauss, or Straub—the bill that you found in the wallet, if I remember correctly."

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"I have it here," replied Lorrimer, putting down his cigar, which he had allowed to go out, on the edge of the desk. "But before we go on," he added, "there is something else I want to show you first. It has worried me greatly."

"We will call it exhibit 'A,'" said the lawyer, resting his hand reassuringly on Lorrimer's shoulder as his client fumbled in the pocket of his coat.

The large pocketbook appeared wedged in the lining. It was with difficulty that the nervous man could draw it forth. From a plain white envelope addressed, "To Mr. Lorrimer," in a round, printed hand, he took a folded illustration, cut from one of the comic papers.

"This was put under my front door last night," said he. "My man found it this morning."

The picture showed a man seated at a desk, surrounded by four rough-looking characters, each holding a pair of revolvers.

Mr. Fowler put on his glasses and read aloud the legend, which was headed:

“HANDY REASONS.”

“*Defaulting Executor* (to friends of late deceased): What reasons can you show me, gentlemen, for paying you any of this money?”

“*Spokesman*: Forty-eight good reasons—six in each hand. Come, fork over!”

Mr. Fowler pushed the clipping over to Mr. Wilkins, who put it in his pocket.

“Seems like a threat or a joke,” he said. “But now let us see the counterfeit bill.”

Lorrimer flushed; his fingers trembled as he took out the crisp, gold certificate and handed it to the head of the Secret Service.

Mr. Wilkins snapped it smartly between his fingers, as a man might test the quality and strength of a bit of silk. Then rising quickly, he walked to the other end of the room, at the same time taking a magnifying glass from his waistcoat pocket. He stayed at the window some time, turning now and then so as to get a better light and focus. The two others watched him expectantly—at

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last he appeared to be satisfied. He closed the glass slowly, as if gaining time to think; then, as he returned to the desk, he caught Mr. Fowler's glance and lifted his eyebrows with a puzzled expression. There was an expectant pause.

"It is a perfectly good bill, Mr. Lorri-mer," said Mr. Wilkins slowly as he extended the certificate held in the palm of his hand, "and worth fifty double eagles at any subtreasury in the country, sir. Any national bank would honor it in spite of the fact that you have labeled it as spurious."

"Then," began the lawyer, turning, "you may possibly have been mistaken."

"I must have deposited the wrong one," broke in Lorrimer excitedly. "You see, when the wind blew them to the floor I may have kept my eye on the good one."

"We will see if we can trace the other," said the detective pleasantly; "but all that is not of so much importance at the moment. The thing for us to do is to go now to your old assistant's apartments and look over the ground. I wired for Agent Danielson to

come on to-day from Washington—I suppose the storm delayed him.”

Lorrimer sat there looking at the bill in his fingers with a dazed expression on his drawn, white face.

“Why, why—” he stammered; “then I passed a bad bill at the bank.”

“Oh, maybe not,” replied Mr. Wilkins reassuringly; “the other one may have been good also—at all events you have here one thousand dollars to take it up with—but we’ll see, we’ll see. How long will it take us to get up to the place where old Strauss had his studio? Too bad you ever got mixed up in the affair. But we must have something to go by.”

“About half an hour, I should think,” blurted Lorrimer hotly. “There’s proof enough there to convince you.”

“You haven’t forgotten the keys,” suggested Mr. Fowler, somewhat anxiously.

“No; I’ve got them in my pocket—what do you suppose I’d do with them?” This time his client’s voice rang with anger and irritation.

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“Then I move we get up there as soon as possible. We can go to the bank afterwards,” said Mr. Wilkins, picking up his hat and tossing himself into his heavy, fur-lined coat.

CHAPTER VIII

A DOUBTING THOMAS

WHEN the three gentlemen reached the East-Side apartment house, Mr. McGuire, the janitor, from the vantage point of the top step, was scolding a circle of children who stood knee-deep in the snow below him on the sidewalk. The fact that Mr. McGuire held a broom in his hand and that snowballs decorated the balustrade and the doorposts sufficiently explained his evident ill temper. He interrupted his discourse when he saw the party of three turn toward him and mount the steps.

"I'm Mr. Lorrimer," began the leader, "I—I mean Mr. Brown, Mr. Straub's—I mean Mr. Strauss's employer."

"Oh, th' old Dutchman, is it, on the top flure. You were here of a Sunday, so me little boy was tellin' me. You had the keys to the room, I believe, sor."

"I have them now," rejoined Lorrimer, continuing, and interrupting Mr. Wilkins, who was about to speak. "We're all friends of his and we'd like to go up there to—to look around a little—it's all right, all regular—we're friends—understand? Has anybody—I mean do you know of anyone who might have been—I mean of anybody in the neighborhood who—er——?"

"Has anyone been here since Mr. Brown's last visit?" asked Mr. Wilkins pleasantly, turning to the janitor and continuing the question.

"No, sor—sure Mr. Brown was the only caller he ever had, dead or alive. Oh, such a bother I've had wid the childer! When it's not marking up the place with chalk, it's throwing banana peels on the shteps or upsetting the ash barrels in the area, and what wid the shnow to clean off—me heart's broke!"

He opened the door, still grumbling, and ushered the little party into the close-smelling hallway.

"Top flure," said he, with an upward

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wave of the hand. "Shall I go wid ye's?"

"No, never mind," said the Secret Service man, who had apparently appointed himself spokesman; "we'll see you when we come down, Mr?——"

"McGuire," answered the janitor. "I've lived in the ward this forty year and sometimes I wish to God I was out of ut. The brats is gettin' worse an' worse ivry day for all the edication—Reform Administrations! It's reform schools we're after needin'—it's the rod that's the best teacher—sure, if we had a dacent government——"

He was about to launch forth on a long tirade against juvenile crime and political shortcomings, but his audience by this time was a third of the way up the first flight of stairs. Here they were halted by a shouted question from below.

"And what am I to do with the burds on the roof?" cried Mr. McGuire. "I've been feeding them for the past four days, but it costs money, and th' corn is out."

"We'll see you about that when we come

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down, Mr. McGuire," returned Chief Wilkins over the banister. . . . "What does he mean by 'burds,' Mr. Lorrimer?"

"I don't know," Lorrimer replied. "I saw no birds when I was up here before, but there is a ladder just outside the door that leads to a scuttle in the roof."

"Ah, here we are," panted Mr. Fowler, as they gained the head of the last flight of stairs, "and there is the ladder! Now, which door is it?"

Lorrimer, out of breath from the climb and the excitement that now had hold of him, was fumbling with the bunch of keys he had found in old Straub's pocket when he had searched his dead body in the studio. He picked out one and inserted it in the keyhole. The door apparently would not open.

"You're turning it the wrong way, Mr. Lorrimer," observed Mr. Wilkins quietly; "here, let me."

In an instant the door stood open. The detective entered first.

"This is the closet from which leads the secret entrance," whispered Lorrimer in

A DOUBTING THOMAS

trembling eagerness. "Ah, here's the key. . . . Now, gentlemen, if you've had any doubt in your minds. . . ."

"Just wait a minute, please," rejoined Wilkins, "and close the door behind us into the hallway. I want to look about a little here first. You've examined this bureau?"

"There's nothing there but old clothes," Lorrimer replied with a show of irritation. "But in that tobacco jar, underneath the tobacco, you will find a revolver. I meant to have taken it when I was last here, but I forgot all about it."

Apparently Mr. Wilkins had paid no attention to this bit of information. He was feeling around the surbase and tapping the floor with the toe of his boot where he lifted the carpet. Apparently everything was as it should be. The bureau drawer he turned upside down on the bed and shook out each cheap garment separately. There was nothing in the least suspicious about them. Old Strauss had evidently done his own mending. At last Mr. Wilkins turned his attention to the tobacco jar, and running his fingers deep

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down into the brown, snuffy mass, brought forth an ivory-handled six-shooter. He examined it closely.

"Ever seen one like this before, Mr. Lorrimer?" he asked, after a pause.

"One pistol is very much like another, I suppose—I don't know anything about them," was that gentleman's retort. "Now——"

"I mean this one especially that I hold in my hand."

"I didn't look at it as carefully as you have, sir—but why?"

"The only reason I ask," said the detective, "is the fact that it has your initials on it—'P. L.,' I believe."

"The old villain!" exclaimed Lorrimer. "The hoary-headed old——!"

He stopped as if at a loss for expressions to voice his feelings. Mr. Wilkins was looking at him with a smile lurking in the corners of his mouth.

"He must have got it from the top drawer of the old cabinet in my library," Lorrimer concluded weakly. "Now I remember—"

there were two of them given me some years ago—the fact had slipped my mind entirely.”

“Well, now for the secret door, gentlemen,” said the detective with a long breath and something in his tone akin to condescension.

Mr. Fowler was looking on with a semi-apologetic and semifoolish smile. All at once he flashed a curious glance in Lorrimer’s direction. How was it going to end? Would his client’s strange revelation and the remarkable mystery finish in nothing at all but a string of fortuitous incidents, or prove to be the self-incubated, badly hatched freak of a disordered intellect? Or might affairs take a new and sudden turn?

As he entered the closet, Mr. Wilkins caught the lawyer’s arm and gave it a slow pinch of understanding. Lorrimer had found the flat key without trouble. He pulled the little door open, and with a “just-wait-and-you-see” air stepped into the black opening. As the two others followed, the lawyer was tempted to give Mr. Wilkins a responsive

nudge, but in justice to his old friend he refrained. Perhaps the developments would now prove more convincing; perhaps some startling evidence might be forthcoming.

As if he had been there a hundred times, Lorrimer's hand had found the gas jet; an instant later, he had applied a match, and there was a burst of brilliant, roaring flame.

The room and its contents, as they stood suddenly revealed, produced no little astonishment. Lorrimer noticed this with an air of triumph.

"Look!" he cried eagerly. "See, a photo-engraving camera, exactly like my own! Notice those acid trays on the table there, with the rockers—my own invention! And the press, in the sand box in order to take up the sound and jar."

"Is that your invention, too, Mr. Lorrimer?" asked the Chief, with a show of great interest.

"I used to use it, but now I have brick pillars built up from the cellar, and a concrete flooring."

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"They would be rather hard to put in the top story of an apartment house," interposed Mr. Fowler.

"We often have to adapt ourselves to circumstances," rejoined Mr. Wilkins. "But, now let's have a look around again, slowly, and investigate everything thoroughly."

"Hold on!" said Lorrimer. "Before you do anything I want you to look at this plate; it's a copy of a Sir Joshua Reynolds, a mezzotint engraved by Thomas Mote."

"Apparently a very good one," smiled Mr. Wilkins.

"It ought to be—I made it myself, sir," was the reply. "And I told old Straub to destroy it. I supposed until the other day that he had done so. But look what probably has happened. He has erased my private mark and no doubt has pulled half a hundred copies of them—the villain! They'd bring good prices in any market as originals—eh, Fowler?"

"Well, that's a private matter between you and a dead man, Mr. Lorrimer. I don't see where the Government could interfere," put

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in Mr. Wilkins good-humoredly. "Now we'll go on."

For the next ten minutes all three were carefully engaged in ransacking the apartment. Every drawer, every nook, every cranny, was explored; but not a scrap of the much-talked-about green paper, not a proof of the incriminating evidence was discovered.

The Chief, despite an assumption of interest and politeness, waxed a little sarcastic as the search proceeded. Mr. Fowler wore an irritated and, if the truth be told, a somewhat shamefaced expression. As for the unfortunate cause of all the strange doings, his manner had changed from excited, chattering nervousness to sullen silence.

"I don't see what more we can investigate," said the Chief, as for the second time he had rolled back the carpet and followed the cracks in the flooring with his penknife. "The old gentleman evidently didn't wish to be disturbed in whatever he was doing—which, by the way, he appeared to know a good deal about. We'll have to depend upon something else—there's nothing here to help

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us! Let's go to the roof and see what we can find—we'll ascertain what Mr. McGuire meant by the 'burds.' By the way," he added, "I keep a little collection of mementos of celebrated cases—perhaps Mr. Lorimer wouldn't object to letting me add this revolver to it."

"Keep it, by all means," growled its former owner. "You can do what you like with it."

For the last few minutes the ground seemed to be slipping away from beneath his feet. He had had the uncertain, dizzy feeling of a person emerging from some anesthetic—the wonder if what had actually happened was real or unreal. But he did not yet perceive clearly the thoughts, or, better, the suspicions, of his companions. Strange to say, he grew calmer. His pitiful nervousness was succeeded by a keen desire to justify his actions—wait till they saw the plates! He longed to lay before them the positive proofs now safe in Mr. Remson's desk at the bank. He could bide his time, till then, in patience.

They left the workshop, passed through

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the little bedroom and out into the hall. The scuttle at the top of the ladder was closed with a rusty hasp.

"Look out! There may be a lot of snow come down," cried Mr. Wilkins before he started to push the scuttle upward.

But, odd to relate, it lifted easily and opened into a little penthouse roughly built of lath and tar paper. On either side, under the low roof, were coops and boxes, faced with wire netting, inside of which were half a score or more of somewhat bedraggled pigeons.

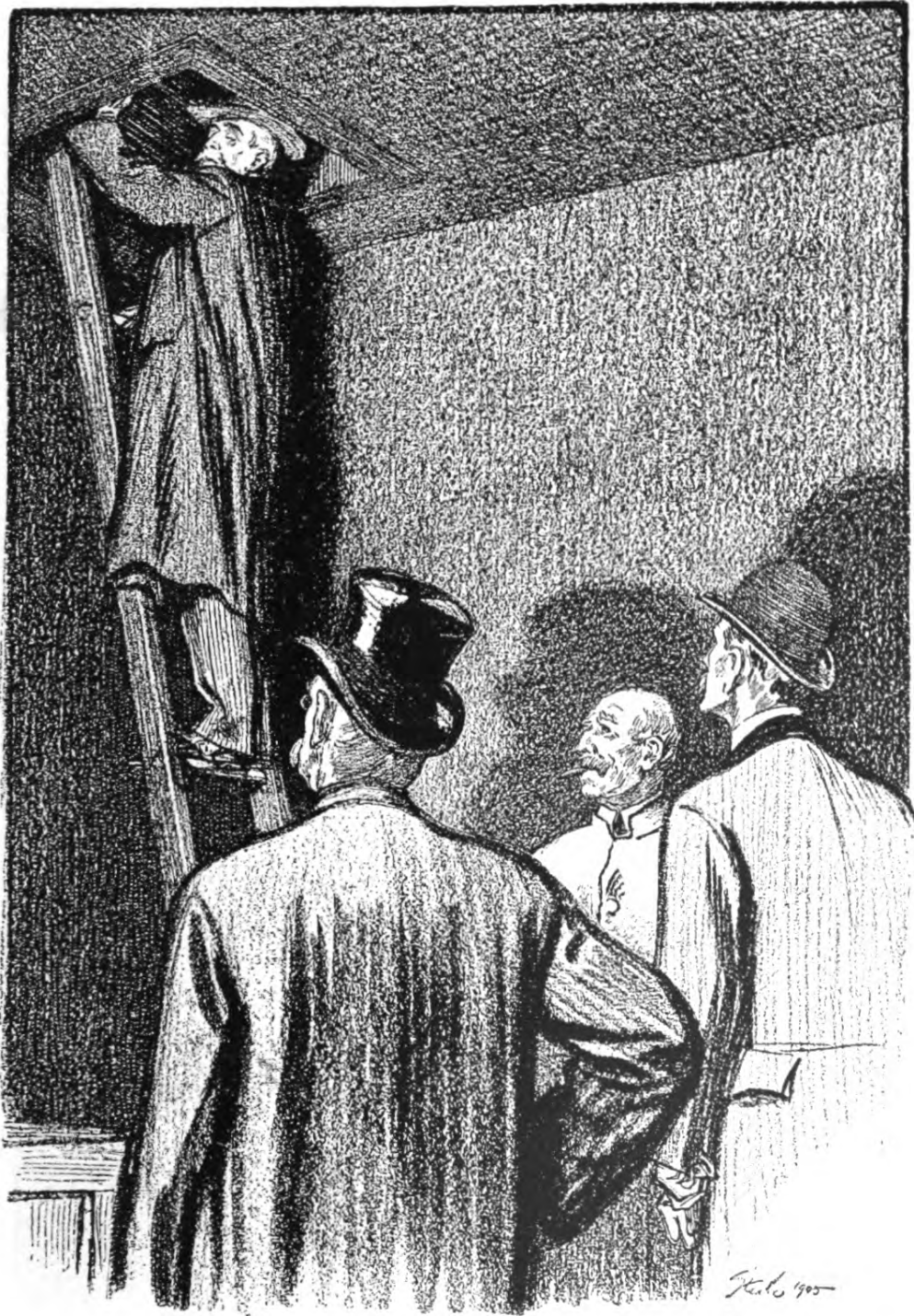
"Carrier pigeons! Here's a clew!" whispered the lawyer, almost with an accent of relief.

The detective looked down at him.

"The only thing they'd ever carry to the roof would be what they'd happen to pick up in the street!" said he.

Lorrimer had waited at the foot of the ladder. The detective found a chance at last to murmur something in Mr. Fowler's ear.

"I can't make head or tail of it," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm afraid you'll



“Look out! There may be a lot of snow come down!”

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have to call in another kind of a specialist. Has your friend been addicted to reading detective stories in the magazines? Is he a devotee at the shrine of Mr. Sherlock Holmes? ”

“ I don’t think so. But we won’t make up our minds till we see what he has down at the bank,” returned Fowler beneath his breath. “ In the meantime he might interview the janitor, and the old woman on the floor below, whom I told you Mr. Lorrimer had wisely put on watch.”

As they turned to descend, they found McGuire waiting beside Lorrimer at the foot of the ladder.

“ Sure, I was telling Mr. Brown that the burds ain’t worth letting loose—sure they’re hardly worth neck-wringin’, for that matter. What’ll I do wid ’em? ”

“ I should suggest a little more food and then a potpie,” said the detective. “ But, by the way, Mr. McGuire, did you know anything of a little door connecting Mr. Strauss’s room with the next apartment? ”

“ Sure, ’twas I helped build ut,” was the

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reply. "It was the consate for the former tenant, an artist he called himself. He died, some one was tellin' me, out West somewhere, two years ago. When the old Dutchman moved in wid all his claptrap he got the key of the dhure from the agent."

"I think we'd better go down to the bank," said Mr. Wilkins shortly. "There's nothing more for me to look into here." Then he added in Mr. Fowler's ear: "It is a strange case, just as you said."

"I move we get some luncheon first before we go down-town," suggested Mr. Fowler. "I'm hungry and we can telephone to Mr. Remson so we may be sure he will be in."

"What am I to do with the things in the rooms?" asked Mr. McGuire. "The rint's paid till the first of next month."

"Keep them until you hear from us," returned Mr. Fowler at a whisper from Mr. Wilkins, "and if anyone calls let us know. Here's my card."

Lorrimer had again lapsed into silence; his nervousness had returned.

"We might as well go to the club, I sup-

pose," the lawyer suggested. "It's about as near as any place else."

"You'll be my guests," returned Lorrimer curtly. "That I insist on."

There was a feeling of constraint very evident between the members of the little party as they fought their way westward through the streets still laden with the heavy drifts.

The first thing Mr. Lorrimer did upon reaching the clubhouse was to excuse himself to the others and enter the telephone booth. He emerged a minute later with a sickly smile on his white face.

"We've got to postpone it, gentlemen," he said. "Mr. Remson has not been at his desk all day. Please sit down while I go and order the luncheon."

"Delayed by the storm, I take it," said Mr. Fowler, as Lorrimer turned and left them.

"Heigho," yawned the detective, stretching his arms.

"I don't look forward to this luncheon with very much pleasure," said the lawyer.

"Nor I either," replied Mr. Wilkins; "but I don't think I have lost my appetite."

It was a strange and uncomfortable meal. The host of the occasion was distraught and ill at ease. Mr. Fowler did his best to enlist his interest and distract his attention by reciting the inner history of a celebrated lawsuit then pending in the courts, and Mr. Wilkins detailed the train of events that led up to the capture of the Harvey gang of coiners some years before in Chicago. But Mr. Lorimer failed to display any great concern in the conversation. When at last the party broke up it was agreed that they should all meet at the bank at half-past nine the following morning.

At the usual hour on this very afternoon when the day watchman should turn over his charge of the institution to the night guardian, there was some doubt as to whether the latter would put in an appearance; but, on time to the minute, the little figure in the brown overcoat crossed the street with his quick, birdlike step, and the day watchman let him in through the heavy doors. The old

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man had evidently disobeyed his daughter's injunctions—when certainly from all appearances he should have heeded them. His eyes were red and his throat muffled in a bit of red flannel—his replies to the day watchman's greetings were given in a throaty whisper—the doctor had forbidden him to talk, he explained shortly in a few hoarse words, otherwise he was better—"much better." Trotting over to the cloakroom he hung up his overcoat and black slouch hat. Then he walked into the back apartment, where the electric lamp blazed perpetually under its green shade, and, putting on his little skull-cap, opened the afternoon paper. No one disturbed him. One after another the clerks wished him good evening as they left, and at last the watchman locked the outside doors and had the bank all to himself.

For a long time the old guardian sat there reading in the same position. Then he put down his paper, and, slowly rising from his seat, strolled into the outer office that fronted on the avenue. The policeman who patrolled the beat as he went by the corner saw

him standing there looking out of the window at the long line of carriages across the way. The officer waved him a kindly salute, to which the old man replied with a pleasant nod of his head. When the policeman had gone up the avenue the night guardian began a slow pacing up and down the corridor. From time to time he entered the front office, where, bending over a desk, he would arrange the papers, or, stooping, straighten a waste-paper basket.

Shortly after midnight, when the policeman had passed for the third or fourth time on his rounds, Mr. Marston opened the inside glass doors of the vestibule—a strange thing to do on a winter's night. Perhaps the old guardian was feeling a slight return of the fever, or maybe it had grown very warm inside the bank. At all events, he stood there a moment, and just as a tall man in a long overcoat crossed the street from the *café* he bent down and straightened the rubber matting; then hastily he closed the glass doors inside the heavy iron grill. The man in the long overcoat, who was carrying a bundle of

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newspapers held flat under his arm, turned suddenly when opposite the entrance, and, approaching the grill, lifted his foot against the lower railing as if to retie his shoe laces. As he did so he put down the bundle he carried inside the opening of the vestibule. Another moment he had picked up his papers again and gone on up the avenue. He must have noticed that his actions were observed by the old guardian, for the latter, standing just back of the closed doors, had nodded to him pleasantly, in the same way he had nodded to the big policeman.

CHAPTER IX

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FORRIMER did not sleep late the next morning. He awoke, strange to say, refreshed and eager to meet the situation. He had the exalted feeling of a strong man with an exciting day before him. The mystery of the affair, instead of puzzling him, lent a vivid interest to his life; the immediate worry was dispelled by the mere fact that he now had a purpose—that of convincing Fowler and Wilkins, who, he saw at last, were skeptical as to the existence of any evidence of attempted crime. His fear of the consequences of his own apparent connection with the plot or the plotters dwindled entirely. He was not placed on the defensive; he had only to show proof of his assertions, and that proof he would lay before the head of the Secret Service before ten o'clock that morning. He had told all that

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he knew—nothing had been held back. With a feeling of satisfaction, he assured himself that he could turn his case over to the representatives of the Government, and leave the rest to them. As he reviewed the happenings of the day before, he remembered with relief the small importance attached by Mr. Wilkins to the fact that he had unwittingly passed a counterfeit bill.

A night of continuous and unbroken slumber is a great factor in the reorganization of disordered faculties. As Lorrimer looked at himself in the glass, he perceived an entirely different face from that reflected there for the past five days; and the best sign of all, he was hungry! If Dr. Higgins could have seen the breakfast he ordered at the club that morning, and the manner in which he stowed it away, he would have had no fear of any serious nervous breakdown. As Lorrimer ate he planned ahead without counting in his troubles at all. His luggage had gone by the *Campania* the previous week, but that was of no consequence; as soon as he finished his meal he cabled the office at Liv-

erpool that he would follow by the *Lucania*—the next outgoing steamer. By half-past eight he had called a cab and was on his way to the bank.

Before he had reached the corner, however, he suddenly remembered that there was something else it might be as well to prove—that was the care which he had always exercised in producing his facsimiles, and the wrong done him by old Straub's betrayal of his trust. He would bring down to the bank some samples of his own printing and some that no doubt had emanated from the workshop of his assistant. Telling the driver to turn up-town, he stopped at his own house and entered hurriedly. Rushing back to the studio he packed some hastily selected prints into a portfolio and was soon on his way down the avenue again, reading the morning paper.

The day watchman in the brass-buttoned uniform gave him a semimilitary salute as he opened the door.

"No, sir, Mr. Remson hasn't appeared yet, sir," he replied to Lorrimer's question.

"But he will be here. The cashier was just saying that he would probably stop on his way up-town—we're expecting him every minute, sir."

"Thanks, I'll wait," said Lorrimer, as the watchman opened the little wicket and ushered him into the front office. "Some gentlemen are to meet me here this morning."

One of the clerks, scribbling on a little pad as he approached, came down the corridor.

"Oh, Mr. Lorrimer," said he, "a message for you! Mr. Fowler has just telephoned that he would be here at half-past nine with a Mr. 'Wilson'—was that the name?"

"Wilkins," suggested Mr. Lorrimer.

"Yes, that was it—and another gentleman," making reference to his notes, "a Mr. Danielson, I think."

"Good," said Lorrimer, as he seated himself; "I'll wait for them."

Inadvertently he had taken Mr. Remson's revolving chair, close to the roll-top desk, and, with his portfolio on his knees and his toes on the floor, he swung himself in little

quarter circles, a habit he had fallen into at home when deep in thought. With one hand he grasped the handle of the desk lid, and suddenly he noticed that the desk was exactly like the one in his own study. He looked at it carefully and softly smiled. Wait until the cynical Mr. Wilkins had seen what that desk contained! He longed for a sight of the flat bundle loosely tied in its newspaper wrappings! In his mind he formed a little set speech with which he would turn over the startling contents to the renowned head of the detective bureau. He wondered if the key to his desk at home would fit Mr. Remson's. He was almost tempted to try—he had it in his pocket. Then again he smiled at the very temptation. He could afford to wait in patience. What if the desk was not locked at all? He gave a strong heave to the handle that he was still grasping, and with the familiar rumbling sound, the roll-top slid upward. He gave a start of consternation that was succeeded by a cold chill of the sheerest fright—the newspaper bundle was not there! The pigeonholes were filled with

papers, the compartments with beautifully bound notebooks. Everything was neat and orderly—but the plates, where were they? Looking up he caught the eye of the watchman, whose attention had been attracted by the sound of the opening lid. He perceived that one of the clerks behind the glass partition had noticed the commotion also; but, as if feigning unconsciousness, the young man had turned back to his ledger.

Despite the uncomfortable situation Lorrimer grew calmer. The fact that the desk was open, when he had turned matters over in his mind, was reassuring. Mr. Remson had probably telephoned the day before and ordered the plates put in the vault. It was very thoughtful of him, to be sure. Lorrimer picked up the portfolio and the morning paper, that had fallen from his lap to the floor, and closed the lid softly. This time the lock gave an audible click. Again he was quite sure that the clerk behind the glass partition had heard it; but it was none of the clerk's affair. He could explain the happening to Mr. Remson when he arrived. He looked

at the clock. All at once it came over him that it would be impossible to transact any very confidential business within sight and hearing of the bank's employees, or any casual depositor who might happen to enter; he bethought himself of the *café*. It would be easy enough to go over there and engage one of the small private rooms for the conference. He rose, picking up the portfolio carefully, and, as he passed through the little gate, spoke to the watchman.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," he said. "If anyone should ask for me, I'll be here on the very stroke of half-past nine."

With that he tucked the portfolio firmly under his arm and hurried out, fairly running across to the opposite corner.

When Mr. Lorrimer returned, in less than ten minutes, he entered upon a somewhat unusual scene. The first thing he noticed was that Mr. Remson had arrived and was standing just inside the railing surrounded by the cashier and his assistant, one or two depositors, the paying teller, and half a dozen clerks. The watchman also was one of the

party; he stood close to Mr. Remson's elbow, whispering earnestly.

"Why, I could swear to it, sir!" he was repeating with some heat. "I could swear to it on a stack of Bibles as high as——"

"Never mind, Conlin. No more just now," interrupted Mr. Remson, hushing him with an impatient shake of the head. "Just give him time to think. He's not himself—anyone can see that. Gently does it!"

An abject little figure of a man was seated in Mr. Remson's revolving chair, his white head bowed forward in his trembling fingers. At last he lifted his face, and his eyes swept the silent group of listeners in bewildered and piteous appeal.

"But it's the Lord's truth, gentlemen," he groaned. "I was not here—I never left my house—I never came down here at all. It seems to me as if I had died last night and came to life again this morning. Don't you believe me? I'm telling you the truth!"

He rose to his feet, his knees shaking.

"Mr. Remson," he pleaded, "you must believe me—has anything happened? If

there has, tell me, tell me—don't hide it! Why are you all looking at me like that? Here, Conlin, you know you never saw me—I never left my bed. I awoke and heard the clock strike every hour between twelve and seven, and I could not move or speak. Wait till you hear the rest of what I can tell! You don't believe me, I see, I see! ”

His voice broke in a little sob. The trust officer placed his arm around him as he might around a child.

“ Now, Mr. Marston,” he said, “ don't take on that way. It's all right. We're all your friends.”

“ But did anything happen? Who was here? Tell me, tell me! ” questioned the old man.

“ Nothing happened, Marston—that I know of.”

“ On your word of honor as a gentleman? ”

“ On my word of honor.”

It was here that the paying teller came to the relief of the situation.

“ Of course, Marston's right,” he said.

"Conlin and Mr. Gray were surely mistaken. The storm must have upset their recollections. Marston never was here last night. Mr. Thrush took his place; didn't you, Thrush?"

The lad appealed to responded with an alacrity that proved him to be even a better actor than the paying teller.

"Why, certainly I did. I was here, Conlin. What's the matter with you and Gray? Don't you remember when we thought Marston wouldn't be able to come, we decided among us who should stay?"

"I do now," replied the watchman sheepishly.

"So do I," broke in a young man in an ink-bespattered alpaca coat. "Patrick, I think you and I had better change our smoke—the joke's on us, for sure!"

"That's all right, Mr. Gray," began the man in uniform testily; "but you and me know that——"

Mr. Remson interrupted him with a warning nudge of his shoulder, followed by a half-angry gesture commanding silence. He bent over the old man again.

"So, you see it's all right," he said soothingly, "and there's nothing to worry about. Come with me to the directors' room and we'll talk it over quietly."

Mr. Marston made his way through the crowd, disdaining the assistance of a proffered arm, and tottered down the corridor. The trust officer signaled the cashier to step aside with him. Passing Lorrimer, Mr. Remson shook his head. "Back in a minute," he said beneath his breath; "sad case, sad case!"

For the first time since he had joined the group of listeners, Lorrimer found an opportunity to ask what had occurred. It was the paying teller who replied:

"That's our old night guardian, Marston; he just appeared here in the most awful state of collapse. It's a sudden case of mental break-up, loss of memory, aphasia, dementia, or something. He says he was not at the bank last night at all. At least half a dozen of us saw him, and Conlin only let him out about two hours ago. There was no complaint from the Holmes people. Everything

was regular. He's been ailing for some time, poor old fellow. I'm afraid it's all up with him!"

"Why don't you telephone for a doctor?" said Lorrimer. "You can send my cab for him. . . . Here, I'll scribble a note on my card—that'll fetch my doctor. Hasn't he any relatives?"

"He has a daughter, I believe; a trained nurse. He told us that she had been called away to attend to a case in Brooklyn. He couldn't remember the address." The paying teller drew a long breath of commiseration. "It must be awful," he went on, "awful, to lose one's mind! We had to humor him, or I suppose he'd been raving by this time—he was on the verge of it."

Talking in subdued voices, the clerks slowly made their way to their respective compartments, the depositors departed, and at this moment the watchman, still much agitated, stepped up to Lorrimer.

"Some gentlemen to see you, sir," said he.

Putting the portfolio down on top of Mr. Remson's desk, Lorrimer stepped out into

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the corridor. The first to greet him was Mr. Fowler. It was with evident pleasure and relief that the latter noticed the change in his client's appearance. Even Mr. Wilkins was impressed, as he acknowledged Lorrimer's rather stiff "Good morning!" he introduced the third man of the little party, a broad-shouldered, stocky individual, as Mr. "Danielson."

The clerks were seated at their desks, although their attention was not yet fixed on their ledgers; and the teller, perceiving that the gentlemen wished to talk over some private business, made an excuse for leaving them and incarcerated himself in his own particular little cage.

Lorrimer drew the others close to the window fronting the avenue.

"As soon as Mr. Remson returns," said he, "we'll collect the evidence I have to show you and adjourn to a little private room I've engaged over the way. We can talk much better there and will not be interrupted."

"Where is Mr. Remson?" asked Fowler.

'Back in the directors' room. They had

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a very pathetic scene here a few minutes ago. One of the bank's employees, old Marston, the night guardian, turned up, suffering from some hallucination—quite out of his head, poor man! I've sent for Dr. Higgins to come down and look him over. Ah, here comes Mr. Remson now!"

The trust officer, looking very much worried, was advancing toward them from the directors' room. He did not enter into any explanation, and, to tell the truth, he would hardly have had the opportunity, for Lorrimer met him with an eager question.

"How about my precious little bundle, Mr. Remson, that I left with you day before yesterday?" he asked. "It was kind of you to take such good care of it."

"Not at all, not at all," said the trust officer, hauling his key ring out of his pocket by its silver chain. "I've your property safe and sound."

He tossed the lid back and stood there for a moment puzzled.

"This is very strange," said he, half turn-

ing. "I left the package here on my desk, and I wasn't here all day yesterday."

"You probably telephoned for somebody to put it away for you," suggested Lorrimer nervously. "By the way, I ought to tell you——"

"I telephoned," replied the trust officer, interrupting, "but it was upon another matter. I didn't mention the package containing the—what was it, you said?"

"Plates, the plates," faltered Lorrimer, his voice wavering. He clutched the top of the desk and swayed forward, his face white to the lips.

"They should be here," said the trust officer, "unless some one opened my desk, which would be very unusual. I'll call Mr. Gray—he acts as my secretary. Perhaps he can throw some light upon what has become of them."

Going to the opening in one of the glass partitions, he knocked sharply and beckoned for a young man to come forward. Lorrimer stood there speechless, trembling. The idea of telling how he had inadvertently opened

the desk faded out of his mind. His lower jaw had fallen and his eyes took on the frightened, haunted look that the lawyer had noticed on the night of their first interview. As Mr. Remson and the clerk once more entered the front office, Lorrimer with an effort seemed to gather his scattered mental forces.

"Mr. Remson," he said slowly and hoarsely, "I told you I wouldn't lose those plates for a hundred thousand dollars—you remember that—and I put them in your care, sir!"

"Just wait a moment," returned the trust officer, nettled. "Just wait a moment! Mr. Gray," said he, turning to the young man who was listening, much bewildered at the strange goings-on, "did anyone open my desk in my absence? I left it locked—I am positive."

"No, sir," replied the young man, "no one went near it that I know of; no one, except, perhaps"—he paused and looked at Lorrimer's ghastly face—"except this gentleman. I saw him open it this morning. He was sitting here in your chair."

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All eyes turned upon Lorrimer. He started to speak, but apparently the words would not come to him. He stammered something unintelligible.

"Have you a key that would unlock this desk, Mr. Lorrimer?" asked Mr. Remson coldly. "Did you open it this morning?"

"Confound it, sir; what do you mean?" Lorrimer gasped at last. "I opened the desk by accident—I was going to tell you— It was unlocked. I closed it again at once. The plates were not there! What have you done with them?" he demanded fiercely. "What has become of them? Tell me that!"

The two men glared at each other in silence. Mr. Remson's astonishment at the outburst seemed to deprive him of the power of reply. Mr. Wilkins stepped between them, quietly interrupting the anxious pause. He spoke rather gently, as if to suggest to the others that they should also lower their voices.

"The gentleman just asked you, Mr. Lorrimer, if you had a key that would unlock this desk," he said, his steel-blue eyes boring into Lorrimer's frightened ones.

"I—yes, I have a key that might—but, of course, I wouldn't try to do such a thing. Do you mean to insinuate——"

"Not at all—but you certainly wouldn't object to trying now," said the detective. "Have you got it in your pocket?"

"That's none of your affair, sir!" returned Lorrimer hotly, taking a half step forward, for an instant the fear in his face giving way to anger. Mr. Fowler grasped his client's arm.

"Softly, softly," he said. "If you've got a key with you, it would be better to see if by chance it might fit the lock. If it doesn't, why——"

"Oh, it'll fit, of course," returned Lorrimer, drawing his own key ring out of his pocket and selecting a key instantly.

He slipped it into the lock and clicked the bolt half a dozen times. Then he replaced the key ring with a vicious drive of his fist into his trousers pocket.

"There," said he, "is that what you wanted?"

"It's quite enough, Mr. Lorrimer," re-

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turned the trust officer. "It's quite enough for me."

"There's been a robbery, sir," cried Lorrimer hotly, "a rank, barefaced robbery! Do you think because I haven't got your receipt for what I left with you——"

"I know what I think," rejoined Mr. Remson with a shrug of his shoulders, "and I dare say that these gentlemen——"

"Please, please," interrupted the lawyer quietly, "don't let us lose our heads. Something very unusual has taken place here. I would like to ask a few questions. I should like to speak to you, Mr. Gray."

He turned to the young man, who moved up closer and stood boldly facing him.

"Now, Mr. Gray," said the lawyer, falling by instinct into his dangerously soft tone of cross-examination that had so often been the pitfall of positive witnesses on the stand, "now, Mr. Gray, you say you saw Mr. Lorrimer open this desk. I suppose you recognize that this is tantamount to an accusation——"

"I don't care what it's tantamount to,"

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blurted the young man; "but I saw him do it—so did Conlin."

"Oh, so did Conlin?"

"Yes, sir; and after he opened it he got up and took this—this big, flat book, or whatever it is, and left the bank."

"Did you see him place anything in the portfolio?"

"No, sir; but perhaps Conlin did."

Again Mr. Fowler had to control his client's desire to speak.

"Just leave this to me, Mr. Lorrimer," he said. "Don't get excited—we'll get to the bottom of this matter. Where is this wit—" he corrected himself "—this man, Conlin?"

"Conlin," called the trust officer.

The day watchman stepped forward. Mr. Fowler fixed him with his eye.

"Conlin," said he, in a familiar tone of intimate previous knowledge, "we're asking a few questions of no special moment. Did you see Mr. Lorrimer open this desk?"

"I saw him with it open, sir; and I saw him close it."

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"What did he do then, may I ask?"

"He got up and left the bank, and crossed over the street, sir."

"Yes?"

"And just at the corner he gave a man waiting there something—I didn't see what it was."

If the electric light overhead had exploded into a thousand fragments, it could not have caused a greater sensation—even Mr. Fowler's imperturbable face showed it. He glanced, half questioning, at his client. It was almost as if he had implored some help from him.

"It was my morning paper," Lorrimer croaked. "I had finished with it."

"Did you know the man, Mr. Lorrimer—perhaps we can find him——"

"I don't know who he was; I don't care, and I don't want to find him! All *I* want is to *find* those plates."

Mr. Wilkins, who had drawn aside with the short, stocky man, with whom he seemed to have some secret understanding, gave a grunt that sounded not at all unlike an ex-

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pression of derision. His companion's face was on a broad and open grin.

"Now, see here, sir," cried Lorrimer, turning upon the Chief of the Secret Service, "I've stood about enough of this sort of thing. I'll have you understand that! Your business is to detect crime, is it not?"

"When a crime has been committed," returned Mr. Wilkins flatly, "yes."

"I suppose you consider that a very brilliant remark," snarled Lorrimer. "I tell you there has been a robbery committed here at this bank."

"Oh, well, if it's a bank robbery, that's an affair for the local authorities to investigate. I advise you to call them at once."

"Do you refuse to go further into the matter?"

"I can't say that I have started yet, Mr. Lorrimer. We must always have some premise to begin with. I haven't seen an iota of evidence."

Lorrimer opened the gate into the corridor.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr.

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Fowler quickly, detaining him by a grasp on his shoulder.

"I'm going to telephone to the Central Office and have some one come up here who'll take hold of this case—that's what I'm going to do."

"Now, wait a minute," said the lawyer, gazing at his client's flushed and angry face. "Just think things over."

"Think nothing over!" Lorrimer exclaimed, shaking himself free. "You're all a pack of fools and idiots. I'll see if I can find a sensible man somewhere in this town. And if it costs every cent I've got I'll probe this affair to the bottom!"

A cab made its way through the crowd of street cleaners and snow carts at work in the avenue. A man with a gray mustache descended and hurriedly entered the bank, just in time to see Mr. Lorrimer standing there shaking an angry forefinger at the group inside the rail. The newcomer seemed to take in the situation at once. He nodded to Mr. Fowler with an expression of sudden understanding.



“Fools and idiots!” Lorrimer repeated.

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"Fools and idiots!" Lorrimer repeated. "Jackasses!" Then, moved no doubt by the condition of his wrought-up nerves, he burst into a bitter laugh, and turned only to run into the gray-mustached stranger's arms. The latter laid a firm, detaining hold on Lorrimer's arm and the lapel of his coat.

"Just got your card, Mr. Lorrimer," said he. "I came down at once."

"Oh, did you? Well, it's none of my affair—these gentlemen will explain, I dare say—I don't want to see you."

"But—just wait! I'm Dr. Higgins!"

"Well, whom did you suppose I thought you were? Let go of me; I'm going to telephone for the police."

"Why, what's the matter? Gently now!"

Somehow the doctor's manner seemed to have an influence upon Lorrimer's excited mind. He lowered his voice, speaking in tense, hoarse whispers. The clerks had again gathered toward the front of the office, crowding up against the bars and grilles.

"There's been a robbery," Lorrimer repeated, "an outrageous robbery! And yet

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I can't convince these gentlemen of the fact!"

"There's been no robbery that the bank can complain of, Mr. Lorrimer," put in Mr. Remson. "I advise you to go somewhere with this gentleman and Mr. Fowler, and talk it over before you send for the police."

For an instant it looked as if Lorrimer was going to lose all control of himself. The doctor rose to the occasion—aid might be necessary.

"There's a policeman just outside here on the corner," said he softly; "we'll ask him in—a very intelligent-looking policeman—he might be the very man you want to talk to."

"You're a fool, too," said Lorrimer, looking at the doctor in disgust. He folded his arms and leaned back against the radiator in the corner, glaring at his unconscious tormentors like a man at bay.

The watchman had opened the door, and, with a shrill whistle, attracted the attention of the round and rubicund patrolman.

"Hey, Jack; you're wanted in here," he

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said, slipping into the vestibule. "We've got a couple of crazy folks inside ready for the Pavilion," he went on, as the officer hurried up to him. "One, who says he wasn't here last night, when he was—the other who says the bank's been robbed, when it hasn't."

"See that fellow over there across the street," returned the officer, pausing; "that fellow with the big *mustache*—that's O'Sullivan, one of our plain-clothes men. Go over and get him."

The watchman obeyed, and the bluecoat, hitching at his belt, ascended the steps.

He entered upon the strained and dramatic situation, just at the moment of a new and startling diversion.

The radiator against which Lorrimer was leaning was at top heat, a fact that had just communicated itself to his anatomy through the medium of his overcoat; he jumped forward suddenly with a smothered exclamation. The crowd scattered in all directions.

"Here, none o' that!" growled the officer, using a phrase traditional in the Department. At the same time he dodged backward and

fumbled with his coat tails, a procedure that Lorrimer, also, was indulging in at the moment.

"Drop that, and throw up your hands!" ordered the policeman peremptorily. "Up with 'em!"

As he spoke, he drew out a shining six-shooter. The clerks at the grilles dodged behind the solid half of the partitions. With a jangle of steel the officer's handcuffs fell upon the floor.

At this instant a querulous, broken voice rose suddenly from the corridor.

"Oh, Lord; I knew it!" came the words, in a wail of fear and anguish. "There *was* a robbery! I knew there must have been!"

All eyes turned in the new direction—there was old Marston! It was a remarkable picture. Mr. Lorrimer stood fronting the officer, with folded arms; the doctor, stepping forward, had grasped the hand containing the shining pistol.

"That isn't necessary," he said; "that isn't necessary at all; put that up—he's perfectly——"

What he was going to say was sharply interrupted.

"Oh, Mr. Remson!" continued the old guardian, tottering nearer with trembling steps. "Tell me what has happened, tell me what has occurred! I knew there was a robbery—I knew there was!"

"What do *you* know about it?" questioned the stout preserver of the peace, turning full upon him before Mr. Remson could answer. He doubtless felt that the dignity of the law demanded his taking control of the situation.

"What do *I* know about it?" the old night guardian replied, his voice rising almost to a treble. "I wasn't here, I was home in bed—I couldn't move hand nor foot!"

This was too much for the red-faced patrolman—he palpably wilted. It had already been too much for Mr. Wilkins and the stocky individual who had doubled up, half hid behind the roll-top desk.

"Well, what's the game here, anyhow?" mumbled the policeman, as, under the still whispered exhortations from the doctor, he

replaced his emblem of immediate authority. "What sort of a graft is this—what am I up against?"

Upon this muddled state of affairs entered the plain-clothes man, followed by Mr. Conlin.

"Hello, Jack; have you got 'em—want any help?" asked the former, in a tone of official gruffness suggestive of latent powers.

"Yes," was the reply; "I want a book full of it—I'm all to the bad here, sergeant. They've got me up a tree for fair."

The plain-clothes man suddenly caught sight of Mr. Wilkins, who had, with an effort, controlled his expression of hilarious enjoyment.

"How'd do, Chief!" he said. "Perhaps you can let us in to what's going on! You remember me—I was with you when we pinched Spieler Richards, over to Greenpoint."

"Oh, I remember you well, O'Sullivan," said the head of the Secret Service, "and I'd be glad to oblige, but to tell the truth, I couldn't explain this game at all—I don't

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think there's anything here for either one of us. We can step down and out."

It was here that old Marston added a new complication.

"How much has been taken?" he asked. "Did he get into the big vault? You gave me your word of honor as a gentleman that nothing had happened, Mr. Remson!"

There was a depth of reproach in the old man's voice. The trust officer stepped up to him.

"We'll explain all that," he said, "when we get back in the directors' room again. Doctor, will you come with us?"

He leaned over as he passed Mr. Fowler and whispered in his ear.

"Get Lorrimer out of this and take him home," he said. "I'll be up there in half an hour—as soon as we decide what to do with old Marston. You've got to help us." He would have passed down the corridor, but Lorrimer, jumping forward impetuously, detained him.

"Hold on," he said; "not so fast, not quite so fast. There's been a robbery, and I

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won't be put off that way. I demand to know what's become of my plates. No, no, they weren't mine," he corrected himself; "I never had anything to do with them. But I accuse—I—I want somebody arrested."

"Who is it?" asked O'Sullivan. "I think there are plenty of us here to take care of two or three safe-breakers."

The lawyer tried to smooth things over.

"We've got to get a warrant first, old man; that's what we've got to do before there will be any arresting. Come with me; we'll go up to the house and talk it over. Don't let's have any more of a scene here. First thing you know we'll all be in the papers—that's what you wished to avoid, you know. Come along now—come like a sensible chap."

Strange to say, Lorrimer allowed himself to be led quietly out into the vestibule. The doctor hesitated whether he should follow or not, but at a subtle shake of Mr. Fowler's head, he turned and allowed himself to be drawn down the corridor by Mr. Remson. Half struggling, the old night guardian was

being coaxed along between Conlin and the paying teller. Mr. Wilkins and the officers gathered together in a corner and indulged in some whispered explanations that seemed to be more or less mirth-provoking.

"So you see," the great detective concluded, "if he gets out a warrant, it will have to be for himself! I think he'll have to go to a place where he can rest for a while and think it over."

"How about the other fellow?" asked O'Sullivan. "He's plumb nutty, isn't he?"

"Yes; we're going to call a cab and inveigle him down to Bellevue—perhaps you'd better come along."

"Let on we was taking him to the Central Office, eh?"

"Yes, that's the ticket. Now you and the officer go out and disperse that crowd that's gathered outside—tell them nothing has happened."

Through this same crowd that had been attracted by the keen scent for unusual commotion dormant in every metropolitan pedestrian, Lorrimer and Fowler had made their

way to the cab. To the lawyer's surprise, his friend, though very pale, had himself well in hand.

They had gone but a few blocks up the avenue when Lorrimer spoke in an even, well-modulated tone.

"Well," he asked, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Give us time," returned Mr. Fowler, "give us time! Wilkins is——"

"Wilkins is an ass," interrupted Lorrimer. "Just count him out of it!"

Mr. Fowler sought to switch the subject at once.

"What a strange thing it was, that poor old night guardian losing his mind that way!" he remarked.

"Yes, very strange!" sneered Lorrimer. "Don't you see through it?"

"See through what?"

"Why, *he's* the man that's got my plates, or is in collusion with the one who took them."

"Oh, come, come! Can't you get those plates out of your mind—see if you can't!"

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Lorrimer turned on him slowly.

"Shall I drop you at the club?" he asked.

"No; I'm going home with you."

"No, no, you're not. I'm going to work this thing out alone, now. I don't need any more expert assistance, thank you. The plates are gone, that's all there is to it!"

The lawyer did not reply. He sat there in silence wondering how he would have to treat this new phase of the affair.

Ten minutes after the loiterers at the doorway of the bank had dispersed and the institution had resumed, to all appearances, its normal quiet, a closed landau in which were seated four men drove away from the entrance, an officer in uniform sitting beside the driver.

When the carriage came in sight of the ominously solemn, gray building on the East-River front, the window was opened and a head thrust out.

"Hey, there, Jack!" hailed the voice of

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Detective Sergeant O'Sullivan, addressing the officer on the box; "tell him to drive down to Mulberry Street."

Now, Mulberry Street is Police Headquarters.

CHAPTER X

A SEARCH WITH A PURPOSE

MISS ELSIE MARSTON, when she returned to the little West-Side flat on the evening of the day of these remarkable occurrences, was in a peculiar condition of mind and temper. She had gone through several experiences that she would not care to undergo again. Like most people under the circumstances, she desired to have some mind, other than her own, brought to bear upon the perplexities of the situation.

Of course she had not expected to find her father at home—it was his time to be at the bank. She imagined him sitting there, beneath the green-shaded lamp, reading, or working on the notes of his never-to-be-finished task of translating the works of Vedic literature into ponderous and very impossible blank verse. For years old Marston had been a faithful and patient toiler in the field

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of research into Sanscrit and Hindoo literature. That the ground had been completely covered by Max Müller and Colin Mackenzie had not deterred him; nor was he depressed by the fact that editors and publishing houses had never evinced the slightest interest in the undertaking. To them the old gentleman was one of those misguided literary cranks whose correspondence is to be kindly tolerated or politely disregarded. Mr. Marston spent his free hours of daylight in delving into musty tomes at the libraries, and employed his long vigils at the bank in compiling the results of his persistent digging. The only encouragement that he ever received had been from his daughter, who had listened to long hours of monotonous rereading, and who had copied page after page of translations of the early Manavas, and the interminable legends of the Maha-Bharata. Sundays and holidays she had often spent in laboring thus as a voluntary amanuensis in the front room of the little apartment, for she had never accompanied the old gentleman to his work. Very often, however, Elsie had rung

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up her father on the telephone and held a few minutes' conversation with him before she bade him a long-distance good night. It was half-past seven o'clock when she entered the little drug shop next door to the apartment house, and, going to the telephone, called for the bank's number. A strange voice replied, requesting, somewhat peremptorily, her name and business.

The clerk at the soda-water fountain, whose hourly entertainment was listening to the one-sided telephonic conversations (the instrument was in plain sight and hearing at the corner of the perfume counter), was now astonished at what he saw and heard. He allowed the vanilla that he was drawing for a young lady customer to fill a half-pint glass and to drip over his celluloid cuffs.

"This is Miss Marston. . . . Yes; he is my father. . . . What! Bellevue Hospital! . . . This afternoon! What was the matter? . . . But I must know. Tell me! . . . I'm his daughter, do you hear! I'm Miss Marston."

The clerk, his eyes and ears still wander-

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ing from his business, saw her waver forward, but she recovered herself and listened quietly.

"I shall go down there at once," she said at last. "Yes, yes, I understand. . . . Thank you!"

White and trembling she rose and staggered slightly.

"Anything the matter?" asked the clerk, turning with the lady customer, who had also been an interested listener and spectator.

"My father has been taken sick at the bank and has gone to the hospital," Miss Marston replied quite calmly, as she paid her fee for the use of the telephone. Another moment she had hurried out into the street.

Never did a Subway train seem to go slower; never did the old horse cars that crawl eastward through Twenty-eighth Street travel at such a snail's pace; but at last—there was the old gray building! Almost on a run Miss Marston entered the gateway.

There was no record at the office of any one of her father's name having been received as a patient in any of the wards!

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Elsie Marston had that peculiar type of courage that faces difficulties with thrown-back shoulders and a steady tension of will and muscle. But this unexpected and heart-stopping climax to the mystery, coming upon other strange doings of the day, almost upset the balance, upon the possession of which she had so often felt a pride. She could feel her knees shaking despite herself, her underlip was quivering. What could she do? To whom could she turn? She had never met, personally, any of her father's associates—if he could be said to have any—at the bank; even their names were not familiar to her. But something must be done! It was still early—there must be some one who could at least give her a clue. Ah, there was the man at the bank to whom she had previously telephoned, the man who was watching in her father's place! As she hurried down the street, she looked for the familiar blue sign with the white letters that told of a public telephone station. At last she saw one at the entrance of a little third-class East-Side hotel.

The man at the bank—still somewhat short

in his replies—was unable to explain what had occurred, but lent her some blind assistance. Somehow he had got it in his mind that a “Mr. Paul Lorrimer,” a depositor, had accused her father of something, or her father had accused Mr. Lorrimer, whichever way it was. At all events there had been a general mix-up and the calling in of the police. He gave her the names of one or two of the bank’s officials who had been present at the disturbance; but only one of them could she find in the telephone book. (He had gone to the theater and would not be back till late.) Lorrimer’s name, however, remained in her mind. Seeking for it in the list, she found it at last; but getting no response after repeated calls, Miss Marston determined upon a bolder plan. She would go up at once and demand to see him—the man who had dared to accuse her father!

CHAPTER XI

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 LADY asking for you, sir," said Judson, in his impeccable manner, as he stood in the doorway of his studio.

Up and down the soft-carpeted floor Lorrimer had been pacing recklessly for the past two hours. He apparently was so engrossed with his thoughts that he did not hear Judson's words or notice his presence.

Now, Judson was one of those individuals whose vocabulary contains no words expressive of surprise and whose rules of personal punctuation eliminate the question mark. If his master had appeared in an Indian head-dress at the dinner table, or had made ready to go out for his drive in the Park wrapped in the folds of the American flag, he would have offered no suggestion. If Mr. Lorrimer had suddenly burst into tears upon his shoul-

der, Judson would have got out of the difficulty with dignity and without a display of curiosity, vulgar or otherwise. But never, in the whole course of his long service, had he known his master to have a feminine caller. Not by the quiver of an eyebrow, however, did he betray any sense of the unusualness of the occurrence. Calmly he repeated his announcement.

"A lady to see me, Judson!" exclaimed Mr. Lorrimer nervously, stopping and turning full upon him. "What are you talking about?"

"Perhaps I should have said 'young person,' sir; but I am sure she is a lady, sir." Judson, like the rest of his kind, prided himself also on his powers of unerring discernment.

"What does she look like?"

For an instant Mr. Lorrimer's thoughts went back to the mysterious meeting at the bank, to the large lady of the "Echo from Strauss."

"I should say she was rather pretty, sir—yes, very pretty, if I may be allowed to think

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so." He coughed. "She insists upon seeing you! Claims it's of great importance, sir."

"And her name, did she tell you her name?"

"No, sir."

"Show her in, Judson, and—er—wait within calling distance."

"Yes, sir."

Lorrimer, forgetting in his perturbation the trouble he had had with Mr. Fowler, longed for that gentleman's presence. But astonishment overcame him when a tall, slender young figure appeared in the doorway.

"This is Mr. Lorrimer, miss," said Judson, murmuring the introduction in a tone of self-effacement. Again his discernment had assured him that the lady was unmarried.

As Miss Marston lifted her veil, Lorrimer stepped forward and turned on the electric light, for up to this moment the room had been in semidarkness. At the same time the lady turned and closed the door in Mr. Judson's sphinxlike face.

"I am Miss Marston," she said, coming down to the edge of the desk. "It is very important that I should talk with you."

"Well, madam," said Lorrimer, covering his half-fright with an effort at politeness, "I am at your disposal. Pray, be seated."

He indicated one of the great leather chairs, but the girl apparently noticed neither the invitation nor the gesture.

"I have come to ask you, Mr. Lorrimer," she continued, withdrawing one hand from her muff and placing her fingertips on the table as she bent forward, "where is my father?"

"I am sure I haven't the slightest idea, madam," said Lorrimer, still politely. "Who might your father be?"

"George Marston, sir; the night guardian at the——"

"Oh, at the bank—I understand!" interrupted Mr. Lorrimer. "So you're his daughter!"

"I am, sir. Where is he?"

Mr. Lorrimer could not help noticing that the girl's voice was deep and resonant and

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that there was also a depth of resolution in her clear, dark eyes.

"My dear young lady, do be seated," he urged again.

This time Miss Marston acquiesced, but her attitude was indicative of her determination. She never removed her fingertips from the edge of the desk. Her hand was ungloved and Mr. Lorrimer perceived that it was small and exceedingly well shaped.

"Now, Mr. Lorrimer," went on the girl, "I want you to tell me things plainly. I hope to have you explain to me what you can of this mystifying affair. Has my father been taken suddenly ill? Is he in trouble of any kind?" She paused. "Has he been accused of anything? Have *you* accused him?"

"Well, no; not exactly," said Lorrimer, seating himself on the other side of the desk and avoiding the lady's eyes. "But you ask a great many questions at one time. Let us take the last one first. I can't say that I have, as yet, accused anybody. But it is all very strange and beyond my comprehension—the whole affair."

"It is also beyond mine," took up Miss Marston. "Will you tell me what you can? Mind you, I know nothing."

"I can only tell you what I saw and heard at the bank this morning. Perhaps it would be better if I kept my deductions to myself."

"Oh, no," said the girl; "we will have your deductions afterwards—but please go on, from the beginning."

"Well, Miss Marston, your father came to the bank this morning, evidently in a much upset mental condition. He affirmed most positively that he had not been near the institution the night previous, when, to the certain knowledge of at least four or five gentlemen who were present this morning, he had been there. They had seen him and conversed with him. There had been no complaint from the Holmes people about any neglect of the watchman's recorder."

"But my father was sick when I left him—he had a fever—he may have been delirious. Oh, tell me, where is he? You know people of his age are apt to have hallucinations in fever. What have they done with

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him? He may have imagined he was not there."

"I don't know. Until now I thought he was in the hospital—Bellevue, I think it was. Dr. Higgins, who has some reputation as an alienist—although I wouldn't give much for his opinion—made some kind of an examination."

"But that is not all. You're hiding something," said the girl.

Lorrimer shuffled his elbows on the desk uncomfortably.

"Well, Miss Marston, on the night your father said he was absent—that is, last night—when the others were ready to declare on oath they had seen him—the bank was robbed!"

"Robbed!" cried Miss Marston, springing from her seat. "Do they dare accuse my father of any knowledge of any——"

She stopped herself. Her eyes narrowed slightly. "Who is it that could think such a thing? I would like to know his name! Do the bank officials make a charge?"

It must suddenly have come to Mr. Lor-

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rimer that his explanation would soon be a little tangled. A realization of the difficulties before him caused him to be overwhelmed in a sudden flood of self-consciousness.

"No; I don't think that they made any accusations," said he. "I think they just suspected — some — er — some mental derangement."

The girl's relief was evident.

"Well, how about the robbery, then? Did they accuse anyone else?" she persisted. "How much was taken, and at what hour, and from where?"

"My dear young lady," said Lorrimer, "I must be frank with you. If anyone has accused your father, it must be I; if anyone was robbed, it was myself; and if anyone is —er—suspected—" Mr. Lorrimer paused.

"Go on, sir," said Miss Marston anxiously.

"It is myself again!"

"You do not make it very clear," said the girl, her forehead wrinkled. "Perhaps you had better begin at the beginning again, and tell me your story."

The dark eyes never lifted from Lorri-

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mer's face until the moment he had concluded. But he told her of old Straub, of the strange finding of the plates, their deposit at the bank, their mysterious disappearance, and, led on by his own troubled story, how inseparably their possession was connected with his future peace of mind.

"But, surely, you must know that my father had nothing to do with this," said Miss Marston when he had concluded. "With all your"—she was going to say "wealth," but corrected herself—"with all your facilities, with all your friends, and the assistance you can command, you should have no hard task in tracing these missing articles."

Lorrimer felt that his face was turning a bright and unbecoming crimson, but he lifted his eyes to the girl's bravely and came to the point like a man.

"Miss Marston," said he, "no one believes me! Even the best friend that I thought I had in the world, I can now see, thinks I, too, am suffering from some mental aberration. You see I have no proof, nothing to show for my statements. People don't

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believe other people's word in matters of this kind; you must show them evidence. We get that from card playing, I dare say; it's not what we say we've got, it's what we can show."

"I believe you," said the girl, quietly and simply. "You would never have to show me the proofs of any statement you might wish to make."

Something seemed to grip Lorrimer tightly inside. He had a second's flash of a strange exhilaration; but he was a self-encouraged cynic and the heartlift lasted but the twinkling of an eye.

"Why do you say that?" he asked after a pause, with a very apparent effort to conceal the suspicion in his voice.

"Because women trust their intuitions, their instincts—their almost infallible 'guardian voice'—the little oracle that they possess, whether in their hearts or minds, I know not. But mine never played me false. I don't think you ever told a lie."

"Oh, yes, I have; I dare say," Lorrimer faltered, much confused, again quenching a

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peculiar surge of feeling that choked his eyes and throat, "I've told a great many."

"Oh, no, you haven't," contradicted Elsie. "Lies are things that destroy and hurt. I know if you met my father—he would give you the same feeling of trust that you give me. Won't you help me find him? Won't you meet him and talk with him? Perhaps with something that he might tell you, and something I might be able to tell also—for I have had a remarkable experience myself—we may all help one another. I seem very calm, I know; but, oh, Mr. Lorrimer, if you only could understand how I am suffering—won't you help me—won't you believe?"

Lorrimer again found relief from his mingled feelings in rather stiff politeness. His impulse was to extend his hand, to take hers and bend over it; but instead he bowed from his shoulders, not from his waist—that is, from his mind, not from his heart.

"I'll do everything I can, Miss Marston; everything I can! Now, let's see. How had we better begin?"

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The bell of the telephone on the roll-top desk in the corner trilled excitedly.

"Will you pardon me?" he asked, rising.

Miss Marston smiled somewhat wanly and watched him cross the room and lift the receiver. The rasping, unintelligible sputter of the transmitted voice sounded for half a minute. Elsie started to go to the door, but Lorrimer detained her with a gesture.

"Very good," said he at last, speaking into the instrument; "I'll be there at once." He turned to the girl quickly.

"Miss Marston," he said, "your father is at the Central Office—at Police Headquarters."

"The police!" gasped the girl. "Oh, poor father! What must he think!"

"I shall call a carriage, Miss Marston; and, if you will accompany me, we will go down there. They say your father is not ill—but never mind what they say—we'll go down there."

"Thank you," said the girl simply. "You are very kind."

But Lorrimer felt frightened now. As he

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had looked at her, he had seen that her eyes were filled with tears. A woman's tears, in Lorrimer's opinion, were only means of obtaining unfair advantage of a man, so he stepped quickly into the hall, beyond their immediate influence.

"Judson," cried he, "call me a carriage immediately. I may not be back till late."

This time Judson was hard put to it to conceal his open anxiety. His features, however, did not outwardly change, although he felt he was inwardly blushing.

"Mr. Lorrimer," said Miss Marston, again seating herself, "we must engage the very best of detectives."

"Detectives! Ha, ha! Detectives!"

Her host's voice rose and died away in a laugh of subdued derision. Then, bending forward, he whispered to her slowly, as if imparting a mock secret—known to the world at large.

"If I ever wanted *not* to find out anything, I'd send for a detective—*that*, believe me!"

Miss Marston was a little confused.

"I meant well," she faltered. "I had no idea——"

"Of course you meant well, my dear young lady; you could never mean otherwise than well, I am quite sure. . . . Detectives"—Lorrimer closed his eyes as if reading a page from memory—"are the most intelligent, enlightened, farseeing, and infallibly wise people that"—he paused—"that ever appeared in storybooks. But in real life" (here he opened his eyes and looked full into Miss Marston's), "if you want to meet a crass, self-conceited, skeptical ignoramus, send for a detective. I wouldn't waste two minutes of my valuable time talking to any one of them. They see evil in everything, except sometimes in the right direction! A man's word, a gentleman's honor, nothing, nothing! They and the lawyers are alike—'Proof, proof!' they cry together. Pah! *that* for the pack of them!" As he spoke, with a toss of his arms Lorrimer had begun again to pace the floor.

Miss Marston had watched the beginning of the unexpected outburst with some anxiety.

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"Well," she faltered, "a friend of mine married a reporter. They say that writers and reporters are clever at finding out and solving things."

"They invent them!" said Lorrimer, halting in front of her. "No wonder they can solve them! But, mind you, stranger things occur than ever take place in their imagination. This little mystery of mine will never be solved by detectives or penny-a-liners, or lawyers, for that matter! It's outside the province of the first and outside the comprehension of the latter. It is *ex lex* entirely. It will require a combination of brains and talent and common sense and——"

"A woman is often very clever," suggested Elsie thoughtfully. "I mean when things are outside the law. Don't you know one you could go to?"

"Not one," replied Lorrimer brusquely. "I never made confidantes of women. I never had the time," he added, as if to make amends for any rudeness.

"Oh, I see," said Miss Marston un-

abashed. "I am sure they could have made a confidant of you." She paused, thought a moment, and then suddenly rose with an evident intention of holding back the excitement that lay behind her words.

"There's my father!" she exclaimed. "The very person! Never was there such a man to follow out the thread of a clew to the very end of all knowledge to be gained concerning it. It is a faculty that has as yet brought him neither much honor nor money, but some day it will. His works on the Ràmàyana and his discoveries in relation to the Śvetāśvataaraupaníshad, and his translations of the Puranas will be read some day by scholars. He has given years to this unrewarded labor. From little threads of clews.

"The Śvetāśvataaraupaníshad and the Puranas!" Lorrimer echoed the words and paid no attention to the rest of the sentence. His pronunciation, by the way, was quite as glib as Miss Marston's (and she might have been saying "cat" or "rat," for that matter). "Why, Hindoo literature was my hobby long

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before I took to etching and photography! I wish I had stuck to it," he added. "I wish I had never given it up! I wouldn't be in this position now!"

"The carriage is ready, sir," said Judson from down the hall.

"The Śvetāśvataraupanīśhad!" repeated Lorrimer, as he bundled into his coat. "Why, who would have thought of that! Miss Marston, I am exceedingly anxious to meet your father—exceedingly anxious indeed!"

As he gave her his hand to assist her down the slippery steps, he pressed hers warmly. It seemed to him for a moment that there was a little fluttering response. Now, strange to say, this alarmed him again. After they had entered the carriage his enthusiasm apparently left him.

"We might have gone down by the Elevated, if I had thought of it," he said at last, breaking the silence. "Or the Subway."

"Yes, why didn't you think of it?" asked the girl pleasantly.

"It never occurred to me," said Lorrimer.

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"Oh!" said Miss Marston. "Would you mind telling me those deductions you thought of keeping to yourself some time ago?"

"Those deductions," returned Lorrimer emphatically, "have vanished! I must have been as strange-minded as a—well—as a detective."

CHAPTER XII

A TROUBLESOME DOUBLE

BY the time the carriage drew up in front of No. 300 Mulberry Street, Lorrimer had determined upon a line of action. It had flashed across his mind during the drive, that some years before he had met an official high in police circles for whom he had been able to do a favor, but to save his life he could not at the moment remember his name. However, he knew that, if he could ascertain it by judicious questioning, he was sure to have a powerful friend at court. Luck favored him. As he entered the bleak hallway of the building, a short, wiry figure came out of one of the offices, and even before Mr. Lorrimer had spoken he had been recognized. As often happens, the missing name came to him without an effort—"Inspector Walter Hudson!"

"Ah, Mr. Lorrimer!" the latter ex-

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claimed pleasantly, as his keen eyes lifted with a glance of welcome, "what are you doing here?"

"I've come down to see you, inspector," said Lorrimer, a most pleasurable sensation coming over him as he saw there was no suspicion of his motives, or his sanity, in this particular official's mind. "You are the very man that can help me in a little matter."

"Good," was the cheery reply. "Lady with you?"

"Yes."

"Anything to do with the case?"

"Yes."

"Come right into my office."

Miss Marston followed to the end of the hall, where the inspector opened a door and ushered her and Lorrimer into a high-ceilinged room, comfortably furnished with one or two desks and some framed photo enlargements of heavy-mustached gentlemen of semi-military cast of countenance.

"Here's where we give 'em the third degree," said Mr. Hudson. "But I'm going to let you do all the talking this time. What

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can I do for you? By the way, I don't think I ever quite thanked you enough for arranging that shooting trip for me. Nice little clubhouse you've got up there in the woods. You don't go there very often?"

"No, haven't been there for years," said Lorrimer. "But, to business—I've come down here to see what can be done in the way of rectifying a mistake. An old gentleman by the name of Marston, through an error, probably mine, has been accused of connection with the supposed disappearance of some—er—property. As the property was mine and I am now firmly convinced that he had nothing whatsoever to do with it, I should like to know how best to go about obtaining his release."

"Have you made any complaint against him? If so, you will have to withdraw it in court to-morrow, I'm afraid."

"No, inspector, I've made no complaint, nor do I, nor anyone else, intend to make any. He was brought down here under a misapprehension. I just received a telephone message in regard to the matter."

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"Oh, yes; oh, yes; of course," mused the inspector. "An old man by the name of Marston. He persuaded my clerk to send a telephone message to you for him. I really did not notice much about him at the time; he sensibly refused to talk for the reporters; but I believe he is just held here on suspicion. He's at the station house down on the street. Want to see him?"

Never in his life had Lorrimer appreciated the potentiality of that comprehensive word, a "pull." He caught Miss Marston's glance. Her eyes were filled with a mingled expression of gratitude, wonder, and admiration.

"We'll have him here in five minutes," said the inspector, and, pressing a bell, he launched forth in a story of last spring's trout fishing.

It was less than five minutes when a police officer appeared—the palefaced old guardian accompanying him. Before Mr. Marston could utter a word to express his astonishment at seeing his daughter in such mysterious and unexpected company, Lorrimer

grasped him by the hand and burst into the most profuse apologies.

"Such a grievous and unpardonable mistake, my dear friend!" he exclaimed. "And to think that I, indirectly, should have been the cause of it! What could those stupid dolts have been thinking of—blundering, asinine idiots!"

"What is the charge against this gentleman, McGuire?" asked the inspector shortly, turning to the policeman.

"There is no charge at all, sir. I was thinking it was one of Detective Sergeant O'Sullivan's brilliant moves. We was to hold the prisoner as a suspicious person. Some connection with a bank robbery, so he said—been no report of it! We couldn't make head nor tail of it!"

"You can rest assured, inspector," put in Lorrimer quietly, "that the whole thing was a mistake. There was no bank robbery. Put it down as a cruel hoax, if you wish to. No charge will ever be made against this gentleman. If there is, I shall be responsible for his appearance at any court, at any time. If

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necessary, I shall go his bail to any amount. And now, as a favor, I shall ask that he be allowed to depart with me."

Mr. Marston's conduct under these peculiarly mysterious and trying circumstances was no longer under his own control, for Elsie had taken her father to a corner of the room, where, with both her hands on his shoulders, she was calming him and directing him in short, breathless whispers.

"Hush," she kept saying; "hush, don't say a word! It has been a great mistake! Don't speak at all—please, please! Let him arrange everything."

In five minutes Mr. Marston had confusedly shaken hands with the inspector, politely declined one of his cigars, and had entered the closed carriage with his daughter and his unhoped-for friend and ally. And there the old gentleman did a perfectly natural thing for one whose nerves, during the last twenty-four hours, had been under the severest strain—he burst into tears of relief. Then suddenly he grew suspicious.

"What does it all mean?" he asked.

"Where are you taking me? I'm perfectly sane, I'm not mad!"

"No, no, dear," replied his daughter, "we know you're not!"

She turned to Lorrimer.

"Where are we?" she asked all at once, as the carriage stopped.

"At the Bleecker Street Subway station, Miss Marston. I think it best to get you both home as soon as possible and, if you will allow me, I will accompany you."

The responsibility of the conduct of affairs now resting upon him gave to Lorrimer a feeling of masterful calm.

"Courage, dear," said the girl to her father, as they left the carriage and waited at the bottom of the station steps; "we won't talk anything about it till we get home. Yes, yes; it's all very wonderful—very hard to understand, I know; but it all will come right——"

In half an hour the strange group of three were seated in the front room of the little apartment. Although still very nervous, the old man's mind was clear, and Lorrimer

could not disguise the truth to himself that he now felt more comfortable and at ease than he had at any time for the past week—he was strengthened, exhilarated. His eyes followed Miss Marston as she brought out from the back room a tray laden with biscuits and a neat little blue china tea set.

“Now,” said she, “we’ve all held to our contract: we haven’t spoken of our troubles; and we’ve got a long, long talk before us.” She kissed her father’s forehead and smoothed back his hair. “So I move we listen to Mr. Lorrimer’s story first, and then we will follow in our turn. That is the best way. Now,” she turned to their guest. “Please?” she said.

Never did anyone have two such attentive listeners. There was not a single interruption, not a word said until he had finished. Then and there Lorrimer rehearsed to them, to their sympathetic and believing ears, the whole of the series of remarkable events that he had told to his skeptical and flaw-picking legal adviser and to the doubting Thomases of the sleuth-hounding profession.

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Odd to relate, two or three times Miss Marston (who was now listening for the second time) made a few little notes with a lead pencil on the corner of the writing pad she had picked up from the desk. Her father, his eyes intent on Lorrimer's face, seemed to have forgotten his own nervousness in his breathless interest.

"A strange story, sir," said he at the finish. "A strange story! But I think mine will equal it. If you will allow me to begin, I shall be both relieved and grateful."

Lorrimer nodded. Elsie moved up closer, her hand on the back of her father's chair.

"Now tell us everything," she said softly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SHADES OF KRISHNA

OU know, when you left me, child," began Mr. Marston slowly, "you made me half promise that I would not go to the office. I fully intended to disobey you! I made up my mind to rest a little and then to start down-town at my usual hour. Just before I fell asleep—I'd been reading Monier-Williams's method of Hindoo transliteration, exceedingly clever it is, too!—I turned out the light. But I soon awoke from what appeared to be a most horrible nightmare! I dreamed that I was lying in a vast temple filled with a strange and overpowering incense. Sinking beneath its influence I was brought out and placed in the track of the relentless car of Juggernaut—I was helpless, lying in its path! Shuddering as I awoke, I endeavored to open my eyes, and

when I succeeded, could see nothing, nothing! I remember trying to shriek, but my mouth was filled with some soft substance; my hands were tied beside me, my legs also were bound. I might have been in my coffin, prepared for lowering into the grave."

The old man shook as if chilled to the bone. His daughter uttered a half-stifled cry. Then there was a silence. Mr. Lorrimer's starched shirt front creaked under the vehemence of his rapid breathing.

"At last," Mr. Marston said, speaking slowly and hoarsely, "by a supreme effort I managed to shake off what seemed to be a film from before my eyes, or, properly speaking, from one eye. Above my head I saw clearly something that told me where I was."

"What was it?" ejaculated Lorrimer.

"You know the stain in the ceiling of my little back room, directly over the bed, Elsie?" continued Mr. Marston. "There it was. I was next door to where we are sitting now. I could hear the rush of the Elevated train on the near-by avenue, I could even recognize the creak of the pulley of the

washline as the wind swayed it. The clock in the kitchen struck and told me it was the hour I should be getting down to the bank. I essayed to rise, but, struggle and twist and turn, I could accomplish nothing, although the bed groaned mightily. The fear that I was paralyzed I overcame by flexing the muscles of my limbs; and now I brought my reasoning powers to bear upon the situation. Never was I more sane than I am at the present moment; never was I more sane and awake than I was then! *I was bound hand and foot!* Carefully, marvelously bound! Even my head was prevented from turning more than an inch or so, and I was gagged—skillfully gagged, for I could but moan softly. A window appeared to be open and I could scent the cold evening air that was yet permeated with the strange, half-sickening fumes that had signalized my dream. Exhausted by fear and struggling, and by my attempt to keep my reason, I fainted or fell asleep again. Oh, the comfort and rest that I experienced in being able to do so—the sense of security I had in being able to put

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away the outside and insistent terror. I revelled in the relaxation of semiconsciousness. As a soldier, safe in some stenching hole on the firing line, might be grateful for the fact that he could escape in slumber the pressure of reality, I rested quietly. I woke two or three times, only to faint away again."

Mr. Marston paused and leaned back in his chair; Elsie brought him a glass of water, and as she placed her arms again about his shoulders, she caught Lorrimer's glance. A thrill of sympathy passed between them.

"Don't you wish to rest a little now?" asked Mr. Lorrimer.

"No, let me go on," begged the old man; "let me finish. Daughter of mine, I ask you"—he paused—"and our dear, kind friend here, to believe that I speak the truth. I woke for the third or fourth time to hear whispering—subdued and earnest, close-to-whispering—from the foot of my bed. I moaned for help, and then I saw, coming into the range of the vision of my one helpful eye—*Myself!*——"

Lorrimer started. Elsie grasped her

father convulsively and laid her cheek against his.

"Dearie, dearie!" she said soothingly, "don't, don't!"

"It was *myself*! My own clothes, my look—even the red flannel bandage that you saturated with liniment and put out for me to wear about my throat—*It* had that on! I faintly discerned another figure—only a glimpse I got of it, shrouded and muffled behind my own. I am calm, dear, I am collected; let me continue. The figure that was me bent over, and moving a hand, it was as if a veil had again hidden my sight. Once more the insidious odor crept into my nostrils, filled my revolting lungs. It seemed as if I was in the hands of Wama, and was descending into Krishna, into the parching, pressing, torturing inferno of Vishnu!"

Lorrimer's hands gripped tightly. Well did he know the punishments of the ancient book outlined in the doctrines of Manu! He could follow the old man's reasoning. He longed to question him. The suggestion of the occult phenomenon was strong and mas-



“The figure that was me bent over.”

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tering; the shuddering nearness of the unseen world held him enthralled. Miss Marston cast at him a half-despairing glance, as if taking note of the effect of this strange recital.

"I understand," said Lorrimer shortly; "but surely Krishna was not for you!"

"No," returned old Marston. "When once more I could feel my even breathing I soared up, up, it appeared to the very summit of Mount Meru. It seemed as if the rich perfume of the rose-colored flowers of the Camalata"—(well did Lorrimer know of the Love's Creeper of the Indra's heaven)—"and I awoke!" concluded old Marston suddenly, bringing his listeners up with a sudden jerk to the reality of their surroundings. "I awoke, sick, with a splitting headache. My limbs were stiff, but I was unbound! I leaped out of bed. The window was closed. There were my clothes as I had left them—I always fold them neatly. I hurried into them, wondering what had happened. I judged it all a dream until I came to put on my shoes, and then——"

"Yes, yes," ejaculated Lorrimer, as the old man paused.

"—They were soaking wet—somebody had been wearing them since I had! Nevertheless, I pulled them on and hurried to the bank to tell my story. The rest you know. . . . I tried to explain. They thought me mad! I came to a realization of that fact while the carriage was on the way to Bellevue, for I, of course, overheard the conversation of those who were with me. So I affected to throw off my apparent feigning and asked quietly to be taken to the police station instead. It was a safer place than Bellevue! I said something about divulging things in the morning. I mentioned that there might be a reward. All I wanted was to escape the horrors of the threatening mad-house! That is my story."

As Mr. Marston paused he heaved a sigh of great relief and looked from his daughter's face to that of Lorrimer.

The latter was deep in thought. His researches had never brought him into contact with any of the actual proofs of theosophic

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reasoning. Could here be an example? The robbery, the plates, his own doubtful position, faded in his newly awakened interest.

"I would like to talk to you further," he began, as if trying to avoid immediate comment. "You say you were reading——"

"May I," interrupted Elsie suddenly, "now tell my story, before we go into abstract questions? You will listen, I can promise, if I once begin."

"Then pray do so," said Lorrimer. "Pray begin at once."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERIOUS PATIENT

YOU almost forgot," said Miss Marston, in her low musical voice, as she lifted her eyes to Lorrimer's, "that I had something to tell in my turn. The history of my day shall be a short one. I answered a call for a trained nurse in Brooklyn. You remember, father, the letter with the money inclosed, and the directions? I found the house, the steps of which had been freshly brushed free from snow, and the door was opened by a colored woman who handed me a note explaining that the case was one of brain fever and that the doctor—the name I could not read—would be back before midnight. Upstairs, in a cold, dusty, closed-up room with a small fire burning in a small stove, there was a woman, evidently once handsome, with short-cropped black hair.

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There was no one in the house but the colored attendant, who apparently was deaf and could tell me nothing. It was extremely mysterious. Although the patient raved slightly, I thought I caught a look of sanity at times when she followed me with her eyes. She had no high temperature; her pulse was almost normal. It was unaccountable, the whole affair. The time went by and no doctor came. The colored woman brought some food, badly cooked and cold. I never left the patient's bedside all that day or night. This afternoon I began to have suspicions, and, taking advantage of a moment when my patient seemed to fall asleep, I hurried out, heading for a chemist's that I remembered seeing at the corner, intending to telephone to a friend of mine, a doctor, to come over and investigate. I fixed the lock so I could get in without ringing on my return. I was not gone more than twenty-five minutes. (I had been unfortunate in not finding anybody on the 'phone.) When I entered the house, it was empty! Upstairs in the bedroom there were no signs that the bed had been occupied; even

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the sheets and blankets had been removed and the pillows were uncased. In a closet were the bedclothes, folded. I called down the hallway; no one answered. Perplexed and fearful, I made inquiries next door. A woman told me that the house had been vacant until the morning of the day before, when "a lady and gentleman," accompanied by a colored servant and the agent, who lived not far down the street, had driven up to inspect it.

I found the agent's office, but it was closed. So I went back to the house, hoping to find a policeman on the way, but I met no one. It took all my courage to enter; but I did. I stood in the hallway shivering, undetermined what to do.

"Now, why the desire for flight came upon me I cannot tell, but a minute or so of this growing fright and the loneliness of my position in that dust-laden, ill-ventilated, locked-up place bore upon me. I could not stand it. I went up to the room; the fire was out, the ashes removed. I packed up my things hastily and descended the stairs, intending to

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wait in the small, unkempt front yard. When I reached the hallway I perceived that a draught came from somewhere, and, looking back, I saw that the rear door was partly open. I could not help it! The desire for air, for freedom, for the actual, controlled me. The door opened on a small piazza from which steps led down to a pathway through the ugly little back yard. There were a number of footprints in the snow—a man's among them! Above the top of the fence I could see a trolley car slide by. In an instant I was at the gate. That too was open. It closed with a click behind me. Before an hour had passed I was home, telephoning for you, dear father, to tell you my strange story."

Mr. Marston was now searching with puzzled eyes his daughter's face as she leaned over him. An appealing glance turned in Lorrimer's direction.

"Are we all bewitched?" he said at last.

"We must sift this matter," returned Lorrimer. "We must help each other. We seem bound together in the toils of mystery.

But what you said a moment since, Mr. Marston, about the Brahman soloka appeals to me. I too have been a student of ancient Vedic literature and the Puranas, perhaps——”

“Come, Mr. Lorrimer,” interrupted Elsie, “let us indulge in no mystic reasoning. We will begin our sifting by mundane investigations. Let us look at the next room.”

She led the way, her father and Lorrimer close behind her. Turning up the light, they all paused together. Some of the belongings were scattered about; the disordered bedding trailed off on the floor. A sheet hung in shreds and strands over the foot of the brass bedstead.

“Smell!” cried Miss Marston, grasping Lorrimer’s arm. She was sniffing, her head thrown back, her nostrils dilated.

“I smell nothing,” said he.

Miss Marston’s grasp tightened. She pulled him down toward her and her voice sank to a thrilling whisper. Mr. Marston had gone over to the window that opened on

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the fire escape and was opening it as if to air the room, that was close and stuffy.

"Don't you smell it?" she asked. Her tones made his flesh creep; they suggested some uncanny presence that he could not realize.

"What is it?" he asked, his voice sinking also.

Miss Marston's lips were almost at his ear.

"Chloroform!" she whispered.

The old man had come back and had picked up the torn fragments of the sheet in his hands. His eyes were elate with the joy of a discovery.

The suggestion of the occult faded before the presence of the tangible.

Lorrimer, when he left the house some minutes later, thought he saw a tall figure on the opposite side of the street draw back into the shadow of a doorway. It had begun to rain, and, as he had no umbrella, he started on a fast walk to the corner. There he stopped and looked over his shoulder. There

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was no one in sight but a drunken man, who reeled limply toward the glaring door of a saloon. Before Lorrimer went to bed that night he took a glimpse out of the window. Yes, sure enough, there was a tall figure standing before the house looking up at the windows. Hurrying into some clothes he rushed downstairs and peered cautiously out through the front door. The only thing to be seen was a cab wabbling along through the slushy street.

CHAPTER XV

NEW DEPARTURES

THE *Tourraine* was discharging her pilot. The distant shores of Long Island and the low-lying New Jersey coast gleamed in the morning sunshine. The crowds lining the rail on the promenade deck watched the boat put off from the steamer's side. With a quiver from her great engines, the steamship gathered headway.

Walking up and down the deck were a man and a woman. The former, in a fashionable gray ulster and a smart plaid steamer cap, had an air of jaunty prosperity; the woman, dressed in a long blue coat, might at first glance have been taken for a traveling schoolma'am. Her hair was short, she wore spectacles, and had on an unbecoming Fedora with an elastic back of her ears. Her face was strong and keen, her features regu-

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lar, and her eyes, despite the spectacles, were bold and handsome. Occasionally, beneath the long blue coat, showed natty patent-leather shoes with large silk bows.

The forward part of the deck was almost deserted. As the couple reached the rail the woman turned to her companion.

"Sam," she said, "let's have another look at you."

With a smile on his fresh, vigorous face, he stood confronting her.

"Like the effect?" he asked.

"What *did* you do with it?" asked the woman. "Upon my soul, I'm ashamed to be seen with you. You look young enough to be my son."

"'Younger by the loss of a beard,'" quoted the gentleman. "Who would have thought, my dear, two days ago, that either of us could have looked like this? Eh, what?"

"Well, who'd have thought we'd be where we are now?"

"You mean, where we are going!" broke in the man. "Hurrah for gay Paree!"

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Maisie," he added suddenly, "you're a sight!"

"Oh, quit!" said the woman testily. "Do you think I enjoy looking like this? Come, let's go down to the stateroom. I feel cold without my wig. Yes, I know what I look like, and if you're a gent, you'll let up."

Taking her husband's arm, Mrs. Reeder led the way down the staircase to the stateroom and closed the door behind them.

"How long do you think we'll have to wait over there before Leon joins us?" she asked. "Do you know, I have a feeling that I'll never see him again."

"Oh, it's Leon now, is it?" smiled Mr. Reeder. "Tut, tut—I suppose I ought to be jealous. He'll be over in about a month. Wasn't that it? And he'll bring the plates with him. He won't stay in America longer than he can help. There's a good ten years hanging over him there. We will most probably reorganize and do the job from England. Too bad we had to give old Peters the go-by. He's the only one of the combine

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that never had to say: 'Good morning, judge.' But many a narrow squeak old Pete has had, I tell you!"

"He went back to Chicago with money in his pocket," put in the woman. "Things were getting too complicated to let everybody in on the ground floor. He thinks the plates are in the hands of the Pinkertons. Trust him for lying low for a time."

"It makes me mad to think of Red getting himself arrested just at this stage of the game," grumbled Mr. Reeder. "He ought to have shown more consideration. What if he peached on us?"

"He won't, I don't think, Sam."

"Sure, it's a fine cock-and-bull story the police would be listening to, if he did. Red doesn't know much of anything. He was only hired to stand by and do as we told him!—to be a good dog—fetch and carry—'Watch,' 'down, charge,' and 'sick 'em!'"

"Besides," took up the woman, "he broke his contract when he began running with that cheap holdup gang—he got what he deserved. I tell you, Sam, it was quick work

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on Leon's part—as soon as he found that Red had got in a row on his own account and was in the jug, he comes over to Brooklyn to see how the sick lady was getting on. Phew! I tell you, Sam, I pretty near did have brain fever, for sure. That trained nurse, the old man's daughter, was beginning to suspect something. Think of the cheek of us, taking possession of a deserted house by the back way and setting up a private hospital of our own."

"Well, we had to get rid of her somehow."

"She was no fool, Sam. She was a clever little peach, for fair. Leon, who was going to play the doctor, arrived just as she left—probably to call in a copper or an ambulance—and he exerted a mind cure on me that just got me and Emily out of the house L.L.E. in five minutes."

"Where did Emily go?"

"She went back to Philadelphia. He had tickets for her, same as he had tickets for us—her route was laid out. She went where he told her, same as we did."

“ ‘ Oh, there are only a few of us left, ’ ” hummed Mr. Reeder in the words of a popular song. “ You and me, Maisie, and Quinnie White, the king of them all; and we——”

Mrs. Reeder’s face suddenly assumed an expression that was disconcerting.

“ What’s the matter? ” asked her husband; “ forgotten anything? ”

“ No; but it’s true, what I told you, Sam, ” said Mrs. Reeder, half despairingly.

“ What’s that, Maisie? ”

“ I’m a bad sailor, Sam. ”

“ Well, if that’s so, me—exit! I think I’ll go up and see what’s going on in the smoking room. ”

“ Oh, dear, ” moaned Mrs. Reeder, as the *Tourraine* took a long swing to starboard.

CHAPTER XVI

A CONFERENCE

OU see, all we've had to do," said Elsie Marston, smiling up into Lorrimer's face, "is to put two and one together and call it three. With a judicious use of what you called, a moment since, 'constructive imagination,' we find our stories agree perfectly. I'm almost inclined to write it all up, supplying the other side where it is missing——"

"No, no," said Lorrimer; "I don't want anything ever written about it. If the newspapers got hold of it, they might find out real names, make fools of us, and spoil the chance of— I'd give twenty-five thousand dollars to get those plates back and hush up the whole affair; and then——" He paused.

"Yes; and then what?"

"Oh, then I suppose I'd go for my long-

postponed trip abroad," he added; "only I must get those plates. As long as they are in anybody else's hands, don't you see that I am, to put it mildly, in an—er—uncomfortable position?"

"Yes, yes, I see," said Elsie thoughtfully. "I feel so sorry. Let us think some more."

The meeting was not in the little West-Side flat this time, but was held in the library of Lorrimer's own house. Old Marston was in a corner of the room, standing near the window, poring over a big volume he had just taken down from the shelf.

"Ha! I've got it!" he suddenly exclaimed in so convincing a tone that both his daughter and Lorrimer, on whom a silence had fallen, jumped to their feet.

"What is it?" exclaimed Lorrimer eagerly.

"Müller says, here in a little note, something that throws much light on the sacred syllable 'Om.' I always held, with Dr. Röer, that Om is called Udgitha, but——"

"Oh, father, father——" broke in Miss Marston in despair, "please come back to

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earth and leave all that alone. Mr. Lorrimer and I need your assistance."

The old man reluctantly put down the book and approached the table.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

"Ideas, ideas!" cried the girl. "Brilliant, conclusive ideas. You both have refused to call in the authorities, although——"

"No detectives, doctors, reporters, authors, or lawyers for me," interposed Lorrimer decidedly. "We've got to work this thing out ourselves: we believe one another's story and we've come to deductions that your father has placed in lucid sequence. The only thing to do is to make use of 'em."

He picked up a piece of paper and read aloud, accenting the verbs with a note of satisfaction.

"The acknowledged *facts* are these: First, that we possess '*mens sana in corpore sano*,' and there *was* an attempt at counterfeiting by a gang whose existence *is* unrecognized by the police. Secondly, that all of our own movements and the blunders of the police *are* known to this clever gang. Thirdly,

that a robbery *was* committed at the bank and that some one *did* substitute himself for your father at that institution at the time the plates were stolen, and that in order to make this possible you *were* lured to Brooklyn so as to get you out of the way. Now, of all of this we have not an iota of evidence or proof. . . . What have we got to go upon?" He paused. "I would give twenty-five thousand dollars——"

He stopped. Elsie had suddenly risen with an exultant cry. She held in her hand a copy of that morning's *Herald*. "Listen," she said; "could this mean anything?"

"What?" exclaimed Lorrimer.

"What?" echoed Mr. Marston.

She placed the paper under Lorrimer's eye, her finger trembling on a column on the first page.

"*'Harry, come back,'*" read Lorrimer;
"*'mother is heartbroken!'*"

"No, not that one," interrupted Elsie excitedly. "The one below it — read, read!"

Lorrimer bent over close and began again:

A CONFERENCE

"To Brown: Bid high. Insert to-morrow, answer. PLATES."

For an instant he stood puzzled. Then the light seemed to dawn upon him.

"What are we to do?" asked Elsie. "You said that they knew you at Straub's place as 'Mr. Brown.' *That* was meant for your eye! You must answer it—you must!"

"I said I'd give twenty-five thousand dollars," faltered Lorrimer. "It's a big sum of money, but for the sake of my peace of mind——"

Elsie was writing something on the margin of the newspaper. "How will this do?" she asked: "'For plates: \$25,000.'"

"If proved unused," added Lorrimer.

"If unused," corrected Elsie.

She scribbled the added words and rose. "We must get this in to-morrow," she added. "Will I take it down?"

"No, no, of course not—I'll send Judson."

Lorrimer stepped into the hall, pressing the electric button as he passed the door. In less than five minutes Judson was on his way to an advertising agency on a near-by avenue.

CHAPTER XVII

A PLUNGE INTO THE MYSTERY

THREE days of warm, rainy weather that followed the big storm almost destroyed the last trace of snow. What little there was left had completely disappeared in the week of sunshine that was close on the heels of the soaking downfall. Marvelous are the vagaries of the metropolitan thermometer!

As Lorrimer stood at the big bay window that jutted over the marble entrance to his house, he could get a glimpse of the Park. Through the leafless trees the grass showed vividly green. The driveway was thronged with vehicles of all descriptions; automobiles of varied colors and sizes flashed along. Everything had the air of the sudden leap into spring, the leap that takes us unawares.

The last ten days had wrought a great change in Lorrimer's appearance. The wor-

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ried look had gone out of his face, the wrinkles had smoothed away from his brow, his eyes were bright, there was color in his cheeks. He had spent more time in the open air during the past week than he had for months; and, although he did not know it, this fact had attracted some comment. Friends and acquaintances had been not a little astonished to see him driving out so regularly. Sometimes he had been accompanied by a little, bright-faced, white-bearded old man and at other times—and these were the occasions when his acquaintances had stared and his friends had gossiped—his companion had been a tall, intelligent-looking young woman, very quietly dressed, who had handsome eyes.

Lorrimer had returned from the drive this evening in a mood that can be compared only to the sensations of a captive balloon. He had of late kept making discoveries, so far as Elsie was concerned. He had made one that afternoon. She possessed the most delightfully companionable laugh in the world! He loved to recall the sound of it.

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But his spirits that were so high drooped a little during his lonely dinner (to his surprise he had found that his caretaker was an excellent cook). Two or three times during his meal he had looked at the empty chair at the other end of the table and sighed, one sigh being of such duration and depth of feeling that the discreet Judson had glanced anxiously at his master's face, wondering if the caretaker's cooking had induced a pleasurable surfeit of appetite or a galloping indigestion.

On the walls of Lorrimer's library hung a number of framed manuscripts, one being a love letter of Robert Burns, addressed to his "Adorable, dear, delightful Clarinda." It had never struck Lorrimer as being of particular interest; but to-night he read it over with an acute joy in the sense of its possession. His troubles were out of his mind; he even took down the poet from the shelf and was deep in a lyrical effort dedicated "To the brilliant Mrs. M'Lehose": "She, the fair sun of all her sex, has blessed my glorious day," when the telephone rang.

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Almost as if surprised in doing something he should be ashamed of, he replaced the volume before answering the call.

Now, under most circumstances, a listener hears but one end of the wire. On this occasion it is better to record the complete telephonic dialogue.

"Is this Mr. Paul Lorrimer?" asked a well-modulated and cultured voice that was entirely new to Lorrimer's ears.

"Yes; who is it, please?"

The man at the other end laughed musically.

"Never mind just yet. Are you alone?"

"Yes; but who are you?"

"Is there a clock in the room?"

"Yes," replied Lorrimer, surprised into glancing at the small onyx timepiece on the mantel; "but——"

"Will you tell me what time it is?" said the voice pleasantly.

"Who are you, and what the devil——"

The voice broke in on him.

"Now, now, please don't get irritated. All this, my dear sir, is rather important. If

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you will tell me the time, I will prove it in one word."

"It's five minutes of nine. Who are you?"

The next word, spoken evidently with lips close to the transmitter, brought Lorrimer to his feet.

"Plates!" came the word softly. "Now, will you listen?"

"Yes," replied Lorrimer breathlessly. "Go on; I understand."

"Your terms are accepted," said the voice at the other end, "and if you follow directions the plates will be yours by eleven o'clock to-night. But, first, will you move that clock close to the telephone so that I can hear it? No, don't hang up the receiver—I've engaged the telephone for five minutes and I want the worth of my money."

Lorrimer, puzzled, brought the clock to the desk and placed it beside the telephone.

"There," said he.

"That's right," soothed the voice. "Now will you walk to the window and look out toward the Park? If there is a big automo-

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bile standing there at the corner of the street, with the lamps lit, come back and tell me. Don't be more than ten seconds."

Lorrimer walked to the window. Sure enough, there was the automobile, its big staring eyes gleaming unblinkingly, like a wakeful dragon.

"It's there," said Lorrimer, returning quickly. "Now, what do you want?"

"Have you the twenty-five thousand dollars in the house?"

"Yes."

Lorrimer was growing laconic, yet he was not in the least bit nervous; never did he feel more self-assured, although the little *frissons* of excitement—the ants' nests back of his ears—thrilled him half delightfully.

"Is it in gold?"

"No; in bank notes."

"Perfectly good, are they?"

"Perfectly good; you could come here and examine them."

"No, thanks," answered the man, laughing again; "I'd rather not. But I tell you what to do. Put them in a small traveling

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bag, hurry on your coat and hat, and fetch them with you to the automobile. Leave the telephone receiver on the clock, and by the time it strikes nine some one will join you there; speak to no one on the way and ask no questions. I can assure you of your personal safety; there is no danger. By the way, those were beautiful flowers you sent somewhere this evening—your man has not yet returned, has he? ”

“ No; I’m all alone.”

“ Well, hurry! and mind you follow instructions—pardon my being curt, but we are working on a schedule—we have about three minutes.”

Impelled by something he could not tell what, Lorrimer did not hesitate. He picked up a little hand satchel, opened the small safe, catching the combination unerringly despite a rather feverish haste. Remembering the night was cold, he swung himself into his heavy fur coat, picked out an automobile cap, and in another moment had closed the front door. Before he had reached the corner his heart was beating like a trip hammer. Here

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he was, carrying twenty-five thousand dollars and absolutely unarmed! His steps grew slower as he came nearer the big automobile. He perceived that it had no tonneau, only a racing seat for two. It was of foreign make and must have been all of sixty horse power. He stepped behind it and glanced at the number. It would be a good thing to remember. It was the figure one, followed by three ciphers, and appeared glaringly new. He stepped around to the side of the machine and stood there astonished. Looking up and down the street he could see no one. A closed delivery wagon rapidly approaching was the only moving thing in sight. Perhaps the chauffeur might be hiding the other side of the stone wall that bordered the Park. He stepped across and peered over the balustrade, glancing along at the ground. Nothing there! All at once he jumped!

With a throb the huge engines of the car had begun to whirl! There was a man in a long coat just straightening himself up from the turn he had given to the crank! Where did he come from? The delivery wagon was

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now half a block away; it turned swiftly about the next corner.

"Ready?" said the man with a trace of a foreign accent. Lorrimer saw that he was tall and broad-shouldered, much muffled about the throat, his collar buttoned across his chin, and his face hidden by a pair of big goggles with gray silk flaps. Without another word the man settled himself at the steering wheel; and Lorrimer, with the bag on his knees, sat down in the lower seat beside him. There was a jar and a grunt as the clutches caught, and, with a swirl, the huge car turned and started up the avenue at a rate much exceeding the limit allowed by law, Lorrimer began to realize that he had taken a rather sudden plunge into the mystery. But as this realization grew his curiosity increased.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF THE BARGAIN

IT really grew embarrassing after a while. Lorrimer's sense of politeness kept impelling him to speak, and yet to save his life he could not think how to begin. A very natural circumstance led to the opening. They were humming down the incline at the upper end of the Park, when Lorrimer detected a man leaning against a bicycle underneath a street lamp.

"Policeman ahead," said he.

"*Merci, monsieur,*" said the man at the wheel.

As he slowed down, gradually and skillfully, he spoke beneath his breath, as if the huge fabric was a restive, nervous horse.

"*Doucement, doucement!*"

Lorrimer admired the way in which he manipulated the pedals and changed to the

lower speed without a jolt or jar. They slid by the policeman as silently as a sailboat. In two minutes they were hurtling on again.

Lorrimer essayed now to open the conversation in French, which he spoke very well. The only answers he received were polite monosyllables. When he asked how far they had to go—trying to put it in the most casual tone—there was no reply at all. His nerves, however, were in such good condition that he now entered with a full enjoyment into the uncertainty of the adventure. The swift motion and the keen fresh air exhilarated him. The minutes and the miles sped by. They crossed the high bridge over the Harlem, sped through the wide parkways beyond, and began to get into the real country. The driver seemed to know the way. He turned to one side of the road to avoid a soft spot in the middle. Then suddenly he whirled out from a long stretch of wide thoroughfare and took a little lane to the left that led up a rough, steep hill. The going was heavy here; the mud and gravel spurted from the wheels and rattled against the guards. Two

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or three times the machine lurched and wallowed heavily, but with hand and foot and proper changing of the gear the silent chauffeur kept the machine at a fairly even speed.

When almost at the top of the hill he turned again to the left and entered a still worse bit of road. An old stone wall was on one side and a deep ditch on the other. They passed something that appeared to be a quarry or gravel pit, and then some shanties, evidently erected for the temporary occupation of workmen. All at once the machine was brought to a stop.

What Lorrimer expected he could not have told at the moment. If his companion had given the traditional low whistle, he would not have been surprised. If four or five masked men had appeared from the bushes or from the direction of the shanties, he would have greeted their appearance as a matter of course. But no such thing occurred. The tall man stood up beside him and stretched his arms in relief.

"Nous voila," he said pleasantly, and

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stepped to the ground. He walked to the head of the machine and turned down the acetylene lamps to a glimmer. Lorrimer sat silently awaiting the next development, but his heart had begun an uncomfortable thumping.

"Do you know," said the man, speaking in English, without the slightest preliminary, "when I first saw your answer in the *Herald* I felt a little shy about opening communications. If you had put in another one I would have fought clear of you. I was afraid you were a detective leading me on."

"Confound the detectives," said Lorrimer. "I'll have nothing to do with them."

"No; in this matter surely not," said the man confidentially. "I'd trust you."

"I trusted you, too," said Lorrimer. "I don't know why."

"It's the best way," said the Mysterious One confidentially. "'Play fair and square with your pals,' has been my motto. But now tell me one thing: Why was it you wanted to get out of the whole business? It was old Strauss's sudden death, I suppose."

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"Yes, that was what led to it."

Lorrimer was puzzled and amazed at his coolness. He had controlled a momentary desire to burst into angry expostulation.

"Afterwards, you just got cold feet and didn't want to meet any of the rest of us—is that it? You and he had never done any work of this kind before, had you?"

"No," replied Lorrimer; "that I'll swear to." He was flushing to a red heat of irritation, but spoke quietly.

"You know, it looked a bit strange, that sudden taking off. He'd sworn they'd never get him alive—always carried a knife or a gun, but I knew he had heart trouble. And he wouldn't meet anybody, either, same as you. Fifteen years did he spend in the donjon in Germany and yet he was willing to risk it. You know, I hate to give this scheme up. . . . You've got twenty-five thousand dollars in that bag, eh?"

At that moment the foolishness of his position came to Lorrimer with a disconcerting force. Here he was, absolutely unarmed, with a man who, from all appearances, was

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his superior in physical strength and who might be meditating the Lord knows what, in a lonely place, miles, for all he knew, from the nearest habitation. And on his knees in a hand bag he had twenty-five thousand dollars in treasury notes.

"You know," said his friend, still confidentially, "you took a pretty bold way out of it. I admired you for it, and the way you played it, too. I couldn't, no, I couldn't have done it so well myself. And now, you just want to get shut of the whole business, eh? And——"

"And I want back those plates," said Lorimer, this time with his teeth clenched.

"And no questions asked," chuckled the man.

"That's it exactly."

"Well, 'you pays your money and you takes your choice.'"

"I've got the money."

"And here's your plates."

From beneath the seat he drew forth a flat package tied up in a newspaper.

"They are just as I got them," said he,

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“and ‘unused’—funny you should put that in!”

“Where did you get them?” asked Lorimer, “and how—how did you get into the bank? Who was it that——”

“Oh, that’s telling—better have a look at them. Bank? I don’t know anything about a bank.”

He detached, as he was speaking, the little lamp from the back of the car and put it on the ground. Then he slipped off the newspaper wrapping and untied the strings of the brown paper one within.

There was the long-coveted copper plate with the two marvelous etchings, the only link that might connect him with the shadow of a crime.

“Beautiful work,” whispered the man, with a sigh. “Beautiful work!”

“I want you to understand,” said Lorimer testily, “that I had nothing to do with it.”

“There’s nothing there to be ashamed of,” said the man. “I’ll never see another effort like this, and neither will your friend,

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Mr. Wilkins. Did you ever intend really to show it to him? I think that you would have been rather foolish. It was risky."

"Maybe it was," said Lorrimer, "but my lawyer thought it was best."

"What does he say now?"

"We're not exactly on speaking terms. I don't intend to consult him."

"Oh, pardon me; I didn't mean to ask any questions. We can each reserve the right not to reply, I suppose."

"Well, there are questions I'd like to ask you," said Lorrimer eagerly. "How did you get to the automobile this evening, without my seeing you?"

"Well, I'll answer that. I got out of the delivery wagon. I drove there from where I was telephoning you. I can account for almost every minute of your time, Mr. Lorrimer, since the day old Strauss died, almost every minute."

"I thought as much. Were you ever at the Café Martin?"

"No; where is that—in Paris?" asked the man innocently. "But we are doing a lot

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of talking," he added. "You don't mind my taking a look at the swag you've got there in the bag, do you?"

Lorrimer handed it to him. In the light of the lamp he counted the treasury bills. Lorrimer now looked closely at him. He had a jet-black mustache and a blue smooth-shaven chin. Suddenly he laughed.

"I almost believe you made 'em," he said humorously, "you seem so glad to get rid of 'em. Now, you wouldn't go and shove the queer on a pal, would you?"

For a minute the stranger had dropped into the easy vernacular of the "talent." It was strange how many accents he had; his French was perfect, and occasionally his English was that of a cultured and refined man of the world. It had a Belgravia twist to it, a suggestion of the inherited affectations of Oxonian ancestors. He did not put the money in his pocket—it made a bulky package—but replaced it in the bag.

"Now," said he, turning to Lorrimer, "there's just one thing more, and I think I have a right to ask it: You don't intend to

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use this work of art, do you? That wouldn't be quite fair."

"I assure you, on my word of honor, I do not. I want to get it out of the way."

"That can be easily done," was the response. "I was going to suggest it. You wouldn't want to be found with this on you, I can tell you that much."

"No, I wouldn't. That goes without saying."

"And you certainly don't intend to hand it over to the authorities. They wouldn't treat you very well. Come," he added, rising and walking back to the autocar, "I've got a little something here that will settle all doubts that might ever arise between us."

He drew a glass-stoppered bottle out of the hood and brought it down to where the light shone on it.

"Sulphuric acid, eh?" said Lorrimer, reading the familiar formula on the sand-blown label.

"With your permission," said the stranger. "May I?"

"Go ahead," said Lorrimer grimly.

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The plate was laid on the ground and the biting acid poured on its surface. The fumes of the corroding metal rose to their nostrils as the fluid bit into the surface of the copper. The last drop was drained. The stranger moved the plate with his foot into a puddle of rain water. At the same time the bottle cracked into pieces against the stone wall. In a minute or so he drew the plate forth and wiped it dry with the newspaper. So far as could be seen, not a trace of the old photo-engraving was there.

"There you are," said he. With a bow he handed the packet to Lorrimer. "You'll never be troubled by that as evidence against you. Here we part."

"What am I to do?" asked Lorrimer.

"Well, it's about three miles to the station, and if you walk down there, over the edge of this ravine, you'll find a little path——"

"Now, see here," broke in Lorrimer, "it's dark as pitch. You might take me as far back as the main road. I haven't the slightest idea where I am. Don't you think it's rather foolish to turn me out this way?"

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"It certainly isn't polite," was the reply, "but it's part of my original plan. It was here I was to disappear out of your life."

"You'd be just as safe if you disappeared out of my life in the corridor of the Waldorf-Astoria—I won't follow you. I pledge you my word—my honor."

"All right," was the reply. "I trust you. I'll take you back to the station. There'll be a train along in about an hour, but I've got some distance to go to-night, so I can't drive you back to town. Now, let's see how we shall get out of this?"

He surveyed the ground with the lantern in his hand.

"A ticklish bit of turning," he said, whistling softly. "*Un vrai cul-de-sac!* Nevertheless, we'll try."

Lorrimer watched again with admiration while the huge machine backed and filled, now with the lamps almost against the stone wall, and again with the back wheels almost over the ditch. At last it was straightened out and pointing the way they had come.

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"Montez, monsieur," said the stranger at last. As Lorrimer mounted beside him, the big man put the bag in the hood and buttoned down the flap. Another moment, they were jolting down the road.

CHAPTER XIX

A CHASE AND A CAPTURE

WHEN they entered the broad highway, having successfully reached the bottom of the hill, the driver let out a link or two. The machine responded with a humming leap. Lorrimer could feel the pressure of the wind upon his chest, his eyes and face stung, the tears rolled down his cheeks. Once he ventured a hint that the pace was a bit fast for the suburbs of a town. It was evident that they were approaching one, for the houses were getting thicker, and in a street to the left he could see the moving lights of a trolley car.

"I'm going to take you over to the other railway," said the man at the steering wheel, "and we'll have to hurry for the train."

The wheels skidded as they swung about a corner. Just ahead of them, standing, pant-

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ing impatiently, beside the road, was another automobile with three occupants. A man stepped out from the curb and lifted his hand as if ordering them to slow down. They passed him with a roar and a spattering rush. Lorrimer turned and saw him spring for the back of the waiting motor car. In a second it had swung out into the road and, just as they crossed the trolley tracks, the car behind passed beneath an electric light. Lorrimer perceived plainly the fateful gleam of a double row of metal buttons.

"The police!" he cried, touching his companion's arm. "They're after us."

The driver gave a quick glance over his shoulder. "They'll never catch us," he said, chuckling. "We'll lose them in five minutes."

The machine turned another corner and reached a winding turnpike; then another sharp swirl to the right, and he had proved his assertion. Looking back there were no signs of the pursuing lights.

"I'll drop you within a quarter of a mile of the station," said the driver. "We're

almost there, and we'll part company. Perhaps you'd better keep quiet for a day or so. I don't know but what I'd leave the country for a short time, if I were you. Hallo! Hold tight! What's this!! *Dieu!*"

The end of the sentence broke short in a curse. Before them, stretched across the road, was a barrier of loose boards lying across the tops of barrels. A dim red lamp shone at the center. Even with hand and foot brakes applied, and the back wheels almost locked, the machine struck the obstruction. A heavy plank caught both lamps and with a tingle of glass and brasswork they shattered and went out. But before they had done so, in that thrilling second before the smash, the roadway beyond the obstruction had been visible. Piles of broken road ballast presided over by a sleeping brute of a steam roller!

"What are we to do?" cried Lorrimer. "Better run for it, hey?" He started to get out.

"Keep your seat, keep your seat!" cried

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his companion. He was heaving at the levers as if he could move the whole machine by force of muscular strength. Slowly they began to go backward. A snap, a groan, and they were going forward again. Another grunt and heave and they had made a wide swirl, just missing a tree box, and had turned back in the road, and were flying through the darkness, retracing the way by which they had come. How the man at the wheel could see was more than Lorrimer could imagine, but he bent forward, peering straight ahead. The road just showed a lighter streak against the dark ground on either hand. They had almost reached the winding avenue again, when with a shout Lorrimer pointed. Here came the other automobile from the left! It was a question of who'd reach the corner first. One of the broken lamps was jingling like a cowbell in front. They might have been ringing a gong. At last they reached the corner. Almost on two wheels the big machine cut round it safely. Far ahead of them they could see a long vista of scattered lights. The small automobile, in which there were

the four men, was not a hundred yards behind. Lorrimer glanced back. He could see that the man beside the driver was standing up, shouting. In the next quarter of a mile down the smooth road the big machine had gained considerably.

Suddenly there came a sharp report behind them.

"Broke a tire, eh?" said his companion. "Good enough for 'em."

But it was not a tire, for as Lorrimer turned to look, there was a flash, and over their heads sped a little whistling, musical note, which changed from sharp to flat. They both ducked forward. Another flash, and a sharp rap at the back of the machine. But they were gaining, gaining!

A wild exhilaration ran through Lorrimer's veins. Never had he been so thrillingly close against the actual. He bent backward and forward in his seat, like a coxswain encouraging a racing crew. They topped a slight incline and shot down the other side, passing a buggy whose horse leaped in fright to the curbstone. Then there was a jar that

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set the lamp jangling and jumped the tools unmusically in the tool basket. The driver came forward against the wheel with a lurch. Lorrimer was pitched forward to his knees, and narrowly missed going out altogether. But down the slope the machine tore on. Once at the bottom he heard the squeak of the accelerator against the ratchet, and then from beneath the chassis sounded a rhythmical jolt.

"She's knocking," groaned the driver despairingly. "The main shaft is out of gear!"

He slowed to the second speed. The clutch spudded exhaustedly. It slipped and caught and slipped again.

"Done for!" said the man with another curse. "Are they in sight?"

"Just at the top of the hill," cried Lorrimer. "What will we do?"

The car was still lamely plunging on.

"Hold tight again!" cried the chauffeur. A driveway between two huge stone gateposts was on the right. He turned quickly into it. But he did not see the iron gate that

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stood half open. It caught the off front hub and Lorrimer was hurled forward clear over the mud guard. He landed full and square, with his chest against the angle of the stone post. He felt as if his breastbone and ribs were stove in. How he had missed smashing his skull he could not have told. But there was one thing that had saved him—the copper plate that he had slipped beneath his heavy fur coat and that he had been holding in place with the tips of his fingers.

Gasping and coughing, he struggled to his feet. His companion was fumbling at the catches of the hood. At last he drew out the leather bag, tearing it free with a jerk from the canvas cover.

“Run!” he cried. “Quick, follow me.”

“Stop!” shouted a voice. “Stop, I say!”

There was the little automobile, its band brakes screeching as its speed slowed. Lorrimer could see the men (three of them) standing up preparing to leap. Two wore uniforms. Animated by the wild desire to escape, he started to run. Only a few steps before him was the tall man with the hand

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bag. Turning, he stretched out his hand as if to lend assistance, and then suddenly he tripped and sprawled full length in the driveway. A chain stretched across the road from two small posts, a sign of the would-be seclusion of the owner of the estate, had proved his ruin. Lorrimer had just time to make a nervous jump across it, when he, too, tripped and, like a football player falling on the ball, came down in a heap on the leather hand bag. His companion, a few paces forward, rose to his feet, and then gave a sudden leap from the driveway into the bushes. At that moment some one spoke above Lorrimer where he lay.

"Here's one of them—drunk, as I suspected. Where's the other fellow?"

"There he goes," cried another voice; "across the lawn, by the corner of the house."

"After him, you men," shouted the first speaker. Then he turned. "Here, Fontine," he cried. "Keep an eye on this chap here. Don't think he can get away very fast."

With that the man who was in plain clothes, and seemed to be in command, started hotfoot after the others.

Lorrimer, still on the ground, rolled over and looked up into the face of Émile Fontine, whom he had employed the year before to run his big Panhard—the very man whom he had found such an expensive luxury and who had landed him more than once in the courts for speeding.

“Hallo, Fontine,” he said, drawing breath with an effort; “don’t you know me?”

“Monsieur Lorrimer!” cried the man. “You! *Parbleu!*”

It was as amusing as a recognition in a comedy. The man’s surprise, his utter consternation at finding his overcareful ex-master in such a plight, was ludicrous to see.

“Fontine,” said Lorrimer, rising, coughing, and sputtering, “this is an awful scrape for me. I wouldn’t have had it happen for—” He paused and thought of the money in the bag that he had picked up with both hands. “For a hundred dollars,” he added desperately.

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"It will cost monsieur fully as large as that," returned the man. "And you smashed ze machine pretty much, too. Yes?"

He gave a glance at the damages of the big F. I. A. T.

"Were you driving, monsieur? *Impossible—non—non!*"

"No; I don't know the gentleman's name. It was just a sort of wild spree—a foolish bet! And you mustn't know me either. And, here, Fontine, Fontine! You see this bag. If you'll take care of it and give it to me to-morrow without letting anyone know, I'll pay you double whatever the fine may be. There are some personal papers in it I wouldn't like anyone to see." He handed the bag to Fontine, remembering with relief that unless a person knew how to press the proper catches, it was as good as locked. The chauffeur took it politely with a hurried bow.

"It will be all right, monsieur," said he; "I'll take care of it. *Certe'ment.*"

He hurried over to the smaller automobile, and lifting the lid of the basket at the side,

deposited the bag safely within, and closed the lid again.

"Monsieur had better not give his name," said the Frenchman, returning. "Here, *vite, vite*, give me your cards and card case!"

"Take my purse, Fontine," said Lorrimer, handing over his wallet. "My name is Smith, John Smith."

"We have caught five John Smiths in ze last week," said the chauffeur, grinning. "But it is all ze same, if they pay ze money. Pst, pst, take care, monsieur, here zey come. Ah, zey have not got him—*échappé!*"

Much disgruntled, the myrmidons of the law returned empty-handed. The fugitive had jumped the high wall at the back of the estate, slid down to the railway embankment, and more than possibly had jumped on a freight train that was pulling up the grade. At all events he disappeared! They vented their harshness on Lorrimer, who, owing to the reaction, and the force of his first fall, was in a condition as near to the semblance of alcoholic collapse as the appearances might have reasonably demanded.

A CHASE AND A CAPTURE

Towing the big automobile behind them, for the running gear was intact, though wabbly, the captor and the prize crawled back to the town.

An hour later Lorrimer could not believe his senses. He was seated next to a tired traveler who was snoring lustily in the rear seat of the smoker on the early morning local bound for New York. On his knees was the bag, for the faithful Fontine had met him at the station, full of congratulations upon the way this particular "John Smith" had managed matters. The big automobile was held as a bond for his appearance at nine o'clock the next morning. The plate in the paper parcel beneath his coat, now dented and misshapen, had puzzled the officers. But Fontine had helped explain it by recognizing it as a part of an automobile's machinery, and had picked it out unerringly before Lorrimer could stammeringly make up his mind, as the "bed plate of an exhaust-valve head," whatever that might have been.

Now, for the reason that he had forgotten his latchkey, Lorrimer went to a hotel at half-

OUTSIDE THE LAW

past one in the morning. And because he thought it wiser he had signed the register "John Smith," at which the clerk had smiled softly to himself and received payment in advance.

CHAPTER XX

THE VALUE OF INCENTIVE

HORRIMER turned in bed toward the sunlit window with a strange sense of the unreality of his surroundings. He felt battered across his chest and ribs; both knees were so stiff he could hardly move them. Now he could account for the strange dreams which he had had the night before. One was that he had joined Bostwick's as a candidate for wrestling with a man-crushing grizzly, and the other that he had persisted in facing Mr. Jeffries in the ring. The only satisfactory part of these somnolent adventures were the tearful protestations of Elsie, who had managed to figure in most of his dreams for the last week or so. Suddenly, with a start of alarm, he remembered the little leather bag! There it was, close beside his bed, and, opening it, he al-

most shuddered in relief, for there were the crisp bank bills! Hurrah! There was the bent and dented copper plate!

There came a knocking at the door, and then, relief of reliefs! a voice whose tones he recognized asked if he was awake. With as much spring as he could muster he jumped out of bed and hobbled over to the door. It was Judson. Now Lorrimer remembered that he had scribbled a note to his house asking Judson to come to him in the morning. The valet walked into the room with an imperturbable countenance. He carried a dress-suit case and a hatbox. Although at a glance he took in the muddy trousers over the back of a chair and the big fur coat over another, he asked no questions, and quietly walking into the bathroom, turned on the hot and cold water. Lorrimer tottered back to bed.

"A gentleman called to see you this morning, sir."

"Who?" asked Lorrimer faintly.

"Left a card and a note for you, sir. 'Inspector Walter Hudson,' sir, of the 'Central Office.'"

THE VALUE OF INCENTIVE

From the way Judson spoke, the inspector might have been a daily visitor, or the milkman. In fear and trembling Lorrimer opened the note; but both manifestations faded when he read its contents. It was simply a request, asking if Lorrimer could by any chance secure him some spring-trout fishing. In his relief he grinned at Judson foolishly.

"Did anything else happen, Judson?" he said.

"At the house, sir? Nothing, sir."

"What did you think when I didn't come back, Judson?"

"I thought you had concluded to stay hout, sir."

An "h" did slip in this time, much to Judson's annoyance; by long practice he had secured a firm hold on the elusive aspirate.

"Oh, sir, I forgot," he continued; "a long-distance telephone this morning from Bridgeport. It happened while Inspect—while the gentleman was there. I was downstairs, sir, and he answered the 'phone, sir."

"Well, well; who was it?"

"Really, I haven't the least idea, sir. When I took the hin—instrument, sir, somebody asked if you'd returned. I said, 'No,' sir, and then the same voice asked who it was that 'first answered' the telephone. I told him it was Inspector Hudson, sir. And then the party said something I couldn't quite catch and closed off."

"What did he say?"

"Couldn't exactly make out, sir, but it sounded like 'mondu'—your bath is ready, sir."

The hot water and the cold plunge after it seemed to limber Lorrimer up. When he emerged a few minutes later, Judson was packing his soiled clothes into the dress-suit case.

"Judson," said Lorrimer, "when you go downstairs, order luncheon for three at one o'clock—and—hold on, go down to the White Star Line and engage the large double outside stateroom on the *Baltic*, for next Wednesday."

"The one they calls the 'bridle suit,' sir? Book it in your name, sir?"

THE VALUE OF INCENTIVE

“No, pay for it, no matter what it costs.” He drew a thousand-dollar bill out of the bag. “‘Book’ it in the name of ‘Mr. John Smith’—and, oh, another thing—I don’t think I’ll go back to the house until the time of sailing. I’m tired of the caretaker’s cooking.”

“Very good,” said Judson, and, taking the money, he left the room.

Mr. Lorrimer sent for pens, ink, paper, and a messenger.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST WHO LAUGHED

SAY what you like, Wilkins," said Inspector Walter Hudson, as he sat in the bow of the Adirondack boat and made a long cast in toward shore, "say what you like, but it pays to have rich friends who appreciate your asking favors of them. Why, Mr. Lorrimer just turned this camp over to me; said he'd feel offended if I didn't use it as if it was my own."

"Lorrimer, Paul Lorrimer?" questioned the head of the Secret Service, from the mid-thwart fixing a white miller to the end of his leader.

"Yes, Paul Lorrimer."

"Crazy as a bug," said Mr. Wilkins. He threw back his head and laughed. "I'll tell you a story some day," he said.

"No more crazy than you are, or me," returned the inspector. "It would be a good

THE LAST WHO LAUGHED

thing if there were more who had his form of insanity."

Mr. Wilkins laughed again. "I'll tell you the story some day," he repeated. "Only probably you won't believe it." He was still chuckling as he cast the white miller out toward the tail of the old beaver dam. "He had counterfeits and robberies and then he got a woman on the brain—the last cured him. But once, honestly, I thought he was steering pretty close between the pen and the lunatic asylum. Some day I'll tell you the story."

"I had a funny run-in with him, too, down at headquarters. Thought myself he acted queer a bit," remarked the inspector. "But he's a fine gentleman."

"Never said anything about plates, did he?" asked Mr. Wilkins and once more he laughed.

"To all appearances he's entirely recovered, doctor," said Mr. Fowler, as he and Dr. Higgins sat in the club window, "and

happy; he was in the seventh heaven, positively beaming."

"Didn't say anything about plates, did he?"

"No; never mentioned them."

"Well, it was a very funny case," mused the doctor, "and it had a strange ending, didn't it?"

"Cupid, M.D.! I remember reading a clever novel by that title once, years ago. This seems to be another case of it. From your account she must be a very handsome young woman."

"Pretty as a picture," said Mr. Fowler; "and as nice as they make them, apparently. Been a trained nurse, I believe."

"Some of the finest women in the world are trained nurses," said the doctor with a sigh that had a little reminiscent diapason. "Well, what has become of the old gentleman?"

"Oh, he's up at Lorrimer's country place. Going to write a book."

"I'd like to read any book *he'd* write," said the doctor, and throwing back his head

THE LAST WHO LAUGHED

he laughed, a laugh in which Mr. Fowler joined.

On the sidewalk in front of the Café Ribeiro, not far from the Rue do Ouvidor, a tall, black-bearded man sat on a spindle-legged chair beside a spindle-legged table upon which rested a long glass of *café com pinga*. He looked up from a three weeks' old copy of a New York sensational paper that he held on his lap. The article was headed: "The Automobile Mystery Still Unsolved!" It told how a sixty-horse-power F. I. A. T. machine of a rich New Yorker had been hired from his dishonest chauffeur in his absence by a stranger, whose description was somewhat vague, as the chauffeur gave it, and how it had been found deserted with a new number pasted over the proper one, in a suburban town not far from the metropolis. The story related that one of the occupants who had given his name as "Smith" had been arrested for fast speeding; the other, who had been driving the machine, had

escaped. "It is rumored," added the article, "that the two were notorious criminals out for some nefarious purpose, and that a double arrest and startling disclosures will shortly be forthcoming. Mr. Smith forfeited his bail and there are strong suspicions of the bribery of police officials."

"Poor Mr. 'Brown!'" ejaculated the tall man with the beard; "it will cost him more than twenty-five thousand dollars to get out of that. Don't think I'll go back to New York for some time to come. Lucky," he added to himself, "I caught that fruit steamer just as she was sailing. They might have got me. Poor old Brown!" He took a sip out of the tall glass and laughed again. Then he remembered it was time for him to get back to the "Club High-Life" and roll the ivory ball at Señor Coelho's roulette table. There was more than one way that the man with the eager eyes could pick up a living.

There was an American dancing couple doing a turn at the Théâtre des Variétés.

THE LAST WHO LAUGHED

The woman was very large and blonde, with a blatant, humorous voice and agile feet. The man in a red wig was quite fascinating, for with all his grotesqueness he danced with grace and intelligence. They were doing a marvelous American side-step jig, in the performance of which they seemed to reflect the pleasure of the audience, for they kept up a little running chirping of small talk, when they were not singing the verses that made an interlude to their terpsichorean efforts. The Frenchmen could not have understood what they said, but suddenly they were treated to a little byplay that was out of the usual order.

"Maisie," said the man, as heel and toe tapped rhythmically on the sanded floor of the stage, "for the love of Moses, look who's in the box!"

"Who?" said his companion, never missing a step as she glanced over her shoulder. But as her eyes fell on the occupants of the lower loge, she missed not only one, but two. "Mr. Brown!" she gasped. She pulled herself together with an effort and her husband carefully covered her discomfiture by stum-

OUTSIDE THE LAW

bling in the same cadence with an exaggeration of her mistake.

"And look, Sam, Sam!" said the woman, almost stopping entirely. "See who's in the box beside him!"

"Mind your steps, Maisie, mind your steps! Who is it?"

"The trained nurse from Brooklyn!"

Mr. Reeder slipped his arm around his wife's waist, and bending down pretended to tie her slipper. Then, with an elaborate bow, he kissed her hand, and they danced themselves off the stage.

"Where have I seen her before?" said Mrs. Lorrimer to her husband.

"Can't say, my dear," said Lorrimer, "but her face *is* familiar to me, too. Probably in America, we've seen them at the theater somewhere."

"It wasn't in New York," said Elsie. "Maybe it was in some past life. Seems as if I had met her in some out-of-the-way corner."

"I never had any past life," said her hus-

THE LAST WHO LAUGHED

band. "I never seemed to be living at all until the present." He stole his hand into hers. "You know what is the best *present* the *past* ever gave to me," he added.

Mrs. Lorrimer laughed softly. "Silly boy!" she said.

Lorrimer almost roared. The audience, too, was in shouts of merriment. Mr. Reeder had made a comic bow.

"What was that—I didn't see it?" said Elsie.

"Neither did I," returned Lorrimer; "I just laughed because I was happy. I don't remember a worry in the world."

"How about the missing plates?" asked Elsie slyly.

"Oh, those blessed plates! Dear old Straub! If he only knows how thoroughly I forgive him!"

He chuckled, and this time Mrs. Lorrimer laughed softly and sweetly.

"I hope he does," she said. "I join in the forgiveness."

(1)

THE END

WHERE LOVE CONQUERS.

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The author is not conscious of having taken any liberties with history in preparing a framework of facts for a mantle of romance.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

NEW YORK, *May 26, 1904.*

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Does anybody remember the opera of *The Inca*, and that heart-breaking episode where the Court Undertaker, in a morbid desire to increase his professional skill, deliberately accomplishes the destruction of his middle-aged relatives in order to inter them for the sake of practice?

If I recollect, his dismal confession runs something like this:

"It was in bleak November
When I slew them, I remember,
As I caught them unawares
Drinking tea in rocking-chairs."

And so he talked them to death, the subject being "What Really Is Art?"
Afterward he was sorry—

"The squeak of a door,
The creak of a floor,
My horrors and fears enhance;
And I wake with a scream
As I hear in my dream
The shrieks of my maiden aunts!"

Now it is a very dreadful thing to suggest that those highly respectable pseudo-spinsters, the Sister Arts, supposedly cozily immune in their polygamous chastity (for every suitor for favor is popularly expected to be wedded to his particular art)—I repeat, it is very dreadful to suggest that these impeccable old ladies are in danger of being talked to death.

But the talkers are talking and Art Nouveau rockers are rocking, and the trousers of the prophet are patched with stained glass, and it is a day of dinkiness and of thumbs.

Let us find comfort in the ancient proverb: "Art talked to death shall rise again." Let us also recollect that "Dinky is as dinky does;" that "All is not Shaw that Bernards;" that "Better Yeates than Clever;" that words are so inexpensive that there is no moral crime in robbing Henry to pay James.

Firmly believing all this, abjuring all atom-pickers, slab furniture, and woodchuck literature—save only the immortal verse:

"And there the wooden-chuck doth tread;
While from the oak trees' tops
The red, red squirrel on the head
The frequent acorn drops."

Abjuring, as I say, dinkiness in all its forms, we may still hope that those cleanly and respectable spinsters, the Sister Arts, will continue throughout the ages, rocking and drinking tea unterrified by the million-tongued clamor in the back yard and below stairs, where thumb and forefinger continue the question demanded by intellectual exhaustion:

"L'arr! Kesker say l'arr?"

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