

**THIEVES'
WIT** 



HULBERT FOOTNER

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THIEVES' WIT

An Everyday Detective Story

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

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THIEVES' WIT

1

My first case!—with what an agreeable thrill a professional man repeats the words to himself. With most men I believe it is as it was with me, not the case that he intrigues for and expects to get but something quite different, that drops out of Heaven unexpected and undeserved like most of the good things of life.

Every now and then in an expansive moment I tell the story of my case, or part of it, whereupon something like the following invariably succeeds:

"Why don't you write it down?"

"I never learned the trade of writing."

"But detective stories are so popular!"

"Yes, because the detective is a romantic figure, a hero, gifted with almost superhuman keenness and infallibility. Nobody ever accused me of being romantic. I am only an ordinary fellow who plugs away like any other business man. Every day I am up against it; I fall down; some crook turns a trick on me. What kind of a story would that make?"

"But that's what people want nowadays, the real thing, stories of the streets day by day."

Well, I have succumbed. Here goes for better or for worse.

Before beginning I should explain that though it was my first case I was no longer in the first bloom of youth. I was along in the thirties before I got my start and had lost a deal of hair from my cranium. This enabled me to pass for ten years older if I wished to, and still with the assistance of my friend Oscar Nilson the wig-maker I could make a presentable figure of youth and innocence.

During my earlier days I had been a clerk in a railway freight office, a poor slave with only my dreams to keep me going. My father had no sympathy with my aspirations to be a detective. He was a close-mouthed and a close-fisted man. But when he died, after having been kept on scanty rations for years, the old lady and I found ourselves quite comfortably off.

I promptly shook the dust of the freight office from my feet and set about carrying some of the dreams into effect. I rented a little office on Fortieth street (twenty dollars a month), furnished it discreetly, and had my name painted in neat characters on the frosted glass of the door: "B. Enderby"—no more. Lord! how proud I was of the outfit.

I bought a fire-proof document file for cases, and had some note-paper and cards printed in the same neat style:

B. ENDERBY
Confidential Investigator

You see I wished to avoid the sensational. I was not looking for any common divorce evidence business. Since I had enough to exist on, I was determined to wait for important, high-priced, kid-glove cases.

And I waited—more than a year in fact. But it was a delightful time! Fellows were always dropping in to smoke and chin. My little office became like our club. You see I had missed all this when I was a boy. Any youngster who

has ever been speeded up in a big clerical office will understand how good it was. Meanwhile I studied crime in all its aspects.

I worked, too, at another ambition which I shared with a few million of my fellow-creatures, viz.: to write a successful play. I started a dozen and finished one. I thought it was a wonder of brilliancy then. I have learned better. In pursuance of this aim I had to attend the theatre a good deal, and from the top gallery I learned something about actors and actresses if not how to write a great play.

I mention the play-writing for it was that which brought me my first case. I used to haunt the office of a certain prominent play-broker who was always promising to read my play and never did. One afternoon in the up-stairs corridor of the building where she had her offices I came face to face with the famous Irma Hamerton.

Nowadays Irma is merely a tradition of loveliness and grace. Theatregoers of this date have nothing like her to rejoice their eyes. Then, to us humble fellows she stood for the rarest essence of life, the ideal, the unattainable—call it what you like. Tall, slender and dark, with a voice that played on your heartstrings, she was one of the fortunate ones of earth. She had always been a star, always an idol of the public. Not only did I and my gang never miss a show in which she appeared, but we would sit up half the night afterwards talking about her. None of us naturally had ever dreamed of seeing her face to face.

We met at a corner of the corridor, and almost collided. I forgot my manners entirely. My eyes almost popped out of my head. I wished to fix that moment in my life forever. Imagine my confusion when I saw that she was crying, that glorious creature!—actually the tears were running down her soft cheeks like any common woman's. Do you wonder that a kind of convulsion took place inside me?

Seeing me, she quickly turned her head, but it was too late, I had already seen them stealing like diamonds down her cheeks. I stared at her like a clown, and like a clown I blurted out without thinking:

"Oh, what's the matter?"

She didn't answer me, of course. She merely hurried faster down the hall, and turned the next corner.

When I realised what I had done I felt like butting my silly head through one of the glass partitions that lined the corridor. I called myself all the names in my vocabulary. I clean forgot my own errand in the building, and went back to my office muttering to myself in the streets like a lunatic.

I was glad no one dropped in. In my mind I went over the scene of the meeting a hundred times I suppose, and made up what I ought to have said and done, more ridiculous I expect than what had happened. What bothered me was that she would think I was just a common fresh guy. I couldn't rest under that. So I started to write her a note. I wrote half a dozen and tore them up. The one I sent ran like this:—I blush to think of it now—

MISS IRMA HAMERTON,

DEAR MADAM:

The undersigned met you in the corridor of the Manhattan Theatre Building this afternoon about three. You seemed to be in distress, and I was so surprised I forgot myself and addressed you. I beg that you will accept my apology for the seeming rudeness. I have seen you in all your plays, many of them several times over, and I have received so much pleasure from your acting, and I respect you so highly that it is very painful to me to think that I may have added to your distress by my rudeness. I assure you that it was only clumsiness, and not intentional rudeness.

Yours respectfully,
B. ENDERBY.

The instant after I had posted this letter I would have given half I possessed to get it back again. It suddenly occurred to me that it would only make matters worse. Either it would seem like an impertinent attempt to pry into her private affairs, or a bold move to follow up my original rudeness. A real gentleman would not have said anything about the tears, I told myself. My cheeks got hot, but it was too late to recall the letter. I was thoroughly miserable. I did not tell any of my friends what had happened.

That night I went alone to see her play. Lost in her part of course and hidden under her makeup she betrayed nothing. There was always a suggestion of sadness about her, even in comedy. When that lovely deep voice trembled, a corresponding shiver went up and down your spine.

I thought about her all the way home. My detective instinct was aroused. I tried to figure out what could be her trouble. There are only four kinds of really desperate trouble: ill-health, death, loss of money, and unrequited love. To look at her in the daylight without make-up was enough to dispose of the first. It was said that she had no close relatives, therefore she couldn't have lost any recently. As for money, surely with her earning capacity she had no need to trouble about that. Finally, how could it be an affair of the heart? Was there a man alive who would not have cast himself at her feet if she had turned a warm glance in his direction? Rich, successful and adored as she was, I had to give it up.

About five o'clock the next afternoon the surprise of my life was administered to me. I received a large, square, buff-coloured envelope with a brown border, and written upon with brown ink in immense, angular characters. On opening it my hand trembled with a delicious foreboding of what was inside, meanwhile better sense was telling me not to be a fool. It contained a card on which was written:

"Miss Irma Hamerton will be glad to see Mr. B. Enderby if it will be convenient for him to call at the Hotel Rotterdam at noon on Thursday."

For a moment I stared at it, dazed. Then I went up in the air. I did a sort of war-dance around the office. Finally I rushed out to the most fashionable outfitters to get a new suit before closing time. Thursday was the next day.

2

I had never been inside that exclusive of exclusive hotels, the Rotterdam. I confess that my knees were a little infirm as I went through the swing doors, and passed before the nonchalant, indifferent eyes of the handsome footmen in blue liveries. "Ahh, they're only overgrown bell-hops!" I told myself encouragingly, and fixed the Marquis behind the desk with a haughty stare.

Walking in a dream I presently found myself being shown into a corner room high up in the building. I was left there alone, and I had a chance to look around. I had never seen anything like it, except on the stage. It was decorated in what I think they call the Empire style, with walls of white panelled wood, picked out with gold, and pretty, curiously shaped furniture. Everywhere there were great bunches of pink roses, picked that morning, you could see, with petals still moist. It smelled like Heaven might.

That was all I had time to take in when the door opened, and she entered. She was wearing a pink lacy sort of thing that went with the roses. She didn't mind me, of course. She was merely polite and casual. But just the same I could see that she was deeply troubled about something. Trouble makes a woman's eyes big. Makes a beautiful woman twice as beautiful.

She went to the point as straight as a bullet.

"I suppose you are wondering why I sent for you?"

I confessed that I was.

"It was the heading on your letter paper. What do you mean by 'confidential investigator'—a detective?"

"Something a little better than an ordinary detective, I hope."

She switched to another track. "Why did you write to me?"

This took me by surprise. "There was no reason—except what the letter said," I stammered.

Several other questions followed, by which I saw she was trying to get a line on me. I offered her references. She accepted them inattentively.

"It doesn't matter so much what other people think of you," she said. "I have to make up my mind about you for myself. Tell me more about yourself."

"I'm not much of a hand at the brass instruments," I said. "Please ask me questions."

This seemed to please her. After some further inquiries she said simply: "I wrote to you because it seemed to me from your letter that you had a good heart. I need that perhaps more than detective skill. I live in a blaze of publicity. I am surrounded by flatterers. The pushing, thick-skinned sort of people force themselves close to me, and the kind that I like avoid me, I fear. I am not sure of whom I can trust. I am very sure that if I put my business in the hands of the regular people it would soon become a matter of common knowledge."

Her simplicity and sadness affected me deeply. I could do nothing but protest my honesty and my devotion.

"I am satisfied," she said at last. "Are you very busy at present?"

"Tolerably," I said with a busy air. It would never have done to let her think otherwise.

"I would like you to take my case," she said with an enchanting note of appeal, "but it would have to be on the condition that you attended to it yourself, solely. I would have to ask you to agree not to delegate any part of it to even the most trusted of your employees."

This was easy, since I didn't have any.

"You must, please, further agree not to take any steps without consulting me in advance, and you must not mind—perhaps I might call the whole thing off at any moment. But of course I would pay you."

I quickly agreed to the conditions.

"I have been robbed of a pearl necklace," she said with an air of infinite sadness.

I did not need to be told that there was more in this than the ordinary actress'-stolen-jewels case. Irma Hamerton didn't need that kind of advertising. She was morbidly anxious that there should be no advertising in this.

"It was a single strand of sixty-seven black pearls ranging in size from a currant down to a pea. They were perfectly matched, and each stone had a curious, bluish cast, which is, I believe, quite rare. As jewels go nowadays, it was not an exceptionally valuable necklace, worth about twenty-six thousand dollars. It represented my entire savings. I have a passion for pearls. These were exceptionally perfect and beautiful. They were the result of years of search and selection. Jewellers call them blue pearls. I will show you what they looked like."

She went into the adjoining room for a moment, returning with a string of dusky, gleaming pearls hanging from her hand. They were lovely things. My unaccustomed eyes could not distinguish the blue in them until she pointed it out. It was like the last gleam of light in the evening sky.

"The lost necklace was exactly like this," she said.

"Had you two?" I asked in surprise.

She smiled a little. "These are artificial."

I suppose I looked like the fool I felt.

"A very natural mistake," she said. "Some time ago my jeweler advised me not to wear the real pearls on the stage, so I had this made by Roberts. The resemblance was so perfect that I could scarcely tell the difference myself. It was only by wearing them that I could be sure."

"By wearing them?" I repeated.

"The warmth of my body caused the real pearls to gleam with a deeper lustre."

"Lucky pearls!" I thought.

"They almost seemed alive," she went on with a kind of passionate regret. "The artificial pearls show no change, of course. And they have to be renewed in a short time."

I asked for the circumstances of the robbery.

"It was at the theatre," she said. "It occurred on the night of February 14th."

"Six weeks ago!" I exclaimed in dismay. "The trail is cold!"

"I know," she said deprecatingly. "I do not expect a miracle."

I asked her to go on.

"I had an impulse to wear the genuine pearls that night. I got them out of the safe deposit vault in the afternoon. When I saw the real and the artificial together I was afraid of making a mistake, so I made a little scratch on the clasp of the real strand. I wear them in the first act. I have to leave them off in the second act, when I appear in a nurse's uniform, also in the third when I am supposed to be ill. In the fourth act I wear them again.

"On the night in question I wore the real pearls in the first act. I am sure of that, because they were glowing wonderfully when I took them off—as if there was a tiny fire in each stone. I put them in the pocket of the nurse's uniform and carried them on the stage with me during the second act. In the third act I was obliged to leave them in my dressing-room, because in this act I am shown in bed. But I thought they would be safe in the pocket of the dress I took off."

"The instant I returned to my dressing-room, I got them out and put them on, suspecting nothing wrong. It was not until after the final curtain that upon taking them off, I was struck by their dullness. I looked for my little mark on the clasp. It was not there. I found I had two strings of artificial pearls."

I asked her the obvious questions. "Did you have any special reason for wearing the genuine pearls that night?"

"None, except that I loved them. I loved to handle them. They were so alive! I was afraid they might lose their life if I never wore them."

Somehow, I was not fully satisfied with this answer. But for the present I let it go.

"Was any one with you when you got them out of the safety deposit box?" I asked.

"I was quite alone."

"Did any one know you were wearing them that night?"

"No one."

"Were there any strangers on the stage?"

"No. My manager at my request is very particular as to that. I have been so annoyed by well-meaning people. No one is admitted. In this production the working force behind is small. I can give you the name of every person who was on the stage that night."

"Has any one connected with the company left since then?"

"No."

"Who has the entrée to your dressing-room while you are on the stage?"

"Only my maid. But she is not expected to remain there every moment. Indeed, on the night in question I remember seeing her watching the scene from the first entrance."

"During which time your room was unlocked?"

"Very likely. But the door to it was immediately behind her."

"Have you any reason to suspect her?"

"None whatever. She's been with me four years. Still, I do not except her from your investigation."

"Does she know of your loss?"

"No one in the world knows of it but you and I."

"And the thief," I added.

She winced. I was unable to ascribe a reason for it.

"Do you care to tell me why you waited six weeks before deciding to look for the thief?" I asked as gently as possible.

"My jeweller—who is also an old friend, has secured three more blue pearls," she answered quickly. "He has asked me for the necklace, so that he can add them to it. I cannot put him off much longer without confessing that I have lost it."

"But shouldn't we tell him that it has been stolen?" I asked surprised.

She energetically shook her head.

"But jewellers have an organisation for the recovery of stolen jewels," I persisted. "The only way we can prevent the thief from realising on the pearls is by having the loss published throughout the trade."

"I can't consent to that," she said with painfully compressed lips. "I want you to make your investigation first."

"Do you mind telling me who is your jeweller?"

"Mr. Alfred Mount."

"If you could only tell me why he must not be told," I insinuated.

She still shook her head. "A woman's reason," she murmured, avoiding my glance.

"You know, of course, how you increase my difficulties by withholding part of your confidence."

There was a little tremble in her lovely throat. "Don't make me sorry I asked you to help me," she said.

I bowed.

"See what you can do in spite of it," she said wistfully.

3

I need not take the space to put down all the operations of my early reasoning on the case. I had plenty to think about. But every avenue my thoughts followed was blocked sooner or later by a blank wall. Never in my whole experience have I been asked to take up such a blind trail—and this was my first case, remember. Six weeks lost beyond recall! It was discouraging.

I narrowed myself down to two main theories:

(a) The pearls had been stolen by experienced specialists after long and careful plotting or,

(b) They had been picked up on impulse by a man or woman dazzled by their beauty. In this case the thief would most likely hoard them and gloat over them in secret.

Not the least puzzling factor in the case was my client herself. It was clear that she had been passionately attached to her pearls; she spoke of them always in almost a poetic strain. Yet there was a personal note of anguish in her grief which even the loss of her treasure was not sufficient to explain. She was a quiet woman. And strangest of all, she seemed to be more bent on finding out who had taken them, than on getting them back again. She had waited six weeks before acting at all, and now she hedged me around with so many conditions that the prospect of success was nil.

I had an intuition which warned me that if I wished to remain friends with her I had better be careful whom I accused of the crime. It was a puzzler whichever way you looked at it. However, an investigator must not allow himself to dwell on the hopelessness of his whole tangle, but must set to work on a thread at a time. Whichever way it turned out, I was to have the delight for a long time to come of seeing her frequently.

I was there again the next afternoon. This day I remember the room was fragrant with the scent of great bowls of violets. The lovely dark-haired mistress of the place looked queenly in a dress of purple and silver. As always when there were a number of people around she was composed in manner, one might say a little haughty.

There was quite a crowd. It included a middle-aged lady, a Mrs. Bleecker, a little over-dressed for her age and envious-looking. She, it transpired, was Miss Hamerton's companion or chaperon. The only other woman was a sister star, a handsome, blonde woman older than Miss Hamerton, very affectionate and catty. I have forgotten her name. The men were of various types. Among them I remember the editor of a prominent newspaper, a well-known playwright and Mr. Roland Quarles. The latter was Miss Hamerton's leading man. He looked quite as handsome and young off the stage as on, but seemed morose.

Miss Hamerton introduced me all around in her casual way, and left me to sink or swim by my own efforts. None of the people put themselves out to be agreeable to me. I could see that each was wondering jealously where I came in. However, since I had a right to be there, I didn't let it trouble me. This is life! I told myself, and kept my eyes and ears open. I was not long in discovering that these "brilliant" people chattered about as foolishly as the humblest I knew. Only my beautiful young lady was always dignified and wistful. She let others do the talking.

I stubbornly outstayed them all. The men very reluctantly left me in possession of the field. As for the lady companion I saw in her eye that she was determined to learn what I had come for. However, Miss Hamerton coolly disposed of her by asking her to entertain a newcomer in the next room while she talked business with me.

These people wearied her. She relaxed when they had gone. She said to me: "I had you shown right up because I want my friends to become accustomed to seeing you. I hope you did not mind."

I replied that I was delighted.

"I suppose I ought to account for you in some way," she went on, "or their curiosity will run riot. What would you suggest?"

"Oh, let them suppose that I am a playwright whose work you are interested in."

She accepted the idea. How delightful it was for me to share secrets with her!

My particular purpose in making this call was to urge her again to take the jeweller into her confidence. I pointed out to her that we could hope to do nothing unless we blocked the thief from disposing of the pearls. Very reluctantly she finally consented, stipulating, however, that the jeweller must be told that she had just discovered her loss. I explained to her that we must look back to make sure that the jewels had not already been offered for sale, but on this point she stood firm. She gave me a note of introduction to Mr. Alfred Mount.

I delivered it the following morning. At this time Mount's was the very last word in fashion. It was a smallish store but most richly fitted up, on one of the best corners of the avenue, up near the cathedral. Every one of the salesmen had the air of a younger son of the aristocracy. They dealt only in precious stones, none of your common stuff like gold or silver.

I was shown into a private office at the back, a gem of a private office, exquisite and simple. And in Mr. Alfred Mount I saw that I had a notable man. One guessed that he would have been a big man in any line. So far I knew him only as one of the city's leading jewellers. By degrees I learned that his interests were widespread.

He was a man of about fifty who looked younger, owing to his flashing dark eyes, and his lips, full and crimson as a youth's. In a general way he had a foreign look, though you couldn't exactly place him as a Frenchman, an Italian or a Spaniard. It was only, I suppose, that he wore his black hair and curly beard a little more luxuriantly than a good American. His manner was of the whole world.

My involuntary first impression was dead against the man. He was too much in character with the strange little orchid that decorated his buttonhole. Later I decided that this was only my Anglo-Saxon narrowness. True, he kept a guard on his bright eyes, and his red lips were firmly closed—but do we not all have to train our features? He was a jeweller who earned his bread by kow-towing to the rich. My own face was not an open book, yet I considered myself a fairly honest creature.

He read my letter of introduction which stated that I would explain my business to him. Upon his asking what that was I told him quietly that Miss Hamerton had been robbed of her pearls.

He started in his chair, and pierced me through and through with those brilliant black eyes.

"Give me the facts!" he snapped.

I did so.

"But you," he said impatiently, "I don't know you."

I offered him my card, and explained that Miss Hamerton had retained my services.

He was silent for a few moments, chewing his moustache. It was impossible to guess what was going on behind the mask of his features. Suddenly he started to cross-question me like a criminal lawyer. How long had I been in business? Was I accustomed to handling big cases? Had I any financial standing? What references could I give? And so on, and so on.

My patience finally gave way under it. "I beg your pardon," I said stiffly. "I recognise the right of only one person to examine me in this manner. That is my client."

He pulled himself together, and, I must say, apologised handsomely. Like all big men he was often surprisingly frank. "Forgive me," he said winningly. "You are quite right. I am terribly upset by your news. I forgot myself. I

confess, too, I am hurt that Miss Hamerton should have acted in this matter without first consulting me. I am a very old friend."

I was glad she had done so, for something told me I never should have got the job from him. I did not tell him how she had come to engage me, though he gave me several openings to do so.

"I am not a narrow man," he said in his best manner. "I will not hold it against you. Only show me that you are the man for the job, and I will aid you with all my power."

I accepted the olive branch. "I spoke too hastily myself," I returned. "I shall be glad to tell you anything you want to know about myself."

We basked in the rays of mutual politeness for a while. Still that instinctive dislike of the man would not quite down. He asked no more personal questions.

"Have the police been notified?" he enquired.

"Miss Hamerton imposes absolute secrecy."

"Quite so," he said quickly. "That is wise."

I had my doubts of it, but I didn't air them.

"Have you any clues?" he asked.

"None as yet."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To publish the loss through the channels of the trade, with the request that if any attempt is made to dispose of the pearls we should instantly be notified. The owner's name, and the circumstances of the robbery must be kept secret."

"Very good," he said, making a memo on a pad. "I will attend to it at once, and discreetly. Is there anything else I can do?"

"I hoped that with your knowledge of jewels and the jewel market you could give me something to work on," I said.

"All I know is at your command," said he. He talked at length about jewels and jewel thieves, but it was all in generalities. There was nothing that I could get my teeth into. He gave it as his opinion that the pearls were already on their way abroad, perhaps to India.

"Then you think that the robbery was engineered by experts?"

He spread out his expressive hands. "How can I tell?"

We parted with mutual expressions of good will. I said, "I expect I shall have to come often to you for help."

"I expect you to," he said earnestly. "I want you to. Myself and my establishment are at your service. Let no question of expense hamper you."

I found later that he really meant this. I was, however, very reluctant to draw on him.

When I saw Miss Hamerton the next day I asked her a question or two concerning Mr. Alfred Mount with the object of finding out if he were really such an old friend as he made out.

"I have always known him," she said simply. "That I happen to buy things from him is merely incidental. He was a friend of my father's and he is a very good friend to me. He has proved it more than once."

I was tempted to ask: "Then why were you so reluctant to take him into your confidence?" But I reflected that since she had already refused to tell me, I had better keep my mouth shut, and find out otherwise.

"Mr. Mount asked if we had notified the police," I said, merely to see how she would take it.

I regretted it. Her expression of pain and terror went to my heart. She was no longer the remote and lovely goddess, but only a suffering woman.

"Oh, you did not, you have not?" she stammered.

"Certainly not," I said quickly. "I knew you didn't wish it."

She turned away to recover herself. What was I to make of it? One would almost have said that she was a party to the theft of her own jewels.

And yet only a few minutes later she burst out in a passionate plea to me to discover the thief.

"It tortures me!" she cried, "the suspense, the uncertainty! This atmosphere of doubt and suspicion is suffocating! I wish I never had had any pearls! I wish I were a farmer's daughter or a mill girl! Please, *please* settle it one way or the other. I shall never have a quiet sleep until I *know!*"

"Know what?" I asked quietly.

But she made believe not to have heard me.

4

I spent the next two or three days in quiet work here and there. The most considerable advance I made was in picking an acquaintance with McArdle, the property man of Miss Hamerton's company. Watching the stage door I discovered that the working-force behind the scenes frequented the back room of a saloon on Sixth avenue for lunch after the show. The rest was easy. By the third night McArdle and I were on quite a confidential footing.

From him I heard any amount of gossip. McArdle was of the garrulous, emotional type and very free with his opinions. The star was the only one he spared. From his talk I got the principal members of the company fixed in my mind. Beside Mr. Quarles there was George Casanova, the heavy man, a well-known actor but, according to McArdle, a loud-mouthed, empty braggart, and Richard Richards, the character heavy, a silly old fool, he said, devoured by vanity. Among the women the next in importance after the star was Miss Beulah Maddox, the heavy lady, who in the opinion of my amiable informant giggled and ogled like a sewing-machine girl, and she forty if she was a day.

Discreet questioning satisfied me that McArdle was quite unaware that a robbery had been committed in the theatre. If he didn't know it, certainly it was not known.

Out of bushels of gossip I sifted now and then a grain of valuable information. He informed me that Roland Quarles was in love with the star. For some reason that I could not fathom he was especially bitter against the young leading man. He would rail against him by the hour, but there seemed to be no solid basis for his dislike.

"Does she favour him?" I asked.

"Nah!" he said. "She's got too much sense. He's a four-flusher, a counter-jumper, a hall-room boy! Lord! the airs he gives himself you'd think he had a million a year! He's a tail-ender with her, and he knows it. He's sore."

"Who seems to be ahead of him?" I asked with strong curiosity.

"There's a dozen regulars," said McArdle. "Two Pittsburgh millionaires, a newspaper editor, a playwright and so on. But if you ask me, the jeweller is ahead in the running."

"The jeweller?" I said, pricking up my ears.

"Spanish looking gent with whiskers," said McArdle. "Keeps a swell joint on the avenue. Mount, his name is. He's a wise guy, does the old family friend act, see? He's a liberal feller. I hope he gets her."

This bit of information gave me food for thought. I thought it explained my intuitive dislike of Mount. The thought of that old fellow presuming to court the exquisite Irma made me hot under the collar.

I went to the store of Roberts, the manufacturer of artificial pearls. This place was as well-known in its way as Mount's, since Roberts had sued the Duke of Downshire and the public had learned that the pearls His Grace had presented to Miss Van Alstine on the occasion of their marriage were—phony. It also was a very fancy establishment but like its wares, on a much less expensive scale.

I fell in with a sociable and talkative young salesman, who at my request showed me a whole tray full of pearl necklaces. Among them I spotted another replica of Miss Hamerton's beautiful string.

"What's this?" I asked carelessly.

"Blue pearls," he rattled off. "Latest smart novelty. A hit. Mrs. Minturn Vesey had one sent up only yesterday. She wore it to the opera last night."

"There isn't such a thing really as a blue pearl, is there?" I asked idly.

"Certainly. These are copies of genuine stones like all our stock. Some time ago a customer sent in the real necklace to have it copied, like they all do. This was such a novelty Mr. Roberts had a pattern made and put them on sale. It's a winner!"

"I wouldn't want a thing everybody had bought," I said.

"I don't mean everybody," he said. "But just a few of the very smartest. It's too expensive for everybody. Seven hundred and fifty. The original is priceless."

"How many have you sold?"

"About ten."

"Who else bought them?"

He reeled off a string of fashionable names.

"That's only six."

"The others were sold over the counter."

The affable youngster was a little aggrieved when I left without buying.

Mr. Mount was both surprised and deeply chagrined when I told him that exact replicas of Miss Hamerton's pearls were to be had at Roberts' by anybody with the price. He didn't see how he could stop it either. It appeared there was a standing feud between Roberts and the fashionable jewellers, in which Roberts had somewhat the advantage because the regular trade was obliged to employ him. No one else could make such artificial pearls.

With Mr. Mount's assistance I had the sales of the replicas quietly traced. Nothing resulted from this. All but two of the sales were to persons above suspicion. These two had been sold over the counter, one to a man, one to a woman, and as the transactions were over two months old, I could not get a working description of the buyers.

On another occasion I went into Dunsany's, the largest and best-known jewelry store in America, if not in the

world, and asked to see some one who could give me some information about pearls. I was steered up to a large, pale gentleman wearing glasses, very elegantly dressed, of course. I put on my most youthful and engaging manner. I heard him addressed as Mr. Freer.

"Look here," I said, "I expect you'll want to have me thrown out for bothering you, but I'm in a hole."

My smile disarmed him. "What can I do for you?" he asked impressively.

"I'm a fiction writer," I said. "I'm writing a story about blue pearls, and somebody told me there was no such thing. Was he right?"

"Sometimes the black pearl has a bluish light in it," said Mr. Freer. "But it would take an expert to distinguish it. Such pearls are called blue pearls in the trade."

"I suppose you haven't got one you could show me?" I said.

He shook his head. "They rarely come into the market. There is only one place in New York where they may be found."

"And that is?"

"Mount's. Mr. Alfred Mount has a hobby for collecting them. Naturally when a blue pearl appears it is generally offered first to him. You'd better go to see him. He knows more about blue pearls than any man in the world."

"One more question?" I said cajolingly, "in my story I have to imagine the existence of a necklace of sixty-seven blue pearls ranging in size from a currant down to a pea, all perfectly matched, perfect in form and lustre. If there was such a thing what would it be worth?"

When I described the necklace I received a mild shock, for the pale eyes of the man who was watching me suddenly contracted like a frightened animal's. The muscles of his large pale face never moved, but I saw the eyes bolt. He smiled stiffly.

"I couldn't say," he said. "Its value would be fabulous."

"But give me some idea," I said, "just for the sake of the story."

He moistened his lips. "Oh, say half a million," he said. "It would not be too much."

I swallowed my astonishment, and thanked him, and made my way out.

Here was more food for cogitation. Why should a few idle questions throw the pearl expert at Dunsany's into such visible agitation? I had to give it up. Perhaps it was a twinge of indigestion or a troublesome corn. Anyhow I lost sight of it in the greater discovery. Half a million for the necklace, and Miss Hamerton had told me that buying it pearl by pearl it had cost her little more than twenty-five thousand!

Meanwhile there was an idea going through my head that I had not quite nerve enough to open to my client. It must be remembered that though I was making strides, I was still green at my business. I was not nearly so sure of myself as my manner might have led you to suppose. To my great joy Miss Hamerton herself broached the subject.

One afternoon she said, apropos of nothing that had gone before: "I'm sorry now that I introduced you to my friends. Though I do not see how I could have seen you without their knowing it."

"Why sorry?" I asked.

She went on with charming diffidence—how was one to resist her when she pleaded with an humble air: "I have thought—if it would not tie you down too closely—that you might take a minor rôle in my company."

My heart leaped—but of course I was not going to betray my eagerness if I could help it.

"As to your friends having seen me," I said, "that doesn't make any difference. Disguise is part of my business."

"Then will you?" she eagerly asked.

I made believe to consider it doubtfully. "It would tie me down!" I said.

"Oh, I hope you can arrange it!" she said.

"Could it be managed without exciting comment in the company?"

"Easily. I have thought it all out. I have an assistant stage manager who plays a small part. By increasing his duties behind, I can in a perfectly natural way make it necessary to engage somebody to play his bit. I shall not appear in the matter."

"I have had no experience," I objected.

"I will coach you."

Could I resist that?

"It would be better to put in an operative."

"Oh, no! No one but you!"

"Well, I'll manage it somehow," I said.

She sighed with relief, and started that moment to coach me.

"You are a thug, a desperate character. You appear in only one scene, a cellar dimly lighted, so you will not be conspicuous from in front. You must practise speaking in a throaty, husky growl."

In order to prolong the delightful lessons I made out to be a little stupider than I was.

I was engaged the next day but one through a well-known theatrical agent where Miss Hamerton had instructed me to apply for a job. Just how she contrived it I can't say, but I know I came into the company without anybody suspecting that it was upon the star's recommendation. In the theatre, of course, she ignored me.

Two nights later I made my debut. Mine was such a very small part no one in the company paid any attention to me, but for me it was a big occasion, I can tell you. In the way of business I have faced death on several occasions with a quieter heart than I had upon first marching out into view of that thousand-headed creature across the footlights. With the usual egotism of the amateur I was sure they were all waiting to guy me. But they didn't. I spoke my half dozen lines without disaster. I felt as if the real me was sitting up in the flies watching his body act down below. Indeed, I could write several chapters upon my sensations that night, but as somebody else has said, that is another story.

What is more important is the discovery of my first piece of evidence.

At the end of the performance I was crossing the quiet stage on my way out of the theatre, when I saw a group of stage-hands and some of the minor members of the company by the stage-door with their heads together over a piece of paper. I joined the group, taking care not to bring myself forward. Another happened along, and he asked for me:

"What's the matter?"

Richards answered: "McArdle here found a piece of paper on the stage with funny writing on it. It's a mystery like."

"Let's have a squint at it," said the newcomer.

I looked over his shoulder. It was a single sheet of cheap note-paper of the style they call "dimity." It had evidently been torn from a pad. It seemed to be the last of several sheets of a letter, and it was written in a cryptogram which made my mouth water. I may say that I have a passion for this kind of a puzzle. I give it as I first saw it:

&FQZZDRR CV REW RIPN PFRBQ AT HXV
DGGZT EP FOBQ IVTCVMXK SJQ TZXD EA
TJTI ZK.

S CEDBBWYB SWOCNA VMD Y&F GC AVSNY
NCA &MW&M&L. HZF EDM HYW ZUM IKQ
BSCOAIQVV ZXK FJOP WOD. KWX DWVXJ.
LEE FVTHV G&HJT LSZAND EBCC BFKY NCAFP
VEDFSF. BSQ ZWVXJ YXM II PL GC DCR FPBV
EA&BO ULS RLZQ WB NELJ KZNEDLKDUAA.
CSQVE VDEV-FBACP! S'WX OS QQT B EHHZXV.

J.

I had no proof on beholding this meaningless assortment of letters that it had anything to do with my case, but I had a hunch. The question was how to get possession of it without showing my hand. I kept silent for a while, and let the discussion rage as to the proper way to translate it.

My excitable friend McArdle (who did not know me, of course, in my present character), naturally as the finder of the paper took a leading part in the discussion. The principals of the company had not yet emerged from their dressing-rooms. My opportunity came when McArdle stated in his positive way that it was a code, and that it was not possible to translate it without having the code-book.

"A code is generally regular words," I suggested mildly, as became the newest and humblest member of the company. "Nobody would ever think up these crazy combinations of letters. I should say it was a cryptogram."

McArdle wouldn't acknowledge that he didn't know what a cryptogram was, but somebody else asked.

"Substituting one letter for another according to a numerical key," I said. "Easy enough to translate it if you can hit on the key."

One thing led to another and soon came the inevitable challenge.

"Bet you a dollar you can't read it!" cried McArdle.

I hung back until the whole crowd joined him in taunting me.

"Put up or shut up!" cried McArdle.

The upshot was that we each deposited a dollar with old Tom the door-keeper, and I took the paper home.

It was the most ingenious and difficult cryptogram I ever tackled. The sun was up before I got it. It was a richer prize than I had hoped for. Here it is:

"disposed of and your share of the money is here whenever you want to get it.

I strongly advise you not to leave the company. You say she has not discovered her loss. All right. But these phony pearls soon lose their lustre. She might get on to it the same night you hand in your resignation. Then good-night. I'll be back Monday. J."*

* For the benefit of those of curious minds I will give the key to the cryptogram. The simplest form of this kind of puzzle is that in which every letter has a certain other letter to stand for it. It may be the one before it, the one after it, or a purely arbitrary substitution. In any case the same letter always has the same alias. That is child's play to solve. I soon discovered that I was faced by something more complex. Observe that in one place "night" appears as EA&BO, whereas in the next line it is FBACP. "Company" masqueraded in this extraordinary form: &MW&M&L. Here was a jawbreaker! To make a long story short I discovered after hundreds of experiments that the first letter of the first word of each sentence was ten letters in advance of the one set down; the second letter eleven letters ahead, and so on up to twenty-five, then begin over from ten. With each sentence however short the writer began afresh from ten. He added to the complications by including the character & as the twenty-seventh letter of the alphabet. The fragmentary sentence at the top of the page held me up for a long time until I discovered that the first letter was twenty-three numbers in advance of the right one. Several mistakes on the part of the writer added to my difficulties.

5

In my experience I have found in adopting a disguise that it is no less important to change the character than the personal appearance. As the new member of Miss Hamerton's company I called myself William Faxon. I appeared as a shabby, genteel little fellow with lanky hair and glasses. The glasses were removed only when I went on the stage in the dark scene. On top of my bald spot I wore a kind of transformation that my friend Oscar Nilson furnished. It combed into my own hair, was sprinkled with grey and made me look like a man on the shady side of forty somewhat in need of a barber. The character I assumed was that of a gentle, friendly little party who agreed with everybody. The people of the company mostly despised me and made me a receptacle for their egotistical outpourings. They little guessed how they bored me.

When I joined the company it had been agreed between Miss Hamerton and I that thereafter she had better come to the office to hear my reports. It was her custom to call nearly every afternoon about five. She insisted on hearing every detail of my activities, and listened to the story from day to day with the same anxious interest.

Since she had first broken out in my presence she seemed not to mind to show her feelings to me. Indeed I guessed that it was a kind of relief to the high-strung woman who was always in the limelight, to let herself go a little. Her implied confidence was very gratifying to me. She never gave me the key to her anxiety in so many words, but by this time I was beginning to guess the explanation, as I suppose you are, too.

When I had deciphered the cryptogram I went to bed in high satisfaction. I knew then that I was on the right track. The man (or woman) I was after was in Miss Hamerton's company. I slept until afternoon. Miss Hamerton had expected not to come that day so I called her up to say I had news. She said she couldn't come, but the coast was clear, and could I come to her?

I found her pale and distraut. "Not bad news?" she asked apprehensively. "I'm not equal to it!"

"But how do I know what is bad and good to you?" I objected.

She ignored the complaint.

When I explained the circumstances of the finding of the cryptogram, and showed her my translation I received another surprise. A sigh escaped her; an expression of beatific relief and gladness came into her face. The roses returned to her cheeks. She jumped up.

"You're a welcome messenger!" she cried. "Oh, I'm happy now! I won't worry any more! I know!"

I suppose I looked blank. She laughed at me. "Don't mind me!" she begged. "You're on the right track! You'll

soon know everything!"

She moved around the room humming to herself like a happy girl. She buried her face in a bowl of roses and caressed them tenderly. "If I knew who had sent them," I thought, "perhaps it would give me a clue." But what had the cryptogram to do with it?

Suddenly to my surprise she said: "Stay and have dinner with me here, Mr. Enderby. I was going to a party, but I will send regrets. I don't want to be with any of them! I'm so happy! I would either have to hide it, or explain it. I want to be myself for a while."

I did not require much persuasion. It was like dining in Fairyland! By tacit consent we avoided any reference to the case. I shall never forget that hour as long as I live. We were alone, for the unpleasant Mrs. Bleecker thinking that Miss Hamerton was dining out, had gone off to some friends of hers.

Afterwards I went home to disguise myself, and then proceeded to the theatre. I had already photographed the cryptogram, and put the negative in my safe. McArdle was lying in wait for me, and I allowed him to drag it out of me, that I had not been able to translate it. He collected the stakes in high glee.

The paper was passed from hand to hand until it literally fell to pieces. No one could make anything of it of course. I encouraged the talk and helped circulate the paper, and watched from behind my innocent pieces of window-glass for some one to betray himself. But I saw nothing. The conviction was forced on me that I had a mighty clever one to deal with.

During my long waits I loitered from dressing-room to dressing-room, and let them talk. As opportunities presented themselves I quietly searched for the first page of that letter, though I supposed it had been destroyed.

Eighteen actors and actresses and a working force of six comprised the field of my explorations. However, the fact that punctuation played a part in the cryptogram, not to speak of the choice of words, convinced me that both the writer and reader of it must be persons of a certain education, so I eliminated the illiterates. This reduced me at one stroke to five men and four women. Of these two of the men were obviously too silly and vain to have carried out such a nifty piece of work, while one of the women was a dear old lady who had been on the stage for half a century, and another was a bit of dandelion fluff. These exclusions left me with five, to wit: Roland Quarles, George Casanova, Kenton Milbourne, Beulah Maddox and Mary Gray.

Roland Quarles I have already mentioned. Both he and Casanova were actors of established reputations who had been in receipt of handsome salaries for some seasons. I scarcely considered them. Milbourne was my dark horse. He was a hatchet-faced individual, homely, uninteresting, unhealthy-looking. His fancy name sat on him strangely. He looked like a John Doe or a Joe Williams. Miss Maddox was a large woman of the gushing-hysterical type; Miss Gray a quiet well-bred girl who kept to herself.

While I concentrated on those named, I did not, however, overlook the doings of the others. With all the men I was soon on excellent terms but the women baffled me. Women naturally despise a man of the kind I made out to be. You can't win a woman's confidence without making love to her, and that was out of my line.

On Thursday night of the week after I joined, Miss Beauchamp, who played a maid's part, spoiled a scene of Miss Hamerton's by missing her cue. It was not the first offense, and she was fired on the spot. This girl was the bit of fluff I have mentioned. The occasion suggested an opportunity to me. There was no time to be lost so I went to Miss Hamerton at once. In my humble, shabby character I meekly bespoke the part for a "friend." Miss Hamerton was startled. She said she would consider it.

I had no sooner got home that night than she called me up to ask what I had meant. I did not want to argue with her over the telephone, so I asked her to see me next morning. She said she would come to my office as soon as she had breakfasted.

Using all my powers of persuasion it took me more than an hour to win her consent to my putting a woman operative in the vacant part. Not only did I have to have a woman in the company, I told her, but I needed an assistant outside. Not by working twenty-four hours a day could I track down all the clues that opened up. She

would never have given in, I believe, had it not been for the mysterious comfort she had found in the cryptogram.

The rehearsal was called for three and I had barely time to get hold of my girl.

This brings me to Sadie Farrell, a very important character in my story.

I had been keeping company with her for a short while. At least I considered that I did, though she denied it. She scorned me. That was her way. Sadie had always lived at home. Her father and mother were dead now, and she lived with her sister. Like all home girls she was crazy to see a bit of life. Her heart was set on being a high-class detective. That was the only hold I had over her. I had promised her that the first time I had occasion to engage a woman operative, I would take her.

Moreover, Sadie was full of curiosity concerning Miss Hamerton, whose praises I was always singing. She was never jealous though. Sadie had a wise little head, and she knew the difference between the feeling I had for that wonderful woman, and for her darling self.

Sadie was at home when I got there. "What, *you!*" she said, making out to be bored to death. "I thought I was going to have a peaceful afternoon."

I couldn't resist teasing her a little. "Cheer up," I said. "I'm going right away again. I thought maybe you'd like to come out with me."

"On a week day!" she said scornfully. "Run along with you, man, I've got something better to do."

"I bet I can make you come," I said.

She tossed her head. "You know very well you can't make me do anything."

"I bet you a dollar I can make you come."

She smelled a mouse. "What are you getting at?" she demanded.

"I wanted to take you to the theatre."

"It's too late for a matinee."

"How about a rehearsal?"

Her eyes sparkled. "A rehearsal! Wouldn't that be wonderful! Oh, you're only fooling me."

"Not at all," I said, "Miss Hamerton herself invited you."

"Miss Hamerton! Shall I see her?"

"Sure. And what's more, you are the person to be rehearsed."

She simply stared at me.

"She offers you a small part in her company," I drawled.

"*Me!*" said the amazed Sadie. "Why—how—how did it happen?"

"Well you see, I have come to the point where I need an operative in the company, and I got her to take you."

"When is it?" she gasped.

"Three o'clock," I said. It was then twenty minutes to.

Sadie rushed to me and gave my arms a little squeeze. "Oh, Ben, you darling fool!" she cried, and ran for her

hat before I could follow up my advantage.

On the way down town I coached her in what she must do. She mustn't let it be suspected that she had never acted before. She must tell the stage manager she had been sent by Mrs. Mendoza, the agent. She must ask forty dollars a week and come down to thirty. She must make out that the part was much inferior to those she had been playing. After the rehearsal she was to come to my office, where Miss Hamerton would meet us, and give her a lesson in making up.

Sadie simply nodded her wise little head like a bird and said nothing. Only at the prospect of receiving instruction from the wonderful Irma Hamerton herself, did her eyes gleam again. I didn't have time then to tell her what she had to know about the case. I let her get out at the station nearest the theatre, while I went on to my office. It was safer, of course, for me not to appear at the rehearsal as Sadie's sponsor.

I had no doubt of Sadie's acquitting herself creditably. If I had had, no matter what my personal feelings were, I would not have employed her in this case. But she was as wise as she was pretty. Under those scornful airs she was as true as steel, and she had the rare faculty of keeping a close tongue in her head.

Sadie had a sort of Frenchy look, long, narrow eyes and pointed chin. This just happened to suit the part of the maid in the play. If I had looked a month I could not have found a better girl, not to speak of the pleasure I anticipated in working side by side with my own girl. Moreover, I was hoping by my conduct of the case to force Sadie to admit that I was not quite such a bonehead as she liked to make out.

Everything went off as planned. Sadie I heard, made a good impression at rehearsal, and at a nod from Miss Hamerton, the stage manager engaged her. Miss Hamerton told me afterwards that Sadie went through the rehearsal like an old stager. They arrived at my office separately, and the lesson in making up was given. Miss Hamerton laid herself out to be kind to Sadie. I think she scented a romance. Anyhow, inside five minutes Sadie was hers body and soul. Like me, she would have stopped at nothing to serve her.

After that I told Sadie all the facts in the case. In her woman's way of reasoning she arrived at the same conclusion that I had reached after my style.

"It's the work of a clever gang," she said. "They have put a member, perhaps more than one in the company."

"But what a lot of trouble to take," I objected, "since the necklace was not known to be of any great value."

"Somebody knew."

"If they knew about blue pearls they must also have known that Mount was the only buyer."

"Maybe they were shipped to India," she said. "I suspect that East Indians have forgotten more about pearls than Mr. Mount ever knew."

The very first time she appeared on the stage, Sadie justified my confidence in her powers. Notwithstanding the excitement of making her debut, she managed to keep her wits about her. Women are wonderful that way. During her only scene on the stage she had to wait at one side for a few minutes. While she stood there close to the canvas scene she heard a bit of a conversation on the other side of it. Unfortunately she had not been in the company long enough to recognise the voices.

A man said. "Yes, sir, forty thousand dollars."

"Go way!" was the reply. "How do you know?"

"I saw it entered in his bank book. I was in his dressing-room, and I saw it on the table. When he went out I looked in it out of curiosity. He deposited forty thousand dollars last week."

"Where do you suppose he got it?"

"Search me."

"Some fellows have all the luck, don't they?"

Then the voices passed out of hearing.

6

I have not mentioned Mr. Alfred Mount lately though I saw him often on matters connected with the case. He was an interesting character. It was only by degrees that I realised what an extraordinary man I had to deal with. After our first meeting his manner towards me completely changed. He appeared to be sorry for his brusqueness on that occasion. Now he was all frankness and friendliness. Nothing crude, you understand, just the air of one man of the world towards another. I could not help but feel flattered by it.

While we worked together so amicably the mutual antagonism remained. I knew he still resented Miss Hamerton's having employed me without consulting him, and I believed that he was working independently. For my part, you may be sure, I told him nothing but what I had to. I found no little pleasure in blocking his subtle questioning by my air of clumsy innocence. I told him nothing about the cryptogram.

I never called at his office again. Sometimes he dropped into mine, his bright eyes wandering all around, but more often I called on him at his apartment over the store. For he occupied the second floor of the beautiful little building which housed his business. There was however nothing of the old-fashioned shop-keeper about his place. I never saw such splendour before or since. But it took you a while to realise that it was splendour, for there was nothing showy or garish. Everything he possessed was the choicest of its kind in the world. Even with my limited knowledge, when I stopped to figure up the value of what I saw, I was staggered. I saw enough at different times to furnish several millionaires.

Mount had a strange love for his treasures in which there was nothing of the usual self-glorification of millionaires. He had a modest, almost a tender, way of referring to his things, of handling them. I learned quite a lot about tapestries, rugs, Chinese porcelains, enamels, ivories and gold workmanship from his talk. He did not care for paintings.

"Too insistent," he said. "Paintings will not merge."

The man was full of queer sayings, which he would drawl out with an eye to the effect he was creating on you.

He never allowed daylight to penetrate to his principal room, a great hall two stories high, lined with priceless tapestries.

"Daylight is rude and unmanageable," he said. "Artificial light I can order to suit my mood."

Another odd thing was his antipathy to red. That colour almost never appeared in his treasures. In the tapestries greens predominated; the rugs were mostly old blues and yellows. The great room never looked quite the same. Sometimes it was completely metamorphosed over night. I understood from something he let fall that the other floors of the building were stored with his treasures. He had them brought down and arranged according to his fancy. The only servant ever visible was a silent Hindoo, who sometimes appeared in gorgeous Eastern costume, encrusted with jewels. It occurred to me that that was how his master ought to dress. The sober clothes of a business man, however elegant, were out of place on Mount. Long afterwards I learned that it was his custom when alone to array himself like an Eastern potentate, but I never saw him dressed that way.

One day, to see what he would say, I asked him point blank what was the value of Miss Hamerton's lost pearls.

He consulted a note-book. "She paid me at different times exactly twenty-five thousand, seven hundred for them."

"I know," I said quietly. "But what was their value?"

He bored me through and through with his jetty eyes before answering. Finally he smiled—he had a charming smile when he chose, and spread out his hands in token of surrender. His hands were too white and beautiful for a man's.

"I see you know the truth," he said. "Well—I am in your hands. I hope you will keep the secret. Only a great deal of unhappiness could result from its becoming known."

"I shall not tell," I said. "But how much are they worth."

"I really couldn't say," he said frankly. "There is nothing like them in the world, nothing to measure them by, I mean. It would depend simply on how far the purchaser could go."

"Wouldn't they be difficult to dispose of?"

"Very. That is our hope in the present situation."

"Do you suppose the thief knew what he was getting?"

"I doubt it. To distinguish the blue cast is a fad of my own. They ordinarily go with the black pearls."

Later he returned to the subject of his own accord. "Since you have learned or guessed so much, I should tell you the whole story, for fear you might have a doubt of Miss Hamerton."

"No danger of that," I said quickly.

He looked at me strangely. I suppose he was wondering if I presumed to rival him there. He immediately went on smoothly:

"She, of course, has no suspicion of the true value of the pearls. Nor does she guess that they were in my possession for years. I let her have them one or two at a time. Do you blame me—" he spread out his expressive hands again.

"They are the most beautiful pearls in all the world," he murmured softly, "the fruit of all my knowledge and my patience. Pearls in a case are not pearls. Only when they lie on the warm bosom of a woman are pearls really pearls. I wished to have the pleasure of seeing Irma—Miss Hamerton wearing them. I could not give them to her. So I devised this innocent deception. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

Maybe I would. Anyhow I didn't feel called upon to argue the matter with him, so I kept my mouth shut.

His long eyes narrowed. "If you had seen her wear the real pearls you would understand better," he said dreamily. "They glowed as if with pleasure in their situation. Her skin is so tender that the veins give it a delicate bluish cast exactly matched by my exquisite pearls!"

To me there was something—what would you say, something delicately indecent in the way Mount spoke of Miss Hamerton. It made me indignant deep down. But I said nothing.

"I am a fool about precious stones," he went on with that disarming smile. "No shop-keeper has any right to indulge in a personal passion for his wares. Pearls come first with me, then diamonds. Would you like to see my diamonds?"

Without waiting for any answer he disappeared into the next room. I heard the ring of a burglar-proof lock. Presently he returned bearing a little black velvet cushion on which lay a necklet of gleaming fire.

"I am no miser," he said smiling. "Quantity does not appeal to me, nor mere bigness. Only quality. This is my whole collection, seventy-two stones, the result of thirty years' search for perfection."

I gazed at the fiery spots speechlessly. Before taking this case I had never thought much of precious stones. They had seemed like pretty things to me, and useless. But upon looking at these I could understand Miss Hamerton's reference to her pearls as living things. These diamonds were alive—devilishly alive. They twinkled up at Mount like complaisant little slaves outvying each other to flatter their master. The sheer beauty of them caught at the breast. Their fire bit into a man's soul. Seeing it, I could understand the ancient lusts to rob and murder for bits of stone like these.

"Aren't they lovely?" Mount murmured.

"Yes, like a snake," I blurted out.

He laughed. "That feeling seems strange to me. I love them."

"Put them away!" I said.

He continued to laugh. He caressed the diamonds with his long, white fingers. "Wouldn't you like to see Miss Hamerton wear them?" he asked softly.

"No, by God!" I cried. "She's a good woman."

He laughed more than ever. It was a kind of Oriental laugh, soft, unwholesome. "I'm afraid you suffer from the Puritan confusion of the ideas of beauty and evil," he said.

"Maybe I do," I said shortly.

"Some other time I will show you my emeralds and sapphires," he said.

I hated the things, yet I was eager to see them. That shows the effect they had on you. I was struck by his omission of rubies.

"How about rubies?" I asked.

He shivered. "I do not care for rubies. They are an ugly color."

I welcomed the chill, raw air of the street after that scented chamber. After the elegant collector of jewels my crude and commonplace fellow-citizens seemed all that was honest and sturdy. I was proud of them. Yet I enjoyed going to Mount's rooms, too. One could count on being thrilled one way or another.

7

As time went on I dismissed the women of the company from my calculations—though I still kept an eye on them through Sadie. Of the men I had most to do with two, Roland Quarles and Kenton Milbourne, the first because I liked him, and the second because I didn't.

Though I had no evidence against him, the idea that Milbourne was the thief had little by little fixed itself in my mind. It was largely a process of elimination. All the others had proved to my satisfaction one way or another that they couldn't have committed the robbery. With the exception of Quarles, none of them had the brains to conceive of such a plan, or to hide it afterwards. I didn't know if Milbourne had the brains, indeed the more I went with him the less I knew. Yet he did not seem to have a guard over himself. I laid several ingenious little traps to get a sight of his bank-book, but did not succeed in finding out even if he possessed such a thing.

Milbourne was a pasty, hatchet-faced individual, very precise and conscientious in his manner, and exceedingly talkative. That was what put me off. He talked all the time, but I learned nothing from it. With his sharp, foxy features and narrow-set eyes he had the look of a crook right enough, but after all looks are not so important as

disposition, and this heavy, dull-witted, verbose fellow was the epitome of respectability. He was not at all popular in the company, principally, I fancy, because of his over-nicety. He bragged of the number of baths he took. He was not "a good fellow." He never joked nor carried on with the crowd. In the play he took the part of a brutal thug, a sort of Bill Sykes, and played it well though there was nothing in his appearance to suggest the part. He was the fox, not the bull-dog. Imagine a man with the appearance of a fox and the voice of a sheep and you have Milbourne.

Shortly after I joined the company I was allotted to share his dressing-room. He told me that he had requested the stage-manager to make the change, because he objected to the personal habits of his former roommate. So I had every opportunity to observe him. A lot of good it did me. He talked me to sleep. He would recite all the news of the day which I had just read for myself, and commented on it like a country newspaper. You couldn't stop him.

Roland Quarles I cultivated for a different reason. I did not suspect him. As a popular leading juvenile his life for years had been lived in the public eye and there was no reason in the world save pure cussedness why he should be a thief. I liked him. I was working hard, but one can't be a detective every waking minute. I sought out Roland to forget my work. I had started disinterestedly with the whole company, but I gradually came to feel an affection for Roland, principally because, much to my surprise, he seemed to like me.

I have said he was a morose young man. Such was my first impression. He did not make friends easily. He was hated by all the men of the company, because he despised their foolish conceit, and took no pains to hide it. But the women liked him, I may say all women were attracted to him. He did not plume himself on this, it was a matter of great embarrassment to him. He avoided them no less than the men.

He was exceedingly good-looking and graceful, and there was not the slightest consciousness of it in his bearing. In that among young actors he stood alone. He had a sort of proud, reserved, bitter air, or as a novelist would say, he seemed to cherish a secret sorrow. His mail at the theatre was enormous. He used to stuff it in his pocket without looking at it.

I got my first insight into his character from his treatment of me. Of the entire company he and Milbourne were the only members who never made my meek insignificance a target for unkind wit. Of them all only this high and mighty young man never tried to make me feel my insignificance. For a while he ignored me, but it seemed to strike him at last that I was being put upon by the others, whereupon in an unassuming way he began to make little overtures of friendship. I was charmed.

One night after the show he offered me a cigar at the stage door, and we walked down the street smoking and chatting until our ways parted. He was not on during the second act, and after my brief scene I got in the habit of stopping a while in his room before I went up to change. He had good sense. It was worth while talking to him. We became very friendly. He was only a year or two younger than I, but to me he seemed like a mere kid.

One night in the middle of our talk he said: "You're not like an actor. You're human."

"Don't you like actors?" I asked curiously.

"It's a rotten business for men," he said bitterly. "It unsexes them. But here I am! What am I to do about it?"

I learned as I knew him better that the popular young actor, notwithstanding the adulation of women—or perhaps because of it, led an exemplary life. The dazzling palaces of the Great White Way knew him not. It was his custom to go home after the show, have a bite to eat in solitude, and read until he turned in.

One night he invited me to accompany him home. He had a modest flat in the Gramercy Square neighbourhood with an adoring old woman to look after him. The cheerful fire, the shaded lamp, the capacious easy chair, gave me a new conception of bachelor comfort. Books were a feature of the place.

"Pretty snug, eh?" he said, following my admiring eyes.

"Well, you're not like an actor either," said I.

He laughed. "After the theatre this is like Heaven!"

"Why don't you chuck it?" I asked. "You're young."

He shrugged. "Who wants to give an actor a regular job?"

We had scrambled eggs and sausages. I stayed for a couple of hours talking about the abstract questions that young men loved to discuss. When I left he was as much of an enigma to me as when I arrived. He was willing to talk about anything under the sun—except himself. Without appearing to, he foiled all my attempts to draw him out.

Hard upon this growing friendship it was a shock to learn from Sadie as a result of her work during the days, that it was Roland Quarles who had deposited forty thousand dollars in his bank.

"Impossible!" I said in my first surprise.

"I got it direct from the bank," she said. "It was the Second National. He deposited forty thousand in cash on April Sixth."

My heart sunk.

"But that doesn't prove that he stole the pearls," said Sadie. She shared my liking for the young fellow.

"I hope not," I said gloomily. "But if it wasn't he then our promising clue is no good."

"Maybe he won it on the Stock Exchange."

"That doesn't explain the cash. No broker pays in cash."

"Well I can think of ten good reasons why he couldn't have done it," Sadie said obstinately. She had too warm a heart, perhaps, to make an ideal investigator.

That night Roland asked me home to supper again. This was about a week after the first occasion. The old woman had gone to bed and he cooked creamed oysters in a chafing-dish, while I looked at the paper.

"Wouldn't it be nice to have white hands waiting at home to do that for you?" I suggested teasingly.

"Never for me!" he said with a bitter smile.

"Why not?"

"What I can have I don't want. What I want I can never have."

"You never can tell," I said encouragingly. I was thinking what a superb couple the handsome young pair made on the stage. It seemed low to cross-examine him while he was preparing to feed me, but there was no help for it.

"The market is off again," I said carelessly. "Chance for somebody to make money."

"How can you make money when the market is going down," he said innocently.

If the innocence was assumed it was mighty well done. However, I told myself his business was acting.

"By selling short," I said.

"I never understood that operation."

I explained it.

"Too complicated for me," he said. "I consider the whole business immoral."

I agreed, and switched to talk of solid, permanent investments. He immediately looked interested.

"You seem to know something about such matters," he said. "Suppose a man had a little money to invest, what would you advise?"

"Your savings?" I asked with a smile.

"Lord! I couldn't save anything. No, I have a friend who has a few thousand surplus."

Being anxious to believe well of him I snatched at this straw. Maybe a friend had entrusted him with money to invest. Hardly likely though, and still more unlikely that it would be handed over in cash. I gave him some good advice, and the subject was dropped.

Later we got to talking about acting again. He said in his bitter way:

"I shall soon be out of it now, one way or the other."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean to leave the stage at the close of this engagement or before."

"What are you going to do?"

"God knows!" he said with his laugh. "Go to the devil, I expect."

I couldn't get anything else out of him. It was all mysterious enough. He sounded utterly reckless when you got below the surface, but somehow it was not the recklessness of a crook.

Worse was to follow.

First, however, I must put down how the situation stood with Milbourne, because I shall not return to him for some time. Kenton Milbourne! I have to smile every time I write it, the fancy appellation was so unsuitable to the tallow-cheeked, hatchet-faced talker who bore it. I believed Milbourne had stolen the pearls, and I worked hard to justify my belief, but without being able to lay anything bare against him.

Every night he talked me to a standstill. He seemed to be a man totally devoid of individuality, temperament, a mere windbag. But I told myself that dullness is the favourite and most effective disguise of a sharper. His talk was a little too dull to be natural, and once in a while I received an impression that he was anything but dull.

One night I said to him as Roland had said to me: "You don't seem like an actor. How did you get into this business?"

"Drifted into it," he said. "Always knew I could act, but was too busy with other things. I had an attack of typhoid in Sydney four years ago which shattered my health. When I was getting better a friend gave me the part of a human monster to play, just to help me pass the time. I made a wonderful hit in it. They wouldn't let me stop. Since then I've never been idle. I haven't any conceit, so they offer me the horrible parts."

"Sydney?" I said.

"I was raised in Australia. I came to America last Fall because there was a wider field for my art."

I put this down in my mind as a lie. I do not know Australia but I suppose they have their own peculiarities of speech, and this man talked good New York.

I asked idly what parts he had played in Australia. He named three or four and I made careful mental notes of them. I thought I had him there.

The next day I consulted old files of an Australian stage paper in the rooms of the Actors' Society. To my chagrin I found his name, Kenton Milbourne listed in the casts of the very plays he had mentioned. I was far from being convinced of his genuineness, however. I wrote to Australia for further information.

Under cover of my meek and gentle air, I continued to watch him close. I could have sworn he was not aware of it, which shows how you may fool yourself. His apparent stupidity still blocked me. But one night when he lifted the tray of his trunk I saw the edge of a book underneath.

"Anything good to read?" I said, picking it up before he could stop me.

A peculiar look chased across his face, which was anything but stupidity. The title of the book was: "The World's Famous Jewels."

"Aha! my man!" I thought. I dropped it, saying: "That's not in my line."

This was how matters stood when things began to happen which drove all thought of Kenton Milbourne out of my mind.

The next day Sadie came into the office to report, looking so confoundedly pretty that it drove the detective business clean out of my mind for the moment. What with her thirty dollars a week from the theatre and her additional salary as operative (which Miss Hamerton insisted on her taking) Sadie was in affluent circumstances, and for the first time in her life she was able to dress as a pretty girl ought. With her Spring hat and suit, her dainty gloves and boots, all from the best shops, she was as smart a little lady as you'd find from one end of the Avenue to the other.

"You look sweet enough to eat!" I said, grinning at her like a Cheshire cat.

"Cut it out!" she said with her high and mighty air. "It's business hours. I'm operative S.F."

"What's that for, swell figure?"

"Wait till after the whistle blows."

"After hours you're Miss Covington the actress, and I'm not allowed to know you."

"Well, there's Sunday."

"But this is only Tuesday."

"I've got to respect my boss, haven't I?"

"What if I kissed you anyhow?"

"I'd box your ears!" she said quick as lightning.

And she would. I sighed, and came back to earth. It was not that I was afraid of the box on the ears, but she was right, and I knew it. As soon as I started that line of talk I resigned my proper place as the boss of the establishment.

"What's new?" I asked.

"I found out something interesting to-day," she said. "Miss Hamerton's in love with Roland Quarles."

"I guessed that long ago," I said calmly.

Sadie was much taken aback. Evidently she had expected to stun me. "You never said anything about it," she said pouting.

"I left it for you to find out for yourself."

"She never believed he had anything to do with the robbery," Sadie said with a touch of defiance.

"Then why was she so distressed in the beginning?"

"Well, there was something that would have looked like evidence to a man," said Sadie scornfully. "So naturally she didn't want to tell you."

"Did she tell you?" I asked, a little huffed at the thought that Sadie was getting deeper in the confidence of my client than I.

"Yes, to-day. She didn't tell me about her feelings, of course. I guessed that part."

"What is this mysterious thing?"

"She only told me because since she saw the cryptogram she knows there couldn't be anything in it."

This was getting denser instead of more clear. "What was there about the cryptogram that eased her mind?" I asked.

"She knows that it couldn't have been written to Roland Quarles because he has no idea of leaving the company."

"Oh, hasn't he!" I thought to myself. How strangely loving women reason. Aloud I said: "Now for the thing that a mere man would have considered evidence."

"Don't try to be sarcastic," said Sadie. "It doesn't suit you."

"Who's forgetting that I'm the boss now?" I said severely.

She made a face at me and went on: "It seems that Miss Hamerton and Roland Quarles had a bet on about the pearls."

This was something new. I pricked up my ears.

"She laughed at him because he thought he knew something about jewels, and she says he scarcely knows a pearl from an opal. They argued about it, and she finally bet him a box of cigars against a box of gloves that he wouldn't be able to tell when she wore the genuine pearls. That is how she came to wear them the night they were stolen."

"The devil!" I exclaimed.

"But he has never spoken about it since. She believes that he has forgotten all about the bet."

I walked up and down the room considering what this meant.

"You needn't look like that," said Sadie. "We know he didn't do it. Wouldn't he have paid his bet if he had?"

"It seems so," I said. I didn't know what to believe.

"There's another reason," said Sadie, "sufficient for a woman."

"What's that?"

"He's in love with her. He's making love to her now. He couldn't do that if he had robbed her."

"I don't know," I said grimly. "If he could rob her, I suspect he could make love to her."

That night at the theatre I devoted my attention pretty exclusively to Quarles. God knows I was not anxious to ruin the young fellow, but Sadie's communication taken in connection with the cryptogram and that mysterious cash deposit was beginning to look like pretty strong evidence. This being my first case, I attached more importance to "evidence" than I would now.

I was in his dressing-room when he left to go on for the third act. He had only a short scene at the beginning, and as he went out, he asked me to wait till he came off.

I watched him go with a sinking heart for I hated to do what I had to do. He was so handsome, so graceful, and with that burden on his breast, so invariably kind to me, I felt like a wretch. Nevertheless, I told myself for the sake of all of us I had to discover the painful secret he was hiding.

I knew exactly how long I had before he would return. I swung the door almost shut, as if the wind had blown it, and made a rapid, thorough search. There was a pile of letters on his dressing-table as yet unopened. Nothing suspicious there. Nothing in the drawers of his dressing-table. There was no trunk in the room. His street coat was on a form hanging from a hook. I frisked the pockets. There was a handful of letters, papers in the breast pocket. Shuffling them over I came upon a sheet of "dimity" note-paper without an envelope. Opening it I beheld a communication in cryptogram exactly like the other.

I could hear the voices on the stage. Roland was about to come off. I hastily returned all the papers to his pocket as I had found them,—except the cryptogram. That I put in my own pocket.

When he came in we picked up our conversation where we had dropped it.

As soon as I got home I made haste to translate my find. I had saved the numerical key I used before. I instantly found that it fitted this communication also. This is what I got:

"I. has known of her loss for a couple of weeks. She has put two detectives in the company. Faxon and the girl Covington. I have this straight. Watch yourself. J."

So this is why Quarles cultivated my friendship! I thought, feeling all the bitterness of finding myself betrayed. I could no longer doubt my evidence. My friendly feelings for the young fellow were curdled.

8

I woke up next morning with a leaden weight on my breast. I had no zest in the day which bore with it the necessity of telling Miss Hamerton what I had learned. I put off the evil moment as long as possible. During the morning Sadie came into the office for instructions. I had not the heart to tell her. I sent her over to Newark on a wild goose chase in connection with some of McArdle's activities.

I was not expecting Miss Hamerton that afternoon. At three I called her up and said that I had something important to report. She said she was expecting some one later, and did not want to go out. Could I come to her? This pleased me, for since I had to strike her down it was more merciful to do it at home. I went.

She had never looked lovelier. Her room was a bower of Spring flowers, and she in a pale yellow dress was like the fairest daffodil among them. She was full of happiness, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling. It did not make my task any easier. I angrily rebelled from it. But she was already asking me what was the matter.

I told her bunglingly enough, God knows, of the second cryptogram and where I had found it. It crushed her like a flower trodden underfoot.

Presently, however, she began to fight. "The first thing the thief would do when he found himself under surveillance," she faltered, "would be to try to divert your attention to some one else."

"He would hardly choose one ordinarily so far above suspicion as the leading man," I said reluctantly.

"He may have known, since he knows so much, that you were already suspicious of Ro—of the other." She could not get his name out.

I felt like the criminal myself, trying to convince her against her heart. "Taken by itself the letter would not be conclusive, but with the other things——"

"What other things?"

"Well, his provoking you by a bet to wear the genuine pearls."

"There's nothing in that," she said quickly. "If he had had an ulterior motive he would have spoken of the bet since. He would have lost it, wouldn't he, to keep us from suspecting?"

I conceded the reasonableness of this—taken by itself. "But his bank account?"

"Bank account?" she repeated, startled. We had not told her of this.

"On April sixth Mr. Quarles deposited forty thousand dollars in cash in the Second National Bank."

All the light went out of her face. "Oh! Are you sure?" she gasped.

"I have seen the entry in his pass-book. I verified it at the bank."

Her heart still fought for him. "But my necklace was worth only twenty-five thousand. And a thief would never be able to realise the full value of it."

I shrugged. Naturally I did not care to add to her unhappiness by telling her that the pearls were worth half a million. She thought from my shrug that I meant to convey that if her lover had been guilty of one theft why not others?

It crushed her anew. She had no more fight left in her. She sank back dead white and bereft of motion. "He's coming here," she whispered. "What shall I say to him? What shall I say?"

"Don't see him," I cried.

"I must. I promised."

I sat there, I don't know for how long, staring at the carpet like a clown.

The telephone rang and we both jumped as at a pistol shot.

I offered to answer it, but she waved me back. She went to the instrument falteringly—but I was surprised at the steadiness of her voice. "What is it?" she asked.

"Let him come up," she said firmly. By her stricken white face I knew who it was.

I jumped up in a kind of panic. "I will have myself carried up to the roof garden so I won't meet him," I said.

"No, *please*," she murmured. "I want you here."

"But he must not meet me!" I cried.

"Wait in the next room." Her voice broke piteously. "Oh, I must have some one here—some one I can trust!"

What was I to do? I obeyed very unwillingly. As soon as he entered I found that the transom over the door was open, and I could hear everything that passed between them. Of all the difficult things that have been forced on me in the way of business, that half hour's eavesdropping was as bad as any.

He must have been highly wrought up because he apparently never noticed her state. His very first speech was

tragically unfortunate. He spoke in a harsh strained voice as if the painful thing he had kept hidden so long was breaking out in spite of him.

"Irma, how soon can you replace me in the cast?"

"Eh?" she murmured. I could imagine the painful start she suppressed.

"I want to get out. I can't stand it any longer."

"But why?" she whispered.

"I hate acting! It is not a man's work."

"Have you just discovered it?" she asked with a little note of scorn very painful to hear.

"No," he said gloomily, "I've always known. If I had been left to myself I never would have acted. But I came of a family of actors. I was brought up to it. I kept on because it was all I knew. It is only since I have acted with you that it has become more than I can bear."

"Why, with me?" she whispered.

"Because I love you!" he said in a harsh, abrupt voice.

"Ah!" The sound was no more than a painful catch in her breath.

"Oh, you needn't tell me I'm a presumptuous fool," he burst out. "I know it already. You don't know the height of my presumption yet. I love you! The silly make-believe of love that I have to go through every night with you drives me mad! I love you! I am ashamed to make my living by exhibiting a pretence of love!"

"It was your father's profession and your mother's," she murmured.

"They were the real thing," he said gloomily. "They had a genuine call. They loved their work. I hark back to an earlier strain, I guess. I have no feeling for art to make it worth while. I hate the tinsel and show and make-believe. I want to lead a real life with you——!"

No man has any right to hear another man bare his heart like this. I went to the open window and leaned out. I had forgotten Roland's supposed guilt. My instinct told me that a guilty man could not have spoken like this.

Even on the window-sill though I tried not to hear, an occasional word reached me. We were so high up that little of the street noises reached us. Bye and bye I heard Roland say "money" and I was drawn back into the room. This, I felt, it was my business to hear.

He was still pleading with his heart in his voice. "A month ago I would just have left without saying anything to you. I don't even know that I am fit for anything else but acting. I could not ask you to give it up without having something else to offer you. I suffer so to see you on the stage. To see your name, your person, your doings all public property drives me wild! I cannot stand seeing you show your lovely self to the applause of those vulgar fools!"

"You are mad!" she whispered.

"I know—but I have had a stroke of luck——!"

"Luck?"

"I have come into some money. Oh, nothing much, but enough to give me a start in some new country—if you could come with me! Oh, I am a fool to think it. But I had to tell you I loved you. You would be quite justified in laughing, and showing me the door. But I love you! It seemed cowardly to go away without telling you."

"You are asking me to give up my profession?" she murmured unsteadily.

"I ask nothing. I expect nothing. But if you could—! You'd have to give it up. It would kill me otherwise. I could stand better having none of you than half." He laughed harshly. "Am I not ridiculous? Tell me to go."

"I am not so enamoured of make-believe either," she murmured.

She was weakening! I trembled for her. This wretched business had to be cleared up before they could hope for any happiness.

"If I loved you I could give it up," she whispered, "but I am not sure."

It was like a glimpse of Heaven to him. "Irma!" He cried her name over and over brokenly. "My dear love! Then there is a chance—I never expected—Oh! don't raise me up only to cast me down lower than before!"

I went to the window-sill again and leaned out.

There I was still when she came in. She was trembling and breathing fast.

"He has gone," she said.

She led me back into the outer room. She noticed that the transom was open. "You heard?" she said startled.

"Some," I said uncomfortably. "More than I wanted to."

"I don't care," she said.

"Have you promised to marry him?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I have promised nothing. I asked for time."

"Good!" I said involuntarily.

She looked at me startled. "You heard!" she said defiantly. "Were they the words of a guilty man?"

"Not if I know anything about human nature," I said promptly.

The sweetest gratitude lighted up her face. "Oh, thank you!" she said. She was very near tears. "Anything else would be unbelievable!"

"Give me one day more," I suggested.

"No! No!" she cried with surprising energy. "I will not carry this tragic farce any further. I hate the pearls now. I would not wear them if I did get them back. They are gone. Let them go!"

"But Miss Hamerton——" I persisted.

"Not another word!" she cried. "My mind is made up!"

"I must speak," I said doggedly. "Because you as much as said you depended on getting honest advice from me. You can't stop now. If you marry Mr. Quarles, the fact that you have suspected him though it was only for a moment will haunt you all your life. No marriage is a bed of roses. When trouble does come your grim spectre will invariably rise and mock you. It must be definitely laid in its grave before you can marry the man."

The bold style of my speech made her pause. I had never spoken to her in that way before. She eyed me frowning.

"I hope you know it's not the job I'm after," I went on. "I never had work to do that I enjoyed less. But you put it up to me to give you honest advice."

"I can't spy on the man I love," she faltered.

"You can't marry the man you suspect," I returned.

"I don't suspect him."

"The suspicious circumstances are not yet explained."

"Very well, then, I'll send for him to come back, and he will explain them."

I had a flash of insight into the character of my young friend. "No!" I cried. "If he knew that you had ever suspected him, he would never forgive you."

"Then what do you want me to do?" she cried.

"Give me twenty-four hours to produce proofs of his innocence."

She gave in with a gesture.

Leaving Miss Hamerton I walked twice around Bryant Square to put my thoughts in order. I wished to believe in Roland's innocence almost as ardently as she did, but I had to force myself to keep an open mind. A fixed idea one way or the other is fatal to any investigator. So I argued against him for a while to strike a balance. I told myself there was a type of man who would stop at absolutely nothing to secure the woman he desired. In the bottom of my heart, like anybody else, I had a sneaking admiration for the type.

True, I had never heard of a man robbing a woman in order to secure the means to support her. Still, human psychology is an amazing thing. You never can tell! I reminded myself of all the other times I had been brought face to face with the apparently impossible. Particularly is human nature ingenious in justifying itself.

I finally made up my mind to search Roland's apartment that night. On my previous visits I had marked a little safe there. Surely it must contain some conclusive evidence one way or the other. What I hoped to find was some natural and honest explanation of the sum of money he had received.

Around the theatre that night Roland and I were as friendly as usual. The shadow was somewhat lifted from his dark eyes. They burned with an expectant fire. An extraordinary restlessness possessed him. For all he said he hated it, that time anyway, he outdid himself in playing his rôle. As far as I could see, he and Irma held no communications outside the play.

In pursuance of the plan I had made, I insisted on his supping with me that night. I was free to leave the theatre after the second act, so I went on ahead to order the supper I said. He was to meet me at the Thespis club at half-past eleven. I did order the supper there, then hurried on to his flat, arriving some time before his customary hour of coming from the theatre.

His old housekeeper having seen me in his company on several occasions expressed no surprise at my coming. I said I would wait for him, and she left me to my own devices in the front room. I satisfied myself that she had gone to her own room on the other side of the kitchen, three doors away, then I set to work.

I had brought a bunch of skeleton keys and a set of miniature housebreaking tools. I didn't require them, for I found that the little safe had one of the earliest and simplest forms of a lock. Part of my apprenticeship had been spent in learning how to open such locks merely by listening to the fall of the tumblers as one turned the knob. All that was required was patience. It was a little after ten. Supposing that Roland waited for me at the Thespis club only half an hour, I had two hours in which to work. It was painfully exciting. I had my first glimpse of the point of view of a housebreaker.

The safe door swung open at last. I looked inside with a beating heart. It contained but little; a diary, which I left for the moment; a wallet containing a sum of money, a bundle of papers enclosed by an elastic band. I went over the papers hastily; they consisted of insurance policies, theatrical contracts and business letters of old dates which had nothing whatever to do with my case.

However, there was still a little locked drawer to investigate. After a number of tries I fixed a key that would open it. The first thing I saw was a number of pieces of men's jewelry that Roland doubtless used for stage properties. The second thing I saw was a beautiful little antique box made of some sweet-smelling wood which contained several notes in Irma's handwriting and some withered flowers. The third and last thing was a seal leather case such as jewellers display. Upon pressing the spring the cover flew back and I saw lying on a bed of white velvet a string of wonderful dusky pearls.

For many moments I gazed at them in stupid astonishment. God knows what I expected to find. Certainly not that. What did it mean? It looked just the same as the string Miss Hamerton had showed me. I counted them. There were sixty-seven pearls. Was it another of Roberts' replicas? Perhaps Roland had bought it and stowed it away for sentimental reasons. That seemed pretty far-fetched.

I carried it to the electric light. There I could see the blue cast like the last gleam of light in the twilight sky. The bits of stone had a wonderful fire, life. An instinct told me they were genuine pearls. But if they were it must be *the* string, for Mount had said there were no others. I remembered that Miss Hamerton had told me she had made a little scratch on the clasp and I eagerly looked for it. There was a kind of mark there. At this point I shook my head and gave up speculating.

I slipped the case in my pocket, locked the drawer and locked the safe again. I switched off the lights and let myself quietly out of the flat.

I decided to go to the Thespis club as if nothing had happened. I was not at all anxious to meet Roland until I knew where I stood, but I reflected that if I failed him it might rouse his suspicions and precipitate a catastrophe before I was ready for it. There was not much danger that he would look in his safe that night if I kept him late. His housekeeper would tell him I had been there, but I could explain that. In the morning I would have him watched.

Roland was at the club when I arrived. "I've been at your rooms," I said instantly. "I had an idea I was to wait for you there. But I got thinking it over and decided I had made a mistake."

"You've got a memory like a colander," he said good-naturedly. "Better do something about it."

We sat down to our supper. Roland was in for him, extraordinary spirits. All the while we ate, drank and joked I was wondering in the back of my head what kind of a change would come over his grim, dark, laughing face if he knew what I had in my pocket.

9

Few would envy me my task next morning. I called up Miss Hamerton merely saying that I would come to the hotel half an hour later. Sadie came in, but having kept from her what had already happened, I could not tell her this. I was not obliged to tell her all the developments of the case, of course, but she had a moral right to my confidence, and so I felt guilty and wretched every way. Sadie I knew would be terribly cut up by the way things were tending, and I had not the heart to face it, with what I had to go through later.

Miss Hamerton received me with great bright eyes that looked out of her white face like stars at dawn. The instant she caught sight of my face she said: "You have news?"

I nodded.

"Good or bad?" she whispered breathlessly.

There was no use beating around the bush. "Bad," I said bluntly.

A hand went to her breast. "Tell me—quickly."

I drew out the case. She gave no sign of recognising it. I snapped it open. "Is this the lost necklace?" I asked.

With a little cry, she seized upon it, examined the pearls, breathed upon them, looked at the clasp. "Yes! Yes!" she exclaimed, joy struggling in her face with an underlying terror. "Where did you get it?"

"Out of a safe in Mr. Quarles' flat."

She looked at me stricken stupid.

I had to repeat the words.

"Oh!—you would not deceive me?" she whispered.

"I wish to God it were not true!" I cried.

"In his room—his room!" she muttered. Suddenly she sank down in a crumpled white heap on the floor.

I gathered her up in my arms and laid her on the sofa. I called Mrs. Bleecker, who came running, accompanied by Irma's maid. A senseless scene of confusion followed. The foolish women roused half the hotel with their outcries. I myself, carried the beautiful, inanimate girl into her bedroom. For me it was holy ground. It was almost as bare as a convent cell. It pleased me to find that she instinctively rejected luxury on retiring to her last stronghold. I laid her on her bed—the pillow was no whiter than the cheek it bore, and returned to the outer room to await the issue. All this time, I must tell you, Mrs. Bleecker was relieving her feelings by abusing me. From the first I had apprehended hatred in that lady.

I waited a few minutes, feeling very unnecessary, and wondering if I would not do better to return to my office, when Mrs. Bleecker came back, and with a very ill grace said that Miss Hamerton wanted to know if it was convenient for me to wait a little while until she was able to see me, and would I please say whatever was necessary to people who called. I almost wept upon receiving this message. I sent back word that I would stay all day if she wanted me. Mrs. Bleecker glared at me, almost beside herself with defeated curiosity. I had the necklace safe in my pocket and she was without a clue to what had happened.

So there I was established as Miss Hamerton's representative. Everybody took orders from me, and wondered who I was. The word had spread like wildfire that the famous star had been taken ill, and the telephone rang continuously. I finally told the hotel people what to say, and ordered it disconnected. I had a couple of boys stationed in the corridor to keep people from the door. I sent for two doctors, not that Irma was in any need of medical attention, but I wished to have the support of a professional bulletin. I told them what I thought necessary. They were discreet men.

Miss Hamerton had no close relatives, and I could not see the sense of sending for any others. I forbade Mrs. Bleecker to telegraph them. In a case of this kind solitude is the best, the most merciful treatment for the sufferer. As it was I pitied the poor girl having to endure the officious ministrations of her inquisitive servants, but I did not feel justified in interfering there.

Only two men were allowed past the guard in the corridor, Mr. Maurice Metz, the famous theatrical manager, and Mr. Alfred Mount. The former stormed about the room like a wilful child. His pocketbook was hard hit. I was firm. He could not see Miss Hamerton, he must be satisfied with my report. Miss Hamerton had suffered a nervous breakdown—with that phrase we guarded her piteous secret, and it would be out of the question for her to act for weeks to come. It was her wish that the company be paid off and disbanded.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded.

"I speak for Miss Hamerton," I said with a shrug. I remembered how humbly I had besieged this man's door with my play a few weeks since, and now I was turning *him* down.

To satisfy him I had Mrs. Bleecker in. He demanded of her who I was.

"I don't know," she snapped.

Nevertheless she had to bear me out. Miss Hamerton had sent word that the company was to be paid off with two weeks' salary, and the amount charged to her. I referred Mr. Metz to the doctors. They impressed him with medical phrases he didn't understand. He finally departed talking to himself and waving his hands.

Mr. Mount, of course, was very different. He came in all suave sympathy, anxious to uphold me in every way. I had wished to see him for a special purpose. I couldn't allow the possibility of a ghastly mistake being made.

I produced the fateful little seal leather box, and snapped it open again. "Are these the lost pearls?" I asked.

The man had wonderful self-control. No muscle of his face changed. Only his black eyes flamed up. He took the case quietly, but those eyes pounced on the pearls like their prey, and wolfed them one by one. He returned the case to me. A curious smile wreathed the corners of his voluptuous mouth.

"Those are the pearls," he said quietly.

"You are *sure*?"

"Sure?" He spread out his hands. "There are no other such pearls in the world."

I returned the case to my pocket.

"Where did you find them?" he asked.

"At present I am not free to say how they were recovered," I replied. "No doubt Miss Hamerton will give it out later."

"I think I understand," he said with a compassionate air. "I suppose there will be no prosecution."

"I do not know," I said blandly.

"Maybe it would be better never to speak of the matter to her?" he said softly.

I shrugged. I wasn't going to let him get any change out of me.

"Anyhow it's a triumph for you," he said graciously. "Allow me to congratulate you."

Was there a faint ring of irony in his words? In either case I never felt less triumphant. What booted it to return her jewels if I had broken her heart? I bowed my acknowledgment.

As he left he said: "Come and see me sometimes, though the case is closed. You are too valuable a man for me to lose sight of."

I bowed again, mutely registering a resolve to ask him a thumping figure if he ever did require my services.

Meanwhile I had the reporters to deal with. I have a strong fellow-feeling for the boys. As a class they are the most human lot of fellows I know. They do not make the rotten conditions of their business. But they certainly are the devil to deal with when they get you on the defensive. They seemed to spread through that hotel like quicksilver, bribing the bell-boys, the maids, even the waiter who brought up my dinner. If we had not been on the eleventh story I should have expected to find them peeping in the windows.

I did not dare see them myself. In my anomalous position they would have made a monkey of me. In my mind's eye I could see the story of the mysterious stranger who claimed to represent Miss Hamerton, etc., etc. I had to take every precaution, too, to keep them from that fool of a Mrs. Bleecker. I carefully drilled the doctors in what they should say, and then sent them down to their fate. They came off better than I expected. Of course the lurid tales did appear next day, but they were away beside the mark. Nothing approaching the truth was ever published.

A little before five everybody had gone, and I was alone in the sitting-room gazing out of the window and indulging in gloomy enough thoughts, when I heard the door behind me open. I turned with a sigh, expecting fresh

complaints and demands from the old harridan. But there was Irma trying to smile at me. She was wearing a white negligée affair that made her look like a fragile lily. She walked with a firm step, but her face shocked me. It looked dead. The eyes open, were infinitely more ghastly than when I had laid her down with them closed. Mrs. Bleecker and the maid followed, buzzing around her. She seemed to have reached the limits of her patience with them.

"Let me be!" she said as sharply as I ever heard her speak. "I am perfectly well able to walk and to speak. Please go back to the bedroom. I have business to discuss with Mr. Enderby."

They retired, bearing me no love in their hearts.

"I must go away, quite by myself," she said, speaking at random. "Can you help me find a place, some place where nobody knows me? If I do not get away from these people they will drive me mad!"

"I will find you a place," I said.

"Perhaps I'd better not go alone," she said. "If I could only find the right kind of person. I'm so terribly alone. That nice girl you brought into the company, Miss Farrell, do you think she would go with me?"

There was something in this more painful than I can convey. "She'd jump at the chance," I said brusquely.

"You have been so good to me," she said.

"You can say that!" I said, astonished.

"Oh, I've not quite taken leave of my senses," she said bitterly. "If I had not known the truth, it would have been much worse."

This struck me as extraordinary generosity in a woman who loved.

"I—I have something else to ask of you," she said in the piteous beseeching way that made me want to cast myself at her feet.

"Anything," I murmured.

"Mr. Quarles is coming here at five. Please see him and tell him—Oh! tell him anything you like, anything that will keep him from ever trying to see me again."

I nodded. "You had better lose no time in getting out of this," I suggested. "Can you be ready by to-morrow morning?"

"I will start packing now," she said. "It will give me something to do."

How well I understood the hideous blankness that faced her.

"Don't let those women bother you," I said. "Refer them to me."

"They mean well," she said.

"I will answer for Miss Farrell," I said. "She'll be here at nine to-morrow."

She started to thank me again, but I would not let her go on. I really could not stand it.

"Very well, you will see," she said with a smile, and left me.

Shortly afterwards Roland Quarles came striding down the hall. I opened the door to him. He was astonished to find a strange man in the room. He did not recognise me without my Faxon makeup.

"Enderby," I said in response to his enquiring glance. "You met me here once before."

"What's this I hear downstairs about Miss Hamerton being sick?" he demanded anxiously.

"She has had a nervous breakdown," I said.

He was not deceived. "What does that mean?" he demanded. "She was quite well yesterday."

I shrugged.

"Can I see her?"

I shook my head.

"I will speak to Mrs. Bleecker, then."

"You can't see her, either."

"Who are you?" he demanded, as so many others had done.

I gave him my card, hoping that he would take the hint, and save me further explanations.

Not a bit of it. "Investigator? What does that mean? Detective?"

"Precisely."

"What's it all about?" he cried irritably. "Why are you looking at me like a policeman?"

"Look at me close," I said.

He stared at me angry and puzzled. "I have seen you before—more than once——" Then his face changed. "Faxon!" he cried. "Is it Faxon?"

"The same," I said.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

This parade of innocence began to exasperate me. "Do you need to ask?" I said.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't play with words," he burst out. "Tell me what's the matter and be done with it."

"Miss Hamerton's pearl necklace was stolen from the theatre two months ago. She engaged me to recover it."

"Her pearls! Stolen!" he ejaculated, amazed. I could not have asked to see it better done.

"Do you still want me to go on?" I asked.

"Oh, drop the mystery!" he cried. "You fellows fatten on mystery!"

"As Faxon in the theatre I was perfectly sincere in my friendship for you," I went on. "I liked you. But little by little against my will I was forced to believe that you were the thief."

This touched him, but not quite in the way I expected. "Me? The *thief*?" he gasped—and suddenly burst into harsh laughter. "How did you arrive at that?"

I was no longer inclined to spare him. "In the first place you provoked a bet with Miss Hamerton which induced her to wear the real pearls on the night they were stolen."

His face turned grave. "True," he said. "I forgot that. What else?"

"On April sixth you deposited forty thousand dollars in cash in the Second National Bank."

He paled. "Anything more?"

"Do you care to explain where you got it?" I asked.

"Not to you," he said proudly. "Go on with your story."

"My first clue was in the cryptic letter found on the stage."

"I remember. You couldn't translate it."

"But I did."

"What's it got to do with me?"

"Nothing. But I found a second letter written in the same cryptogram and about the same matters in your pocket."

"That's a lie!" he said.

"If you want to see it it's at my office."

"If you did find such a paper in my pocket it was planted there."

"I should be glad to believe you were not the man," I said mildly.

"Spare me your assurances," he said scornfully.

He was silent for a while, thinking over what I had told him. Slowly horror grew in his face. "But—but this is only a devilish combination of circumstances," he stammered. "You haven't proved anything."

"The pearls have been recovered," I said.

"Where?" he shot at me.

"In your safe."

His legs failed him suddenly. He half fell in a chair, staring at me witlessly. "Oh, my God!" he muttered huskily. "Those, *hers!*"

I believe I smiled.

"And you—you have told her this story?" he faltered.

"That's what I was engaged for."

"Oh, my God!" he reiterated blankly. "What shall I do!"

His agony was genuine enough. In spite of myself I was moved by it. "Better go," I said. "The matter will be hushed up, of course."

"Hushed up!" he cried. "Never!"

This theatrical pretence of innocence provoked me afresh. "Oh, get out!" I said. "And be thankful you're getting off so easily!"

He paid no attention to me. "I must see her," he muttered.

"What do you expect to gain by bluffing now?" I said impatiently. "You must see that the game is up."

"I will not leave here without seeing her," he said with a kind of dull obstinacy.

"You have me at a disadvantage," I said bitterly. "You know I can't have you thrown out without causing a scandal."

He scarcely seemed to hear me. "I will go when she sends me," he muttered.

"All right, my patience is equal to yours," I said.

So there we sat, he with his ghastly white face turned towards the door into the inner rooms, moistening his lips from time to time, I looking out of the window.

To make matters worse, Mrs. Bleecker came clucking in. She, knowing nothing, fell on Quarles' neck, so to speak, and told him all her troubles with sidelong shots at me.

He paid little attention to her vapouring, only repeating in his ghastly, blank way: "I must see Irma."

"Of course!" said Mrs. Bleecker. "I'll tell her you're here."

"Mrs. Bleecker, as a friend, I advise you not to interfere," I said sternly.

She went out, flouncing her skirts at me.

To my surprise, Miss Hamerton presently came in. I cannot say what led her to do it, perhaps she was hoping against hope that he could defend himself. There was no sign of weakness in her now. Her face was as composed as marble. Mrs. Bleecker did not return.

"Irma," he cried, "send this fellow away."

I made haste to go, but she kept me. "Mr. Enderby must stay," she said. "He is your friend," she added.

He made a gesture of despair. A hideous silence descended on the three of us.

"You asked to see me," she said at last.

"Irma, do you believe this of me?" he cried like a soul out of Hell.

"I am willing to hear anything you have to say," she murmured.

"What does evidence matter?" he cried. "Do you believe me capable of such a thing?"

"Am I not forced to?" she said very low.

His head dropped. I never saw such hopeless wretchedness in a man's face. I felt like an executioner.

"Speak up!" I said sharply. "We are anxious to believe in you."

He shook his head. "It doesn't matter," he said in a stifled voice. "I doubt if I could clear myself. Anyway I shan't try. It—it is killed!"

He bent a look of fathomless reproach on her. "Good-bye, Irma," he said quietly. "I'm glad I was the means of your getting your jewels back. I never knew they had been stolen."

This to me was the purest exhibition of cheek I had ever met with. I was hard put to it to keep my hands off the man. If she had not been there! He went. And when I turned around Irma had gone back into the next room. I was angry through and through, and yet—and yet——! A nagging little doubt teased me.

So ended, as I thought, the case of the blue pearls. Little did I suspect what was on the way.

The following day was a blue one for me. Deprived of all the exciting activities of the past few weeks I was at a loss what to do with myself. Moreover, I was dissatisfied with the result of those activities. I had won out, so to speak, but my client had not. For her only tragic unhappiness had come of it. Meanwhile that little inner voice continued to whisper that I had *not* got to the bottom of the case. I could not put that young fellow's amazed and despairing face out of my mind. It did not fit into the theory of his guilt. On top of it all I had had a quarrel with Sadie the night before.

About noon my uncomfortable thoughts were broken into by the entrance of Sadie herself with storm signals flying, to wit: a pair of flashing blue eyes and a red flag hoisted in either cheek. I had supposed that she was already on the way to Amityville with Miss Hamerton, where they were to stay at a sanatorium conducted by a doctor friend of mine.

Before I could speak she exploded like a bomb in my office. "Ben, you've been a fool!"

"Eh?" I said, blinking and looking precious like one, I expect.

She repeated it with amplifications.

"So you said last night," I remarked.

"But I hadn't seen her then."

"Aren't you going to the country?" I asked, hoping to create a diversion.

"Yes, at two o'clock. But I had to see you first."

"To tell me what you thought of me?"

"To beg you to do something."

"What is there to do?"

"You have made a hideous mistake! Ruined both their lives!"

I may have had my own doubts, but it wouldn't have been human to confess them in the face of an attack like this. "Easy, there!" I said sulkily. "Have you discovered any new evidence?"

"Oh, evidence!" she cried scornfully. "I know he *couldn't* have stolen her pearls, and in your heart you know it, too."

"Sorry," I said sarcastically, "but in conducting my business I have to consult my head before my heart."

"I know it!" she said bitterly. "That's why you've been a fool!"

"Well, next time I'll consult a clairvoyant."

"Oh, don't try to be clever! It's too dreadful! If you had seen her! She will never act again. And he!—he will likely kill himself, if he has not already done it."

This struck a chill to my breast. Sadie had an intuitive sense that I could not afford to despise. At the same time having been called a fool, I couldn't back down.

"I don't see what better he can do," I said hardily.

"You can say that!" she said aghast. "You don't mean it!"

A very real jealousy made me hot. That handsome young blackguard had all the women with him. "Are you in love with him, too?" I asked sarcastically.

It was a mistake. She had me there. "You're doing your best to make me," she retorted.

"What are you abusing *me* for?" I complained. "I did no more than what I was engaged to do."

"She was distracted!" said Sadie. "She couldn't think for herself. She depended on you."

"Well, I did the best I could for her," I said doggedly. "You seem to think that I enjoyed doing it. There is a perfect case against him."

"There is not!" she said quickly. "Your own evidence that you set such a store by is full of holes!"

I invited her to point them out.

"One of your points against him is that he lately came into possession of a lot of money, presumably the proceeds of the theft. Yet you found the pearls on him, too. One fact contradicts the other."

"How do I know what other activities he's been engaged in?"

"You do not believe that."

"I beg your pardon," I said stiffly. "Permit me to know my own beliefs."

"If it wasn't true it wouldn't anger you."

"I am not angry." I smiled to prove it.

"How can I talk to you if you act like such a child!" cried Sadie.

"Never mind my actions. Stick to his."

"You know very well that he could not have carried out several successful robberies without a lot of experience. His whole open life gives the lie to that. Have we not gone into every part of it?"

"I know I found the pearls on him," I said doggedly. "They could not very well have been planted in a locked drawer in his own safe. He did not even claim that they were."

She ignored this. "And that cryptogram," she went on, "I mean the first one. It didn't say so in so many words, but the inference was unmistakable that Miss Hamerton's pearls had been disposed of, and that part of the proceeds was waiting for the thief. How do you account for that?"

I did not try to account for it. I pooh-poohed it. "He convicted himself," I insisted. "We invited him, we begged him to explain. He could not."

"Would not, you mean."

"What's the difference?"

She favoured me with an extraordinary glance of scorn. "And you set up to understand human nature!"

"Well, let me have your understanding of it," I said sarcastically.

"He was in love with her," said Sadie. "I suppose you don't question that."

"No, strange as it seems, I believe he was in love with her."

"That makes goose eggs of all your fine reasoning! Reason all night and it wouldn't make sense. He might have stolen anybody else's pearls but never hers. It was she who wronged love in believing that he could. To find out that she suspected him killed his love dead. Losing that, what did he care about his reputation? If he does away with himself it will be not because he was accused of a theft, but because she killed his trust in her, and he doesn't care to live without it."

I listened to all this with an affected smile of superiority, but it reached me. Every word that the unhappy Quarles had uttered fitted in with Sadie's theory.

"Suppose some one accused you of stealing Miss Hamerton's purse to buy me a present," she went on, artfully changing her tone. "I would make a tremendous virtuous fuss, of course, but in my heart I couldn't love you any less, though you might not have the sense to know it. But if they said you had stolen my purse to buy me something, how I would laugh! It's too silly for words."

I was rapidly weakening, but it was damnably hard to own up.

"The same with this case. You think I'm in love with Quarles because I defend him. That's just like a man! The truth is, what hurts me is to see you deceive yourself, and then look fatuous about it."

She was now wielding a double-edged sword. "But if the woman who loves him was deceived, surely I have some excuse," I said meekly.

"That's the weakness of her character—or the penalty of her position, whichever you like. She is so surrounded by flattery and meanness, it has taught her to suspect even her lover."

"But how did the pearls get in his safe?" I cried, begging for mercy.

"I don't know. It's a mystery. I'm only trying to show you that you haven't solved the mystery yet." Once more she changed her tone, the witch! "I'm so keen to have you make a great success of the case, Ben. And to help a little."

That completed the rout of my forces. "Sadie, darling," I cried. "In my heart I feel the same as you. I would have given in at once if you hadn't begun by slapping my face!"

There was a little private interlude here. Boss and operative were lost sight of.

"Now let's get to work!" I said.

"I hope it's not too late!" she said sadly.

11

I hastened down to Quarles' rooms near Gramercy Square. I found his old housekeeper in tears. My glimpse beyond her showed me that the place was partly dismantled. I found that she was half-heartedly packing. She did not know me without my Faxon makeup, and refused any information. I suspected that she had been forbidden to speak. However, by adroit and sympathetic questioning, and because the poor old soul was bursting with her troubles, it finally came out with a rush. She thought her master had lost his mind, he had acted so strangely, but such was her awe of him, she had not dared question his commands.

All night long he had paced his bedroom and sitting-room, pausing only to burn papers and cherished mementos in the grate. When she had risen from her bed and timidly enquired if he were ill, he had harshly ordered her back to her room. There she had lain trembling until morning, grieving because she thought she had offended him.

He had left his breakfast untasted. Afterwards he had called her to him, and in a voice and manner totally unlike his own, had announced that he was going away, and had given her instructions that terrified her. His furniture was to be sent to an auctioneer's under an assumed name, and was to be put up on the first sale day. She was to keep what it brought in lieu of wages. His clothes were to be sent to the Salvation Army. His jewelry and knick-knacks she might sell or keep as she chose. On second thoughts he had written out his instructions in the form of a letter to her in case any of her acts should be questioned. He had then called a taxi from the stable he usually patronised, and had departed without any baggage. This last fact alarmed her more than all the rest.

All this read fatally clear. I was careful, however, to make light of it to the grief-stricken old woman. I assumed an authority which she willingly deferred to. I ordered her to put the rooms in order, and not to make any other move until she heard from me again. She was vastly cheered. What she dwelt on most tragically was the necessity of sending all his beautiful suits to the ragged crew who profited by the Salvation Army's benefactions.

I found out from the taxi stable that Quarles had been driven to the Pennsylvania station. I got hold of his driver, a man frequently employed by him. He had remarked his strange appearance this morning. On reaching the station Quarles had asked the porter who opened the cab door what time the next train left for Baltimore. On learning that he had but three minutes to catch it, he had thrust a bill in the chauffeur's hand, and rushed away. This had been at ten o'clock; it was now nearly one. I had the same driver carry me to the station, where I telephoned Sadie, snatched a bite to eat, and caught the next express South.

It was not the most cheerful journey I have taken. I had four hours to think over the tragic possibilities of my mistake, and it was small comfort to reflect that it was a natural mistake. Quarles, with his three hours' start had only too much time to put his purpose into effect. My only hope was that he might instinctively be led to wait until night. Darkness has an invincible attraction for desperate souls.

Arriving in Baltimore I had the whole wide city to choose from, and not a clue. No chance of anybody's having marked him in the crowd that left the train there. However, I happened to know of a certain select hotel invariably patronised by the elite of the profession, and I went there on a chance. The clerk I saw did not know Mr. Quarles, but upon my describing him he said that such a young man had been in the hotel during the afternoon. He was not registered there. He recollected him because he had stopped at the desk to ask an unusual question. Did the clerk know where there was a taxidermist in town? Together they had looked up an address in the business directory, and the young man had departed. He had not returned.

I hastened to the taxidermist's wondering greatly what could have been Quarles' errand in such a place. Casting back in my mind, I remembered having seen several little cases of mounted butterflies among his treasures. There was something pathetically innocent in the wide open trail the young fellow was leaving behind him. This surely was no experienced criminal.

The store was kept by a benignant old man who somehow seemed to belong with the stuffed birds and pet dogs that lined the walls of his little place. I also saw many little frames of impaled beetles and butterflies such as I had seen in Quarles' rooms. The entire place had an old world look.

The old fellow was a kindly, garrulous soul who required not the slightest pressure to set him talking. Quarles, it appeared, had made quite an impression on him. "A handsome young fellow!" he said, "and such a gentleman." Quarles, he said, had been attracted into his shop by the butterflies, and they had fallen into talk about butterfly hunting, of which sport both were devotees. Quarles had finally purchased three beautiful specimens of something with a terrible Latin name.

As he was about to leave, Quarles had remarked that he was on his way out of town for a jaunt, and he had neglected to provide himself with any cyanide. It seems that cyanide is what they use to kill the insects. In all innocence the old man had furnished it, and his customer with one more question had departed. Where was there a second hand clothes dealer?

Cyanide of potassium, deadliest of poisons! I hastened to the second hand store with a sickness at the heart.

They remembered Quarles here, too. The story he had told here was that he wanted some worn old clothes to wear to a masquerade. He had been furnished with a complete outfit, hat, suit, shirt, socks and shoes. While things

were being wrapped up, he had mentioned idly that he was a stranger in town, and he had a couple of hours to kill. He wanted to know of a trolley line that would take him out in the country. The storekeeper had recommended the Annapolis short line as the pleasantest ride on a mild evening.

This had been about four, and it was now a little after six. I had caught up on him a little, I found that the cars left for Annapolis every half hour. By good luck the car which had left at four returned while I was waiting in the station. I interviewed the conductor. He remembered Quarles. His attention had been attracted to him because, although he held a ticket to Annapolis, he had suddenly risen and left the car at the Severn river bridge station. I took the six-thirty car for Annapolis. The conductor told me that the station at the bridge was used principally by summer residents who had their motor boats meet them here. At this season, early in May, there was but little business there. It was almost dark when I got off, a balmy, Spring evening. It was a lonely-looking spot. There was a little settlement up a hill, with a path from the station, but I guessed that if my man had been attracted by the loneliness of the situation, he would not go that way. I looked about. Crossing the track and climbing down to a deserted strip of beach beside the wide river, I found with my flashlight that a solitary person had gone that way before me. He was wearing a shapely shoe. This would surely be he. The tracks drew me along beside the river towards its mouth, which was in view. On the other side, farther down, sparkled the lights of the Naval Academy.

Rounding a point, in a little cove hidden from the world, I found the remains of a fire on the sand. The embers were still glowing. Poking among them I found scraps of scorched felt and woollen cloth and bits of broken glass. Here obviously, Quarles had changed his clothes, and had destroyed the expensive garments he wore to the scene. Evidently he was counting on the fact that there is little trouble taken to establish the identity of a poorly dressed suicide. The glass was no doubt what remained of the case of butterflies he had bought. Some coins in the ashes added their mute testimony of his desperate intention.

I hurried on. The footprints recommenced beyond the fire, their shape somewhat altered, for he had changed his shoes with the rest. His fine shoes he must have filled with stones and thrown in the river for I found no remains of leather in the fire. I hoped that with the time he had spent doing all this he would now be but a short distance ahead of me. Unfortunately half a minute—half of that, would be enough for him to accomplish his purpose.

I came to the main road from Baltimore to Annapolis which crosses the Severn by another long bridge. Automobiles crossed it at intervals. Since the footprints were not resumed in the sand across the road it was clear he had turned into it one way or the other. The river seemed likeliest. I started out on the bridge, dreading most of all to hear a splash just out of my reach. It was now quite dark.

Out in the middle of the bridge close to the draw I came upon a motionless, slouching figure with battered hat pulled down over the face. Notwithstanding the shapeless clothes the tall slenderness was unmistakable. He was leaning with his elbows on the guard rail regarding something that he held in one hand. The object caught a spark from the red light of the draw overhead. It was the vial of cyanide. My heart bounded with relief. I was in time—but barely.

"Quarles," I said softly.

He straightened up with a terrified hissing intake of the breath. I turned the flashlight on myself to save lengthy explanations.

"*You!*" he said after a moment, in a low bitter tone. "God! must you dog me here!"

"I am your friend," I said.

He laughed. "Friend!" he said. "That's good!" Then his tone changed. "You'd better be on your way," he said threateningly. "I'm in no mood for fooling."

"I've been trying to overtake you since noon," I said, merely to be saying something. An instinct told me there was nothing like a little conversation to let down a desperate man.

"Why, in God's name?" he demanded. "What good am I to you now?"

"I no longer believe you guilty."

"I don't give a damn what you believe."

"I want you to help me find the thief."

"It's nothing to me who took the pearls. She's got 'em back again. You'd better go on. I won't stand for any interference."

"You won't do it now," I said confidently.

"Won't I!"

He made a move to uncork the little vial. I struck his wrist and it fell to the ground. We searched for it frantically in the dark. I had the light, and I saw it first. I put my heel on it, and ground the fragile, deadly thing into the planks of the bridge floor. He cursed me.

"There is still the water," I said.

"I'm a swimmer," he said sullenly. "I couldn't go down. I meant to climb on the rail and take the stuff, so it would look like drowning. But there are plenty of ways."

"Be a man and *live!*" I said.

He laughed again. "There's nothing in that cant for a man who's sick of the game."

"Live for her sake," I hazarded. "She loves you."

"You've mistaken your job, old man," he said with grim amusement. "You ought to be a playwright. Write her a play. She's a great actress. Yah! I'm sick of it! Love! There's no such thing. Not in women! This is real, anyhow."

I had got him talking. Something told me the crisis was past. I took a new tack.

"She certainly has treated you badly," I said. "I don't wonder you're sore. I know just how you feel."

He turned on me with clenched fist and a furious command to be silent. "It's no damned policeman's business what I feel!"

"Revenge is sweet," I murmured.

It brought him up all standing. In the dark I heard him breathing quickly.

"Do you want to crawl away like a cur and die in a hole?" I asked.

"Why in Hell can't you let me alone?" he said fretfully. "What do you want to drag me back for?"

I saw I had him going now. "Make her suffer," I urged. "The most perfect revenge in the world is yours if you want it, because she loves you."

"What are you getting at?"

"Prove your innocence to her."

"I doubt if I could," he said weakly. "I shouldn't know how to begin. I seem to be caught in a net."

"I am offering to help you."

"What's your game?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I've made a serious mistake," I said. "I've got my professional reputation to think of. Besides, I'm only human. I don't want to have your untimely end on my conscience."

"It needn't be. I'm my own master."

I decided to risk all on one throw. I laid a hand on his shoulder. "Look here," I said frankly. "You and I are not strangers. We took to each other from the first, though I happened to be wearing a disguise. I have suffered like the devil all day. Forgive me my part in yesterday's affair, and be my friend. Friendship isn't such a common thing in spite of all the talk about it. I should think you'd recognise the real thing when it's offered to you."

"Rubbish!" he grumbled. "I don't believe in friendship. I never had a real friend." But he didn't shake my hand off.

"Try me."

"Oh well, you've spoiled it for to-night, anyway. I'll listen to what you've got to say. Where can we go? I haven't a cent. And nothing but these filthy rags."

"That's a trifle," I said joyfully. "I'll find a place."

12

We proceeded on across the bridge into the town of Annapolis. First I took Roland to a lunch room and commanded him to eat. I had a time getting him to swallow the first mouthful, but that once down, he developed a ravenous appetite. I suppose he had not eaten in thirty hours. It was comical to see how, with a stomachful of hot food inside him, a zest in living renewed itself. The more his resolution weakened, the louder he inveighed against life. But he had a sense of humour. He suddenly became conscious of the absurdity of his attitude, and we laughed together. From that moment he was safe, and he was mine. There is nothing to cement a friendship like laughter.

Afterwards I got a room in an obscure hotel. Roland sat down on the edge of the bed, and proceeded to give me his version of the matters that perplexed me so. In the middle of a sentence he fell over and slept like a dead man. I stole out and telegraphed Sadie at Amityville that I had him safe and sound. Returning, I sat by the hour watching him. My heart was soft for the human creature I had snatched from the brink. He looked very boyish and appealing as he lay sleeping. He seemed years younger than I. I cannot tell you how glad I was to think that there was warmth in the young body, and sentience under the shut lids.

Shortly after midnight he awoke as suddenly and thoroughly as he had fallen asleep. Then he wanted to talk. He was bursting with talk. I swallowed my yawns and set myself to listen. I let him talk in his own way, no questions. For a long time I listened to what I already knew, the tale of his jealous, hopeless passion for Irma. Sometimes he had suspected that she inclined towards him, but it seemed preposterous to ask her to give up her profession for him. On the other hand he knew he could not endure sharing his wife with the public. He had decided to go away without speaking—and then the miraculous legacy had dropped from the skies.

"Tell me all about that," I commanded.

"I promised not to tell," he said reluctantly.

"This is a matter of life and death. Why was a promise exacted?"

"To avoid publicity."

"There will be none," I said. "I pledge myself to guard the secret as well as you could."

"I destroyed the letter I got, with the others," he said. "But I read it so often I can give it to you almost word for word."

"Too bad it was destroyed!" I said.

"Oh, you can verify the contents by the Amsterdam Trust Company who paid me the money."

"But if you have a clear case what did you run for?" I asked amazed.

"You will never understand," he said with a wry smile. "I seemed to die at that moment when I saw that Irma believed I was capable of robbing her. What did I care about my case?"

Hearing that, my opinion of Sadie's perspicacity went up marvellously. "Go on," I said.

I took down the letter from his dictation. It was written, he said, on expensive note-paper, without address, crest or seal, in a large and somewhat old-fashioned feminine hand.

"DEAR MR. QUARLES:

Although you have never heard of me I think of you as my dearest friend. I have followed your career from the time of your first appearance on the stage. I am one of those unfortunates who, condemned to live, are cut off from life. I watch life pass from behind my iron screen. It is you who, all unconscious, have supplied me with a dream to cheat my emptiness. I have warmed my cold hands at your fire.

"Now they tell me my release is at hand. I wish to show my gratitude to you in the only way that is possible to me. An artist's career is difficult and uncertain. I want to remove a little of the uncertainty from yours.

"I must avoid giving rise to silly gossip which would grieve my relatives. To avoid the publicity of probate I am making secret arrangements beforehand. An old friend will carry out my wishes for me when I am gone.

"The doctors give me a week longer. Upon my death this letter will be mailed to you. You will then hear from the Amsterdam Trust Company that a sum of money awaits your order. You will never know my name. But if you should let even the bare facts become known, some busybody would eventually connect them with my name, and unhappy gossip result. Therefore I ask you as a man of honour to keep the whole transaction locked in your breast."

"That is all," said Roland. "It was signed: 'Your grateful friend.'"

"Did you look in the recent obituaries for a clue?" I asked.

"Yes," he confessed. "There was none."

"Go ahead with your story. We'll return to the letter later."

"At first I thought it was a hoax," he resumed, "but sure enough, in two or three days I received a letter from the Trust Company asking me to call. I saw the President. He said that the sum of forty thousand dollars had been deposited with them to be turned over to me in cash. He said it had been bequeathed to me by one who desired to remain unknown. He said he did not know himself who my benefactor was. He had dealt with a lawyer. He said that there was but one condition attached to the legacy, namely that I give my word never to speak of the matter. I had met this Mr. Ambler the president, and he had seen me act, so there was no difficulty about identifying me. I left his office carrying the money, and carried it to my own bank to deposit. That is all there is to that."

"Good!" I said. "The Amsterdam Trust Company is a solid institution, and the president a well-known man. They will still be there if we need them."

"It mustn't get in the newspapers," he said nervously.

"Trust me for that. I'm not going to make you break your word. Now about the bet you made with Miss Hamerton."

He winced at the sound of her name. "There's no more in that than appears on the surface," he said irritably. "I couldn't have told the paste from the genuine. I wanted to give her a box of gloves. But she never claimed them, and I forgot about it."

"The cryptogram you have already explained," said I.

"I did not know there was such a paper in my pocket."

"Hold on," he cried suddenly, "about that bet. I have just remembered that I once had a talk about precious stones, pearls, with a man in the company."

"Milbourne?"

"Sure! How did you know?"

"I believe he took them. But it's going to be a job to prove it."

"It was just a trifling conversation," Roland resumed, thinking hard. "I can't remember exactly. He marked the beauty and oddity of Ir—of Miss Hamerton's necklace. I think he said he hoped that she did not risk wearing real pearls on the stage. That may have been to find out if I knew they were artificial. I told him she did not wear the real ones. There was more talk. He seemed to know about pearls, and I believe I asked him how to tell the real from the artificial. I never thought of it then, but looking back I see that it may have been that talk which gave me the idea of making a bet with Ir—with her. Oh, I have been a fool!"

"This is all interesting," I said, "but it doesn't give us anything solid to go on. Now for the main thing. How did the real pearls get in your safe?"

Roland struck his forehead. "I have been everybody's dupe!" he groaned.

"It's a part we all have to play occasionally," I said soothingly. "Go ahead."

"About this time I began to get circular letters from a firm of jewellers called Jones and Sanford with an address on Maiden Lane, where all the jewellers used to be. They were fac-simile letters, very well written."

"The kind that are made to look like personal letters, but like false teeth, deceive nobody?"

"Precisely. I got one every few days. They were all to the effect that the writers as brokers, were prepared to sell precious stones at prices much under those asked by the big jewellers. There was a lot of rigmarole about saving on overhead charges, interest on valuable stocks and so on, about what you would expect in such letters. There were a lot of imposing-looking references, too."

"At first I paid no attention to the letters; precious stones didn't interest me. But when I got all that money I began to read them. You see I—I wanted to make Irma a present, and I knew she loved pearls better than anything else in the world."

I let a whistle of astonishment out of me. "Do you mean to say you bought Miss Hamerton's pearls with the idea of presenting her with them, to add to her collection?"

He nodded shamefacedly. "I didn't know she had been robbed."

"How long had you had them?"

"Just a few days."

He told me that he had asked Miss Hamerton to marry him, and intended the necklace for a wedding-gift if she consented.

"You were a downy bird!" I exclaimed.

"Wait till I tell you," he said. "They were a slick pair. You might have been taken in yourself."

"Did they know you?" I asked, still full of amazement.

"Certainly. I paid for them by check, certified check."

"Which they cashed within half an hour!"

"Maybe. I never enquired."

"Sold Miss Hamerton's pearls back to Miss Hamerton's leading man!" I cried. "My boy, we have something out of the common in crooks to deal with!"

"They had a well-furnished suite on an upper floor of a first-class office building," he resumed. "I was there three or four times. I saw other customers coming and going. Everything was business-like and all right looking. Even the stenographer had a prim New England air. They showed me all kinds of precious stones. I bit at the pearls because I recognised that they were the same kind Irma had. They asked eight thousand dollars for them."

"You knew, didn't you, that Miss Hamerton's necklace was worth much more than that?"

"Yes. But I had been told hers were very fine and perfect. I supposed these to be not so good."

"And so you paid your money on a chance, and took them home."

"Not quite as fast as that. The jewellers seemed to take it as a matter of course that I would have the pearls examined by an expert before purchasing. They suggested that I take them up to Dunsany's."

"*Dunsany's*?" I said amazed.

"Yes. Wasn't that enough to lull suspicion? Dunsany's is more than a jewelry store; it's a national institution."

"But you never took them there?"

"Indeed I did," was the surprising answer. "Sanford and Jones' clerk went with me. We saw Mr. Freer, the firm's expert on pearls."

I whistled again. Freer, the man at Dunsany's to whom I had told my little fiction of the fiction-writer, and who had looked so queer when I mentioned blue pearls!

"Large gentleman, elegantly-dressed, with a face like a boiled dumpling?"

"Sure!" cried Roland. "Do you know him, too?"

"Go on with your story!" I said.

"Mr. Freer examined the pearls and told me they were genuine, and of good quality. He valued them at about twelve thousand dollars."

"The devil he did!" I cried. "This case is spreading wider and wider. Freer is in the gang, too. To think of their having a picket in Dunsany's!"

"How do you know?"

"Because he like everybody else in the trade had been informed that the only necklace of blue-black pearls in the world had been stolen. He knew, moreover, that it was worth——" But here prudence stopped my tongue.

"Worth what?" asked Roland.

"Well, much more than twelve thousand."

"The only blue pearls in the world?" he said, puzzled.

"There's a lot about this necklace you don't know," I said smiling. "All in good time. Go on with your story."

"Well, that's all, isn't it?" said he. "At least you know the rest. Why these fellows were so careful of details, you will even find their imprint in gold inside the case. Jones and Sanford, such and such a number, Maiden Lane."

"Hm! I have a case on my hands now!" I said meditatively. "It may take me six months or more to clean this up."

"I'll work with you," he said.

"My dear fellow, I like you better every minute," I said, smiling at him. "But you'd make the worst detective in the world."

"Oh, well, maybe I would," he said.

"There's no need for you to await the outcome of the case," I said. "We have the evidence right in hand to clear you. I'll lay it before Miss Hamerton to-morrow morning."

My young friend surprised me again. He leaped up with his dark eyes positively blazing. "You'll do nothing of the kind!" he cried passionately. "That affair is done, done for ever. If you interfere, I won't be responsible for the consequences. She has her pearls back. Let her be. My time will come when she reads of the capture and the trial of the real thieves in the public newspapers!"

13

Back in New York next day, I made haste to get to work on the half dozen clues with which Roland had furnished me.

I may say in passing, though the visit had no important results, that I called on Mr. Ambler of the Amsterdam Trust Company. At first he declined to give me any information whatever, but when I hinted that a certain suspicion rested on Mr. Quarles, he corroborated Roland's story as far as he knew it. He declined to give me the name of the attorney who had brought the money to the bank. "My endorsement of Mr. Quarles' story should be amply sufficient to clear him," he said, with the air of a bank president.

"Undoubtedly," I said, bowing, and left.

Since there appeared to be no immediate connection between Roland's legacy and the theft of the pearls, I let that go for the present.

I went to the address of the jewellers on Maiden Lane, but found, as I expected, that the birds had flown. An irate renting agent aired his opinion of Messrs. Sanford and Jones, but could give me no information of their whereabouts. They had leased the offices for a year, and after five weeks' tenancy, quietly moved out.

"Don't you ask references from prospective tenants?" I asked.

"They gave A1 references," he mourned.

I took down the names of their references for future use. One of them was Mr. Freer of Dunsany and Company.

My next call was upon Mr. Alfred Mount in his office behind the store of exquisite fashion. His greeting, while polite, was slightly cooler than of yore. As a man of the world, I was expected to gather from it, that our relations were now at an end. It warned me to be wary. I was already on my guard, because I knew that he hated Roland, and

hoped to profit by his disgrace.

"Anything new?" he asked casually.

"Yes—and no," I said. "I am not satisfied that we have got quite to the bottom of our case."

"Do we ever get quite to the bottom of anything?" he asked.

"I do not believe that Quarles was alone in this," I said as a feeler.

"What makes you think so?" he asked quickly.

"Nothing definite," I said. "Just a feeling."

He shrugged.

"I believe that expert jewel thieves made a fool of him," I suggested.

"It is possible," said Mount, looking bored.

"If so, it is much to the interest of your business to run them down. So I have come to ask for your co-operation."

"My dear sir," Mount replied with his indulgent, worldly smile, "the world is full of trouble. I do not try to escape my share; I face it like a man, or as near like a man as I can. But I never go searching for more. We have by your skill recovered the jewels. The reasons for not pursuing the matter any further are to me obvious. Better let well enough alone."

I appeared to give in to him. "Maybe you're right. I thought I saw a chance to earn a little glory."

"There will be plenty of opportunities for that," he said affably. "You can count on me."

We parted in friendly fashion.

So much for Mr. Alfred Mount. At least he would never be able to say later that I had not given him his chance.

I went to the magnificent marble building which houses Dunsany and Company, and asked boldly for Mr. Walter Dunsany, great-grandson of the founder of the house, and its present head. I was admitted to him without difficulty. I found him a jeweller and a man of affairs of a type very different from him I had just come from. Mr. Dunsany was a simple, unassuming man, direct and outspoken. In short, a man's man. I was strongly attracted to him, and I may say without vanity that he seemed to like me. From the first he trusted me more than I had any right to expect.

At this time he was a man of about forty-five years old, somewhat bald, and beginning to be corpulent, but with a humorous, eager, youthful glance. He glanced up from my card with a whimsical smile.

"Confidential investigator? More trouble, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid so," I said. "Have you an employee named Freer, an expert on pearls?"

"I had until a few days ago."

An exclamation of disappointment escaped me.

"What's the matter with Freer?" he asked.

"I suppose you don't know where he is?"

"On his way back to Holland, I suppose. He came from there ten years ago. Why?"

"One more question first. I am assuming that you know that a certain famous necklace of blue pearls has been stolen?"

"Mount's pearls? Certainly. Everybody in the trade was advised."

"You are sure Freer knew?"

"Certainly. It was his business first."

"Yet a week or so ago, that necklace was brought into your store by a man who was considering the purchase of it. He submitted it to Freer. Freer pronounced the stones genuine, and said that the necklace was worth about twelve thousand."

Mr. Dunsany jumped up and paced the room agitatedly. "Freer!" he exclaimed. "Impossible! You are sure of your facts!"

I described the operations of Messrs. Sanford and Jones.

"Not impossible, I suppose," he said more quietly. "This sort of thing has happened to me before. I doubt if there was ever a time when I was not harboring some thief or another. They never steal from me, you understand. They are the pickets, the outposts, who watch where the jewels go, and report to Headquarters. But Freer! He had been with me ten years. He had an instinct for pearls!"

"Headquarters?" I said eagerly. "Then you agree with me that there is an organised gang at work?"

"That's no secret," he said. "Every jeweller knows that there is a kind of corporation of jewel thieves. It is probably ten years old, and better organised and administered than our own association."

"Why don't you break it up?"

"Break it up!" he echoed. "It is my dearest ambition! There has never been a meeting of our association but what I have urged with all my eloquence that we get together and break up the thief trust. They will not support me. Everybody suspects that he has spies in his establishment, perhaps like Freer in a responsible position. The crooks seem to have us where they want us. They have never robbed us, you see. There is a sort of unwritten agreement, you leave us alone and we'll leave you. The other men in the association say: 'If our customers are careless with their jewels, we are not responsible.' But I say we are! These crooks have put us in a position where, if we do not go after them, we may be said to be in league with them."

"Mr. Mount is a member of the association, I suppose?"

"Mount? Oh yes, he's the president. To give Mount credit I must say that he has always supported me in this matter, though not so warmly as I would have liked. But I am considered a fanatic."

"Why don't you and he do it together?" I asked.

"He won't go into it without the backing of the Association."

"Why don't you go it alone?" I said. "You are powerful."

He glanced at me sharply. "I will when I see my way," he said. "Such police officers and detectives as have happened to come under my observation have not seemed to me the right men for the job. When I find my man _____"

"Will you consider me as an applicant for the job?" I asked quietly.

He studied me hard. "I should be difficult to satisfy," he said.

"First of all as to references," I said. There were some good men who backed me. I gave him their names.

"How about Mount?" he asked.

"I have already applied to him for the job," I said frankly, "and was turned down. He is satisfied with the recovery of the pearls. As long as he has refused to go in, I think it would be better not to let him know about our plans. That, however, is up to you."

"I shall not let him know," Mr. Dunsany said briefly.

To make a long story short, I succeeded in satisfying Mr. Dunsany of my fitness to undertake the matter in hand. We concluded a defensive and offensive alliance. He let me understand that expense was to be no object. I saw him every day. We met at his club, which was as safe a place as we could find.

I gave him my full confidence, of course. With Roland's consent I told him everything that had occurred up to that time. Mr. Dunsany for his part had a whole file of evidence that he had quietly collected. He turned it over to me. It was interesting, and in the end valuable, but it had nothing to do with the case of the blue pearls.

We laid our plans with infinite care. There was no hurry now, and every move was planned in advance. Absolute secrecy was imperative. Mr. Dunsany and I agreed not to take a soul on earth into our confidence.

It was necessary to hire a small army of operatives. I did not figure in this. I had Peter Keenan, an old friend of mine, who was not known generally among my friends, act for me. Peter was a faithful, conscientious soul, not at all brilliant. He hired a suite of offices on Forty-second street and set up the "International Detective Agency." Peter was the nominal head, and Sadie the real directress of this establishment. Here the operatives were hired and sent on their errands. Each did his little task knowing nothing of the general plan.

Meanwhile Mr. B. Enderby was to be found all day in his office on Fortieth street with his feet on the desk, chinning with his young friends or composing a new play. You see the second cryptogram led me to suspect that they were aware of my identity, and in case I were watched, as I surely would be, I desired to give the impression that I had dropped all activities in connection with jewels or jewel thieves. I communicated with Sadie by letter. Uncle Sam is at once the most public and the safest messenger. For emergencies we arranged a system of telephone calls.

It would be a tedious task to set down all the routine work of the agency. There were mistakes, disappointments and blind trails without number. To begin with, Sadie was ordered to trace Freer, the pearl agent, also Sanford and Jones, the bogus jewellers, and any of their employees. All this entailed great labour, and it was absolutely barren of result. These people seemed to have vanished into thin air. In the case of Kenton Milbourne she was more successful. She wrote:

"In my character of Miss Covington the actress, I called on several of the women of Miss Hamerton's company who gave me their addresses when we disbanded. From their gossip I learned without having to ask questions, that Kenton Milbourne has not disappeared. They have all met him on Broadway. He is apparently living the ordinary life of an actor out of a job, going around to the different agencies to list his name, etc. His address is No. — West 49th street.

"I have allotted three of our best men to keep Milbourne under surveillance. The first, D.B., who has been an actor, is working independently of the other two. He has engaged a room in the same house and will make friends with M. The other two operatives, A.N. and S.C., are to trail him turn and turn about."

Thus the ground was laid out. Making my report in turn to Mr. Dunsany, I said: "It's all very well as far as it goes, but we must do some original work. Tracking the theft of Miss Hamerton's pearls is following a cold trail. Our work is destroyed by the fact that the jewels have been recovered. We must branch out."

"What do you propose?" said he.

"Let us lay a tempting bait for a new robbery, and catch them red-handed."

"Go ahead!"

"Are you prepared to risk something choice in diamonds or pearls?"

"Anything I have in stock."

"Very well. First, however, we've got to get a man accepted into the inmost circle of the thief trust."

14

Mr. Walter Dunsany and part of his family sailed for Liverpool on the following Wednesday. The fact was liberally commented on in the newspapers. A squad of reporters saw him off at the pier, and got a statement from him on the country's business prospects.

I must offer my little tribute of admiration to Mr. Dunsany. I have yet to meet his equal for daring and gameness. Middle-aged men are not generally conspicuous for these qualities, and when they are rich into the bargain—why, to hang on to what they've got is usually their highest aim. But Mr. Dunsany insisted on playing the rôle of danger in our projected drama. He eagerly accepted a part that the most hot-headed young adventurer might have quailed from. I would never have allowed him to go in ahead of me, but unluckily an expert knowledge of gems was required. That he had and I had not. He insisted anyway that I must be free for the general command of all our forces.

Twelve days after Mr. Dunsany's departure, one John Mattingly, in appearance a sober, decent, elderly artizan, descended the second-class gangway of one of our speediest ocean ferry-boats, and went to Ellis Island with the other immigrants. Landed in due course at the foot of Manhattan Island, he gazed at the towering buildings with a wondering eye, and allowed himself to be guided to an humble hotel in the neighbourhood.

I was not there to meet him for a very good reason, but later in the day I received a note apprising me of his arrival. Two days later I had another telling me that having presented letters of recommendation, he had been engaged in the gem-setting shops of Dunsany and Co. I cannot do better than quote from his own reports. Far from being the usual cut and dried affairs, they were little human documents of humorous observation.

REPORT OF J. M. #2

Wednesday, June 3rd.

The morning after I landed, according to our program, I went to Dunsany's to apply for a job. I wonder if any merchant before me ever had the experience of besieging the doors of his own shop in a like humble capacity. Probably not. I enjoyed the experience. As soon as I opened the door I began to learn things about my own place. I always thought that my democratic ideas encouraged my employees to treat me exactly like one of themselves, but I found that they did not—quite. Walking through the aisles I perceived a new atmosphere, a casualness, an indifference in the salesmen which shocked me at first, then made me want to laugh. The joke was on me!

My letter of recommendation, which I had written myself, naturally, gained me the entrée to the present head of the firm, i.e., my son Edward. I approached his office with some nervousness. Here would be the first grand test of my disguise. Would the son recognise his father? And if he did, would he have the wit not to give me away before others? And if he did not, would I be able to keep my own face in the ludicrous situation?

I should say that in the matter of disguise I have followed your instructions carefully. The wig or toupee or transformation with which you furnished me, completely changes my appearance. I have also applied the stubbly beard and short moustache as you showed me how to do. I am letting my own hair grow beneath and will soon be able to leave off the false, which will be a relief as it is both hot and sticky. In addition it occurred to me to leave aside certain dental work which cost me a lot of money. The result is startling, and very satisfactory to our purpose.

My clothes I bought ready-made in a London emporium. Need I say more? The hat is a wonder, a sort of decrepit music-master affair of black felt. It is undoubtedly third or fourth hand—or should I say fourth head? I took care to have it well fumigated.

Eddie did not recognise me. He favoured me with some sharp glances which discomposed me not a little, but this was only natural caution in engaging an unknown man. In our business we have to be careful. I was well-pleased with Eddie's manner, succinct and business-like without a trace of arrogance. Much better than my own manner, I dare say.

Eddie was plainly annoyed by the situation, nor could I blame him. It was, of course, very irregular. In effect we were breaking the alien labour law, beside opening up the prospect of labour troubles in our own shop. I knew exactly what was passing in the boy's mind, and I was longing to reassure him. Instead I had to make believe to be slightly overawed in the presence of my little boy!

He had no choice in the matter, because I had virtually instructed him to employ this Mattingly. In addition to the letter of recommendation I had written him from London saying that I was sending such a man, an experienced jewel-setter, I had said, and had described Mattingly's appearance, so that he had no need to ask me to identify myself.

Finally after asking a number of questions, to all of which I had the answers pat, Eddie engaged me. I followed him to an upper floor, hard put to it to keep from grinning at the idea of my boy showing me the way around the place. Fortunately the spectacles I wear help me to preserve an owl-like gravity.

He took me to Ashley, the foreman of the gem-setting department. Ashley has been with us forty years. He is a surly, lovable old crab. It was under Ashley that I got my training in handicraft twenty-five years ago. Ashley regarded me with no favourable eye, but bowed to the mandate of the head of the firm, of course. He gave me a boy's work cleaning old settings, and kept a sharp watch on me. Later I succeeded in mollifying him a little by showing a certificate of good standing in the English jewellers' union, and by asking the name of the local secretary so that I could apply for membership here.

He has not forgiven me, though, for being put in over the youngsters' heads. "A blank-blank furriner!" his irascible eye seems to say. I thought I had taken the measure of the old man's irascibility, having worked under him. And in late years I would have said: "Here is one man in my shop who is not afraid to speak his mind to me." But Eddie had not been gone five minutes before I found that Ashley had never spoken *all* of his mind to me. I found, too, that his irascibility had been tempered to the boss's son. The boss himself, masquerading as a meek, alien workman, now received the full benefit of it.

I am glad I made the resolution before coming here not to let anything I might learn on the inside, apart from actual dishonesty, influence me in dealing with my men later. Already I confess my patience has been tried. I thought I was a radical myself, but I find I am way behind the times. There is one young fellow, Mullen by name, a hothead, a socialist, who exasperates me every time he opens his mouth. He is so sure that his crazy ideas are right! Yet he is none the worse workman for that. He and old Ashley are the leaders of the two elements in the shop, and I'm sorry to say the old man generally comes off second best in their verbal encounters.

During one of their arguments the first day, I was much amused, and a little alarmed, when the talk turned on me.

"You with your socialist talk!" cried Ashley to Mullen scornfully. "A man would think every boss was a horned devil! There's our old man now, what's the matter with him?"

"I don't know him," said Mullen with a leer. "We ain't on visiting terms."

"He talks to us, simple and friendly, just like one of ourselves," said Ashley.

"Sure!" cried Mullen. "It don't cost him nothin'! I ain't seen him give up nothin' but talk, though. That's what he keeps you quiet with, a little soft talk like strokin' the dog!"

"He don't set up to be no more than a man like myself!" said my defender.

"Sure, and he is no more!" cried the other. "I've got as good an appetite for my meals as him, and my kids is as strong and handsome as his. But there he is sailing across the ocean in a soot de luxe, and here am I sweating at his bench."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Ashley, whereat all the men on his side crowded.

"Do?" cried Mullen. "I'm goin' to give him fair value for his wages, that's what I'm goin' to do. But I don't have to lick the hand that pats me!"

"A man can do what he likes with his own, I guess," said Ashley.

"'Tain't his own!" was the surprising answer. "He didn't earn it, did he? It was the surplus that his dad made out of us workmen, and his grand-dad before him."

"His grand-dad started as a workman like ourselves," said Ashley. "Only he was the best workman, so he went ahead."

"I doubt that," said Mullen coolly. "'Tain't the best workman that gets ahead, but the sharpest. Grand-dad was sharp enough to get ahead of the other workman. All right, I say. Let him enjoy what he can get. But does that give his family the right to run us to the end of time?"

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Ashley again. All his supporters laughed.

Mullen turned to me unexpectedly. "What have you got to say about it, mate? You know what they think about such things across the water. Give us your ideas."

"I don't know the boss," I said feebly. "How can I tell?"

"I don't mean him," said Mullen scornfully. "He's nothing but a rich man. I mean about labour and capital."

I shook my head.

"Ah! they tame them over there just like they do here, I see," said Mullen, turning away.

I would like to fire that fellow when I get out of this—but, of course, in common decency I must not.

Meanwhile I suppose you are wondering what all this has to do with our case. Have patience with me. I am so absolutely alone in my new life, I must have somebody to air my thoughts to. The evenings are the hardest to put in. The club calls me with a siren voice. Eddie's wife is away, too, and I think of the boy dining alone. I wish we had taken him into our confidence, but I suppose it was wiser not to.

I have changed my boarding-place. Couldn't stand the fare at Mrs. McMahan's. I am now at a French place No. — West 29th street. It is humble enough to suit my altered station in life, but the cooking being French is not impossible. I have mitigated my lot by buying a jug of excellent Bordeaux at Bardin's, which I have with my dinner without exciting suspicion. I am aiming to get the name of a "character" which will enable me to do pretty much as I please.

The only break I have made so far was upon the avenue yesterday. I was on my way home from work and my wits were wool-gathering. I was dreaming, I suppose, of where I would like to go for dinner. Along came Warner Macklin, an elegant old dandy and a club acquaintance of mine. Without thinking, I nodded to him as I would ordinarily. You should have seen his affronted stare. The old snob! Anyhow it testifies to the efficacy of my disguise.

If you would like to look me over I will be walking up and down in front of the dairy lunch on Thirty-fourth street East of Sixth avenue at Twelve-thirty to-morrow, Thursday. J.M.

REPORT OF J. M. #4

Tuesday, June 9th

I have not written you since Saturday, because there was nothing new to report, and I didn't want to take up your time with any more discussions on Labor versus Capital. I am receiving a liberal education in these matters, very salutary. After working at my bench all day I find my point of view much changed. But I do not like that Mullen fellow!

I am pretty well shaken into my job by now. The local union is considering my application for membership favourably, so I am not a bone of contention in the shop. But I hope there is something more exciting than this ahead.

I have neither seen nor heard anything suspicious in any of my fellow-employees. I would be willing to swear they are all honest, but you have told me, others too, that I'm too ready to believe the best of my fellow-creatures, so I'm keeping an open mind.

To-day there was a little shake-up in the shop on account of vacations. I got a step up. Ashley put me at the bench where jewels are removed from old settings on orders to be reset. This is exactly what we need to carry out our plans, and it comes sooner than he hoped—but not too soon for me. However, I do not mean to rush things, but will proceed with due caution.

My heart still yearns every time I pass a first-class restaurant. J.M.

15

At this stage I cannot better carry my story forward than by continuing to quote from the reports of different operatives. To me these are fascinating documents. Their sober matter-of-factness is more thrilling than the most exciting yarn. With a wealth of seemingly irrelevant detail they build up a picture more convincing than any except those of a master of fiction. One has to be in the secret, of course. The operatives themselves are not supposed to know what it is all about, though they may guess a little. But to be in the secret of a case and to read the reports bearing on it from a hundred angles, gives one a strange sense of power.

REPORT OF D. B.

According to my instructions I applied for board at number — West Forty-Ninth street, Mrs. Atwood, landlady. I gave my name as Winston Darnall, and made out I was a character actor just in from the road. I engaged the rear hall room top floor. The place is an ordinary actor's house, considerably run down. The landlady has only lately bought the business from another woman, so it hasn't got the familiar friendly air of a long-established place.

At the supper table I recognised my man Kenton Milbourne from the description furnished. He's an unusual looking man—unusually homely. He doesn't keep to himself at all, like a fellow with something on his mind. He seems to be on good enough terms with the other boarders, but they keep out of his way because he's such a tiresome talker. There's one or two old fellows that go around with him. They sit in the parlour and talk by the hour about what dandy actors they are.

Milbourne has the large front room on the third floor. As luck would have it, the hall room adjoining was vacant, and there is only a thin board partition between, because the hall-room was originally an alcove. But I judged this was too much of a good thing. I was afraid of taking the hall room for fear of putting M. wise. Maybe later, when we're friends I can move.

I wasn't in any rush to pick up Milbourne. Thought I'd better wait awhile and give him a chance to make up to me. Meanwhile I jollied the landlady. She was a talker like all of them. Milbourne, it seems, is her pet. She holds him up as a model for the other boarders because he paid her four weeks board in advance when her rent fell due. This seems to indicate he means to stay a while.

All the boarders look up to Milbourne with a kind of respect because he's just closed his season with a first-class company, while the rest are mostly with repertoire companies, and cheap road shows.

The second night I was there, Milbourne braced me in the parlour. Looking for a new listener, I guess. He started in to tell me what a hit he made with the Irma Hamerton production. If this man is a crook he's the smoothest article I ever ran up against. Because he isn't smooth at all. He talks all the time about himself as simple as a child, but at that he don't tell you much. He's got a dull eye which don't seem to take in nothing, and he talks in a slow, monotonous way and says a thing over and over until you're doped.

A couple of nights later some of the younger boarders were having a bit of a rough house in the parlour and M. asked me up to his room where we could talk in peace. His room was bare like. He don't show any photographs or pictures or gimcracks. Seems he never even unpacks his trunk. It was a big trunk even for an actor, and packed neat and full as a honeycomb. Whenever he wants a little thing he unlocks it, takes out what he's after, and locks it again, even though he's right in the room. The key is on a chain fastened to his waistband.

His talk was mostly about the Irma Hamerton company. He told me what he says is the rights of the story about her sickness, and the unexpected closing in the middle of good business. She was in love with her leading man, Roland Quarles, according to him. Nothing was too bad for him to say about Quarles.*

* My operative went into considerable detail here as to Milbourne's opinion of Roland. Most of it I have deleted, since it was no more than meaningless abuse.

B.E.

I didn't take much stock in all this. It is the way a poor actor likes to talk about one who rises above him.

About Quarles and Miss Hamerton; Milbourne said that just as she was going to marry him she found out that he had a wife already. Without exactly saying so, he let on that it was he, Milbourne, who had put her wise to the young man. That's the way they go on. She had hysterics, he said, and broke up the show. As proof of his story, he said that Quarles had disappeared and nobody knew where he was, not even his old servant.

As I talk more with Milbourne I see that he isn't so simple as he likes to make out. He has a way of sandwiching in little questions in his dull talk, that amounts to pretty effective cross-examining in the end. He didn't get anything on me though. My story hasn't any holes in it yet. I have an idea that I've had considerably more experience acting than he has.

Sometimes he lets slip a clever remark that don't fit in with his character of a bonehead at all. For instance, we were talking about the Chatfield case that all the papers are full of now, and Milbourne says:

"Put a police helmet on any man, and right away his brain seems to take the shape of it. Cops think as much alike as insects. Let a crook once get on to their way of thinking, and he can play with them like a ball on a rubber string."

He let this out by accident. Afterwards he looked at me sharp to see if I had taken anything amiss. I never let on.

I have been in this house a week now, and Milbourne and I are supposed to be quite intimate friends. Last night on my way up stairs I saw a light under his door, so I knocked. His door is always locked. He wasn't any too glad to see me, but he couldn't very well keep me out, because he hadn't started to undress yet. He was having a little supper: a bottle of a syrupy kind of wine and biscuits with some blackish stuff he said was caviare. I didn't take any. I marked the labels, and to-day I went into a swell store and inquired the prices. The wine was Imperial Tokay. It is

\$2.50 the small bottle. The caviare was \$1.50 for a little pot. I give this for what it's worth. Seems funny if a man has a taste for such swell eats he should put up at a joint like Mrs. Atwood's.

D. B.

REPORT OF A. N.

Operative S.C. and I were instructed to trail a certain K. Milbourne, supposed to be an actor, and report on his habits and his associates. We were furnished with his description, and sent to watch the building at No. — West 49th street, where he boards. This house is a few doors from Eighth Avenue. We kept watch from outside a corner saloon over the way. We turned up our collars and stood around like the regular corner loafers.

At 10:05 A.M. our man came out and walked up the long block to Broadway. We followed across the street. He turned down Broadway with the crowd. We split up, one on one side of the street, one on the other. He often stopped in front of store windows, but didn't seem to mind the windows so much as to look sideways to see who was passing. He turned in at 1402 Broadway, a big office building. I slicked up and went after him. Went up in the same elevator. He gave everybody in the car a sharp look. Got out at the eighth floor, and went into an office marked: "Mrs. Mendoza: Theatrical Agency."

I went back down-stairs to wait. This building has an entrance on Broadway and one on Thirty-ninth street. S. C. took the Broadway door, and I watched the side street.

Forty minutes later or 11:15 he came out my door. He walked around into Broadway, and S. C. picked us up again. He took us down as far as Thirty-fourth, and then turned around and went back to Forty-second, without leaving Broadway or stopping anywhere. Turned West on Forty-second, and went into the office of the D. and E. Booking agency in the Forrest Theatre. Stayed twenty-five minutes. Came out and went down West side of Broadway. At Thirty-ninth street met an actor and stood with him twenty minutes talking loud, and looking around them the way they do, to see if anybody is noticing. The talk was all theatrical gossip which I was instructed not to report.

Looked at his watch and went on down to the 36th-37th street block, where he walked up and down about seven times, stopping at each end to look in the same store window, and then coming back. We watched from a music store where we were making out to listen to the piano-player.

At 12:50 he met a man as if by surprise. They greeted each other so loud everybody rubbered. But it was all a stall. Right away they came down to business and talked low and serious to each other. My partner and I brushed against them, but we couldn't hear much. Too much noise in the street.

I heard Milbourne say: "The grub is rotten! More than flesh and blood——"

His friend replied: "My dear fellow, it's worth it, isn't it? Be reasonable. You're safe. We're all safe——"

The two of them turned North walking arm in arm, still talking low. At the Forty-ninth street corner they parted. Milbourne turned West, on his way home presumably, and his friend continued North. S. C. went with M. and I took after the stranger.

He was a big fat man, but energetic. He looked like a theatrical manager or a promoter. He wore a silk hat and a cutaway coat which flapped out as he walked. He had very big feet which slapped the pavement loudly as he walked along in his energetic way. It was a regular fat man's walk, the knees giving a little with every step. Height about 5 foot 10: weight about 220: dark brown hair and eyes. Eyes with a bright, hard expression. Heavy brown moustache with curled ends. Carried a cigar in his mouth which he never lighted, but kept twisting around while he talked.

At Fiftieth street he crossed over and went down the subway stair spry as a kid. Got on the first train: I took a seat in the adjoining car. At the next station, Columbus Circle, he suddenly jumped up and left the train. But I was with him. He stayed on the station platform. For a little while the two of us were alone there. He gave me a good

hard look. When the next train came along he took it. I was in the next car again.

At Seventy-Second street he got out again. This time he went up to the street. He stood on the corner for a while. I watched from behind the glass doors of the subway station. I thought he was waiting for somebody. But suddenly he made a run for a passing car. I had to hump myself to get on it, but I did.

For near an hour we rode around, hopping from car to subway, and back to a car again, with a ride in a taxi in between. Of course I knew by this time that he was on to me, but I stuck, hoping for a bit of luck.

Later at the Ninety-sixth street station he darted down the steps again, me a good second. This station is always crowded. A woman blocked me at the gate, and he gained a few seconds. There was an express train waiting. Just as I reached it the guard closed the door in my face. Fatty was just inside. As the train started he turned around and thumbed his nose at me. I felt cheap.

A. N.

16

REPORT FROM AUSTRALIA

Melbourne, May 20th

Referring to your inquiry of the 10th ultimo respecting one Kenton Milbourne said to be an actor formerly of this place, we beg to report as follows:

You are in error in supposing that Kenton Milbourne formerly acted in Australia, and sailed for America last year. Mr. Milbourne is at present appearing as —— in —— . The company is now touring the province of New South Wales. Mr. Milbourne has never been to America. We enclose one of his published pictures which you will see at a glance is not that of the same man whose picture you sent us.

Mr. Milbourne is an actor of character parts, fairly well known in the profession here, though not of wide public reputation. His personal character is of the best. His real name is John Whittlesey, and he comes of respectable parents in moderate circumstances, still living in the town of Perth, Western Australia.

As to the photograph you enclosed, we are informed by a friend of Mr. Milbourne's that this is undoubtedly Evan Whittlesey, younger brother of John and the black sheep of the family, who went to America ten years ago, after having been implicated in the robbery of Morton's Bank, Melbourne. No proceedings were ever taken against him.

From the same informant we learn that no one in Australia has heard of Evan Whittlesey since he went away, except possibly his brother who is reticent on the subject, suggesting that what information he has of his brother is not perhaps creditable.

At this writing we are unable to furnish any information regarding Evan Whittlesey's early life beyond what is contained in the general statement that he was "wild," that is to say, a trial to his parents and his respectable brother—whose stage name he appears to have borrowed for his American activities. If you desire us to go to the expense of a thorough investigation of Evan Whittlesey's past, please authorise by cable.

Trusting to be favoured with your future commands, etc.

WILLARD, WILLARD AND GAINES.

The next report from which I will quote is Sadie's. It contained an unpleasant surprise. In order to make it clear I must briefly explain the arrangements of the International Detective Bureau. We had three offices en suite on the sixth floor of a building on West Forty-Second street. The door of the first room faced the elevators, and upon it was lettered our sign. Within was a neat railing, behind which sat Peter Keenan the ostensible head of the establishment, and an ornamental stenographer. The door to the adjoining room was hidden behind a tall file.

The second little room was supposed by the employees to be Keenan's private office, but in reality it was designed as a sanctum for Sadie. There was a telephone here by which she might talk to me in safety. Sadie had her own door on the corridor and was never seen in the front room.

The third office which was at right angles to the first and second was intended for the operatives in general when we were obliged to have them in. They were not supposed to come in without being instructed to do so. The other operatives looked on Sadie as one of themselves, and considered Keenan the boss. The door to the third room opened on a side corridor so that the men were never seen around the front office.

REPORT OF S. F. (SADIE FARRELL)

Last evening at 5:15 operative S. C. came into the office without instructions. He had been told like the others to mail in his reports, and keep in touch with Mr. Keenan by telephone. The excuse he gave was that the man he was trailing had led him around so fast and so far that it had used up all his money. I had Mr. Keenan give him some money and call him down, and thought no more about it. Unfortunately, it appears to-day that his disobedience has had very unfortunate results.

This morning I heard loud talking in the front office. Mr. Keenan explained later that a queer old man had come in, and had told a long rambling story about being persecuted. It seems that he wanted to engage the agency to protect him. It seemed a natural enough thing—we have had these harmless cranks before. Mr. Keenan soothed him down by telling him we were too busy to do proper justice to his case, and referred him to the police station. Neither of us thought anything more about it.

This afternoon shortly before five I heard the old man's voice again in the outer office. Mr. Keenan had stepped out to post some papers to you. The old man was excited, and I could hear by Miss Reilly's voice that she was very much frightened. So I went to her assistance.

I saw a bent, old man in shabby black, with wild, straggly hair, broken teeth and red-rimmed eyes, a repulsive sight. The instant I laid eyes on him I saw that he was not very insane. His manner was both servile and threatening. It was like stage insanity, incoherent jabbering and wild gestures. The girl was frightened half out of her wits.

I asked him what he wanted, and he calmed right down. His speech was unintelligible as if he had some of those tablets in his mouth that actors use to make their voice thick. He made no more trouble. He bowed and smirked and backed out of the door. The last thing I heard was a silly kind of laugh.

By this time I was full of suspicions. He had quieted down much too quickly. Besides, there was something familiar about the horrible old man. I had Miss Reilly enquire of the elevator boys. They said the old man had been in three times. Last evening as well as twice to-day. Last night he came up in the elevator with operative S. C. To-day, I believe, he hung around down-stairs until he saw Mr. Keenan go out.

S. C. called up about this time to report that Milbourne had not left his boarding-house all day. Mr. Keenan questioned the operative over the phone at my prompting, and we discovered that S. C. had no proof that Milbourne was in the house. We learned that S. C. had lost Milbourne about 3:30 yesterday among the several entrances to a department store. He had merely supposed that he had gone home later.

I then ventured to call up Milbourne's boarding-house. If he had been there, I would, of course, have lost the connection, but he was not. His landlady told me that he had telephoned her yesterday afternoon that he had been called out of town, and not to expect him home until to-night. Which shows how little we can depend on these

operatives. Since talking to this woman I have received D. B.'s report from inside the house, confirming what she told me.

Puzzling over in my head what it could be that gave the old man a familiar look, I suddenly got it. Do you remember when Milbourne first joined Miss Hamerton's company he played the part of the old forger, afterwards given to Richards? The management thought Milbourne's conception was too realistic, but Milbourne himself was childishly proud of his make-up in that part. He showed us a photograph, do you remember? Well, that was the same old man, wrinkles, scraggly hair, mean smile and all. The same clothes.

It is easy to figure out now what happened. After giving the operative the slip in the department store, Milbourne went to some friend's room or thieves' hangout and disguised himself. He then returned to the neighbourhood of the boarding-house on 49th street and watched the watchers there. When S. C. was relieved by A. N. at five, Milbourne followed S. C. into the office. He was smart enough to see on his first visit to-day that Mr. Keenan was not the real head of the office, and so he bothered us until I betrayed myself. Hence the laugh when he went out.

I need not say how sorry I am for the accident. I blame myself quite as much as S. C. Luck played right into Milbourne's hand this time. I see how important it is. He knows of the connection between you and I, consequently all your trouble to let it be supposed that you are out of the case goes for nothing now.

I have replaced S. C. with the new man, W. J., who came so well recommended. I have put S. C. at clerical work. Shall I discharge him altogether?

S. F.

REPORT OF J. M. No. 5

June 15th

On Saturday afternoon after work according to your instructions I took one of the unset diamonds with which I am provided to M——'s pawnshop at No. — Third Avenue. I was very glad to have the second act of the drama open, and the fun begin. To tell the truth, I am very weary of the work bench at Dunsany's this hot weather. If I ever return to my proper character I will have more sympathy for my workmen. I believe now that it is not poverty that makes the working classes restless so much as monotony.

M——'s, as you know, is a large and prosperous three-ball establishment near Fifty-Seventh street. The proprietor is a youngish man, a typical pawnbroker, with eyes as hard and bright as shoe buttons. Such eyes I am sure, would look on at the murder of a parent unconcerned—if there was anything in it. I believe you are right in your estimate of the man. Good as his legitimate business appears to be, he is no doubt not averse to the other kind—if it looks safe.

But he was afraid of me. He offered to lend me money on my diamond, but declined to purchase. He demanded to know how it had come into my possession. I replied with a long and affecting tale of the hardships of an immigrant couple, no longer young. It was our last bit of property, I said, the stone out of my wife's engagement ring. The ring itself she still wore with its empty setting. Such was the pathos of the tale that I almost succeeded in convincing myself that it was true. It didn't matter, of course, whether the pawnbroker believed it or not, but it had to be a good story on the face of it, because it would be fatal to my chances of success if I gave the impression of being a fool.

The hard eyes gave no sign one way or another. One could hardly expect a pawnbroker to be moved by a hard luck story. He told me to come back on Monday at noon, and he would see what he could do for me.

I hastened up there as soon as we were released for the lunch hour to-day. There were two men loitering in the store; men of the same kidney as the astute proprietor apparently, very sprucely dressed. M—— himself ignored me for the moment and this precious pair gave me the "once over" as they say. I could feel their eyes boring into me like

gimlets. However, it is possible to be too sharp to be discerning. They were deceived. A scarcely perceptible sign passed between them and the pawnbroker, and the latter suddenly became aware of the existence of his shabby customer.

He now showed me what he intended for a real friendly air. He couldn't buy my diamond himself, he said, but seeing he felt so sorry for me he would send me to a diamond broker he knew, who would do business with me if I satisfied him it was on the level. He gave me an address near by. I enclose the card, but neither the name nor the address means anything of course. I went there at once, risking a call down from the foreman if I was late getting back to the shop.

It was a room on the second floor of a typical Third avenue house, shop below, furnished rooms above, and the elevated road pounding by the windows. Evidently there had been a hasty attempt to make it look like an office; a desk had been brought in and the bed removed. Behind the desk sat a fat man rolling a cigar between his thick lips, and trying to look as if he were not expecting me. He looked prosperous in a common way, with his silk hat on the back of his head, and his immense gaping cutaway. His face was red and what passes for good-humoured with little pig eyes lost in fat. A huge moustache with curled ends, decorated it, the kind of moustache that I thought even New York politicians had given up nowadays. In a phrase, the man looked like a ward leader of fifteen years ago. The most characteristic thing about him was his bustling energy, unusual in one so fat.

This alleged diamond broker was making out to be very much occupied with business. He kept me waiting a while. As soon as he took the diamond in his hand I saw that he knew nothing about stones. He didn't even have a glass to examine it. Evidently the word had been passed to him that it was all right. But if he knew nothing about diamonds, he was well experienced in humanity. He put me through a gruelling cross-examination which I supported as best I could. My delicate problem was to lead him to suspect I was a crook, without letting him think I was a fool. To this end I elaborated the story of my old wife's engagement ring. He listened to it with a leer in his little eyes, as much as to say: "Pretty good old fellow! But you needn't take all that trouble with me!"

He expressed himself as satisfied, and we passed to the discussion of the price. I asked something near the stone's real value. He laughed, and offered me a fifth of that. We were presently hotly engaged in humankind's first game, bargaining. He loved it. Unfortunately I was handicapped by the necessity of getting back to work. We agreed on a price which was about a quarter of the stone's value. No doubt he would have had more respect for me if I had held out longer. He paid me out of an enormous roll of greasy bills.

I was sorry to see the stone go. It was a good one, nearly two carats. It was not safe of course to mark it in any visible way, but I have had this and the other decoy diamonds carefully described and photographed, so that we will have no difficulty in identifying them later.

As I was about to leave he shook my hand in friendly fashion, and still with that indescribable leer, expressed a hope that he might do further business together.

I mumbled something about a pair of earrings.

"Good!" he said. "Let me see them. Even if you don't want to let me have them, I'll appraise them for you so you won't get cheated. Come to me. I'm looking for a better office, so you'll find me gone from here. What's your address? I'll let you hear from me."

I declined to give it.

"Cautious, eh?" he laughed uproariously. "You needn't mind *me*! M—— (the pawnbroker) will tell you where you can find me."

I got back to my work just in time to avoid a fine.

J. M.

REPORT OF J. M. No. 6

June 18th

I suspected that I might be trailed from the alleged diamond broker's office back to my work, and I hoped that I might be. Evidently I was yesterday. On my way to my luncheon place on Thirty-Fourth street I ran into my fat friend. He came towards me with his coat-tails flying. He has very large feet which slap the pavement resoundingly. His knees give a little which furnishes an undulatory motion, a roll to his walk.

He hailed me blithely, and immediately announced that he was looking for a bite to eat. Somewhat sullenly, for I did not wish to appear too glad to see him, I confessed that I was on the same errand, and we turned into the dairy restaurant together. He laid himself out to win my liking. His loud, jolly, fat-man ways provide a cover for a considerable astuteness. It was my game to make out that I was startled to be found in that neighbourhood, and that my conscience was none too good. It was his game to put me at my ease and have it understood that everything went between friends. Nothing was said, however, about his business or mine.

I stuck to my lately-arrived immigrant story, and he sympathised with my lonesomeness in a strange land. He was a bachelor, he said, and often lonesome himself. This line led presently to an invitation for me to join him last night for a little sociability at the Turtle Bay Café on Lexington Avenue. I accepted it. I am sure by his eagerness to cultivate my acquaintance that he knows I work in Dunsany's.

I met him at eight o'clock, and we secured a little table to ourselves in a sort of alcove. The Turtle Bay is just one of the usual saloons, mahogany, plate glass and electric lights. The principal lure of such places is the dazzling flood of light they cast on the pavement. They have discovered the subtle psychological appeal of light. Away with night and its terrors!

My fat friend was liberally hospitable. I allowed my suspicious sullen manner to be charmed away by degrees. In a way he is really entertaining with his gross humour and rude vitality. I suppose any one can charm when they have a mind to. The cloven hoof, however, peeped out in his brutal snarls at the newsies and beggars who came to our table. On the whole I enjoyed myself. It was a lot better than mooning in my wretched room, or wandering the sultry streets thinking of the cool and comfortable club.

The will being good on both sides we got along famously. No actual confidences have passed between us yet, but we are ripe for them. As we mellowed together I allowed it to peep out that I had a bitter grudge against society, and would stop at nothing to feed it. He enthusiastically applauded my sentiments.

"Life is a bank!" he said, "that's got to be busted into if a man wants to enjoy any of the good things!"

I am to call him George Pawling. We have a date to meet at the Turtle Bay again to-morrow night. I hinted that I might have another diamond or two.

I was glad to hear from you that this man is undoubtedly one of the gang. So I am on the right track!

J. M.

I don't want to give you too much of the operatives' reports. I tell myself it is not to be expected anybody would have the same absorbing interest that I have in all the ramifications of the case. So I will go on with my story in the ordinary way.

After the catastrophe, it will be remembered, Miss Hamerton and Sadie had gone into the country to a little retreat I chose for them. After a day or two Sadie, seeing that Miss Hamerton could be left alone, would in fact be

better alone, returned, and took up her work on the case as has been seen. Later, that is about the first of June, Miss Hamerton was so far recovered as to be able to go to Southampton, and open her cottage for the season. Now, towards the end of the month, I learned that she had come to town for a few days to talk over next season's plans with her manager. All of which was encouraging as far as her health and spirits were concerned. But thinking of my friend Roland, I was not anxious to see her recover too quickly. I had kept my promise to him, and Miss Hamerton was unaware that I was still busy on her case.

I was shy about going to see her. My feeling was, considering her position and mine, that if she wished to keep up the connection she ought to give me some sign. I confess I was a little hurt that I had not received any.

One day as I was returning to the office after lunch I met her strolling up the avenue with Mount. When I caught sight of her the whole street brightened for me with her loveliness. I watched her coming for half a block before she saw me. She seemed well; she had a good colour, and her face was vivacious—more vivacious than it used to be, a little too vivacious. She seemed to have become aware of the necessity of vivacity. When she laughed her eyes were sombre.

She was dressed in a strange bright blue—few women could have carried off that dazzling colour so well, with coral red at her girdle and on her hat. She walked through the crowd with the beautiful unconsciousness that was part of her stage training. The staring, the whispering, the craning of necks neither troubled nor pleased her. Alfred Mount, who was no child in the world, could not quite hide his pride at being seen with her. He, too, was gorgeously arrayed, a little too well-dressed for a man of his age. But I had to grant his youthful air, and good looks.

I raised my hat, and was for keeping on, but she stopped short.

"Are you going to pass me by?" she cried with charming reproachfulness.

I became as proud and conceited as Mount, thus to be singled out by her. Everybody stared at me. Mount's greeting was affable and chilly—like winter sunshine. I fell into step beside them.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" she demanded.

"Why didn't you let me know you were in town?" I countered.

"I didn't like to bother one so busy," she said.

This to me from her! I walked on air.

"How is business, Enderby?" Mount asked in a faintly sneering tone.

"Poor," I said calmly. "Everybody appears to be behaving themselves."

"Ah!" said he.

"What stories he could tell us if he would!" my dear lady said admiringly.

I smiled, as I suppose was expected of me. Little did she suspect that the only case I had was hers.

We walked on chatting idly. What was said wouldn't be worth repeating, I expect, even if I could remember it. For me the mere sound of her voice was enough.

There was no mention of the unhappy things that were past. We were all engaged in a tacit conspiracy to look forward. She told me of the new play that was proposed for her. She insisted that I must read it before the matter was finally determined.

"You have such wonderful good sense!" she said. "And not at all affected by the actor's point of view."

Mount's face looked a little pinched at this warm praise. I wondered, had he been consulted about the play. If he really honoured me with his jealousy he was foolish. I did not dream of aspiring to be anything more than her

honest, faithful friend. Sadie, I hoped, was my destined mate while Irma Hamerton was—why she was the sun over us all. Sadie herself felt the same towards her as I did. On the other hand I was jealous of Mount. I considered him presumptuous to aspire to our sun, as he plainly did. He wasn't half good enough—half?—he wasn't worthy to tie her shoe. Besides, I was anxious about Roland.

At Forty-second street they were turning West to the theatre district, and I bade them good-bye. Miss Hamerton covered me with confusion by asking me to dine with her at her hotel the same night.

"Is it to be a party?" I asked.

"No, indeed," she said. "Nobody but Alfred."

This "Alfred" was new. It had always been "Mr. Mount." It set my teeth on edge.

I accepted and left them.

Dinner was served in her exquisite little drawing-room now loaded with sweet peas. For some reason that I have forgotten, the tiresome old Mrs. Bleecker was not in evidence—still I did not have a good time. I believe none of us had. "Alfred" still stuck in my crop. I reflected jealously, that if it had not been for the accidental meeting with me, Mount would have been alone with her. No doubt he was thinking of that, too. Everything from *hors d'oeuvres* to *chartreuse* was exquisite, but I had no zest in it.

It was "Alfred" this and "Alfred" that. Really it seemed as if my dear lady was rubbing it in. I suppose that was her delicate way of letting me know of her intentions. I fancied I perceived a certain apprehensiveness in her as to how I was going to take it. Perhaps I flattered myself. Anyhow it was enough to make the angels weep. She was not in the least in love with him, she *could not* have been, but after the way of dear, ignorant women she was trying to persuade herself that she was. Hence the "Alfreds." I thought of my passionate young friend eating his heart out in a hall bedroom and my food choked me.

Irma made some half laughing reference to the relief of being freed from Mrs. Bleecker's presence.

"If she bothers you why don't you let her go?" said Mount.

"Poor soul! What would she do?" said Irma. "She'd never get another situation, she's so disagreeable. Besides, I don't know that I could do any better."

"Hardly worth while," said Mount. "You won't need a chaperon much longer."

This was plain enough. It killed conversation for a moment or two. I was sure Irma sent an imploring glance in my direction, but I kept my eyes on my plate. Was it imploring me not to judge her, or imploring me to support her in what she meant to do, or imploring me to save her from it? How was a man to tell? I am sure she would have been glad if I had forced the question into the open, but I didn't know how to do it. True, I could have dropped a bomb in the middle of the table that would have shattered Mount's hopes, merely by telling what I knew of Roland. But my lips were sealed by my promise to him.

Mount made some facetious remark at which we laughed and fled from the disconcerting subject. But it seemed as if we could not avoid it for long. The most innocent line of conversation had a way of landing us squarely in front of it. As when Irma said:

"Have you heard that Beulah Maddox has started again to get a divorce?"

Miss Maddox had been the heavy woman in our company.

"That is the eleventh time she has started proceedings, isn't it?" said I.

"Constant in inconstancy!" murmured Mount.

"Miss Maddox's emotions are like soap-bubbles," I said.

"Do you think women are fickle?" Irma asked with a direct look in which there was something very painful.

I, thinking of poor Roland agonizing over his shorthand book until after midnight every night, could not help but shrug slightly.

"If they are it's the men's fault!" said Irma bitterly. "The men I have known would make constancy in women an indication of imbecility!"

So there we were again!

"Funny, isn't it," drawled Mount, "how the sexes have no use for each other, yet love stones still sell."

We laughed again. You had to admit Mount was a good man at a dinner table.

I excused myself early on the plea of business, and went direct to Roland. Here I find I am a little ahead of my story, for I have not told you of his present circumstances.

Roland had forsworn the stage. In this, as in everything else, he was an extremist, and he had cut himself off absolutely from his former life. People were always deceived by Roland's quietness. That composed face and indifferent manner concealed a capacity for white hot passion. As a matter of fact, I suppose, really passionate people are always like this, they couldn't live with themselves else, but we are blind to it. Roland had the spirit of a fanatic. He was always torturing himself one way or another. You couldn't help being fond of him he was so noble—and so silly.

Now, if you please, he had sold everything he possessed, and with the proceeds had pensioned off his old servant with an annuity. The mysterious legacy which had counted so against him, he had turned over to me with instructions to use it in bringing the thieves of Irma's pearls to justice. I couldn't very well refuse the money without confessing that Walter Dunsany was backing me, and no one in the world, not even Sadie, was to know of the relations between Mr. Dunsany and me. Besides, if I hadn't taken it he would have done something more foolish with it. So I was holding it in trust.

Having divested himself literally of every cent, Roland set about finding a job. Among his old acquaintances there were several prominent men who would have been glad to put him in the way of a good berth, but of course he would not apply to them. I could have done something for him myself, but he would not let me. He wanted to stand on his own bottom, he said. He set about answering advertisements, and visiting employment bureaus like any green lad from the country.

Roland with his romantic good looks could not be insignificant in any sphere however humble. He had some quaint experiences. More than once he had to fall back on his good looks to save himself, as he thought, from starvation. He served as a demonstrator for a while, and another time as a model. Roland used to say at this time that he hated his good looks, and I really think he meant it.

He finally landed a job as assistant bookkeeper and invoice clerk with a coffee importer on Water street. How he hypnotised them into believing he could keep books I can't say. His salary was ten dollars a week, and he lived within it, which you will grant was something of a change for the late darling of the matinees. He had a hall bedroom on East Seventeenth street, and ate outside. In the evenings he boned shorthand. His idea was to become first an expert law stenographer, and finally to study law.

I found him as usual in the wretched little room, bending over the shorthand manual with a green shade over his eyes. I was his only visitor in those days. He was thinner than of yore, not so harassed perhaps, but grimmer. There were deep hawklike lines from his proud nose to the corners of his bitter lips. It made me savage to see him wasting his splendid youth in this fashion.

"I've just had dinner with Irma," I said.

"Yes?" he said calmly.

You never could get any change out of Roland. Whatever he felt he never dropped that hawk mask.

"Mount was there."

"Charming fellow, Mount."

"Do you like him?" I asked amazed.

"I neither like him nor dislike him," he said evenly. "He's a charming fellow, isn't he?"

"Oh, that's the tag they put on him," I said impatiently.

He returned his attention to the shorthand book. This unnatural pretence of indifference exasperated me beyond bearing.

"I believe they're preparing to get married," I said brutally.

"We expected that, didn't we?"

"Don't you *care*?"

"Not overmuch."

I knew he lied.

"What do you want to put on this pretence with me for?" I demanded. "If you were really as callous and unfeeling as you make out I wouldn't bother with you."

He merely smiled.

I was determined to rouse him. "She doesn't love him," I said.

"He's rich," he returned with a sneer.

All the time I was trying to goad him I was getting more worked up myself. "That's not it!" I answered angrily. "Nobody knows it better than you. She's sound to the core. It's only your black temper that sees evil in her!"

"Then how do you explain Mount?" he asked.

"That's her instinct," I said. "It would be any good woman's instinct. She's trying to persuade herself that she loves him to fill the horrible emptiness of her heart since you failed her."

"I fail her?" he said with his eyebrows making two peaks.

"Precisely. You have no right to allow her to go on thinking that you are guilty."

"I don't care to go into that again," he said with his immovable stubbornness.

"If there is a catastrophe it will be your fault," I cried.

"Really, as I've told you often, you've missed your vocation, Ben," he said with his bitter smile. "You're so romantic. Let's change the subject."

"I won't," I cried. "I'm glad I'm romantic, if that's what it is. I love her a sight better than you ever did, because I have no hopes there myself. I am thinking of her. You think of nothing but yourself and your childish pride!"

"Bravo, Ben!" he said mockingly.

"I can't stand aside and see her marry Mount. He's too old. There's an evil spot in him some place that I can't put my finger on."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I came to you to get you to let me off my promise to say nothing."

That roused him as nothing else could. He sprang up, his face dark with passion. He actually threatened me with his fist.

"You swore to me!" he cried. "By God! if you break your oath——"

"Keep your hair on," I said. "Am I not here asking you to let me off?"

"I will not let you off," he said. "This is my affair, and mine only——"

"How about her?" I put in.

He did not hear me.

"You mean to be my friend, but friendship has no right to dictate another man's private affairs. I lead my life as I have to. You lead yours. No interference. That's the only way we can be friends. The only way you can help me in this is by bringing the thieves to book."

"But that's going to be a long chase," I groaned. "Meanwhile Mount is making hay. What's the use of publishing the truth if the mischief is already done?"

He shrugged. "If she can bring herself to marry Mount——!"

The self-sufficiency of a passionate young man! I could almost have wept at my helplessness against his obstinacy. "Be fair!" I cried. "It is our experience, our knowledge of men that warns us against Mount. How can she tell?"

"This does no good," he muttered.

In his bitter wrongheadedness I believe that he almost wished that Irma might find out her mistake too late.

But I would not give up, though I felt it was useless. "What happiness can there be for any of us if Irma comes to grief?" I said.

"Oh, for God's sake drop it!" he cried painfully. "What's the good of tearing open these old sores. You're off on the wrong tack. I've told you often enough. What if you did tell her I was innocent, and she turned back to me. That would be worse. I have nothing for her. I don't believe in her. She's dead to me. You can't revive that sort of thing."

"Very well, then," I said. "It would be more merciful never to tell her that you are innocent."

That touched him. "Oh——!" he said sharply taken aback. "A man doesn't like to dwell under that sort of accusation!" He quickly recovered himself. "Just as you think best," he said hardily.

But let him make believe all he liked, the one little glimpse had convinced me that he was human after all.

18

It was on the way home from Roland's room in the dark and silent side streets that I first discovered I was being trailed. Since receiving Sadie's report of Milbourne's visit to her office I had expected this. It troubled me little. My position as commander-in-chief kept me behind the lines, and they would not learn much by following me. My mail I got from the post-office myself, and our telephone conversations as a rule would not have conveyed anything to an

outsider, if he did succeed in intercepting them. At the same time it was annoying to know oneself watched. I wondered if there was any advantage to be gained from a counter stroke. Since they had succeeded in bringing me into the open, I had a mind to take an open shot at them. I began to lay my plans forthwith.

My shadow picked me up as I issued from my house next morning. He waited outside the restaurant where I had my breakfast and accompanied me to the office. Looking out of my office window I could actually see him sitting on a bench in Bryant Park opposite. He was a slender young man with an unwholesome complexion and mean, sharp eyes, a "sleuth" of the cheapest type. I wondered somewhat since they thought me worth following, that they had not chosen a better instrument than that.

He had a good long wait, for I sent out for sandwiches at lunch time. At two o'clock he was relieved by a man, considerably beefier but not a bit more intelligent-looking. It apparently had not occurred to either of them to investigate if I was watching them.

I determined to reach back at my enemies through their own spy. Having telephoned Sadie to have two good men meet me at the New Amsterdam Hotel at five-thirty, I sallied forth. My shadow resumed his attendance at my heels in the most obvious way. What kind of a fool did he think I was! It was child's play to shake him off. I merely went through the drug-store in the Times Building and downstairs to the subway station. I crossed under the tracks, mixed in the crowd on the up-town platform, and ascended to the street again. I saw my gum-shoe artist no more.

I met the two men Sadie sent me, gave them their instructions and went home. My only fear now was that I might not be able to find my trailer again. But bye and bye to my satisfaction I saw the beefy one loafing across the street. I went out and dined well, while he looked through the restaurant window. I took in a show, letting him cool his heels outside the theatre and afterwards I treated myself to one of old Adam's rabbits and a mug of ale. It was near midnight when I was through with that and the time was ripe for my little comedy. I wended my way towards the office with gum-shoes hard on my trail.

The little building where I have my office is given over entirely to business, and is closed for the night at ten o'clock. Like the other tenants, I am provided with a latchkey, in case I have to get in after hours. I am often there late, but I have never met any of the other tenants at night.

It all went through as on roller bearings. I walked down Fortieth street softly whistling "Mighty Lak' a Rose," which was my signal to the two men. They were posted in the shadow of the last doorway I had to pass before turning into my own. The block is a quiet one at that hour.

I let myself into my building and waited just inside the door. When gum-shoes came along all unsuspecting, my two friends jumped him, and holding his mouth, hustled him in after me, before he well knew what had struck him. We improvised a gag out of a handkerchief, and carried him up-stairs to my office. The fellow did not even kick.

We dumped him in a chair and turned on the lights. Then we stood off, and the three of us burst out laughing simultaneously. You never saw a more comical sight than the expression of that poor bloodhound who suddenly found himself treed by his quarry! I now had no further use for the two men, so I tipped them and they left us. I locked the door after them and put the key in my pocket. I told my prisoner he might unfasten his gag, and I sat down at my desk facing him. On the desk I prominently displayed a wicked-looking automatic. I had no idea of using it, but it made a potent argument.

Having laughed at the man I felt almost friendly towards him. I offered him a cigar.

He ignored it, and I put it away. "What do you mean by this outrage!" he demanded.

I laughed afresh. "Come off, Jack!" I said. "You must think I'm a downy chick."

At that he climbed down, and asked for the cigar quite humbly. "What do you want of me?" he muttered.

"Just a little heart to heart talk," I said grinning.

"You can't make me talk," he growled.

I played with the revolver. "There's not a soul in the building but ourselves," I said offhand.

The janitor lived on the top floor, but I supposed he didn't know that.

He wilted right down. He had no nerve at all. "I ain't got nothin' against you personally," he whined. "I only got my living to make the same as yourself."

"Who hired you to trail me?" I asked.

"I don't know what guy's got it in for you," he stammered. "Honest, I only got my orders from the office."

"What office?"

"If you queer me there I'll lose my job. I'm a married man with two children."

"I'll tell them I put a gun to your head."

"Aw, let me go. I ain't got nothin' against you."

I picked up the gun. "Come across! Who hired you?"

"The ——— Detective Agency," he stuttered.

He named one of the largest Agencies in town. Of course, I didn't know but what he was lying, but I meant to find out before I let him go. I turned a threatening scowl on him, and let my hand stray towards the gun again.

"I want the truth," I said.

He watched my hand like one hypnotised. Little drops of sweat broke out on his forehead. "For God's sake, Mister—!" he chattered. "For God's sake—! I'm telling you the truth. I'm only a poor operative. I don't know who wants to get you!"

"You'll have to prove it," I said.

"Call up the Agency," he stuttered. "They're open all night. My name is Atterbury. I'm number 68."

The instrument was at my hand. I got the number, and was presently answered by a brash young voice demanding to know what I wanted.

"This is B. Enderby," I said, "of number — West 40th Street. Have you got an operative working for you named Atterbury, number 68 on your books?"

"I don't know you," returned the voice. "We don't give any information over the phone. Call around and let us look you over." He hung up.

This little passage made me downright hot, and I suppose it showed in my face when I looked at the detective again.

"Wh-what's the matter?" he stammered.

"They refuse to identify you."

He became still paler and clammy if that were possible. "Let me—let me call them," he stammered.

I shoved the instrument towards him and waited. When he got his number he fell all over himself trying to explain. "Who is this, Dixon?—Oh, Jones. Jones—for God's sake!—this is Atterbury. Square me, can't you? This guy Enderby—I mean Mr. Enderby's got me sewed up in his office. He's got me covered—for God's sake, square me! Or I'm a goner!"

He shoved the instrument towards me. I kept one hand on my gun, inwardly I was shaking with laughter. "This is Enderby again," I said into the transmitter. "Now you have the situation. What about it?"

"I know you!" cried the brash voice, now thoroughly scared. "I've got your name and number. If anything happens to our man we've got you dead to rights."

"Sure," I said laughing. "You identify him, then?"

"Sure, I do! And if anything happens to him——"

"That's all I wanted to know," I said. "Good-bye." And this time I did the hanging up.

I got up and unlocked the door. "Get!" I said to Mr. Atterbury. "If you take my advice, old man, you'll go into some other line."

He made grand time on the stairs.

The head of the —— Detective Agency was Dongan, a well-known and able man, once the head of the New York Detective Bureau. He belonged to a school of investigation different from mine, but I respected his ability and I knew him to be above reproach. I was sure in this situation I could not do better than go direct to him. I called next morning.

"So you're in the same line?" he said looking at my card.

"That accounts for my business with you," I replied.

"What can I do for you?"

"Haven't your people told you what happened in my office last night?"

"No. Explain yourself."

"We *are* in the same line. Hunting down crooks. The supposition is that we handle only clean business.

"What are you getting at?" he demanded scowling.

"I came to ask you to explain why you're tracking me in the legitimate pursuit of my business. You will agree, I think, that it looks fishy."

"I don't know anything about it," he said crossly. "I don't know you."

"I will wait while you enquire," I said mildly.

He went into his outer office. In about five minutes he returned bringing a younger man.

"Well, you seem to have the goods on us, Enderby," he said ruefully. "It was a small job and I was not consulted."

"Our client never told us you were a detective," said the other man.

"I will make the excuses," said his employer dryly. "Describe the man who engaged us to trail Mr. Enderby."

"Gave his name as Lawlor. Fleshy man about forty-five years old. Red face, big black or dark brown moustache. Wears a cutaway coat and silk hat, very active in his movements."

"Has unusually large feet," I added, "which he slaps down in a peculiar way when he walks."

"Why, yes," said the young man, surprised. "You know him?"

"Not so well as I would like to," I said dryly. "What address did he give you?"

"We haven't got his address?"

"Where were your reports to be sent?"

The young man consulted a card. "Box 229, Station W, New York."

"Well, that's something," I said, and rose. "When you report to him please don't mention that I've been in."

"There will be no more reports," said Dongan shortly. "We'll return his money."

"If you want to make up to me for the trouble you've put me to, make him one more report," I suggested. "Simply tell him that upon learning that I was a detective, Mr. Dongan directed that the business be refused."

"I will do that," Dongan said.

"When would you ordinarily report to him?" I asked.

"This morning," the young man replied. I guessed from his foolish expression that a lurid account of the last night's proceedings had already been written.

"Good!" I said. "Will you please send it right off? I want to watch the letter box."

Dongan agreed.

I hastened to Oscar Nilson's shop. An hour or so later I issued from under his hands, as perfect a specimen of the snuffy old man, the shabby genteel, as you could have found in any public reading-room from Chatham Square to Cooper Union. Oscar is a wonder.

By noon I was at Station W, which is away uptown on Columbus avenue. Peeping through the glass front of Box 229 I saw that the letter from Dongan had not yet arrived, at least the box was empty. A little while later I had the satisfaction of seeing the letter with the ——— Detective Agency imprint on the corner shoot into the box.

For a weary two hours thereafter I made believe to amuse myself with the store windows of the block, up and down, both sides. Since I was the very picture of a harmless old loafer, my movements attracted no notice.

At last he hove in view on foot. There was no danger of overlooking this man in a crowd. I spotted him nearly two blocks away. He came dipping down the street with his vast cutaway spread to the breeze and his feet slapping the pavements, just as the different operatives had described him. With a shape and peculiarities so marked, a crook must needs be doubly clever to keep out of the toils. I suspected I was up against a good one. There was little of the crook in his appearance. His fat, rosy face bore an expression of good will to all men.

He issued out of the post-office with the open letter in his hand, and looking not quite so good-natured. He started North again, still on foot. Walking at that rate it was impossible for an apparently decrepit old man to keep up his character, so I was presently obliged to get on a car. It was an open car and I could keep track of him for several blocks. Indeed, with the stops, we travelled very little faster than he did. When I got too far ahead, I got off and let him overtake me.

He turned West on One Hundredth street and disappeared in a cheap apartment house, one of a long row. When I came abreast of the stoop I saw him in the vestibule, poking his fat fingers in one of the letter boxes. Marking the position of the box I passed on.

Returning presently, I saw that the box belonged to Apartment 14. The name upon it was R. Winters. I do not, however, mean to tax your brain with any more of Fatty's innumerable aliases. From one of the reports I learned that his nickname was "Jumbo." Hereafter I shall call him that.

I loafed up and down the street debating my next move. It is a crowded street and I was not conspicuous. Many an old dodderer walks up and down watching the children's games with a vague glance. I was very keen to have a look at the inside of Apartment 14. Thinking of Irma and Roland and the necessity of accomplishing something quickly, I am afraid I was not content to act with the caution that Mr. Dunsany and I had agreed was necessary. The most obvious suggestion was to send Jumbo a fake telegram, calling him out. But in that case, when he discovered the sell he would know that I was on to him. I wanted to be sure of a case against him first.

While I was still pondering the matter, Jumbo issued forth again accompanied this time by a woman of his own age and type who might have been his wife. From the style of her dress I judged that they were off on an expedition, and my heart beat high. I made sure that they were really leaving the neighbourhood, by seeing them on an Amsterdam avenue car bound down-town.

Returning, I rang the bell in the vestibule several times to make sure there was no one else at home. The latch never clicked. I took advantage of some one's coming out to enter, and climbed the stairs until I came to the door marked 14. I knocked without receiving any answer. The doors of these flats are childishly easy to open unless the tenant puts on a special lock. In this case it had not been done. A calling card properly manipulated did the trick. I found myself inside.

I shall not go into a lengthy description of the place because there was nothing to describe. It was an ordinary flat of four small rooms, and from the look of it might have been outfitted complete by an installment house. There was nothing to suggest the taste of the owners, at least not until you came to the kitchen. Here there was an immense ice chest crammed with the choicest and most expensive eatables and drinkables. That was where their hearts lay! There was also a great store of fine liquors and cigars.

One bit of evidence rewarded my search, and only one. There were no letters, no papers, not a scrap of writing of any kind, except two lines on a piece of paper which I found under the blotting-pad of the cheap little desk by the sitting-room window. It had evidently slipped under and had been forgotten. A clever crook, of course, is no cleverer than an honest man. He is sure to make a little slip somewhere. In the two lines of writing I once more beheld the famous cryptogram. I pocketed it in high satisfaction.

I had got as far in my search as the imitation Japanese vases on the mantel-piece. I was peeping inside one of them when I heard a slight sound behind me. I turned around and beheld Jumbo swelling and purpling with silent rage in the doorway. I confess I was a good deal shaken by the apparition, though I managed to put down the vase with a good appearance of composure. He had stolen in as noiselessly as a cat. No matter how clear one's conscience may be, one is taken at a disadvantage discovered in the posture of a burglar.

For a while we looked at each other in silence. I cautiously reassured myself that my gun was safe in my pocket. I saw that Jumbo was making a tremendous effort to hold himself in, and I realised that he had more to fear from a showdown than I had. I began to breathe more easily. I had taken off my hat for coolness, and the wig was sewn inside the band. He obviously knew me. Perhaps it was as well for me. If he had supposed me an ordinary sneak thief he might have struck me down from behind with a blow of that mighty fist.

He began to swear at me thickly and softly. I remember wondering if he were going to have an apoplectic seizure, and hoping he wouldn't because it would spoil my case.

"I have you covered from my pocket," I warned him, in case his feelings got the better of his judgment.

"Yah! I'm not going to touch you!" he snarled. "I don't have to."

He got his rage under partial control. "Go ahead and finish looking," he said with a grim sort of humour.

"I have finished," I said.

"Well, what did you find?"

"Nothing."

"You're dead right you didn't find nothing," he triumphantly retorted, "because there ain't nothing to find! I'm

straight, I am! I don't fear nobody. I don't know what you think you're after, but I'll tell you this, I'm sick of this spying business! I warn you to drop it, or I'll crush you as I would a fly! Who are you, you—amateur! I know all about you. You ain't got nothin' behind you. You're a four-flusher, a cheap skate! Keep away from me or I'll make you sorry you set up to be a sleuth!"

All this had quite the opposite effect of what was intended. As soon as Jumbo began to brag and blow, something told me he was not in the least to be feared. However, for my own purposes, I assumed an air of confusion, and looked longingly toward the door behind him. He was not at all anxious to detain me. He circled away from the door, keeping his front carefully turned towards me. I in turn backed out of the door, and he slammed it shut.

As soon as I got home I made haste to translate my find. It proved to me even more important than I had hoped.

"Received of Jumbo six thousand cash, three thousand stock as my share of the blue pearls.

"EVAN."

I allowed myself a little feeling of triumph. You will remember I had learned that Kenton Milbourne's name was Evan Whittlesey. As for the mention of blue pearls, there were no others but Irma's in the world. This amounted to real *prima facie* evidence then, the first bit I had secured.

Would they find out that it was in my possession? It must have been temporarily mislaid, they were in all other things so careful. After my visit perhaps Jumbo would begin to think back. I was not left long in doubt as to the matter. They struck at me with a boldness and skill I was little prepared for.

19

REPORT OF J. M. #9

June 25th.

To-day as I came out of the work-people's entrance to Dunsany's at noon Jumbo passed by on the sidewalk. He tipped me a scarcely perceptible wink, and kept on, as I was with my fellow-workmen. I suppose that he wished to catch me in the act, so to speak. In other words he wants to have it understood between us that he knows I work there. It is a step towards more confidential communications.

We met as usual to-night at the Turtle Bay Café, but something had happened in the meantime, because Jumbo was glum and sour. I made believe not to notice it. After he had a drink or two he volunteered the reason.

"A fellow broke into my rooms to-day, a sneak thief," he said.

"No! What did you do to him?" said I.

"Oh, I half killed him and let him go. He didn't get anything."

This was obviously no explanation of his worried air. I continued to question him about the affair with a friend's natural curiosity, but he suddenly became suspicious, so I let it drop. I do not know if this has anything to do with your other activities, but I give it for what it's worth.

Later in the evening when Jumbo's good-humour was somewhat restored, he referred to our noon meeting in a facetious way.

"Thought you said you were out of a job," he said.

I made believe to be somewhat confused. "Ahh, I wasn't going to tell everything I knew to a stranger," I said.

He made haste to commend me. He affected a certain admiration of my astuteness. "You're a deep one, English! I bet you could teach me a trick or two!"

Have I mentioned that "English" is becoming my moniker?

By this time it is thoroughly understood between Jumbo and I that we are both "good sports," i.e., dependably crooked. It saves a lot of bluffing on both sides.

Jumbo asked me what my job was at Dunsany's. I explained how I handled all the stuff that was sent in to be reset, my particular job being to remove the jewels from their old settings before handing them on to the expert craftsmen.

"What a chance!" said Jumbo wistfully. "But I suppose they have you watched."

"Oh, yes," I said, and I went on to explain all the precautions against theft and loss, "but, of course——" Here I made believe to be overtaken by caution.

Jumbo's little eyes glistened. "Of course what?" he demanded.

I tried to turn the subject which only increased his eagerness. He kept after me.

"If a man knew the trick of making paste diamonds," I suggested, "and could substitute one occasionally——! Of course he'd have to make them himself. It wouldn't be safe to buy them."

Jumbo whistled softly. "Can you make them?" he asked.

I confessed that I could.

"But wouldn't the fellows get on to you, I mean the experts you hand the jewels on to?"

As I have already told you, Jumbo knows next to nothing about diamonds, so I felt safe enough in my romancing. "Not likely," I said. "The paste jewels are first rate imitations at first. It's only after a while that they lose their lustre. Of course if I was found out, I'd pass the buck to the fellow who gave them to me. After the new work is returned to the customer there's no danger until the work has to be cleaned or repaired."

"How could a fellow keep all the different sizes and cuttings handy in his pocket?" Jumbo asked.

"In his pocket!" I said scornfully. "He'd be spotted the first day! You make the job last over night, see? Weigh, measure and test the stone you want, and bring the phony stone to match it next morning."

Jumbo was breathing hard in his excitement. I suppose he saw an endless vista of profits, the risk all mine. "But ain't the stones all cut different?" he asked.

"Say, you want to know as much as I do," I said sarcastically.

He fawned on me. "You're dead right, 'boe. That's your private affair."

After we had another drink or two I made believe to drop my guard completely. I left out the ifs and the coulds and admitted that my game at Dunsany's was as I had described it. To prove it I brought out a couple of beautiful unset diamonds, which completed the conquest of Jumbo.

"It's a cinch! a cinch!" he cried. "A couple of good men could make fifty thousand a year easy and safe. Fifty

thousand after the commission was taken out."

"What commission?" I demanded.

"Thirty-three and a third per cent to them that disposes of the stones," said Jumbo evasively.

I thought it wiser not to question Jumbo any farther in that direction at present.

Jumbo went on enthusiastically. "You and me'll be pardners! This is our little private graft. We won't let anybody else in, see? You on the inside, me out, we were made for each other!"

The coyer I made out to be, the more friendly was Jumbo.

Finally, coming down to practical matters, he asked me what the stones were worth. I told him the market value.

"Of course I can't get anything like near that," he said. "But I'll make the best dicker I can. I'll let you know before I close with them."

After some more persuasion I finally handed over the stones. I knew he wouldn't play me false as long as he thought there were larger gains in prospect.

We haggled for an hour over the division of the profits. I passionately refused to consider fifty-fifty, since the work and the risk were all mine. Half a dozen times the budding partnership seemed about to end. We finally agreed on sixty and forty. By holding out as I did, I believe I have lulled Jumbo's suspicions forever.

The compact was cemented with a drink.

We talked on about diamonds, and I saw a new idea form and grow in Jumbo's little swimming eyes. Studying me speculatively, he put me through a lengthy cross-examination concerning my knowledge of precious stones.

"You're one of these here experts yourself, ain't you?" he said at last.

I modestly accepted the designation.

"What did you leave England for?" he asked suddenly.

"What's past is past," I said scowling.

"Sure," he said hastily. "I don't want to pry into your affairs."

He changed the subject, but I could see him still chewing over the same idea, whatever it was.

We were sitting as usual at one of the little tables down the side of the bar-room. Jumbo excused himself for a few minutes. When he came back he talked about one thing and another, but it was manifestly to gain time. He glanced at the door from time to time. I wondered what was saving for me.

At about ten o'clock, a man came into the place alone, and went to the bar without, apparently, looking at us.

"Why there's Foxy!" cried Jumbo in great surprise.

He hailed his friend, and had him join us at our table. They overdid the casual meeting a little. I began to suspect that Jumbo had telephoned this man to come and join us, and I waited with no little curiosity to see what would come of it.

The newcomer was a man of Jumbo's age, but looking much younger because he was slender and well built. He was one of the plainest men I have ever seen but not in the sense of being repulsive, just plain. He was a blonde with ashy, colourless hair, and features of the "hatchet" type, that is to say sharp nose, narrow, retreating forehead, with the hair beginning some distance back. "Foxy" didn't seem to fit him very well, because he looked heavy-witted,

stupid, but perhaps he can be sharp enough when he wants. He had a dull, verbose style of talk, and a conceited air like a third-rate actor.

Jumbo informed me with a scarcely concealed leer that Foxy was a "good fellow," in other words a crook like ourselves. Verily, words come to strange passes!

Presently we got to talking about diamonds again, and Jumbo in his character of the broker, exhibited the two he had just obtained from me. He did not, however, in my hearing say where he had got them. A look at me was a sufficient hint to say nothing about our compact. Presently I began to realise that Foxy in his heavier way was putting me through a sharper examination than Jumbo's. My opinion of hatchet-face's cleverness went up several points.

This man exhibited a considerable theoretical knowledge of diamonds as of one who might have read up on the subject. For instance he knew the characteristics, the weight and the ownership of the world-famous stones. He had, however, nothing of the eye-to-eye knowledge of the experienced jeweller.

I apparently passed his examination satisfactorily. He glanced at Jumbo in a meaning way, and the latter said:

"Look ahere, English, you ought to be able to make a good thing on the side by appraising diamonds."

My heart jumped at the possibilities this opened up. Was I about to land the job of diamond expert to the gang? "The profession's overcrowded," I said carelessly.

"I could put you in the way of a job occasionally," said Jumbo. "Some fellows Foxy and me knows would be glad to pay for a little advice about buying and selling stones."

I began to hope that the end of our labours might be in sight. The next question dashed me a little.

"Have you ever heard of Mrs. —— —?" Foxy asked.*

* He named one of the most prominent society women in New York.—B.E.

Of course I had, she is one of my best customers. I shook my head.

He gave me some details of her history which would have astonished Cora —— could she have heard them. "She has a fine string of sparklers," he remarked in conclusion.

"Has she?" I said innocently. I had sold them to her.

"She's at Newport now," said Foxy casually.

"Hell! what's the use of beating round the bush!" said Jumbo in his hearty way. "Ain't we all friends together? It's worth a nice little sum to you, English, if you can find out and report if it's the genuine stones that she wears around town up there."

"But I can't leave my job," I objected.

"Sure, he can't leave his job," said Jumbo at once.

"He can go up on Saturday night's boat, and come back Sunday, can't he?" said Foxy.

The matter was so arranged. I suppose I am in for it next Saturday. Will you see that Mrs. —— is warned in some manner?

In the meantime I am to be taken to see the "friends" that buy and sell diamonds. Here's hoping that this may

prove to be the grand headquarters of the gang.

When we left the place, Jumbo excusing himself, pulled Foxy aside, and held a brief, whispered consultation with him, which boded ill for somebody. Their faces were distorted with anger. Foxy took the west-bound cross-town car, and we walked over to the subway.

Jumbo anxious, I suppose, to make me feel that I had not been left out of anything, said: "Me and Frank had a little trouble to-day. There's a bull poking his nose into our private business."

Hoping to hear more, I heartily joined with him in consigning the whole race of "bulls" to perdition.

"Oh, this is only an amateur-like," said Jumbo. "He's running a little private graft of his own. He ain't dangerous. Me and Foxy's got it fixed to trim him nicely."

This was all I could get. I mention it, thinking that it may be of interest to you.

I suppose if either of my worthy friends ever suspected that I was not a "good fellow," my life would not be worth a jack-straw. The same menace lurks behind Jumbo's swimming pig-eyes, and Foxy's dull ones. But I am enjoying the spice of danger. The only thing that irks me are the tiresome hours at my work bench in Dunsany's. I'll be glad when the game becomes livelier. This is life!

J. M.

REPORT OF A. N.

June 25th.

K. Milbourne came out of his boarding-house at 9:20 to-night. Walked East to Seventh avenue, North on Seventh to Fifty-eighth street, and East to a resort near Third Avenue called "Under the Greenwood Tree." This is a saloon and restaurant with a large open air garden in the rear where a band plays.

I waited outside upwards of an hour. Then I went in to see if I had my man safe. I found there was a back entrance from the garden out to Fifty-ninth street, and he was gone. I'm sorry, but "accidents will happen!" I returned to the boarding-house. Milbourne came home at 11:35, and judging from the light in his room, went directly to bed.

A. N.

20

As soon as I had read the two foregoing reports which reached me in the first mail, I called up Sadie for the purpose of telling her to have the operative A. N. transferred to some other duty, as he had obviously outlived his usefulness where Milbourne was concerned. This was the day following my encounter with Jumbo in his flat.

Keenan answered the phone. He said Sadie had just gone out after reading her mail. She had told him she didn't know how long she would be. We did not take Keenan very far into our confidence. He knew he was not clever, poor fellow, and did not mind his exclusion.

His word made me vaguely uneasy, for I knew of nothing to take Sadie out that morning, and she was very scrupulous about letting me know before embarking on anything new. However, there was nothing to do until I heard from her.

I plunged into the work awaiting me. That was considerable. I am only giving you an occasional report or part of a report which helps on the story a little. There were dozens of other lines we were obliged to follow that never returned us anything for our work. The office end of my business is the part I like least.

At noon I called the other office again. Sadie had not come in, said Keenan, nor had she sent any word. I was downright anxious by this time. Sadie must know that I would call her up, I told myself. Surely she would never stay away so long without sending in word, unless she were prevented. I called up her sister with whom she lived. They had not heard from her there since she had left as usual that morning.

I spent a horrible afternoon, condemned to inaction, while my brain busied itself suggesting all the dreadful things that might have happened. Curiously enough I thought only of the ordinary accidents of the streets. The truth never occurred to me.

The blow descended about half-past four. Terrible as it was it was like relief to hear anything. It came in the form of a special delivery letter, mailed as in irony from Station W. Within were two lines more of that damned cryptogram, thus:

SP JAH FUXLJG QCXQ WYE DFB&U OWK-
MZM&YW SY EUS UYHJL FVDH QMWZCDBK
QBC OYFG YB UOWX.

Meaning:

"If you return what you stole yesterday in the first mail to-morrow all will be well."

On the back of the paper was written another message:

"They have got me, Ben. Save me!"

This went to my breast like a knife. It was unquestionably Sadie's handwriting. The wild words were so unlike my clever self-contained girl it broke me all up. For a while I could not think, could not plan. I could only reproach myself for having put one so dear to me in danger.

Fortunately for humans, old habits of work reassert themselves automatically. My brain screwed itself down upon the hardest problem of my career. There was not the slightest use in flying up to the flat on One Hundredth street. There would be no one there. Neither could I call on the police for aid without precipitating the catastrophe. If Sadie was to be saved it must be by unaided wits.

I thought of Mr. Dunsany with hope and gratitude. In him I had a line on the gang they did not as yet suspect. I immediately called up Dunsany's and asked if I might speak to Mattingly in the jewel-setting department. It was a risky thing to do, but I had no choice. Knowing how the gang watched Dunsany's it would have been suicidal for me to have gone there to meet him.

I finally heard his voice at the other end of the wire. "This is Enderby," I said. "Do you get me?"

"Yes," he said, "what is it?"

I had to bear in mind the possibility of a curious switchboard operator in Dunsany's listening on the wire. "Are you going to meet your friends to-night?" I asked in ordinary tones.

"Yes," he said, "same as usual."

"Those fellows have played a trick on me," I said. "They have copped my girl."

"Not Sadie!" he said aghast.

"Yes," I said. "It's a deuce of a note, isn't it?"

He took the hint, and his voice steadied. "What do you want me to do?"

"Find out if you can without giving yourself away where they have put her."

"I'll try. Where can I meet you?"

"We can't meet. But watch out for my friend Joe the taxi-driver. He stands outside your joint up on Lexington avenue. The number of his licence is 11018. It's painted on the sidelamps."

"I get you," said Mr. Dunsany.

I cannot give a very clear account of the next hour or two. It was like a nightmare. I knew a young fellow that drove a taxi which he hired from a big garage by the day. I was depending on him to help me out. I had often employed him. I searched him out, taking suitable precautions against being trailed. He agreed to hire me his cab for the night and I went to his room to change clothes with him. The visored cap in itself was a pretty good disguise. I had made an engagement by telephone with my good friend Oscar Nilson, and he fixed me up so my own mother wouldn't have known me.

In my anxious eagerness I arrived at the Turtle Bay Café long before the hour. None of the men I was looking for had arrived, and I was compelled to drive around the streets for another half hour or more. I turned down the little flag on the meter, to avoid taking any business. Once more I had a drink at the bar without seeing any of my men. The third time I returned I caught a glimpse of Mr. Dunsany's face at one of the tables, and I waited outside as if for a fare who had gone in for a drink.

After a while I could stand it no longer. My torturing curiosity drove me inside. I went to the bar taking care not to look towards the alcove where the three sat. I found I could see them in the mirror without turning my head. Mr. Dunsany, or "English," as I shall call him, and "Foxy" each presented a side view, while Jumbo, seated farthest within the alcove, faced me. Foxy was Milbourne, as you have already guessed.

All the alcoves down the side of the room were fully occupied. Even if I had been able to secure a place in either of the adjoining compartments, I doubt if I could have heard any of my men's talk. They had their heads very close together. There was an infernal racket in the place. I had to content myself with watching Jumbo's lips, wishing vainly that I might read them. I had to be careful not to seem to stare, for at any moment he might raise his eyes and meet mine in the mirror. My face was revealed in every line by the strong lights behind the bar.

As far as I could make out Jumbo and Foxy were trying to urge something on English to which he resisted. His reluctance was so well done I could not decide if it were real or assumed. Once more I was compelled to pay tribute to my friend and assistant. What a lucky chance it was that had led me to him. He was a wonder!

The other two were an ugly-looking pair at that moment, the one face gross and mean, the other sharp and mean. They had dropped their masks. I wondered now how I could have thought even for a moment that Milbourne was stupid. His long nose, his close-set eyes, the whole eager thrust-forward of his gaunt face suggested the evil intelligence of the devil himself. Not for nothing was this man called Foxy.

After a while they seemed to come to an understanding. Jumbo sat back and putting his hand in his pocket, looked around for the waiter. I made a quiet exit to my cab outside where I waited the turn of events.

They must have had another drink for it was still some moments before they issued from between the swinging doors. I saw English's eyes go at once to the number on my side lamps, which he read off with visible satisfaction. He gave me a fleeting glance as I sat nodding on the driver's seat. English was making out to show the effects of his liquor a little. The other two were cold sober.

"Say, boys," said English, "let's taxi it up; I'll blow."

I made believe to come to life, hearing that, and hopping out touched my cap and opened the door.

Foxy frowned and held back. "What's the use?" he grumbled.

"Aw, come on," said English. "I ain't had an auto ride since I landed." His slightly foolish air was beautifully done.

Neither Jumbo nor Foxy liked the idea, but they liked less calling attention to themselves by a discussion in the street. So they all piled in. Jumbo gave me a number on Lexington avenue which would be about half a mile North of where we then were.

There was a hole in the front glass at my car for the purpose of allowing fare to communicate with driver. With the noise of the engine, however, I could hear no more than the sound of their voices. It seemed to me that both Foxy and Jumbo were admonishing English not to drink so much if he couldn't carry it better.

I found my number on a smallish brown stone dwelling facing the great sunken railway yards, and drew up before it. It was one of a long row of houses, all exactly alike.

As my fares climbed out, English said to Jumbo: "How long will we be in here?"

"Not long," was the answer.

"Then wait," said English to me. A glance of intelligence passed between us.

"You must like to throw your money away," grumbled Foxy, as they mounted the steps.

They were admitted by a negro man-servant.

I examined the surroundings more particularly. The excavating of the great yards opposite has damaged the neighbourhood as a residential district and the tidy little houses were somewhat fallen from their genteel estate. Small, cheap shops had opened in one or two of the basements, and beauty parlours, or dry-cleaning establishments on the parlour floors. Only one or two houses of the row retained a self-respecting air, and of these the house I waited before was one. The stone stoop had been renovated, the door handles were brightly polished, and the windows cleaned. Simple, artistic curtains showed within. In fact it had all the earmarks of the dwelling of a well-to-do old-fashioned family which had refused to give up its old home when the first breath of disfavour fell upon the neighbourhood.

I should further explain that the houses were three story and basement structures with mansard roofs over the cornices. At the corner of the street, that is to say three doors from where my cab was standing, there was a new building four stories high, which contained a brightly lighted café on the street level and rooms above. In other words what New Yorkers call a Raines' Law Hotel.

The three men remained inside the house about forty-five minutes, I suppose. It seemed like three times that space to me, waiting. They appeared at last, talking in slightly heightened tones, which suggested that they had partaken of spirituous refreshment inside. Their talk as far as I could hear it was all in respectful praise of a lady they had just left. She was a "good fellow," a "wise one," "long-headed."

At the cab door they hesitated a moment as if in doubt of their next move.

"It's early," said Jumbo. "Let's go back to the Turtle Bay."

The others agreed.

English let them get in first. "Back to the Turtle Bay," he said to me. His lips added soundlessly: "She is here!"

When they got out again, English paid me off. His expressive eyes said clearly that he wished to speak to me

further. The others stood close, and we dared not take any risk.

I thanked him, touching my cap. "Any time you want me, gen'lemen, call up Plaza 6771," I said.

They went inside.

I had given the first telephone number that came into my head. It was that of an artist friend of mine who had a studio apartment on Fifty-ninth street. I hastened up there in the car, and routed him out of bed. Artists are used to these interruptions. I had a little difficulty, however, in making myself known to a man half asleep. He was decent about it, though. He gave me tobacco, and telling me to make myself comfortable, went back to bed.

In an hour or so the telephone bell rang, and to my joy I heard English's voice on the wire.

"This you?" he said. We named no names.

"I get you," I said. "Fire away."

He plunged right into his story and though plainly labouring under excitement, was admirably clear and succinct.

"She is confined in that house. She was lured there this morning by a forged letter from you instructing her to go there for certain evidence. I did not see her. I understood from their talk that so far she is all right."

"The house is occupied by a woman they call Lorina or Mrs. Mansfield. Handsome, blonde woman of forty; great force of character. She is a member of the gang, perhaps the leader of it. Anyway, they all defer to her. She has a better head than either Jumbo or Foxy. I was taken there to-night for the purpose of having her size me up. Apparently she approved of me."

"I understood that the girl is safe until to-morrow morning. Then they plan"—his voice began to shake here—"to—to do away with her."

"Unless I come across with the paper they want?" I interrupted.

"Whether you do or not," he said grimly. "They have no intention of letting her go. They plan to get you, too, to-morrow."

"How?"

"I don't know. I was not consulted."

"Go on."

"The—the job they are trying to force on me," he faltered, "is to dispose of her body. They chose me because I am not suspected by you, not followed. I am to carry it out of the house piecemeal. Oh—! it's horrible!"

"Steady!" I said. "I promise you that won't be necessary. Any more particulars?"

"Mrs. Mansfield lives alone," he went on. "She has three coloured servants, two maids and a man."

"Did you find out where they slept?"

"Yes. The two maids on the top floor in the front room, the man somewhere in the basement."

"Are they in the gang?"

"No. They do not know that Miss Farrell is in the house. But the man, I understood, could be depended on absolutely. Which means that he is ready for any black deed. He is as ugly and strong as a gorilla."

"What about the other internal arrangements of the house?"

"On the first floor there is a parlour in front, dining-room and pantry behind. On the second floor the front room is a sitting-room or office. The telephone is here. Mrs. Mansfield sleeps in the rear room on this floor. Between her bedroom and the office there is an interior room, and that is where Miss Farrell is confined. This room can be entered only through Mrs. Mansfield's bedroom."

"Did you notice the locks on the doors?"

"No. There was nothing out of the common. On the front door a Yale lock of the ordinary pattern."

"Anything more?"

"One thing. Mrs. Mansfield goes armed. She has a small automatic pistol with a maxim silencer which is evidently her favourite toy. I hope I got what you wanted. They were at me every minute. I could not look around much."

"No one could have done better!" I said heartily.

"What do you want me to do now?"

"Where are you?"

"In my own boarding-house. The party at the Turtle Bay soon broke up. The telephone here is in the restaurant in the basement, and everybody sleeps upstairs."

"You had better stay at home until morning," I said, after thinking a moment. "It is very likely that they are having you watched to-night."

"But I must do something. I couldn't sleep."

"There is really nothing you can do now. Stay where you can hear the telephone and I'll call you if I need you. I'll call you anyway when I get her out safe. If you do not hear from me by say, three o'clock, go to police headquarters, tell them all the circumstances, and have the house surrounded and forced."

"I understand."

"To-morrow morning if all goes well, you must go to work as usual. I don't mean that we shall lose all our work so far if I can help it. They must not suspect you."

"Don't take too big a chance, Ben, the girl——"

"Don't worry. The girl is worth fifty cases to me. But I mean to save both."

21

I went home for some things I needed, and in less than half an hour after the telephone talk I was back in front of the Lexington avenue house, still at the wheel of my taxi. I had, however, changed my clothes in the meantime. I did not want the chauffeur's uniform I had worn earlier to figure in any description that might be circulated in the gang.

Passing the house slowly I surveyed it from pavement to roof. All the windows were dark. The basement windows were open, but were protected as is customary by heavy bars. The first floor and the second floor windows were closed. The two windows on the top floor which were above the cornice, stood open.

Turning the corner, I came to a stop outside the rear door of the saloon I have mentioned. It was after the legal

closing hour, but they were serving drinks in the back room. I went in and ordered a beer. The desk and the hotel register were in this room. You entered from a narrow lobby from which rose the steep stairs. I paid for my drink and took it. Choosing a moment when the waiter was in the bar, I rose to leave. In the lobby I turned to the right instead of the left and mounted the stairs. There was no one to question me.

In one side pocket I carried a small but efficient kit of tools, in the other a bottle of chloroform and a roll of cotton. My pistol was in my hip pocket.

I went up the three flights without meeting any one, lighted by a red globe on each landing. There was a fourth flight ending at a closed door which I figured must give on the roof. It was bolted on the inside, of course, and I presently found myself out under the stars.

This building, you will remember, was half a story higher than the row of dwellings which adjoined it. It was therefore a drop of only six feet from the parapet of one roof to the parapet of the other. Easy enough to go; a little more difficult perhaps to return that way. From the parapet I stepped noiselessly to the roof of the first dwelling, and crossed the two intervening roofs to the house I meant to enter. I had nearly two hours before Mr. Dunsany would put the police in motion, ample time, I judged. Probably the first few minutes in the house would decide success or failure.

There was a flat scuttle in the roof which, as I expected, was fastened from within. I could have opened it with my tools, but it seemed to me quicker and safer to enter by one of the windows in the mansard. In any case I would have to deal with the maids on that floor, and it was likely they slept behind locked doors.

The cornice made a wide, flat ledge in front of these windows. It was a simple task to let myself down the sloping mansard to the ledge and creep to the window. Had I been seen from the pavement across the way it would have ruined all, but the street was deserted as far as I could see up and down. There were no houses opposite.

Pausing with my head inside the window I heard heavy breathing from the back of the room. I cautiously let myself in. Then I could distinguish two breathings side by side, and knew that both women were sleeping in the same bed. I got out my cotton and chloroform. Fortunately for me negroes are generally heavy sleepers. I let each woman breathe in the fumes before the cotton touched her face. They drifted away with scarcely a movement. I left the saturated cotton on their faces without any cone to retain the fumes. In this way they could not take any injury. The potency of the drug would soon be dissipated in the atmosphere.

It was a hot night and the door of their room stood open. I didn't see until too late, that a chair had been placed against the door to prevent the draft from the window slamming it. I stumbled over the chair. It made little noise, but the jar caused me to drop the precious bottle, and before I recovered it the contents was wasted. This was a serious loss.

I crept down the first flight of stairs. This landed me on the floor where the mistress slept. As I approached the door of her room a shrill yapping started up inside. I cursed the animal under my breath. English had not told me that the woman kept a dog. It made things twice as difficult. The noise sounded through the house loud enough, it seemed to me, to wake the dead. I heard somebody move inside the room, and I hastened down the next flight of stairs, and crouched at the back of the hall outside the dining-room door.

Over my head I heard the bedroom door unlocked, and presently the upper hall was flooded with light. I was safely out of reach of its rays. I offered up a silent prayer that the lady would not be moved to descend the stairs, for I pictured her carrying the automatic with the silencer. True, I had my own gun, but for obvious reasons I was averse to firing it.

She did not come down. The dog apparently was satisfied that all was well, and ceased his yapping. From his voice I judged the animal to be a Pomeranian. Mistress and dog finally returned to the bedroom and the door was locked again. With the dog and the lock on the door my problem was no easy one. I had to enter that way before I could reach my girl. She left the light burning in the upstairs hall.

Before attempting to deal with the mistress it seemed to me necessary to dispose of the negro in the basement. I went on downstairs not at all relishing the prospect. There were swing doors both at the top and the bottom of the

basement stairs which had to be opened with infinite caution to avoid a squeak. On the stairs between it was as dark as Erebus. On every step I half expected to find the gorilla-like creature crouching in wait for me, but when I finally edged through the lower door I was reassured by the sound of a rumbling snore. The dog had not awakened him.

He slept in the front room. This had originally been the dining-room of the house. I cautiously opened the door and looked in. A certain amount of light came through the area windows from the street lamps. The negro's bed was against the wall between me and the windows. These were the windows which were heavily barred outside.

When I saw the bars and felt the door which was a heavy hardwood affair, and had a key in it, I thought it would be sufficient to lock the man in. You see I was pretty well assured that none of these people would care to make a racket. However, there was another door leading to the pantry, thence to the kitchen. This had no lock on it, and I was compelled to find another means of confining him.

Exploring the rear of the basement I came across a trunk in the back hall with a stout strap around it. This I softly removed and appropriated. Going on through the kitchen out into the yard I found stout clothesline stretched from side to side. I cut down several lengths of it.

While I was in the yard I made an important discovery respecting the lay of the back of the house. The lower story extended out some fifteen feet above the upper floors. The mistress' windows therefore opened on a flat extension roof. These windows were opened and unbarred. There was no light within the room.

I returned with the strap and the lengths of rope to the negro's sleeping-room. He was still snoring vociferously. He lay on his back with his brawny arms flung above his head like an infant, and his great chest rose like a billow with every inhalation. The bed was a small iron one with low head and foot. It looked strong, but I knew that these things were generally of flimsy construction.

First I laid my gun on the floor where I could snatch it up at need. Then with infinite care I passed my long trunk strap under the bed and over his ankles, and drew it close, but not tight. This was intended for a merely temporary entanglement. He never stirred. I made a noose out of one of the pieces of rope and passed it carefully, carefully over his two hands. During this he began to stir. The snores were interrupted. I passed the rope around the iron bar at the head of the bed, and as he came fully awake I gave it a sharp jerk binding his hands hard and fast. I knotted the rope.

I flung a pillow over his head, and sat on it to still any cries while I made a permanent job of trussing him up. His great frame heaved and plunged on the bed in a paroxysm of brutish terror, finding himself bound. You have seen a cat with a rope around it. Imagine a mad creature thirty times the bulk of a cat. But everything held. The bed rocked and bounced on the floor, but there were four closed doors between me and the woman sleeping up-stairs, and I hoped the sound might not carry.

It was all over in a moment or two. The ropes were ready to my hand. Every time he heaved up I passed a fresh turn under him. Presently I had him bound so tight he could not move a muscle. True to the character of his race, he gave up the struggle all at once and lay inert. There was a moment in which he might have cried out when I changed the pillow for a gag made out of the sheet, but by that time he was gasping for breath. I knotted the gag firmly between his teeth. Smothered groans issued from under it. I went over all the ropes twice to make sure nothing could slip. I expected, of course, that he would wriggle out in the end, but I only needed a little while.

Before proceeding further I gave my stretched nerves a moment or two to relax. The big task was still to come. Finally I stole up-stairs again. When I closed the doors behind me I could no longer hear the negro's smothered groans. The house was perfectly quiet. As I softly crept up on all fours stair to stair I was busily debating how to open the attack. Locked door, silent gun and dog made the odds heavy against me.

By the time I was half way up the main stairway I had made a plan. Rising to my feet I mounted the rest of the way with a firm tread. Instantly the little dog inside broke into a frantic barking. I heard his mistress spring out of bed. I hastily unscrewed the electric light bulb, and throwing a leg over the banisters slid noiselessly down to the first floor again. As before I sought the security of the back hall.

She unhesitatingly opened the door—she was a bold one. I heard her catch her breath to find the hall in

darkness. Her hand shot out, I heard the click of the switch, but of course there was no light. Instantly she began shooting. The light "ping" of her weapon had an inexpressibly deadly sound. The bullets thudded viciously into wood and plaster. From the direction of the latter sounds, she was shooting along the upper hall and down the stairs.

I knew she had ten shots, not more, and I counted them. After the tenth, running forward in the hall, I set up a horrid groaning. She was silent above. I kept up the groaning, and threshed about on the floor alongside the stairs.

Suddenly she came running down. This was what I had prayed she might do. She reached the switch in the lower hall and light flared out. Instantly I sprang up the outside of the stairway, vaulted over the banisters and stood half way up the stairs, cutting her off, I hoped, from additional ammunition.

She stood at the foot of the stairs gun in hand, glaring up at me. I saw a large, handsome woman with a rope of coarse blonde hair as thick as my wrist hanging down her back and eyes like lambent blue flames. By her snarl I saw that I had the advantage for the moment, but her eyes never quailed. To give her her due she was as bold as a lion. I know of few other women of her age who would look handsome under the circumstances. She was wearing a pink negligee robe over her nightdress. Her feet were bare, they were pretty feet, too. The little dog sheltered himself behind her skirts barking madly. I saw the woman glance down the hall. No doubt she was wondering why the noise didn't bring the negro.

"What do you want?" she demanded in a high and mighty tone.

"Never mind what I want," I returned. "Do what I tell you."

"If you let me go to my room I'll give you what money I have," she said.

"And load up again," I said smiling.

"You can watch me. I have two hundred dollars in the house. It's all you get, anyway."

"That's not what I came for."

By that she knew me. She bared her fine white teeth and raised her gun.

"It's empty," I said laughing. "I counted the shots."

She swore with heartfelt bitterness like a man.

I drew my own gun. "This one is loaded," I said.

I descended a step or two to enforce my orders. I pointed the gun at her. "Open the front door!" I commanded. "Go into the vestibule and close it behind you."

My purpose was to lock her between the two sets of doors while I searched for Sadie. She scowled at me sullenly, and for a moment I thought I had her beaten; she seemed about to obey. But reflecting perhaps that I didn't want to bring in outsiders any more than she, she took a chance. Suddenly putting down her head she ran like a deer for the rear hall, the little dog whimpering in terror at her heels.

The door at the head of the basement stairs banged open and she plunged down, calling on her servant. I had to make a quick decision. The way was presumably open to Sadie, but there were plenty of knives in the kitchen and if she liberated the man I would have to fight my way out of the house against the two of them. I ran after her. A rough house in the basement followed, doors slamming, chairs overturned, and the ceaseless yelping of the dog.

She ran into the front room, saw the negro's predicament, and ran back through the pantries to the kitchen. I was close at her heels. She knew just where to find her knife, and she was out of the room again by the other door before I could stop her. She ran back through the hall to the front room, slamming both doors in my face to delay me. She tried to lock the second door, but I got my foot in it.

She flung herself on the negro, sawing at his bonds with the knife. Fortunately there was some light in this

room. I dragged her off the bed. I had only one arm free on account of the gun. She tore herself free from me, and turning, came at me stabbing with the knife. I thought my last hour had come. I fired over her head. She ran out of the room.

I stopped to look at my prisoner's bonds. I found them intact. In bending over him my foot struck something on the floor. I picked up her gun. She had been obliged to drop it in order to use the knife.

I ran after her. As I put foot on the upper stairs I heard her slam her bedroom door and turn the key. So there I had my work to do all over—but not quite all, for I had the gun now, and it was hardly likely she would have another.

22

I hammered on the door with the butt of my revolver—a little noise more or less scarcely mattered now, and commanded her to open it.

She was not so easily to be intimidated. Through the door she consigned me to the nether world. "If you break in the door I'll croak the girl," she threatened.

I believed her capable of it. Remembering the knife she carried, I shuddered.

We spent some moments in exchanging amenities through the door. I wished to keep her occupied, while I threshed around in my head for some expedient to trap her.

"All right!" I cried, giving the door a final rattle. "I'll get the poker from the furnace."

She laughed tauntingly.

Of course I had no such intention. I had suddenly remembered the open windows on the roof of the extension. It seemed easier to drop from above than climb from below, so I went up-stairs.

The room over Mrs. Mansfield's bedroom was unlocked and untenanted. I took off my shoes at the threshold, and crept across with painful care to avoid giving her warning below. Unfortunately the windows were closed. I lost precious time opening one of them a fraction of an inch at a time.

Finally I was able to lean out. She had lighted up her room. I could see the glow on the sill below. To my great satisfaction I saw that she had pulled down the blinds, without, however, closing the window under me. For while I looked the blind swayed out a little in the draft. Evidently the possibility of an attack from that side had not occurred to her.

It was a drop of about fourteen feet from the window sill on which I leaned to the roof of the extension below. I dared not risk it. Even suppose I escaped injury, the noise of my fall would warn her, and the moments it would take me to recover my balance might give her time to execute her foul plan. I believed that she had my girl locked in the inner room (else I should surely have heard from Sadie). This would give me one second, while she was unlocking the door—but only one second.

The bed in the room I was in was made up. Always with the same precautions of silence I fashioned a rope sufficiently long out of the two sheets and the cotton spread. I fastened the end of the rope to the leg of a heavy bureau beside the window, and carefully paid it out over the sill. Before trusting myself to it I planned every movement in advance.

I must let myself down face to the building, I decided, until I had almost reached the roof. Then I must drop, and with the reflex of the same movement spring into the woman's room.

It worked all right. I was already inside when she turned around. It was well that it was so, because the door into the inner room stood wide. I saw my girl lying on a couch. Like a flash the woman had the lights out. Quick as a cat she was through the door, knife in hand. But I had got my bearings with that one glimpse. I was hard upon her. I flung my arms around her from behind, pinioning her close. I dragged her back into the outer room. She was surprisingly strong for a woman, but I was just a little stronger. She spit out curses like an angry cat.

I dragged her across the room to where the switch was. I had to take an arm from her to search for it. She renewed her struggles. It took half a dozen attempts. Once she escaped me altogether. She still had the knife. I do not know how I managed to escape injury. She slit my coat with it.

At last I got the blessed light turned on. She was still jabbing at me with the knife, but I could see what I was doing now. The little dog fastened his teeth in my ankle. I kicked him across the room.

Between the two doors I have mentioned there was a third door, which evidently gave on a closet. It had a key in it. I dragged my captive to it, and somehow managed to get it open. I flung her in, knife and all, slammed the door, locked it, and leaned against the frame sobbing for breath. I was half blinded by the sweat in my eyes. The woman was all in, too, or I never should have got the door closed. For a while she lay where she had fallen without sound or movement. When his mistress disappeared the dog ran under the bed. His little pipe was now so hoarse he could scarcely make himself heard.

Presently the woman recovered her forces. Springing up, she hurled herself against the door with as much force as she could gather in that narrow space. The door opened out, and the lock was a flimsy one. I saw that I couldn't keep her there for long. I ran into the inner room.

My dearest girl was lying on a couch, fully dressed and unfettered, but strangely inert, stupefied. I was terrified by her aspect. However, her body was warm and she was breathing, though not naturally. She was not wholly unconscious. Her head moved on the pillow, and her misty eyes sought mine with a faint returning gleam of sentience. Obviously she had been drugged, and the effect was just now beginning to wear off.

I could not stop to restore her there. I gathered her up in my arms, snatched up her hat which was lying near, and ran out through the bedroom. I had no more than got the bedroom door locked behind me, when the door of the closet burst open, and the woman fell out into the room. She immediately threw herself against the other door, but as regarded that, my mind was easier. It was a much heavier affair, and it opened towards her. I need not point out that there is a considerable difference, between bursting a door out, and pulling it in.

I carried my precious burden down the stairs, murmuring phrases in her ear that I did not know I had at my command. She commenced to weep, a very encouraging sign. I believe I wept with her. She was dearer to me than my life.

I paused at the front door to try to bring her to somewhat before venturing out into the street. Unfortunately there was no water within reach. I was afraid to take much time. The woman up-stairs had obtained some kind of a weapon with which she was battering the door. In her insane passion she had forgotten all considerations of prudence. She finally managed to split one of the panels; the key, however, was safe in my pocket. She hurled imprecations after us.

I opened the outer door a little, and the fresh air revived my dearest girl marvellously. Presently she was able to stand with a little assistance. Her first conscious act was to pin on her hat with a piteous assumption of her usually composed manner. For a long time she could not speak, but she knew me now, and leaned on me trustfully.

I knew how best to reach her. "Brace up!" I whispered urgently. "Pull yourself together. I need you. Show me what you can do!"

She smiled as much as to say she was ready for anything. Such was her temper.

We went out, closing both doors behind us. I fully expected to see a knot of the curious on the steps, attracted by the strange sounds from within. But the street was still empty. There must be a lot of strange things happening that no one ever knows of. We did not meet anybody until we got around the corner. Here a policeman stood idly

swinging his club and staring at the taxicab, speculating no doubt on the mystery of its apparent abandonment and wondering what he ought to do about it. The back room of the saloon was now closed.

I saluted him, inwardly praying that he would not be led to look down at my feet. I had managed to keep my cap through all vicissitudes, but I had no shoes on. I briskly opened the door, and helped Sadie in.

"Here you are, Miss," said I.

Then I ran completely around the car to avoid the bluecoat, and cranked her. Even then I could hear in the stillness the muffled sound of the woman's blows on the door. The policeman was apparently unaware of anything amiss. Fortunately my engine popped at the first turn. The policeman's suspicions of me were gathering, but he was a slow-thinking specimen.

"Hold on a minute, fellow," he said at last.

The car was then in motion, and I made believe not to hear him. Apparently he did not think it worth while to raise an alarm.

I cannot tell you with what a feeling of thankfulness I left that neighbourhood behind me.

I took Sadie direct to her sister's. We found that young woman in a pretty state of fluster. She was of an emotional type, very different from the matter-of-fact Sadie. Maybe she didn't give it to me for leading her darling into danger! But I was happy enough to be able to take it with a grin. Sadie by this time could speak for herself. She took my part.

I telephoned from here to English at his boarding-house as I had agreed. I still had more than half an hour to the good.

He gave a restrained whoop when he heard my voice. "You've got her!" he cried. "You're both all right?"

"Right as rain!"

"Ben, you're a wonder!"

At that moment I was quite prepared to believe it.

"How did you manage it?" he asked.

"Can't tell you now. The game is only starting."

"What am I to do?"

"Go to bed. Above all keep them from suspecting you. The whole case depends on you now. I will write you care Dunsany's on Monday."

"Take care of yourself!"

"Same to you!"

Warning the girls to be ready to start for the country in an hour, I borrowed a pair of brother-in-law's shoes and returned the taxi to its garage. I then went home and washed and dressed myself in my own clothes. Afterwards I got out my own little car and went back for Sadie. By this time the dawn was breaking. It was Sunday.

I found Sadie quite her own self again, and flatly rebellious at being ordered to give up the game and retire to the country. In vain I explained to her that these people had their backs against the wall now, and that our lives were not worth a farthing dip if they ever caught sight of us. Sister was now on my side, not, however, without a few back shots at the one who had first got her Sadie into the crooks' bad books. It was not until I said that I was myself going to lie low for a while that Sadie gave in. I'm afraid at that, that her opinion of me suffered a fall for the time being.

The dearest girl was furious when she learned that I had almost been frightened out of my wits by the message from her they had sent me, so much so that I had been prepared to drop the whole case to save her.

"That was what they were after!" she cried. "I had to write it, of course, because she held a pistol to my head. But I was sure you would understand. If I had thought for a moment that you would let it interfere with the case I would have let her shoot."

I shuddered. One did not know whether to praise or blame such game folly. However, I registered a little vow privately not to let Sadie's enthusiasm lead her into danger again. Meanwhile I hugged her right there with sister looking on. She promptly slapped my face—but not so hard as usual.

I took the sisters to that same little sanatorium at Amityville, Long Island, where Sadie had been before with Miss Hamerton. The doctor-proprietor was an old friend of mine. A single warning word to him, and I knew they would be as safe as I could guard them myself.

Notwithstanding Sadie's violent objections (she said she had been lured to Amityville under false pretenses), I motored right back to town. I did intend to lay off for a day or two but I had to put my office in order first. It was about eight o'clock when I got back to Manhattan. I put up my car and had an excellent breakfast. I thought if I was going to be plugged it might as well be on a full stomach. I did not deceive myself as to the risk I ran in visiting my office, but it was absolutely necessary for me to secure certain papers and destroy others.

I took a taxi down and ordered the man to wait. I cleaned everything up in case the place should be entered during my absence. What papers I meant to take with me I deposited in a satchel, and took the precaution of strapping it to my wrist. Then I locked up and returned down stairs. I found that my chauffeur had moved away from the doorway a little, consequently I was exposed for a moment or two on the sidewalk.

It was sufficient. I heard that deadly little "ping" and simultaneously a sound like a slap on bare flesh. I did not know I was hit, but I fell down. Then a pain like the searing of a hot iron passed through my shoulder.

"I'm shot!" I cried involuntarily.

I realised that I was not seriously hurt. However, I had no mind to get up and make myself a target for more. I made believe to close my eyes, and lay still. My mind worked with a strange clearness. I saw the woman across the street. She was poorly dressed with a shawl over her head, but I recognised the stature and the curves of my antagonist of the night before.

The usual gaping crowd gathered. Nobody had heard the shot but me. While all eyes were directed on me the woman coolly walked away across the park, tossing the gun into the middle of a bush as she went. I said nothing. It was no part of my game to have her arrested.

I suspected that the openmouthed crowd surrounding me was full of spies, so I made out to be worse hurt than I was, groaning and writhing a little. The wound helped me out by bleeding profusely. One youth with an evil face made to take my satchel as if to relieve me. The strap frustrated his humane purpose. He was afraid to proceed further under that circle of eyes.

Somebody had telephoned for an ambulance, and presently it came clanging up with a fresh crowd in its train. The white clad surgeon bent over me.

"I am not badly hurt," I whispered to him, "but please take me away quickly out of this mob."

I was carried to Bellevue Hospital where I engaged a private room. My wound, a slight affair, was cauterised—I had in mind the possibility of poison, and dressed. Afterwards I enjoyed my first sleep in twenty-four hours. I had left instructions that no one was to be admitted to see me, and that no information regarding my condition was to be given out.

By the next day I was quite myself again. I had already seen the reporters, and by the exercise of persuasion and diplomacy had managed to keep the affair from being unduly exploited in the papers. The police, good fellows, were hard at work on the case, but they could hardly be expected to accomplish anything without the evidence which I did

not intend to let them have. The doctors who hate to see any one escape out of their hands so easily did their best to persuade me to stop a while in the hospital and "rest" but how could I rest with so much to do outside?

Having decided that I must leave the hospital, it was a matter of considerable concern to me how this was to be effected without exposing myself to a fresh danger. I had received a disguised telephone message from English to the effect that they were waiting for me. I decided to confide in the visiting surgeon, an understanding man.

"Sir," I said, "I am a private detective. I have a gang of crooks almost ready to be rounded up. Knowing it, they are desperate. That is the explanation of the attack on me. Now the chances are that the instant I step outside the hospital I'll stop another bullet. What would you do if you were me?"

"Call on the police," he said, of course.

"I can't do that without exploding my charges prematurely."

As I said, he was an understanding man. He didn't bother me with a lot of questions, but took the case as he found it. After thinking a while, he said:

"How would it do if I had you transferred in an ambulance to my private clinic on —— Street. You see you'll be loaded on out of sight in the hospital yard here, and you will be driven right inside my place to be unloaded. You lie flat in the ambulance and no one can see inside without climbing on the step, and a surgeon sits there."

"Fine!" I said. "You're a man of resource."

He gave the order, and it was so done. Arrived at his private hospital I dressed myself in street clothes, borrowing a coat to replace my bloody one, and calling a taxi had myself carried to Oscar Nilson's shop.

23

I have mentioned, I believe, that Oscar Nilson was a wig-maker, the best in New York. His little shop on a quiet side street North of Madison Square is quaint enough to be the setting of an old-fashioned play. The walls are lined with old cuts of historical personages and famous Thespians as historical personages, all with particular attention to their hirsute features. On the counter stands a row of forms, each bearing some extraordinary kind of scalp. Oscar deals in make-up as a side line and the air bears the intoxicating odour of grease paint and cold cream.

Oscar's business is chiefly with the theatrical profession, but many an old beau and fading belle have found out that he knows more about restoring youth than the more fashionable beautifiers. Oscar loves his business. His knowledge, historical, artistic, scientific, is immense—but all in terms of human hair. He can tell you offhand how Napoleon wore his in 1803 or any other year of his career, and will make you an exact sketch of the toupee ordered by the Duke of Wellington when his fell out.

Oscar himself, strangely enough, or perhaps naturally, has next to no hair of his own, merely a little mousy fringe above the ears. He has a jolly rubicund face and is held in high affection and esteem by his customers. He flatters me by taking a particular interest in my custom. I am the only one of his clients in the criminal line.

He led me into one of the little cubicles where the trying-on takes place, and stood off to observe me from between narrowed lids.

"What will it be now?" he said. "I was sorry to read of your accident."

"A mere trifle. What would you suggest? It must stand sunlight and shadow, and be something I can keep up for a while if necessary."

"Let me think! Your head and face offer a good starting-point for so many creations!"

"In other words the Lord left me unfinished," I said, teasingly.

"Not at all! I meant that in your case there were no awkward malformations to be overcome."

From which it will be seen that Oscar is a diplomat.

"What would you say to a South American gentleman?" he asked. "New York is full of them in the summer."

I shook my head. "No time to bone up a Spanish accent."

"An officer of a liner on shore leave."

"On shore they look like anybody else."

"Well then, how about an Armenian fruit peddler?"

"That would restrict my activities too much. I must be able to go anywhere."

"I see you have an idea of your own," he said. "What is it?"

"We've used several rough-neck disguises," I said. "Suppose you fix me up as a swell this time. I have a mind to stop at a fashionable hotel."

"The very thing!" cried Oscar. "A curled toupee, slightly silvered; a wash for the skin to give an interesting pallor; a little touching up about the eyes for an expression of world weariness; waxed moustache, monocle——"

"Easy! The burning-glass would give me dead away. You have to be born to that."

"Well you don't have to have the monocle," said Oscar regretfully. "But it's very aristocratic. The costume must be exquisitely appointed—it will be expensive——"

"Expense is no object in this case," I said.

He set to work and an hour later I left his shop a changed man. In the event of such a contingency I had already secured from Mr. Dunsany the name of his tailor, and I now left him a rush order for several suits. Meanwhile I bought the best I could ready made. I went to the most fashionable outfitters and invested heavily. Until they displayed their stock here, I had no idea that men might indulge such extravagant tastes. All this was to be sent to the Hotel Rotterdam where I engaged an expensive suite. I believed that it would be the last place in town where the gang would think of looking for me.

I wished to persuade them that I had been scared off. After having the cryptogram receipt photographed, I returned it in a plain envelope to Jumbo's flat. By telephone I instructed Keenan to discharge all the operatives, close the Forty-second street office and advertise it for rent. This place had outlived its usefulness. Jumbo, Foxy, *et al.*, had proved themselves more than a match for such operatives as could be hired.

This done, I went out to Amityville to spend a day with Sadie. I had promised to lay off for a little, and anyway I had to wait until my new clothes were done before being seen around town. After the mad excitement of the past few days, we spent a heavenly peaceful interlude under the oaks of my friend's big place.

While I was out there an interesting report from my sole remaining operative arrived.

REPORT OF J. M. #10

June 27th.

As soon as I heard that you and S. F. were all right I went to bed as you instructed. It seemed to me that I had

scarcely fallen asleep when I was awakened by my landlady at my door to say that a man wanted to see me. It was no more than daybreak then. Hard upon her knock Jumbo entered the room. I had barely time to pull on my false hair and fix it. Hereafter I shall have to sleep in it.

Jumbo was in a state of no little excitement. He gave me his version of what had happened. Lorina, having apparently just escaped from her room, had called him up about half an hour before. I am not sure but what Jumbo came to me because she had suggested a suspicion of me. However, I think it more likely that he just wanted moral support. He was badly frightened. Jumbo for all his bluff, is not a strong character. He is dependent both on Foxy and on the woman, and now seems disposed to lean on me. If he was suspicious my sleepiness and bad-temper upon being awakened must have reassured him.

I dressed and we went right up to the Lexington avenue house. Being Sunday, I had the day to myself. Mrs. Mansfield had gone out leaving word that we were to wait until she came in or telephoned. The maids believed that she had gone to consult the police. These two were full of highly-coloured accounts of the supposed robbery of the night before. The hulking black man, however, was silent and sullen. He knew. I wonder what you did to him. I don't think I ever saw a more repulsive human creature—or one more powerful.

Foxy arrived shortly after we did. I am now admitted to terms of the closest equality by these two. The understanding is that each knows enough to the discredit of the others to ensure faithfulness all around. We all chafed at the enforced inaction, but dared not go against Lorina's instructions. She is the boss. The other two half expected the police to descend on the house momentarily.

About ten o'clock Mrs. Mansfield returned in a taxi-cab. This taxi, by the way, is her property and the driver is one of the gang. The woman was handsomely dressed without disguise of any kind.

We had a conference in the sitting-room up-stairs. Mrs. Mansfield gave us some further details of the previous night. As soon as she succeeded in breaking out of her room after telephoning to Jumbo and Foxy she hastened up to S. F.'s house, also to your place, both of which addresses she knew. She said that she was disguised, so she must have some place outside where she changes her clothes. She found she was too late at both places. You had carried off S. F. in your automobile.

Mrs. Mansfield then went down to Fortieth street. From the park opposite, she watched your office for four hours. You got inside too quick for her, she said, but when you came out she potted you. Her eyes gleamed like a devil's as she said it. Fancy how my heart went down.

She had then changed her clothes and come straight home. She couldn't tell how seriously she had wounded you. A general prayer went around the table that it would be your finish. She said we should hear presently.

She seems to have an unlimited number of men subject to her orders. While she waited for you at your office she had sent for several, and posted them near. They mixed in the crowd that surrounded you when you fell. One of them had been instructed to make away with your satchel. Another was to follow the ambulance to the hospital. A third was to recover her gun after the excitement was over and return it to her.

The first of these, an evil-looking young blackguard, came in while we talked. He reported no success. The satchel was strapped to your wrist, he said, and when he started to unfasten it the crowd began to murmur. He said that you had been shot in the shoulder, and had been carried to Bellevue. He gave it as his opinion that you were not as badly hurt as you made out. This cheered me greatly. Bitter disappointment was expressed around the table.

Later another of Lorina's men reported by telephone that he had learned through an orderly in the hospital that you had suffered only a slight flesh wound, and would be able to leave the hospital next day. On hearing this she gave her orders to have every exit from the hospital watched. Instructions were to shoot to kill. If it can be found out in advance what time you are going to leave, she means to be on hand herself.

As soon as I could get out without exciting suspicion, I sent you a warning by telephone.

J. M.

June 28th.

To-day I had to go to my work as usual, so I didn't see any of the gang until night. In our present state of excitement and uncertainty we have abandoned the Turtle Bay as a meeting place. I found my partners in anything but a good humour.

In the first place they had learned through the friendly orderly that in spite of all their measures, you had been safely spirited out of the hospital in an ambulance. It was learned by way of the ambulance driver that you had been carried to Dr. ——'s private hospital. It was then too late to do anything. By the time they got there, you had left, and the town had swallowed you up.

The entire strength of the gang, excepting me, has been devoted all day to picking up your trail, so far without any success. They have watched all your usual haunts, your flat, your restaurant, S. F.'s home and your office on Fortieth street. Foxy brought in word that the International Bureau on Forty-Second street had been closed, and all the operatives discharged. He trailed Keenan, the supposed manager to the office of the —— Railway, where he was re-engaged for his old position.

Jumbo came in with the information that the piece of evidence which they regarded as of such importance had been returned to him. I don't know what this was. Lorina, examining it, said that it appeared to have the remains of paste on the corners, and that you had probably had it photographed.

Foxy gave it as his opinion that you had been scared off. "We know there is no one backing him," said he. "He has no financial resources. He can't keep it up."

Lorina would have none of it. Her eyes become incandescent with hatred when your name is mentioned now. "Don't you believe it," she snarled. "That man will never give up. I have seen his face and I know! He's a bull-dog. He will never rest until he has pulled us down, unless we stop him with a bullet."

Jumbo became panicky. His suggestion was for the gang to scatter and lie low for the time-being.

Lorina scorned him. She proceeded to point out to us all just where you stood. She appeared to know as well as you do. Her insight is uncanny. You have no case, she said, except possibly against Foxy. You are too conceited to be satisfied with one. You will not strike until you have a chance of landing the whole gang.

"But how about the kidnapping?" asked Jumbo.

"The police would have been here before this if Enderby wanted to proceed on that," she said. "Why, he watched me walk away after I shot him; and never said a word. No, I tell you he hasn't got the evidence yet, and we're safe until he gets it. He's aiming to make a grand haul of the whole gang together, and get his name in the headlines."

The others were considerably impressed. They asked for instructions.

"We've got to go on just as we are," said Lorina. "Foxy must keep the room on Forty-Ninth street, Jumbo the flat on One Hundredth street, and I stay here. Let everybody go about freely, and meet here as usual, that is, all except English. English mustn't come here again. Enderby isn't on to him yet. Enderby, if I have the right dope, will lie low for a few days and then thinking that we are lulled to security, will quietly start to work again. That's why we must keep our present hang-outs. He's got to come to one of them to pick us up, and then we'll have *him*."

This woman is a wonder in her way. Fortunately, there is one fact that spoils all her reasoning—your humble servant.

As we broke up she said a significant thing. "Lord! the conceit of the man, thinking he can break up the gang! Why if he did land all of us it wouldn't make any difference. He hasn't got within a mile of the real boss!"

Being excited she spoke more recklessly than usual. So it appears that our work perhaps is just beginning!

J. M.

24

On Wednesday morning I motored to town and took up my residence in the Hotel Rotterdam. I hardly knew myself amidst such grandeur. For several days the situation remained in *status quo*. I learned from English's daily reports that Lorina and her gang were still waiting for my first move. I, for my part, was determined to make them move first.

Only one of his reports gave me anything to do. I quote from it:

"Among all the men who come and go in this den of crooks there is one that has particularly excited my interest and compassion. It is an extremely good-looking boy of eighteen or thereabouts whom I know simply as Blondy. He seems so like a normal boy, jolly, frank and mischievous, that I keep wondering how he fell into Lorina's clutches. He reminds me of my boy Eddie at his age. Lorina has him thoroughly intimidated. She is more overbearing with him than the others. He seems not to be trusted very far, but is used as errand boy and spy. His extreme good looks and ingenuous air, make him valuable to them I fancy.

"Blondy's instinct seems to have led him to make friends with me, though as far as he knows I am no better than the rest. At any rate we have had a few talks together and feel quite intimate. Without any suggestion from me, he has kept this from the others. It is quite touching.

"I would like very much to get the boy out of this before the grand catastrophe. I'm sure he's worth saving. Naturally in my position I can't undertake any missionary work. Could you with safety arrange for some one to get hold of the boy? He tells me that he lives at the Adelphi Association House, No. — West 125th street. Apparently it is a semi-philanthropic club or boarding-house for young men. He passes there by the name of Ralph Manly."

I was in almost as unfavorable a position for undertaking "missionary work" as Mr. Dunsany. After thinking the matter over I decided to again ask the help of the famous surgeon who had befriended me in the hospital. I called at his office for the ostensible purpose of consulting him as to my health. When I was alone with him in his consulting room I made myself known. Being a human kind of man, notwithstanding his eminence, he was interested in the dramatic and mysterious elements of my story. Far from abusing me for taking up his valuable time, he expressed himself as very willing to help save the boy.

We consulted a directory of charities in his office, and he found that he was acquainted with several men on the board of managers of the Adelphi Association. This offered an opening. He promised to proceed with the greatest caution, and promised to write to me at my hotel if he had any luck.

Three days later I heard from him as follows:

"I took my friend on the Adelphi board partly into my confidence, and between him and the doctor employed by the association to safeguard the health of the boys, the matter was easily arranged. The doctor's regular weekly visit to the institution fell yesterday. He saw the boy, and making believe to be struck by something in his appearance, put him through an examination. He hinted to the boy that he was in rather a bad way, and instructed him to report to my office for advice this morning.

"The young fellow showed up in a very sober state of mind. He is really as sound as a dollar, but for the present I am keeping him anxious without being too explicit. He appears to be quite as attractive a youth as your friend said. I am very much interested, but am not yet prepared to make up my mind about him. He is coming to-morrow at two-thirty. If it is convenient for you to be here, I will arrange a meeting as if by accident."

Needless to say, I was at the doctor's office at the time specified. I found the blonde boy already waiting among other patients in the outer office. It was easy to recognise him from Mr. Dunsany's description. He was better than merely good-looking; he had nice eyes. He was dressed a little too showily as is natural to a boy of that age when he is allowed to consult his own taste exclusively.

There happened to be a vacant chair beside him and I took it. Presently I addressed some friendly commonplace to him. He responded naturally. Evidently he was accustomed to having people like him. Soon we were talking away like old friends. I was more and more taken with him. Primarily, it was his good looks, of course, the universal safe-conduct, but in addition to that I was strongly affected by a quality of wistfulness in the boy's glance, of which he himself was quite unconscious. Surely, I said to myself, a boy of his age had no business to be carrying around a secret sorrow. The doctor, issuing from his consulting room, saw us hobnobbing together, and allowed us to wait until everybody else had been attended to.

He had me into the consulting room first. "Well, what do you think of him?" he asked.

"I am charmed," I said. "There are no two words about it."

"So was I," he said, "but I didn't want to raise your hopes too high in my letter."

After discussing a little what we would do with him, we had the boy in.

"Ralph, my friend, Mr. Boardman, wished to be regularly introduced," said the doctor.

Boardman was the name I had taken in my present disguise.

The boy shook hands nicely, he was neither too bashful, nor too brash, and some facetious remarks were made all around.

"I tell Boardman," said the doctor, "that if he had done his duty by his country and had had half a dozen sons like you he would have no time to be worrying about his appendix now."

"Has your father got half a dozen like you?" I asked.

An expression of pain ran across the boy's face. "I have no brothers," he said. "My father is dead."

"Well, since you're a fatherless son, and I'm a sonless father—with an appendix, perhaps we can cheer each other up a little," I said. "Will you have dinner with me at my hotel to-night?"

Boys never see anything suspicious in sudden overtures of friendship. Ralph accepted, blushing with pleasure.

The dinner was a great success. I don't know which of us was the better entertained. My young friend's prattle, ingenuous, boastful, lightheaded, renewed my own boyhood. It was rather painful though to see one naturally so frank, obliged to pull up when he found himself approaching dangerous ground. Then he would glance at me to see if I had noticed anything.

I had him several times after that. It was a risk, of course, but one must take risks. At the same time I was pretty sure from Mr. Dunsany's reports that Ralph never talked of his outside affairs to any of the gang. At least he never told Mr. Dunsany anything about his dinners with Mr. Boardman at the Rotterdam, and he was friendly with him.

The dénouement of this incident really belongs a little later in my story, but for the sake of continuity I will give it here.

I soon saw that I would have no difficulty in winning Ralph's full confidence. His gratitude for friendliness was very affecting. I could see that he often wished to bare his painful secret. I let him take his own time about it.

It was the doctor's offering him a position in a friend's office that brought matters to a head. Ralph refused it with a painful air. He could give no reason for it to the doctor. Afterwards when I had him alone with me I saw that it was coming.

"That certainly was decent of Dr. ——," he said diffidently. "I don't know why he's so good to me."

"Oh, you're not a bad sort of boy," I said lightly.

"You, too," he said shyly. "Especially you. I—I never had a man friend before."

I smiled encouragingly.

"I suppose you wonder why I couldn't take the position?" he went on.

"That's your affair."

"But I want to tell you. I—I wouldn't be allowed to take it. I am not a free agent."

"Perhaps we could help you to be one," I suggested.

"I don't know. Maybe you wouldn't want to have anything more to do with me. Oh, there's a lot I want to tell you!" he cried imploringly. "But I don't know how you'll take it."

"Try me."

"Would you—would you kick me out," he said, agitated and breathless, "if you knew that my dad had committed a forgery, if you knew that he had died in prison?"

"Why, no," I said calmly, "I suspect you were not responsible for that."

A sigh of relief escaped him. "You are kind!—But that's only the beginning," he went on. "But I feel I can tell you now. I'm in an awful hole. I suppose you will think I'm a weak character for not trying to get out of it more, and I am weak, but I didn't know what to do!"

"Tell me all about it," I said.

And he did; all about Lorina and Foxy and Jumbo as he knew them. They didn't trust him far. He knew nothing of their actual operations, but his honest young heart told him they were crooks. Lorina held him under a spell of terror. He had not up to this time been able to conceive of the idea of escaping her. There are those who would blame the boy, I have no doubt, but I am not one of them. I have seen too often that a mind which may afterwards become strong and self-reliant is at Ralph's age fatally subservient to older minds. Those who would blame him should remember that until he met the doctor and me he had not a disinterested friend in the world. They must grant that he instantly reacted to kindness and decent feelings.

"How did you first get into this mess?" I asked, strongly curious.

"I'd have to tell you my whole life to explain that."

"Fire away."

I will give you Ralph's story somewhat abridged.

"My mother died when I was a baby," he said. "I do not remember her. My father and I lived alone with servants who were always changing. We did not seem to catch on with people. I mean, we didn't seem to have friends like everybody had. I thought this was strange when I was little. My father was quite an old man, but we got along pretty well. He was what they called a handwriting expert. He wrote books about handwriting. Lawyers

consulted him, and he gave evidence at trials."

"What was his name?" I asked.

"David Andrus."

Now I remembered the trial of David Andrus, so I was in a position to check up that part of Ralph's story.

"I was twelve years old," he went on, "when Mrs. Mansfield first began coming to our apartment. I don't know where or how my father met her, of course. He knew her pretty well already when I first saw her. At first she was kind to me, and brought me things, and I was fond of her. I told myself we had a friend like anybody else now. I used to brag about her in school.

"Bye and bye I found out, I don't know how, that she was a sham, that her kindness meant nothing. Little by little I began to hate her, though I was careful not to let her see it, for I was afraid of her cold blue eye. Besides my father became more and more crazy about her. He seemed to lose his good sense as far as she was concerned. She could make him do anything she wanted. Children see more than they are supposed to.

"It is three years now since the crash came. I was fourteen then. One day my father was arrested and taken to the Tombs. Mrs. Mansfield took me to her house, not the same one she has now. She treated me all right, but I hated her. Young as I was I held her responsible. I didn't see much of her. I don't know if you remember the trial——?"

"Something of it," said I.

"The papers were full of it. I was not allowed to attend, but, of course, I got hold of all the papers. They said that my father had got hold of blank stock certificates by corrupting young clerks, and had then forged signatures to them and sold them on the stock market. He was sentenced to Sing Sing for seven years. They took me to see him before he was sent away. He had aged twenty years. He wasn't able to say much to me."

"Mrs. Mansfield told me I must change my name, and sent me to a good school in Connecticut. She paid the bills. I was pretty happy there, though this thing was always hanging over my head. In the summers I was sent away to a boy's camp in the mountains. Mrs. Mansfield told me nobody was allowed to see my father or to write to him and I believed her. So it was the same to me as if he had died.

"One day last winter in school I received a letter signed "Well-Wisher," asking me to meet the writer at a certain spot in the school woods that afternoon. Naturally I was excited by the mystery and all that. I was scared, too. But I went. I didn't tell anybody."

"I found a queer customer waiting for me. A man about fifty with close-cropped hair. He told me right off that he was just out of Sing Sing. Why hadn't I ever come to see my dad, he asked. He said it was pitiful the way he pined for me."

"I stammered out that I didn't know anybody could see him. He told me about the visiting days. 'Anyhow you could have written,' he said."

"'He never wrote to me,' I said.

"'Sure, doesn't he write to you every writing day! He has read me the letters. Elegant letters.'"

"'I never got them!' I said."

"'That's why I came,' he said. 'Dave said he thought that woman had come between you.'"

"The old fellow told me how to address a letter to my father, and he gave me money to go to Sing Sing when I could. I had an allowance from Mrs. Mansfield, but not enough for that. I wrote to my father that night."

"It was Easter before I had the chance to see my father. I made out to Mrs. Mansfield that the school closed a day later than it did, and I used that day to go to Sing Sing. My father was in the infirmary. I scarcely recognised

him. They let me stay all day. Even I could see that he was dying."

"For the first time I heard the truth of the case. It was Mrs. Mansfield who had got the certificates out of the young clerks, and had brought them to my father to be filled in. When they were found out she carried on so, that he took the whole thing on himself. He thought he might as well, since he had to go to jail anyway, and he knew he would die there. Besides she promised him to have me educated and looked after. He had no one else to leave me with. At that time he still believed in her.

"But in the prison he met men who knew about her of old. My father was not the first she had been the means of landing in jail. It was then my father began to be afraid for me, and managed to send me word.

"He died in April. Mrs. Mansfield immediately took me out of school. She told me my father was dead, and that it was time I went to work. I think she must have learned by her spies that I had been to see my father, for she no longer took the trouble to put on a good face. Now it was, do this or that or it will be the worse for you. When I saw how all the other men gave in to her, I was afraid to resist. I hated her, but what could I do? I had no one to go to. I had no experience. I wasn't sure of myself. The understanding up there is that Lorina could reach you wherever you went. And if you did anything to cross her, look out! She has spies everywhere!"

"I wonder why she didn't turn you adrift altogether?" I said.

"I think I am useful to them because I look honest," the boy said wretchedly. "I run errands for them, but I never know what it's all about."

"Have you ever heard talk up there of a boss greater than Mrs. Mansfield?" I asked.

He nodded. "But only vague talk. I've never seen him."

"Does she have you watched?" I asked.

"No. She thinks she has me where she wants me. But if she suspected anything——"

"You mustn't come here again," I said.

His face fell absurdly.

"Oh, I'm not kicking you out," I said smiling. "I shall keep in touch with you. Would you like to see this woman go to jail?"

"Would I?" he cried, jumping up. Words failed him. "Oh—! Oh, just try me, that's all!"

"Well, I'm going to put her there," I said. "And you shall help me. But we must be careful."

25

In the meantime Lorina Mansfield, weary of the inaction I had forced on her, or persuaded perhaps that I had dropped the pursuit, boldly resumed her designs on Mrs. ——'s diamond necklace. For convenience' sake I shall call this lady Mrs. Levering. His real name is one to conjure with in America.

Mr. Dunsany or "English" reported that he had been detailed to go to Newport on Saturday to spy on the lady, and what should he do about it? The plucky gentleman who never hesitated to put himself in danger, became uneasy when it was a question of actually committing a crime.

We arranged a chat over the telephone, and I gave him the best reasons for going ahead with the scheme. We had so much to talk over that I told him I would go up to New England by a different route, and if he was not spied

upon he could come to me at Providence early on Sunday and we could go over everything. All the time we had been working together we had never exchanged a word face to face in our natural characters.

We succeeded in pulling off the meeting. Mr. Dunsany assured me he had not been followed. We laid out our plan of campaign. I convinced him that the quickest and surest way to land the whole gang would be to allow them, even to assist them, to carry out a robbery from start to finish. Let them steal Mrs. Levering's jewels, I said, let them get clean away with them. We'll return them later."

"Suppose some one gets hurt," he said nervously.

"Not likely," I said. "They play too safe a game. We will be on our guard."

He agreed with me, but said if we fell down on the case he would feel obliged to give her another necklace of equal value. This was a matter of \$90,000.

"We are not going to fall down on it," I said.

What followed can best be told by Mr. Dunsany's reports.

REPORT OF J. M. #15

Newport, Sunday, July 4th.

My patience was rewarded shortly before noon to-day by the sight of Mrs. Levering walking to the Casino accompanied by a gallant gentleman unknown to me. She did not notice me, of course. If I had been in my own person I warrant she would not have passed me so indifferently. What marvellous faculty is it that enables a lady to know without looking at a man whether he is worth looking at?

I soon satisfied myself that she was wearing her veritable diamonds. Foolish woman! When I sold them to her I warned her not to exhibit them in public. At the time there was a lot of gossip about what Levering paid me for the necklace, and I suppose every thief in the country has it on his list. But Cora Levering was always feather-headed.

I telegraphed to Lorina in the code we had agreed on, and had my dinner while I waited for her answer. It came presently, instructing me to meet her in a certain hotel in Providence to-morrow, two-thirty. To-morrow being a holiday, I am not expected at Dunsany's. This means that I have to put in a long, empty twenty-four hours here. The place is full of my friends eating and drinking themselves black in the face, while I have to stay at a fourth-rate hotel.

To-morrow night there is going to be a great entertainment at Fernhurst, one of the palaces on the cliffs.

J.M.

#16

Newport, July 5th, 9 P.M.

All is set for the drama to-night, and I am nervously awaiting my cue. Heaven knows what the next few hours may bring forth! When you read this it may be up to you to get me out of jail. If we pull it off all right I have no doubt the newspapers will say, as they always do, that the robbery gave evidence of long and careful planning, whereas it was all fixed up in a few minutes.

I went over to Providence to-day shortly before the hour set by Lorina, and found Foxy waiting at the hotel she

named. Lorina herself, he said, was in Newport looking over the ground, and would be back directly. It seems that hearing of the affair at Fernhurst they had determined to turn the trick the same night.

Lorina came bringing a good-looking, well-dressed young fellow whom she introduced to the crowd as Frank. He was evidently a youngster of the fashionable world, one cannot mistake the little earmarks. He has a look of the —— family; one of the younger sons, maybe, whom drink and the devil have done for. At any rate, he is completely under Lorina's thumb like the rest.

Lorina was playing the part of a traveller in books—religious books if you please! She dressed the business woman plain and handsome, and had engaged a private sitting-room for the day to show her samples. There was actually a whole trunk full of sample books. I suppose she passed us off as her agents or customers.

She had us all in the sitting-room together. Besides Frank, Foxy and myself, there was a fourth man whom I recognised as her chauffeur. His name is Jim. She proceeded to lay out her campaign in the most matter-of-fact way without wasting a word. It might have been the sales-manager instructing the drummers in the Fall line. Nobody seemed nervous except Frank, who was apparently new at the game.

The entertainment at Fernhurst provided our opportunity. It appeared that Frank was well acquainted with Mrs. Levering, and that by Lorina's instructions he had been particularly cultivating her society of late. He was to be the decoy. Furthermore, he drew for us with rather a shaky hand, a plan of the house and grounds at Fernhurst, showing the location of roads, paths, benches, shrubbery, etc. Lorina used this plan in issuing her instructions.

"Dancing is to begin at nine-thirty," she said, "but all the guests will not have arrived until nearly midnight. So we will fix on midnight to turn the trick, or as soon after as possible. We have decided on this bench that I have marked with a cross for the spot. Get its position well fixed in your mind, all of you. It is quite a way from the house you see, few, if any, of the dancers will go so far. It is off the main paths. It is near the street fence, but is hidden from the street by this dense shrubbery behind it.

"Mrs. Levering has promised Frank the first dance after she arrives. He will then make an engagement with her for another dance to fall just before midnight as near as he can figure it, and after dancing with her the second time will take her out to this bench.

Foxy and English will already be in hiding in the shrubbery behind the bench. Foxy has an invitation to the affair, and he will go in evening dress and mix with the guests until he sees Frank dancing with Mrs. Levering the second time. He will then go out of the house and conceal himself in the shrubbery.

English will already be waiting there. English must be there by eleven to make sure. English wears his ordinary clothes, and slips in by the service entrance to the grounds, marked on the plan here. Once inside the gates he must make his way under cover to the shrubbery behind the bench. English will carry an old overcoat for Foxy which will be provided. There will be a mask in one side pocket, a cap in the other. As soon as you two meet, Foxy will put on the things.

"Now as to the actual trick. It is perfectly simple. Frank is keeping Mrs. Levering in conversation on the bench. Foxy sneaks up behind with the nippers, cuts the necklace, and tosses it back to English, who remains in the bushes.

"The woman will scream, of course. Foxy will stand up and show himself, and run in this direction, that is, towards the house. Frank will take after him for a way, and then go back to the woman. Foxy will double around this shrubbery that conceals the stable entrance. As soon as he is out of sight of the woman he will throw off the cap, mask and coat, and go back to Mrs. Levering as one of the first attracted by her cries. If she does not cry out, he can mix with the crowd in the house until he has a chance to make a getaway.

Meanwhile, English lies quiet in the shrubbery until the excitement has passed out of the vicinity. Then he slips out by the service gate, the same way he went in. Jim will be waiting with the car about five hundred feet beyond the service entrance, towards town. We have been over this ground. There is a big clump of rhododendrons inside the sidewalk at this point.

English, without stopping, will toss the necklace inside the car. But if he is pursued he had better drop it among

the rhododendrons. Mind you, English, if there's anybody after you, don't make any throwing motion with your arm. If there is a chase Jim can join in it, and help English make his getaway. Later he can return and get the diamonds.

English takes the trolley to Providence, and the owl train back to New York. Jim secretes the diamonds in the secret pocket in the car, and waits for Foxy. If Foxy is pursued, however, he must not lead them to the car. Jim waits until one-thirty. If Foxy has not arrived, he takes the car to the Atlantic garage. You, Jim, ask them to let you sleep in it, see? as you're expecting a call from your master. Foxy can get the car from the garage any time after that."

Lorina went over all this twice. At the end she consulted her watch. "If any of you want to have anything explained, speak up. I've got to catch the four o'clock back to town."

Frank was the only one who had any objection to raise to the arrangements. "Look here," said he, "this will queer me for good with that lot, even if they can't fasten anything on me."

Lorina fixed him with her hard blue eye. "How?" she demanded.

"I used to be known as a runner. They'll think it funny I wasn't able to catch Foxy."

"Catch him then," said Lorina coolly. "Struggle with him. He will throw you off. That will let you out, won't it? Rehearse it now."

It was a grim kind of play. Everybody took it quite seriously. A sofa was placed to represent the fateful bench. Lorina and Frank took seats on it. Lorina tied a piece of string around her neck to represent the necklace. Foxy and I crouched in the rear. Foxy crept forward, snipped the string and tossed it back to me. His implement was a pair of heavy nail clippers such as manicures use. Then as Foxy made off, Frank flung himself upon him, they struggled and Frank was thrown to the ground.

All this was gone over again and again. Some buttons were tied on the piece of string, so that it would carry when it was thrown back to me. Foxy's stage experience proved serviceable. He acted as director, showing Frank how to tackle him, and how to fall without hurting himself. Lorina's depiction of the startled woman was admirable. The whole scene would have been funny if it hadn't been so grim. None of them seemed to be aware of any humour in the proceedings but me. Jim, who did not take part in the scene, acted as critic. He stood off making suggestions.

Finally, Lorina announced that it was only ten minutes to train time, and hustled us out. She said Frank and Foxy might go off by themselves and practice if they felt it necessary. We scattered. I returned to the little hotel in Newport where I had taken a room. I have not seen any of them since.

It is now nine-thirty and I am waiting in my hotel until it is time for me to go out to Fernhurst. I will post this to you on the way, so that in case anything happens you will at least be in full possession of our plans. I believe I was not cut out for a life of crime. It is too madly exciting. As the hour draws close my knees show an inclination to knock together, and my teeth to chatter.

J. M.

26

REPORT OF J. M. No. 17

Providence, 1:30 A.M.

When I got to the service gate of Fernhurst I found it guarded by two men, detectives unmistakably. This was disconcerting. I passed on. They bored me through with their gimlet eyes and I broke out in a gentle sweat all over. Presently, however, I realised it was but their professional manner of looking at anybody who was not well dressed, and I calmed down.

It filled me with a kind of terror to think that I might be prevented from carrying out my part of the evening's entertainment, so you will see I was well worked up to it by this time. I went around the block and prepared to try again. On my way towards the service gate I had the luck to fall in with a crowd of waiters clearly bound for the show and it was no trouble at all to mix in with them. My make-up was of the same general style as theirs. We passed through the gate without question.

Once inside I began to lag behind the bunch, and presently slipped away in the darkness. I reached my specified hiding-place in the shrubbery behind the bench without further adventure. The place had been so carefully mapped, there was no possibility of mistaking it.

I had to wait over an hour for Foxy. It was not a pleasant time. Lorina's plan seemed perfect, but you never can tell. And my inexperience in this line was such that I didn't feel overmuch confidence in myself should an emergency arise. Not far behind me I could hear the steady procession of motors bringing guests to the party. In the distance I could hear the music. They had picked their spot well. In all that time no one passed that way.

In the end Foxy's coming gave me a great start. Creeping through the bushes without the rustle of a leaf, he was beside me before I heard him coming. He was dressed in the height of fashion. I caught a gleam of a monocle dangling against his white waistcoat. I silently passed him over the coat I had brought, and standing in a little open space, he put it on together with the cap and mask. Then we crouched down side by side under the leaves, with the back of the bench in plain view before us. Foxy laid the nippers on the ground ready to his hand. We did not speak to each other.

Bye and bye we heard voices approaching, and my poor heart set up a tremendous how-de-do. On the other hand something told me Foxy was enjoying it. Mrs. Levering and the young man called Frank came strolling dimly into view. I was nearly suffocating with excitement.

"This is the place," Frank said.

"How cosy!" she sang.

"Shall we sit down?" he suggested.

"Let's!" said she. "I'll have a cigarette."

They sat. Frank presently struck a match. If she had looked over her shoulder she would have seen the glare faintly reflected from our white faces. I stole a look at Foxy's ratlike profile. He had shoved up the mask. His teeth were bared. He was amused at the prospect of a little scandalous eavesdropping. Merciful Heavens! what a face!

I need not report the further conversation of the two on the bench. It was merely silly. Frank's voice was trembling. I suppose she ascribed that to the violence of his feelings for her. She is a fool.

Foxy gave them a good while to their talk. Meanwhile I suffered agonies of suspense, and Frank no doubt worse. I at least could see when the blow was going to fall, but he could not. Not until Mrs. Levering said she must go back, but not really meaning it yet, did Foxy pull down the mask and creep forward. I held my breath.

It seemed as if it were all accomplished in a single movement. Foxy rose to his knees behind the woman, snipped the shining thing around her neck—and there it was lying at my knees. I mechanically dropped it in my pocket.

She did not scream. In that, at least, she showed blood. "My necklace!" she gasped, jumping up, hand to throat. "Gone!"

In Frank's little choking cry one heard the snapping of the frightful tension he had been under.

Foxy, bent almost double, started up from behind the bench, and headed diagonally across the path. Another gasping cry, not loud, broke from the woman. "There he is!"

Frank flung himself on the back of the runner, and they rolled over on the ground, all exactly as I had seen it

rehearsed a dozen times in the hotel room. They sprang up, grappled, swayed and finally Frank was flung with apparently great violence to the ground. Foxy disappeared.

Frank struggled to his feet, seemingly hurt. He attempted to stagger in the direction the fugitive had taken, but Mrs. Levering clung to him. One may suppose he was not sorry to be prevented.

At this moment the tragic-farce was interrupted by the entrance of an actor not on the bill. This was a man with an electric flash, a detective to all appearances. I suppose they had them posted about the grounds, and this man had heard the disturbance, slight though it was. The flash terrified me. I softly and precipitately retired under the leaves into the thickest of the shrubbery.

"I have been robbed!" I heard Mrs. Levering gasp. "My diamond necklace! He came from there. He went that way."

The detective threw his light around. Fortunately for me I had put a screen of leaves in front of me. I was not disposed to linger in the neighbourhood. I ran along close to the fence where there was a narrow open space. As I passed out of hearing, I heard others come running up. Excitement runs like electricity. I had no doubt that Foxy in immaculate evening dress, was among the first to reach the scene. I took care to survey the service gate from a discreet distance before presenting myself there. It was well that I did so. I saw that it was closed, and the two men still on guard. Not knowing at what instant an alarm might be raised behind me, I dared not apply to them with any tale however ingenious. Those diamonds were red hot in my pocket. On the other hand, I would have to retrace my steps nearly a quarter of a mile to reach the main entrance, and I was not suitably dressed to be seen there. I could not climb the fence at any point, for it was a smooth, high iron affair, moreover, the street outside was brightly lighted. I knew nothing about the cliff side of the grounds.

For a moment or two I felt decidedly panicky. Before my mind's eye headlines in the next day's papers were vividly emblazoned:

"WELL-KNOWN JEWELLER STEALS THE
DIAMONDS HE SOLD"

or something like that. Finally I recollected that the road to the service entrance of Fernhurst ran quite close to the boundary of the next estate. I determined to try that way.

To reach the boundary I was obliged to make a long detour. Still there were no sounds behind me to indicate that an alarm had been raised, at any rate a public alarm. The line between the two estates was marked by a thorn hedge and a wire fence. Choosing a dark spot I managed to struggle through without receiving any serious damage. I finally gained the street through the service gate of this place.

This brought me out beyond the point where Jim was to be stationed with the motor car, and I had to retrace my steps. The car was in the appointed spot. Jim was on the front seat with his head craned in the other direction whence he expected me. I gave him a little signal. He was much troubled to see me come from that way thinking the plan had fallen through, but was reassured no doubt by the fall of the necklace on the floor of his car. I was thankful to be rid of the cursed thing.

There were several cars standing across the street, with their chauffeurs chatting together, and I was afraid of attracting attention to myself or to Jim by turning back at that moment. I kept on. I was startled half out of my wits when a motor patrol wagon full of police came flying up the street past me. It turned in at the service gate of Fernhurst ahead. Since I was travelling in that direction I had to keep on.

A man stepped out as I approached. Seizing my shoulder he swung me half around so that the light fell on my face. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

I thought it was all up with me. "I just wanted to have a look at the swells," I stammered.

Another man joined him. "Hold this guy," said the first. While the second man kept a hand twisted in my collar, the first one frisked me expeditiously. I had taken care, of course, not to have anything on me. But the side pocket of my coat was still hot from the diamonds.

Finding nothing the man growled an order for my release. The second man spun me around, and propelled me towards town with a shove. "Get the H—— out of here!" said he.

And I did.

J. M.

27

REPORT OF J. M. No. 18

New York, July 6th, Midnight.

I have just returned from a celebration up at Lorina's house. Everybody made a clean get-away last night, and the diamonds are safe in Lorina's desk, so the gang made merry. The newspaper stories of the affair caused us the greatest amusement. The police, as you have seen, are very wide of the mark. Of us all, only Frank has fallen under suspicion. It appears that I was right in my guess as to his identity. The affair will ruin him socially, though it is not likely to lead to his arrest. I can't say that I feel sorry for the youth. Of all the parts in this sordid drama, Frank, the decoy played the most contemptible.

In the general loosening of tongues to-night I have some rather interesting matter to report. When I arrived at the house all the gang except Lorina were in the dining-room. Spencer, the negro, told me she was up in the office, so I went up-stairs to make my report. The office door was open a crack, and as I was about to knock I heard Lorina's voice within. She was talking over the telephone. The first sound of her voice froze me where I stood in astonishment. The tone was that of a woman distracted by love and longing. Think of it, Lorina!

I heard her say: "I'll do anything you tell me. But I want to see you. I must see you sometimes, dearie. What is the use of all this working and worrying, what am I doing it for if you never even let me see you? I can't stand it. I can't go on. I *won't* stand it!"

Do you wonder that I was amazed?

There was a silence, and she went on in a broken, humbled tone: "No—I didn't mean that. I will obey you. You always know best. But don't be so hard on me. Please, dearie, *please*——!"

At this point Foxy came running up-stairs. I was caught rather awkwardly.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I came up-stairs to report to Mrs. Mansfield," I said, "but I don't like to disturb her. She seems to be having a private conversation."

He listened at the door for a moment, then pulled me away.

"Beat it!" said he. "She's talking to the boss. She'd kill us if she found us here."

One other thing that I had heard Lorina say was: "Then I'll keep the coal here, until I hear from you again."

"Coal" or "white coal" is their slang for diamonds, so I suppose she meant the necklace.

I returned down-stairs full of speculations regarding this wonderful and mysterious "boss." What kind of man must he be, thus to bring the imperious Lorina who commands us like slaves, to her knees?

Frank was not present at the party in the dining-room. He is not a regular member of the gang. Besides Foxy,

Jumbo, Jim the chauffeur and myself, there were several of the younger fellows, but not Blondy, I am glad to say, for I should not like to see that nice boy drinking. Lorina appeared only once or twice and then but for a moment. The lady's gaiety was forced. However, she was liberal in her hospitality. Champagne flowed like water.

Jumbo got very drunk and even Foxy drank enough to make him indiscreet. It was then that interesting ancient history was retold. It would astonish you to see Foxy at such moments. There is nothing about him of the dull, prosy bore that he ordinarily affects.

Jumbo was toasting him with maudlin praise. "Drink to Foxy, fellows!" he cried. "There's the lad that brings home the bacon! The slickest, smoothest article of them all!"

Foxy took it as no more than his due.

"Say, Foxy," asked another admirer, "what was the hardest trick you ever turned?"

Naturally I have to let others ask these questions. Curiosity on my part would be prejudicial to my health. I am on the *qui vive* for the replies, though.

"Oh, six months ago, when I lifted an actress' pearls," drawled Foxy.

Fancy how I pricked up my ears.

"Tell us about it," said the same youngster.

All the young ones sit at Foxy's feet, you understand.

Foxy was nothing loath. "Elegant pearls," he said reminiscently, "blue pearls, they called them, though I couldn't see the blue. But fine and choice! It was a long operation. I had to take a job acting in her company a couple of months beforehand. You see she kept the real pearls in a safety deposit box, and wore a phony string, which added to our difficulties. First I had to persuade her to wear the real pearls one night."

"How did you do that?" somebody asked.

"I egged on the leading man to make a bet with her that he could tell the real from the phony."

"Was he in with you?"

"No, indeed. Innocent as a lamb. He didn't know that I put the idea in his mind."

"Foxy is a wonder to manage!" put in Jumbo.

"After the bet was made, we had the actress trailed every day until she went to the bank and got out her pearls. Then we knew she would wear them that night. She wore them in the first act. In the second she had on a nurse's costume, and had to leave them off. My next job was to get her maid out of the dressing-room during the second act. I managed this by having it gossiped around the company that the star was going to introduce some new business that night, and so the maid went out to look on, see? So I went in her dressing-room——"

"How did you get in?" asked some one.

"Walked in straight as if I had a good right to. There was no other way. I frisked the room, but could only find one string of pearls. You see, I counted on two, the phony and the real. I couldn't tell which was which. I had arranged to have a fellow who was in with us, a pearl expert call on me between the acts. I saw him at the stage door, and showed him the string I had. He said they were phony. So I had to do it all over.

"During the third act, however, luck was with me. The actress' maid not having seen anything new in the second act left the dressing-room of her own accord to watch the scene. I went in again. This time I found the real thing in a pocket of the petticoat she had worn in the second act. I left the phony string in its place.

"And they never got on to you!" said his admirer.

"Nah! That was where Enderby came in. He fixed the crime on the young leading man and broke up the show. Lord! I laughed. It let me out, too. I was sick of the fool business of acting every night. It wasn't till lately that Enderby got it in his head that he'd made a mistake. It's too late now. The pearls have been sold and the swag divided."

Jumbo took a hand in the tale at this point. "Let me tell you the joke about selling the pearls," said he. "Me and slim Foley set up an elegant office on Maiden Lane, with stenographers and office boys and all, everything swell. We were brokers in precious stones, see? We sent out decoy letters to the leading man Foxy mentioned, and I'm blest if we didn't sell him the string of pearls back again. Then he gave them to the actress, the fool, and she fired him and bust up the company."

"But I don't understand," said the young fellow, "what did you want to sell them to him for? Risky business I should say."

"Don't ask me," said Jumbo with a shrug. "Orders from higher up."

This suggests a new line of thought, doesn't it?

During one of Lorina's brief visits to the dining-room, she was pleased to commend me for my work last night. She asked me to come to her down-town office to-morrow afternoon as soon as I finished work. I enclose the card she gave me with her address.* Subtle irony, eh?

* The card enclosed by Mr. Dunsany read:

THE EARNEST WORKERS PUBLISHING CO.,
No. — Fifth Avenue, New York.
Mrs. Lorina Mansfield, Manager.

To-morrow night I'll report on what happens there.

J. M.

J. M. #19

New York, July 7th.

The number on Fifth avenue given me was not a great distance from Dunsany's and I was there by 5:15 this afternoon. It is one of the older office buildings and is filled with the most respectable tenants, mostly firms engaged in some form of religious business: publishers, mission boards, church supplies, etc. It is amusing to think of Lorina in such company.

Lorina's office, of course, was no whit less respectable in appearance than a hundred others in the building. There was a respectable elderly stenographer, a subdued office boy, and Lorina herself playing her part of the saleswoman of religious literature in a starched shirt waist. She waved me to a seat beside her desk, and started right in to sell me a consignment of tracts. I confess I was a bit dazed by the scene.

At five-thirty the respectable stenographer and the subdued office-boy asked her humbly if she desired them any further, and upon receiving a negative departed.

When the door closed behind them Lorina yawned, stretched, and swore softly—to take the religious taste out of her mouth, I suppose. I laughed, but she didn't like it. I have discovered that laughter makes these people uneasy.

"Cut it out!" she said frowning.

I apologised.

"English," she said, "Jumbo told me that you would be glad to get a little extra work as a diamond expert."

I nodded, wondering what was coming next.

"There's a friend of mine a jewel-broker next door," she went on, nodding towards the adjoining room. "His business is so full of risks from thieves, you know, that he decided the best way to fool them would be to take an humble little office in this building without so much as an extra lock on the door to give warning."

Lorina only handed out this line of talk to save her face. I was not expected to believe it. These people are never frank with each other, even when there's nothing to be gained by bluffing. It is only when the men have been drinking that things are called by their right names.

"My friend needs an assistant, a diamond expert," Lorina continued. "For a couple of months now, he's been at his wit's end to find a man he could trust. Jumbo said you were just the man for the job so I recommended you, and my friend told me to bring you around."

I nodded sagely to all this palaver. "Am I to give up my job at Dunsany's?" I asked, hoping that the answer would be in the affirmative.

"No," she said. "That's a good thing, too. This new job will only take an hour or two in the evenings and on Saturday afternoons."

She arose and tapped in a peculiar way on the door that led into the adjoining office. Some one got up within, and unlocked and opened it. Fortunately as a result of all that has happened during the past few weeks I have my nerves under strict control, for I got a shock. There stood Freer, the missing ex-head of my pearl department!

We were introduced. Freer saw nothing suspicious in my aspect. There was a lot of palaver which I will not tire you with. The upshot of it was that I was engaged to assist my late assistant at a handsome salary. For the present I was to work from 5:15 to 6:30 every evening, as well as Saturday afternoons, and Sunday mornings if necessary.

"I do not like to work late at night," said Freer nervously. "It attracts attention."

Freer undertook then and there to explain my duties. "My work is with the pearls," he said, "and the diamond end of the business has been neglected since I lost my last assistant two months ago."

"He died," remarked Lorina with a peculiar look at me.

I got her meaning.

Against one wall of Freer's office was a large letter file with drawers that pulled out, and a shutter to pull down over the whole at night, and lock. It was built entirely of steel as the modern custom is. Freer pulled out one of the drawers but instead of letters inside, my amazed eyes beheld a heap of gleaming diamond jewelry. There were necklaces, dog-collars, lavallieres, pins, bracelets, rings. I wondered if the thirty-odd remaining drawers were filled with like treasures, and made a breathless mental computation of their value—millions! It was a modern burlesque of the scene in Aladdin's cave!

Freer, referring to the drawer he held open said: "These are consignments of diamonds lately received, which I have not had the time to inventory. You see each article is tagged with a number. You are to take them in numerical order, enter a careful description and valuation in a journal, then demount the stones, weigh them, grade them and put them in stock."

He opened several other drawers which contained princely treasures of unset diamonds lying on white cotton. They were carefully graded according to size, colour, quality. Here apparently is the loot of years past. I could not

begin to give any estimate of its value. I have not seen the pearls yet.

"The other part of your work," Freer went on, "will be to fill the orders for diamonds that are received." He showed me several order slips, evidently from the phraseology, made out by experienced jewellers, but bearing no shipping directions.

"Am I to send these orders out?" I asked with a simple air.

He shook his head. "Enter the orders in the order book, fill them from stock, and turn them over to me."

"Mind you do not carry your work to the window," put in Lorina sharply.

I nodded.

"Mind you do not leave anything about at night," added Freer, "no tools, no papers. The women come in here to clean after we are gone."

He showed me where the tools of my trade were kept. In addition to everything else needful, in a locked cabinet there is a beautiful little electric crucible for melting down gold and platinum.

I immediately set to work under the eyes of Lorina and Freer.

You can imagine in what excitement I now write this. Our work is done!—or almost done, for we have not yet got a line on that mysterious and terrible "boss." For a moment I thought it might be Freer, but he is as subservient to Lorina as the rest. Man! Man! What a haul we shall make—if there is no slip! We must do our best of course to ensure complete success, but I beg of you not to risk too far what we have in our grasp, in the hope of getting more. I confess I am a little scared by the magnitude of the developments to-day. Do not wait too long before delivering your master stroke!

J. M.

28

To resume my own part in these matters, you can conceive what a great responsibility devolved upon me in the light of these two last reports. I did not have to have Mr. Dunsany remind me of it. I was like a player in a close game who holds the best card. The question was when to play it. One may easily hold one's trumps too long. Still I could not bear to show my hand without the assurance of taking the king, i.e., the "boss."

So I still held off, though the tension was frightful, particularly on poor Dunsany. In every subsequent report he begged me to strike, and take our chance of getting our man through the disclosures sure to be made in the general crash. There was more up on this game than cards were ever played for.

In the meantime I was straining every nerve to pick up a clue to the "boss." I knew that we must get him in the end if we could hold off long enough. I arranged a meeting with the boy Blondy, and cross-examined him for hours. The poor youngster was only too anxious to tell me what he knew, but he could not help me.

He said that Lorina never sent any of the men to the boss. All communications between them were made without the aid of a third party. Some of the men, he said, affected to believe that the boss was a myth invented by Lorina to keep them in awe. I had, however, good reason in my reports to know that the boss was a real man.

I put the most skilful woman operative I could procure on Lorina's trail. It appeared, however, from her first report that Lorina was instantly aware of being watched, and fooled the operative at her pleasure. Thus she became a danger to me instead of a help, since Lorina with her infernal cleverness might very easily have found a way to intercept our communications. So I discharged the operative two days after I hired her.

In justice to Mr. Dunsany, who hourly ran such a terrible risk, I now took the police into my confidence. The chief of the detective bureau at this time was Lanman, a man I had always respected for his contempt of spectacular methods and his strong sense. I went to see him.

He did not know me, of course. He listened to my story with an incredulous grin. He has an aspect as grim and forbidding as a granite cliff. But as I piled up my evidence, and read from Mr. Dunsany's report, I shook the cliff. I had the satisfaction of seeing the granite betray excitement.

When I was done he was convinced. He was frankly envious of my luck in obtaining such a case, and of my success with it, but he showed a disposition to play absolutely fair. I had been afraid that he might try to rob me of the fruits of my success with the public.

Lanman agreed that it was best to hold off for a day or two longer in the hope of getting the "boss." In the meantime he secured a room at # — Fifth avenue on the same floor where Lorina had her offices, and there every day during the hours while Mr. Dunsany was at work, waited six men within call. We next secured quarters in the little hotel three doors from Lorina's house, and every night ten of Lanman's men were domiciled there. Signals were agreed on in case of need.

Matters stood thus at the end of the week whose beginning had witnessed the Newport robbery. On Friday morning Irma Hamerton came to town again. I witnessed her arrival in the lobby of the Rotterdam, which you will remember was her hotel before it had been mine. Every one sat up and stared. She was as lovely as only herself, but I thought, looked harassed. Mount was attending her like a shadow, smoother, more elegant and more complacent than ever.

With a fanciful, sentimental feeling I had engaged rooms on the same floor of the hotel as Irma's. Her suite was rented by the year. During the morning as I went to and fro in the corridor of the eleventh floor, I could not help but notice an unusual stir in the neighbourhood of Irma's rooms. Messengers were flying, packages arriving, and the switchboard busy.

There is a telephone switchboard on each floor of the Rotterdam, opposite the elevators. In addition to answering the calls, the operator is supposed to keep an eye on things generally. While I was waiting for the elevator I asked the girl on our floor what was the cause of the excitement. She said she didn't know, but said it with a simper and a toss of the head that added to my uneasiness. Downstairs I asked the clerk with whom I was on friendly terms, but with no better success.

While I was hanging around the lobby, Irma and Mount came down. They took a taxi at the door. Following a sudden impulse I engaged the next in line, and ordered the driver to follow them. They led me through the maze of down-town traffic direct to the Municipal Building. They disappeared in the bureau of Marriage Licenses, and my worst fears were confirmed.

This time I determined to act without consulting my passionate, headstrong friend. I hastened back to the hotel. I had evidence that the ceremony was to be performed there, most likely the same afternoon. I wrote Irma a note begging her to see me privately on a matter of the greatest importance. I signed it with my assumed name Boardman, but I had worded it in such a way that she would know it was from me. Moreover she knew my handwriting. I sent it to her room in advance of her return. There was a chance of course that some one else might open it, but I knew she made a general practice of opening her own letters.

A little before two o'clock, I got a summons and hastened to her suite. She started back dubiously at the sight of me, but I soon identified myself. She was alone. The room was filled with orange blossoms. The scent sickened me.

"Where is Mr. Mount?" I asked.

"I sent him away for an hour," she answered, blushing.

"Are we quite alone?"

"Bella and Marie are in my bedroom. That is two rooms away."

Bella was Mrs. Bleecker; Marie her maid.

"Laying out your wedding-dress, I suppose," said I.

She started and blushed deeply. "You know?" she murmured.

"Is it a secret?"

"Not from you. I didn't know where to reach you by phone."

There was a somewhat painful silence. I did not feel inclined to make things easy for her.

"Aren't you—aren't you going to congratulate me?" she murmured at last.

"No," I said bluntly.

She looked at me full of surprise and pain, like a hurt child, but I was hurt, too, and impenitent.

"Oh, Irma, how could you?" I cried at last. It was the first time I had ever addressed her so. At the moment neither of us noticed it.

My question confused her. "I—I don't know," was her strange answer.

Presently she recovered herself somewhat. "Why shouldn't I?" she demanded, showing fight.

I shrugged. "I don't know. I have no reasons. You should be guided by your instinct."

"He is good to me," she said defiantly.

"Naturally, he sees his interest."

I can't remember all that was said on both sides. The conversation was sufficiently painful. She was no match for me. Finally she began to tremble.

"Why did you leave me?" she faltered. "I asked you to help me. You have avoided me all these weeks. I needed you. It's cruel and useless for you to come now, when it is too late and—and——"

"I have been working for you!" I cried. "I thought I could trust your instinct."

"I had no intention of marrying at first," she said. "You saw a while ago what was coming. Why didn't you speak then if you had anything to say. It's too late now."

"It's never too late if you have a doubt," I cried.

"But he—Alfred will be here at four," she stammered, "and the clergyman—and my friends——"

"Let Alfred go away again," I said coolly.

Her eyes widened like a frightened child's. "I dare not!" she whispered. "You don't know! He is a terrible man!"

"I'll back you up," I said.

"No! No!" she cried. "I will not! I cannot! Please go!"

I took a new tack.

"Why don't you ask me the result of my work the last few weeks?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

I had brought for the purpose, that report of Mr. Dunsany's in which Foxy had told how the theft of Irma's pearls had been accomplished. I explained to Irma how this report had been secured, and then I read it to her. Joy and horror struggled together in her face.

"You knew this long ago!" she cried accusingly. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Roland forbade it. I am breaking my word to him in telling you now."

"He no longer cares then what I think!"

I shrugged.

She walked up and down the room like one distraught.

"Knowing that Roland is innocent would you dare to marry Mount?" I asked.

"It is too late!" she cried.

At this moment we were warned by a sound in the next room to pull ourselves together. The door opened and Mrs. Bleecker's fawning countenance appeared in the opening.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, cringing. "I didn't know you were still engaged." She did not withdraw, however, but favoured me with a good, long stare.

I never saw the gentle Irma so angry. "Leave the room!" she commanded. "I told you I was not to be disturbed!"

If she had always taken the same tone with that woman it would have been better for her. Mrs. Bleecker precipitately retired.

Irma continued to pace the floor. "What shall I do?" she murmured, twisting her hands together. "I have not the strength to face him out."

"Don't try," I suggested.

"What do you mean?"

"Beat it," I said in homely slang.

A gleam of light, of mischief appeared in her tortured face. "But how?—where? Will you go with me?" she cried breathlessly. "What will I do about the women here? What explanation shall I make?"

"One thing at a time!" I protested. "Make no explanation. You are your own mistress. If you like you can leave Alfred a note saying you have changed your mind. As to the women——"

"I can trust Marie."

"Very well. Send Mrs. Bleecker out on an errand. No trouble to invent an errand at this juncture. You can be gone when she returns."

"Will you come with me?"

I shook my head. "Matters are rapidly approaching a crisis," I said. "I must stay on the job."

"But where will I go?"

"That's up to you. I can only offer a suggestion——"

"Yes! Yes! Don't tease me."

"You have a difficult time ahead of you. I think you need a man's support."

A crimson tide swept up from her neck.

"I would put on my oldest and plainest suit," I went on wickedly, "and go register at some quiet little hotel, the last place they would think of looking for you. I will give you the name of such a place. At five-thirty this afternoon I would go to a certain horrible cheap little restaurant known as the American café, which is on Third avenue near Sixteenth street. Half-past five remember, and just see what happens."

"If you would only come with me—I mean as far as the door," she murmured in confusion.

"Too risky," I said. "Mind I do not guarantee anything in any event. It's up to you. A certain young friend of ours has the pride of Lucifer, and you have made a ghastly wound in it. You will have to humble yourself shockingly."

In her present mood I saw she was quite ready to do that.

"This is what I'm counting on," I went on. "Pride is pretty poor fare. Let him act as high and mighty as he likes, he's really starving for all that makes life worth living. The unexpected sight of you ought to be like a feast to his eyes. I'm hoping he'll fall to, before his damnable pride has a chance to bring up reserves. One thing more. If anything prevents him from supping there as usual, he lives at # — East Seventeenth street."

"Are you sure he loves me still?" she whispered.

"Not at all sure," I said coolly. "You'll have to go and find out. If you've lost him, you've lost a lover that was worth a woman's while."

29

After I had seen Irma safely out of the Rotterdam (I thought she looked more adorable in her plain black dress and modest hat than in all her finery), I went back to my own rooms in the hotel. I was expecting a telephone report from a man whom I had sent to pick up what he could at the garage where Lorina stored her car. Meanwhile I gave myself up to the joy of picturing Mrs. Bleecker's dismay when she returned from her hypothetical errand, and Mount's black rage when he dropped in at four to be married and found himself minus a bride. I had always suspected that Mount concealed tigerish tendencies under his too-smooth exterior.

By and by my telephone did ring, but it was not the man I expected. An agitated young voice hailed me over the wire, which I had some difficulty in recognising as Blondy's. He was so excited I could not make head or tail of his message. When I got him straightened out it ran something like this:

"I have just been at Mrs. Mansfield's office, I mean the down-town office. She told me last night to come to-day as she had a package to be taken to a man at the Hotel Madagascar. I was sitting beside her desk and she was writing a letter to go with the package, when the telephone bell rang. She knows how to talk over the telephone without giving anything away. All she said was 'yes' and 'no' and 'repeat that,' but I saw that it was important because her face changed and her eyes glittered. When she looks like that it means danger.

"She was talking to a woman called Bella.

"She made some notes on a pad. As soon as she rang off she jumped up. She said she was called out and told me I needn't wait because she wouldn't send the package until to-morrow. When she turned to get her hat I managed to catch a glimpse of the notes she had put down. She had written:

"Elegantly-dressed man of fifty.
Silvery toupee, waxed moustache, pale face.

Brown suit, waistcoat edged with white.
White spats, white gloves.
Expensive Panama hat, fancy band green and red.
Room 1104."

"This is your description, and this is the number of your room. I was scared when I saw the expression of her face. She sent me home. She left at the same time, and took a taxi at the door. She carries her gun in a kind of pocket in her skirt. Look out for her!"

"I get you, old boy!" I cried. "You've done me a good turn and I shan't forget it. Don't you worry."

I hung up the receiver, and did a little thinking. I was struck by the name of the woman who had called Lorina up, Bella. It is not a very common name. It was Mrs. Bleecker's name. Was this a new thread in my extraordinary tangle?

It was decidedly awkward to have my disguise laid bare just at this moment. However, forewarned is forearmed. I set about putting my affairs in order. I did not know whether Lorina would visit the Rotterdam or not, but I was sure she would not do so without making her usual careful arrangements, and not probably, without disguising herself, all of which would take time. I gave myself an hour, anyway.

I gathered my papers together, and despatched those of them I valued to Dr. —, who had been so good to me already. I wrote notes to Mr. Dunsany, Blondy and other agents instructing them to send their reports in the care of Oscar Nilson until they heard from me again. All the beautiful sartorial effects I had to leave behind me. Maybe I could redeem them later if they were not sold by the hotel to pay my bill.

It was close upon four and I supposed the wedding-guests were gathering, when my telephone summoned me again.

"Miss Sadie Farrell is calling," said the voice at the other end.

My heart jumped, but simultaneously Caution held up a warning finger. "One moment," I answered.

I did some rapid thinking. I did not keep the girl waiting an appreciable moment, but in that time I thought a whole chapter, as one may do in a crisis. Not Sadie! Better sense instantly told me she would never come to my hotel. She had a more exalted notion of what was due her. Lorina, of course. She had used the most obvious expedient of reaching my rooms. I had three alternatives:

(a) To deny myself to her. But in that case I would virtually be besieged in the hotel.

(b) To see her down-stairs. She would hardly take a shot at me in the crowded lobby—but she might very well have some half-crazed youth there to do it for her.

(c) To have her up-stairs, where she could not pass any signals outside. I had two rooms——

"Please have Miss Farrell come up-stairs," I said over the phone.

I had one of the best suites at the Rotterdam, a corner room which was my parlour, and a bedroom. I put the key to the parlour door in my pocket, retired into the bedroom, and locked the communicating door. Presently I heard the bell-boy's knock on the parlour door.

"Come in!" I sang out.

Through the door I heard the sounds of two people entering my parlour.

"Hello, Sadie!" I cried. "Make yourself at home. I'll be dressed in a jiffy!"

An indistinguishable murmur answered me. This was certainly not my Sadie.

The bell-boy went out, and I heard him retiring down the hall. I gave him time to get out of the way, then I slipped out of the bedroom into the hall, key to the other room in hand. I inserted it ever so softly in the parlour door, and turned it. But she heard! She rushed to the door and shook it. By that time I was around the corner of the corridor.

The telephone girl looked at me somewhat curiously as I pressed the elevator button, but did not quite like to question me. She knew, of course, that a caller had just been shown into my room.

"I'll be back in a minute," I said carelessly.

Just then I saw the number of my room 1104 displayed on the switchboard. Lorina had rushed to the phone.

"Is there a drugstore in the hotel?" I asked the girl at random, to distract her attention.

"No, sir. There is one opposite the Thirty-fourth street entrance."

The elevator was approaching my floor. I needed one more second to make my getaway. "Is it a reliable place?" I asked.

"Conway's," she said, holding the plug ready in her hand, "one of the largest in town."

The elevator door was now open, and I stepped aboard. The operator shoved the plug in, and answered the call. I was carried down.

I could not tell, of course, what form Lorina's appeal for help would take. In case she might telephone to have me intercepted in the lobby, I took the precaution to get off at the mezzanine floor. I passed around the gallery to the other side of the building, and gained the street without interference.

So there I was safe, but once more homeless.

A gaily-dressed couple left the hotel immediately in front of me. The woman was talking rather excitedly. Reaching the pavement I saw that the talker was Miss Beulah Maddox, late of Irma's company. Of course! No difficulty in guessing what she was excited about. They turned West on Thirty-fourth street. I was bound in the same direction. I heard her say:

"Of course nobody believes she's sick. What can be the matter?"

"They've had a row I suppose," replied her companion.

Half a dozen steps farther along, they met another couple likewise gloriously arrayed. I did not know these two, but it required little perspicacity to guess that they too belonged to the profession. Miss Maddox greeted them with a squeal of excitement.

"Oh, my *dears!*"

It was risky, but I could not forbear stopping a moment to listen. I made out to be looking for a taxi.

"What do you *think?*" cried Miss Maddox. "There's no use your going any farther! There isn't going to be any wedding!"

"Why?"

"Nobody knows. Another extraordinary caprice of Irma's! Everybody is told at the desk that she is ill, and the ceremony postponed, but of course that's only an *excuse*. I had a glimpse of Mr. Mount and he looked simply *furios*, my dear!"

And so on! And so on! A taxi drew up and I jumped in.

I had myself taken to Oscar's shop, and in one of the little cubicles, the distinguishing marks of the elegant Mr. Boardman, late of the Rotterdam, were removed. It would have been fun to adopt another swell makeup and go back to the Rotterdam to see what was happening, but it was too risky. It was safer for me to play an humble character now.

Oscar provided me with a longish mop of black hair, and a pair of heavy black eye-brows. He went out himself to get me the rough clothes I needed. An hour after I had gone into his shop I came out again, a typical representative of tough young New York. The Hudson Dusters would not have rejected me.

It was now nearly half-past five. The hands of the clock reminded me of the meeting that I had arranged to bring about at that hour. My heart was very keen for the success of this meeting, yet I was full of uncomfortable doubts. Now that I had changed my character I felt that I might safely go and see how things turned out, so I turned my steps in the direction of the American café on Third avenue.

When I got there Roland was already eating his supper. No sign of Irma yet. The American is one of those older lunchrooms where they have long mahogany tables each decorated with a row of sugar bowls and sauce bottles with squirt tops. In such places one of the squirt tops still gives "pepper sauce" though I never saw anybody use it. There was a double row of long tables with a lane between. Roland had the wall seat of the first table on the right. His shorthand book was propped against a vinegar bottle, and he studied it while he fed himself.

I took a seat two removes from him on the same side of the table. He paid no attention to me. I took this distance, because if Irma came I didn't want to hear too much. No one was likely to sit between us, so long as there were whole tables vacant. It was a little early for the supper hour, and there were few in the place.

I ordered the *pièce de resistance* of such places, viz.: a plate of beef stew. Roland was almost through his supper, and I wondered apprehensively if Irma meant to exercise her woman's prerogative of being late. Perhaps her nerve had failed her, and she would not come. She had burned her bridges though. What else could she do but come? From time to time I glanced in my young friend's face. It was pale and drawn. Verily, I thought, his infernal pride was sapping his youth.

Then I saw Irma and my heart set up a great beating. It's a risky thing to presume to play Providence to a pair of young souls, one of whom is as explosive as guncotton. What was going to happen? Irma was hovering about outside. She glanced in the place nervously. Unfortunately there was no other woman eating there at the moment, though women did come to the place. Irma walked on. Had she given up? My heart sunk. No, presently she came strolling back. She meant to wait for him outside. I approved her good sense. Plainly dressed though she was, her entrance into that place would have created a sensation.

Roland, all unconscious of what was in store, got up, slipped the book in his pocket, paid his score with an abstracted air, and went out. He never looked at me. His brain was full of shorthand symbols.

I followed him at once, though I had but started my supper. Nobody cared so long as I paid.

I was just in time to see them come face to face on the pavement outside.

"Roland!" she whispered with the loveliest smile surely that ever bedecked the human countenance; wistful, supplicating and tender.

He started back as if he had been shot, and gazed at her with a kind of horror. He did not speak. I expect he could not. Passers-by stared at them curiously. Irma lowered her head, and slipping her hand inside his arm with affecting confidence, drew him forward away from the stares. Still he did not speak. He was oblivious to the passers-by, and to everything else but her. He gazed at her like a man in a trance, his dark eyes full of a passionate hunger. She only spoke once more. Raising her eyes to his she moved her lips. I could read them.

"I love you," she whispered.

His lips began to tremble. Where were all his proud vows then?

She drew him around the corner into the quieter side street. She was weeping now. When she looked at him I

could see the bright drops. They were more potent than any words she could have spoken. Roland suddenly came to life. He stopped short, flung an arm around her, turned up her face and kissed her mouth, careless if all New York saw.

So that was all right.

The sight induced me to take the first train out to Amityville where I might dine and spend the evening with my dear girl. We were much mystified upon receiving a telegram during the evening signed by my name. To my astonishment I saw English and Freer on the train returning from Amityville. The explanation of all this was forthcoming in the morning.

30

Next morning as soon as Oscar opened his shop, I was on hand to get my mail. I found that big things had happened during the night.

REPORT OF J. M. No. 23

Lorina's House
Saturday, July 11th, 3 A.M.

It is unfortunate that this should be the first night of our association that we are out of touch with each other. I sent home an hour ago to see if there was any word from you. I got your letter, but that only gives me the address of the wig-maker's shop which is, of course, closed until morning. I have to remain on watch here, and I cannot make the hours pass better than by writing you an account of all that has happened. It will save time when we meet.

I have done the best I could. I followed your instructions to the letter. I do not see how I could have acted differently. I hope you will not blame me.

As soon as I was through work at Dunsany's this afternoon, I went down to No. — Fifth avenue as usual, to continue my inventory of the gang's diamonds. Freer is always there when I am, of course. He's not a bad sort of fellow. There's something sorrowful about him. I think he would prefer on the whole to lead an honest life. He speaks of having an expensive family to keep.

As soon as Lorina's stenographer and office boy went home, she came into our room as she usually does. This evening she was in a state of excitement. She had evidently been holding herself in some time. The air was lurid with the fire and brimstone she used in apostrophising you. If hate could be sent by wireless you'd be dead this minute, my friend.

I gathered she had learned during the day that you were at the Rotterdam. But when she went around there with her silencer, you turned the tables on her somehow and not only got away again, but left her in a very humiliating position. Bully for you!

"He's slipped through my fingers for the moment!" she went on, "but I've got a line on his girl again. I'll fix her to-night."

My heart went down at this piece of news.

"She's at a sanatorium at Amityville," Lorina went on. "I got a servant into the house, and I know her habits. I won't take any chances this time. This is a job for you, English."

Fancy my feelings! I had no time to think. Yet I had to say something, and quickly, too. I said the natural thing.

"I won't do it!" I cried. "I am working for you night and day as it is, good work, too! I didn't engage for murder—a woman too. I won't do it! I'm done with you all!"

And I flung down my tools.

Lorina took this outburst calmly. She is accustomed to it no doubt. She merely looked at Freer, and he got between me and the door.

"Don't be simple-minded, English," she said contemptuously. "This is no child's game, that you can refuse to play if you don't like the rules. You're in it for bad or for worse like the rest of us. And I have the means of enforcing my orders!"

"Not that!" I begged.

"It was agreed long ago that this woman and this man have got to be put out of the way. You're the only one of the crowd that hasn't been tested out, and the other boys are complaining. Here's your chance to make good. You understand there's no alternative. You're a valuable man to us, but——!"

I can give you no idea of the effect with which she said this. She is a terrible woman. Her eyes were like points of ice. Meanwhile I was thinking hard. If I did not go, she would undoubtedly find some one else. I might be prevented from warning you. I could not warn Sadie direct, because you had never given me her address. In the end I agreed.

Lorina smiled on me.

"What are my instructions?" I asked.

"The girl is at Dr. ——'s sanatorium," said Lorina. "You should not get out there before dark, so the seven-thirty train will be the best. There is a train back from Amityville a little after ten which will land you in town before midnight."

She then told me how to reach the sanatorium, and described the layout of the grounds.

"My report says that the Farrell girl keeps close to the house during the day," she went on, "and walks out at night. Her favourite spot is a pool at the bottom of the lawn, which is surrounded by juniper trees. There is a bench at the southerly side of the pool that she always visits. It is near the public road, and will be no trouble for you to reach. The thick growth of young trees makes plenty of cover."

"What am I to do when she comes?" I asked.

Lorina turned her back on me a moment. When she faced around she handed me an automatic pistol with a curious cylinder affixed to the end of the barrel.

"Use this," she said. "It makes no sound."

I slipped it in my pocket.

"Freer will go with you," said Lorina.

This seemed fatal to my hopes—I had to keep command of my face though. I made believe it was a matter of indifference. To give Freer credit, he did not appear to relish the assignment, but he dared not object either.

"As soon as you get back you will both come direct to my house," said Lorina.

Such were our instructions.

We went to take the seven-thirty train as ordered. As Freer never left my side I had no opportunity to call you

up. I know now that you weren't at the hotel anyway. In the station Freer went to buy the tickets. I waited on a bench in plain sight of him. Next to me sat a nice, sensible looking girl, and I had an inspiration.

"Will you send a telegram for me?" I asked smiling at her.

Naturally she was somewhat taken aback. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Don't look so surprised," I said, smiling still. "There's a man watching me. He mustn't know. It's terribly important—a question of a life, maybe."

I was lucky in my girl. She had an adventurous spirit. She smiled back. "Who to?" she asked.

"Have you got a good memory?"

"First-rate."

"Miss Farrell, care Doctor ——'s Sanatorium, Amityville."

"I have it."

"Just say: 'Do not leave the house to-night.'"

"Right. Signature?"

"B. Enderby.' You'll find the money to pay for it on the seat when I get up."

Freer, having secured the tickets, now came towards us. I met him half way. He look at me hard.

"I made a friend," I said, grinning as men do.

"Humph!" he said sourly. "I shouldn't think you'd be in the humour now."

I went out to the train with him, giving an amorous backward glance towards the girl.

An hour and a half later we were crouching among the young juniper trees at the edge of Dr. ——'s pond. I was reminded of that other night in Newport. Certainly I have led a full life this past week. Once more I waited with my heart in my throat fancying that I heard her approach in all the little sounds of night. Freer was no happier than I, I believe. While we waited in the dark I quietly unloaded the magazine of the pistol to guard against accidents.

Once we did hear steps approaching along one of the paths, and held our breaths. But they passed in another direction. If she had come my plan was to secure Freer with her assistance, if she were not too frightened. But she did not come.

Freer had a tiny electric flash with which he consulted his watch from time to time. He said at last:

"We can just make the train. It's the only train to-night."

"Come on," I said. "It isn't our fault if she didn't come."

"Thank God she didn't!" he said involuntarily.

I shook hands with him. He was a traitor to me, and a thief, but I forgot it at the moment.

The trip home was without incident. We got up to Lorina's shortly after midnight. The whole gang was there: Foxy, Jumbo, Jim, Blondy, several of the young fellows, a dozen in all besides Freer and me. They were all gambling in the dining-room.

Lorina jumped up at the sight of us.

"Well?" she demanded.

"No good," I said. "The girl never came."

"Hm!" said Lorina. That was all.

It struck me that she must have known already that we had failed.

Lorina asked for her pistol, and I handed it over.

"Boys," said Lorina, "we'll go up to the office and have a council. I was just waiting for these two to come in. We've got to decide what we're going to do about this bull Enderby. He's active again."

There was something in the tone of this speech, or in the look which accompanied it, that caused the scalp behind my ears to draw and tingle. I began to wonder if I had not risked too much in venturing back into the lion's den this night. However, it was too late for regrets. I put the best face on it I could.

We trooped up-stairs. Some of the boys had been drinking. There was a good bit of noise. The office as I have already explained is the front room on the second floor. It extends the width of the house, and it has three windows. That on the left is over the portico and stoop.

At the right of the room is a large flat-topped desk. Lorina sat at it with her back to the fireplace. She motioned me to a seat at her right. The men lounged in chairs about, some of them with their elbows on the desk. Lorina ordered the door closed. I was wondering if I'd ever leave that room alive.

Lorina rapped on the desk for attention.

"Boys," she said bluntly, "we've got a spy among us."

Instantly every pair of eyes turned on me. I jumped up. My back was in the corner. I bluffed them as best I could.

"What's the matter with you?" I cried. "I didn't ask you to take me in. You came after me. You gave me your work to do. Haven't I done it? Didn't I deliver the goods at Newport? Didn't I undertake a nasty bit of work to-night? Ask Freer there. And now you turn on me!"

"Keep quiet!" commanded Lorina. "You'll have your hearing."

To the men she said: "For a week I've known there was a leak somewhere, and I wanted to test him. I gave him a job out at Amityville, and I sent Freer with him. I had an agent in the house out there. Well, he didn't pull the job off."

"Was that my fault?" I cried. "Ask Freer."

She turned to Freer. "How about it?"

"I—I didn't see anything," he stammered.

"Were you with him all the time?"

"He was never out of my sight."

"Be careful how you answer," she said, "or I'll believe you're in with him."

Freer's face was pale and sweaty. "Well—well—he flirted with a girl in the station. I couldn't hear what he said because I was buying the tickets. It looked all right."

"Looked all right!" snarled Lorina. "You fool! One of Enderby's spies tracked you!"

"I swear we weren't trailed!" cried Freer. "I watched particularly."

"What time was that?"

"About quarter past seven."

"At eight o'clock a telegram was delivered at the Sanatorium," said Lorina. "My agent called me up. It said: 'Do not leave the house to-night,' and was signed 'B. Enderby.'"

The gang looked at me with a new hatred.

Lorina laughed harshly. "Oh, this isn't Enderby," she said. "Enderby was at the Sanatorium to-night seeing his girl. We had the two of them together, and this traitor double-crossed us!"

They began to move threateningly towards my corner.

"Keep back!" cried Lorina. "Let's hear what he has to say first."

I licked my dry lips and did the best I could for myself. "You've got no proof!" I cried. "How could I have sent a telegram? I was never out of Freer's sight. Why should I have signed it Enderby if Enderby was out there? You all know I'm no bull but a workman at Dunsany's. I can account for every minute of my time since Jumbo first picked me up!"

Lorina was nearer me than any of the men. She took a step forward. I guarded my face. But that was not her point of attack. Her hand shot out, and the wig was snatched from my head. There I stood with my bare poll. The jig was up.

A loud laugh broke from the men—jackals' laughter, before tearing their prey. A different kind of sound came from Freer.

"My God! it's Mr. Dunsany!" he gasped.

"Eh?" said Lorina.

"Walter Dunsany," he repeated, staring as if he saw a ghost.

"Is this true?" she demanded of me.

I felt as if the worst were over now. A sudden calmness descended on me. It was a sort of relief to be able to be myself. "Quite true," I said.

"What's your game?" she demanded scowling.

"Do you need to ask?"

There was a commotion among the men. I heard different exclamations and demands. Some were for despatching me on the spot; one suggested I be held for a million dollars' ransom.

Lorina turned on the last speaker. "You fool!" she cried. "Ten millions wouldn't save him! He gets a perpetual lodging in my cellar!"

Cries of approval, more laughter greeted this.

From her dress Lorina drew the gun I had given her a little while before. "Hands up!" she commanded.

Now I knew it was not loaded, and I had a loaded gun in my pocket. But so had every other man there, and all had more practice in drawing their weapons than I. So I thought it best to obey. Up went my hands.

"Foxy, Jim, frisk him!" said Lorina.

They found the gun, and flung it on the desk. Lorina dropped it in the middle drawer. There was nothing else incriminating upon me.

"Down on the floor with him!" cried somebody.

"Wait!" said Lorina. "We'll see what we can find out first."

I caught at the little straw of hope that showed. "Send them out and I'll talk freely," I muttered. "I've no mind to be shot when I'm not looking."

Over-confidence betrayed her. With a gun in her hand she felt herself more than a match for any unarmed man. By a fatal oversight she never looked to see if her weapon was loaded. She didn't trust that mob very far, as I knew, and perhaps she thought I might have something to say which it was better they shouldn't hear. They grumbled, but she was absolute mistress there. She ordered them out of the room.

"Shut the door," she said. "Wait outside. Do not come in unless I call you."

If I could get that door locked, and get my gun back! I crept along the wall opposite the windows a little at a time. Lorina made no serious attempt to stop me, because there was no possible escape on that side of the room.

"What have you got to tell me?" she said.

"What do you want to know?" I parried. Every second I could gain was precious.

"Stand still!" she commanded. "Where is Enderby to-night?"

"At the Sanatorium, you said."

"He returned on the same train you did."

"I didn't know it. I wish I had."

"Well, where is he now?"

"At the Rotterdam, I suppose."

"He has not come back there. I have the place watched."

"Then I don't know where he is."

"You lie! Where do you have your meetings?"

"We have never met but once since I've been on the case."

"Do you expect me to believe that? Stand still!"

"I don't care whether you believe it or not. It's the truth."

Meanwhile I was moving a few inches at a time around the wall towards the door the men had gone out by. Since Lorina knew the dozen of them were just outside the door, indeed we could hear them, she cared little. My hands were still elevated of course.

"How do you communicate with him?" she asked.

"By letter or telephone."

"Where?"

"At the Rotterdam."

Her eyes glittered. "I've had enough of this fooling," she said. "If you've got anything that's worth my while you'd better say it. My finger's impatient."

I needed a few seconds yet. I adopted a whining tone. "Why should I split on Enderby? You're going to croak me anyway. What'll you do for me if I tell?"

"For the last time, tell me what you know, or I'll hand you over to the boys!" said Lorina.

I had reached the door now. The key was in it. I had calculated every move in advance. Down came my hands, I turned the key, and flung it out of the open window. Lorina began to shoot. The gun makes so little noise at any time that she had pulled the trigger several times before she realised it was not loaded. By that time I was half way back to the desk. I got the drawer open and my hand on my gun, as she leaped on my back. I flung her off.

She was crying for help by this time. The men outside tried the door, then flung themselves against it. It could not hold long against that weight. But I needed only a few seconds. I reached the window over the portico. Somehow or other I slid down a pillar to the steps. As soon as my feet touched something solid I fired three shots in the air. This was the pre-arranged signal to the men in the hotel.

I vaulted over the balustrade, and crouched in the areaway of the adjoining house out of range of any shots from the windows. Foxy undertook to follow me. As he dropped to the stoop I shot him in the legs. He fell in a heap. The others looking out, thought better of imitating him.

Almost immediately the men came running out of the hotel, and Lorina's gang disappeared like magic from the windows. But as it had been arranged that some of the detectives were to approach over the back fences, and others by the roof, I had no fear they would escape us.

The rest is soon told. When we broke in the door we heard Lorina commanding the men not to shoot. As the police crowded into the hall, she came towards us head up, and with superb insolence demanded to know the meaning of the outrage. I'm afraid I indulged in rude laughter.

The police were amply provided with handcuffs. We secured the prisoners two by two, searched them, and carted them off in the patrol wagon that was summoned by telephone. The bag was Lorina, Jumbo, Foxy (not seriously wounded), Jim, Freer, seven other men and the three negroes. Blondy escaped in safety according to your instructions. There was much mystification expressed, since the house was guarded front, rear and roof, and every corner of the interior was searched. Of course, I made a great fuss about it.

The lieutenant of police reported the haul to Inspector Lanman, who arrived bye and bye with other high police officials in an automobile. You ought to have been there too. I was wild at my inability to get hold of you. I used all the eloquence at my command appealing to Lanman not to disturb anything in the house, and not to have the prisoners questioned until we could get hold of you. He agreed.

I am remaining here in the house to see that his orders in that connection are obeyed, and also on the chance that other members of the gang may come in. We have all of them that matter though—except the grand boss. Unfortunately the noise of this capture will give him warning, but I have done the best I could. Lorina's other establishment is well-guarded, but will not be broken into until morning. Come quickly when you get this.

WALTER DUNSANY.
(J. M. no longer.)

The tremendous popular excitement that followed on the capture of Lorina and her gang does not help on my story, so I will pass over it quickly. The haul we made in the modern cave of Aladdin staggered the public

imagination. Much against Mr. Dunsany's advice the jewels were publicly exhibited in police headquarters for three days.

Mr. Dunsany and I were elevated into the position of newspaper heroes. He at least deserved it, but I doubt if he enjoyed his honours. I know I didn't enjoy what fell to me. I couldn't help but think if we had only been able to hush up this noise for twenty-four hours, maybe the grand boss of the outfit might have walked into our welcoming arms.

I will simply say that a thorough combing of Lorina's house, and of her offices, revealed not the slightest bit of evidence leading to the man we sought. She was a wonder at covering her tracks. In the midst of all the popular praises I was discouraged. There was nothing as far as I could see to prevent the organiser of the gang from presently organising another. Meanwhile I was in hourly expectation of receiving his compliments in the shape of a bullet.

I had one small hope left, and that was in Blondy. The fact of his escape had been duly published, and I was praying that Lorina, deprived now of any better instrument might be led to use him. I carefully stayed away from the boy, keeping in touch with him by letter and phone. I would not, of course, put him up to communicating with Lorina. That would instantly have aroused her suspicions. Any move must come from her. I append some of Blondy's letters.

July 10th.

DEAR MR. ENDERBY:

The house was pinched last night, as you know by this time. I had gone to the back room on the third floor by myself because I thought they were going to murder a man in the office, and I was sickened by it. I don't know if he got away or not. I suppose the whole story will be in the evening papers. Anyhow I heard the three shots outside, which you told me would be the signal, so I beat it up the ladder to the scuttle. You told me if any one else tried to get out that way, I was to let them go on ahead of me and hide in the hall closet, but I was all alone. There was a deuce of a racket down-stairs. The servants in the front room were hollering, but they didn't come out. I got out on the roof and met the detectives coming over from the hotel. They grabbed me and threw a light in my face. Seeing who it was they let me go. I was glad. I was afraid maybe you had forgotten to give them instructions. I went down to the street through the hotel, and chased home as quick as I could. According to your instructions I shall go on living here as usual until I hear from you.

Yours respectfully,
RALPH ANDRUS.

For nearly a week nothing of any importance happened. Then I received this:

July 16th.

DEAR MR. ENDERBY:

I called you up this morning to tell you about the lawyer coming to the association rooms to see me. This afternoon I went down to his office as you told me I should. The fellow said he was one of the lawyers hired by Mrs. Mansfield to defend her, and she had given him my name to see if I would make a witness on her side at the trial. Then he put me through a cross-examination that lasted a couple of hours. I was kind of flustered by it, because I didn't know how you would have wanted me to answer his questions. But you told me if I didn't know what to say to tell the truth. So I did. The only time I lied was when he asked me how I got out of the house that night. I said when I got out on the roof I saw the officers coming, and hid behind a chimney till they passed. It seems I didn't know enough about the gang one way or another to make any difference. The lawyer told me to keep my mouth shut if I wanted to stay out of trouble, gave me a couple of dollars and sent me home. I hope I handled this matter right.

Yours respectfully,
R. A.

The lawyer Blondy referred to was a junior partner in one of the best-known firms engaged in criminal cases. It had been announced that this firm had been retained by Lorina. Since the lawyer had approached the boy openly there could be no doubt but that he himself was acting in good faith. I could not but feel though that there was something behind this visit, because, of course, Lorina knew that Blondy could tell next to nothing about her affairs, and that little not to her credit.

I finally decided that she must have used the young lawyer as a kind of cat's-paw to discover Blondy's situation and present disposition towards herself. If I was right there would no doubt be developments presently. I awaited the event in no little anxiety.

Sure enough, three days later Blondy called me up to tell me he had just received a long letter from Lorina that I ought to read at once. I arranged to meet him in an hour at the office of the doctor who had first brought us together. He was instructed to make sure that he was not followed there.

Lorina's letter enclosed a second letter. The enclosure was not sealed. The friendly tone of the first so different from Lorina's attitude towards him out of jail, excited the boy's derision. It read:

DEAR BLONDY:

I am *so* glad you made your getaway. The lawyer told me about it. You certainly were lucky. He tells me you are broke. I have been worrying about this. He will take this letter out to post, but he doesn't know what I am going to say to you. That's between ourselves. I know I can count on you not to split on a pal. Burn this as soon as you get the contents fixed in your mind.

I can't send you anything from here, because these devils have stripped me. They have even taken my keys, so I can't send and get into my safety deposit box for funds. But if you will help me, I'll be in a position to do something handsome for you. I have a duplicate set of keys that nobody knows about, and I want you to get them for me.

I enclose a letter to Mrs. Bradford who is the janitress of the house at No. — East Fifty-Ninth street. I kept a room there that I could go to when I wanted to be quiet. Read the enclosed letter then seal it so she will think you don't know what's in it. Do everything just as the letter says. Don't forget that my name is Mrs. Watkins to this woman. You will find fifty dollars in my pocketbook there. Give her thirty for the rent and ten for herself. You keep the other ten. Get a receipt for the rent.

The keys are in the pocketbook. Be very careful of them. In a few days a man will call you up and ask you if you have them. You ask him his name, and he will say Thomas Wilkinson. Then he will tell you what to do, and you must obey him exactly. As soon as he gets the keys and can open my box he will send you five thousand dollars in bills, which will set you up in business or give you a good time, whichever you like.

If this turns out all right there will be a chance for you to make other good things out of the crowd.

I enclose the combination to the safe on a separate slip.

Take care of yourself,

With love,
LORINA.

P.S. You mustn't think from my letter to Mrs. B. that I do not trust you. That's just to stall her off.

L.

The enclosure was a masterpiece.

DEAR MRS. BRADFORD:

I have been taken real sick, threatened with nervous prostration they say. I have had to go to Dr. ——'s sanatorium at Amityville. Don't know how long I'll be here. Now Mrs. Bradford, I'm in a fix because I've lost my keys. I keep duplicates in my safe, and so I'm sending my nephew to you with this to get them. He has wavy, blond hair and blue eyes, and nice white teeth. He slurs his rs a little when he talks like a child. So he will call you Mrs. B'adfo'd. These details will identify him to you.

Please let him into my room with your pass-key, and remain with him while he is there. Not but what he is a good boy, but boys will be boys you know. Don't let him see this. I have given him the combination of my safe. Inside is an old handbag with fifty dollars in it and a bunch of keys. He will give you thirty dollars of it for the rent, and ten for your trouble. Nothing else in the safe must be touched. Thanking you for your trouble,

Yours sincerely,
(Mrs.) ELIZABETH WATKINS.

P.S. I hope your rheumatism is better.

I made copies of the letters and the safe combination, and told Blondy to go ahead and do exactly as he had been told. I suspected from Lorina's care that the little safe would make interesting disclosures. However, I could get into it some other time. I was inclined to believe her story about the safety deposit box. Like all first-class liars she wove truth into her lies when she could. I was hoping, while scarcely daring to hope, that in a matter of such vital importance she would not dare trust any one short of the "boss" himself. If he would only come after the keys!

Next day I got the following letter from Blondy.

DEAR MR. ENDERBY:

I did everything just as the letter said. Mrs. Bradford was a suspicious kind of woman. She lived in a cellar kind of place below the street level. She asked me about a thousand questions before she would let me in. But I wasn't afraid of her. Suspicious people are generally easy to fool.*

* Pretty good observation for eighteen years old! B. E.

No. — East Fifty-Ninth street is an old building that is let out in stores and studios. Mrs. Mansfield's room was second floor rear. I couldn't look around much the old woman watched me so close. It was just an ordinary furnished room, nothing rich like the Lexington avenue house. There was an alcove with a bed in it. The only thing funny was the number of trunks standing around. I counted seven of them. They had covers and cushions on them.

The safe was a little one. I opened it all right. There was nothing in the main part but a lot of papers and the little satchel. There was an inside locked compartment. After I locked the safe again the old woman made me destroy the combination before her eyes. I paid her the money, put the keys in my pocket, and she hustled me out. That's all.

Yours respectfully,

R. A.

After this followed a period of strained anxiety for me. I could not stay near Blondy, of course, and I was afraid the man we hoped to get might circumvent him in some way. Maybe instead of telephoning him he would call on him in person. Blondy was instructed of course in that event to hang on to him like grim death, but how could I expect a boy of his age to get the better of an astute crook?

However, this fear proved groundless. On Thursday morning about eleven Blondy called me up. I instantly knew by his breathlessness that something had happened.

"Guy just called up," said Blondy. "Said: 'Have you got the keys?' I came back: 'Who are you?' 'Thomas Wilkinson.' 'O.K.,' said I. Then he started in quick to give me my instructions."

"I must take the twelve noon train from the Long Island Terminal for Greenwood City. I get off at Greenwood City and walk one block North to Suffolk avenue which is the main street of the village. I turn to the right on Suffolk which is to say turn East or away from New York, and keep straight on right out of town to the wide, empty stretch of land that they call Ringstead plains. I have to walk about two miles out this road. Half a mile beyond the last house there's a locust tree beside the road. He said I couldn't miss it because it was the only tree standing by itself as far as you could see. Motor cars pass up and down the road frequently. But I must not accept a ride if it's offered to me. I must sit down under this tree as if I was tired and stay there ten minutes or so, until anybody who may have seen me stop there will have passed out of sight. Then I am to leave the keys on the ground behind the tree and walk back to Greenwood City, and take the first train for New York. If he gets the keys all right, he said he would send the money in a package by mail to-morrow."

I made notes of all this while the boy was speaking.

"Is it all right?" he asked anxiously.

"Fine!" I said.

"But the twelve o'clock train! It's quarter past eleven now. I wanted to put him off to give you more time, but you said do exactly what he said."

"Quite right," I said. "Run along and get your train. Follow your instructions exactly and leave the rest to me."

32

Time was very precious, but I allowed myself a few minutes for hard, concentrated thought. I believed that Blondy would be under surveillance from the time he left the Association rooms until he reached the appointed spot. Evidently my man was aware of the advantage to himself of rushing the thing through, and it was likely the keys would be picked up within a few minutes of the time they were dropped. At any rate he would surely come after them by daylight, for night would make an ambush easy. Therefore it was up to me to make my preparations *before* the boy got there. Not very easy when he was already about to start.

My man had had several days in which to find the spot near New York best suited to his purpose. From Blondy's description the place he had chosen must be bare of cover in miles. "Thomas Wilkinson" would come in an automobile, naturally, and if anything in the vicinity aroused his suspicions he would not stop. I could not hope to pick him out among all who passed. It was a tough problem.

I called up Lanman the chief of the detective bureau. Nowadays I commanded the respect of these people.

"Look here," I said, "we have a chance to take the boss of the thief trust this afternoon, if we strike like

lightning."

"Shoot!" said he.

"First, send me quick a high-powered automobile with a nifty chauffeur and two operatives. Have them pick me up at the Southwest corner of Second avenue and 59th street, Queensboro bridge plaza."

"Right!"

"Next get together five other good cars without any distinctive marks. Come yourself in one of them, and bring a dozen good men. Meet me—let me see—What town is there near Greenwood City, Long Island, but not on the same road?"

"Ringstead, two miles South."

"Know a hotel there?"

"Mitchell's a road house."

"Good. Have your five cars proceed to Mitchell's by different roads as quickly as possible. I may not be able to come there to you, but wait there for further instructions by telephone."

"O.K.," he said. "We'll be on the way in ten minutes."

"One thing more. Bring a good pair of field glasses."

I took my own binoculars and a gun. On the way to the meeting-place I bought a road map of Long Island. The car was already waiting for me at the spot named. Lanman was a man after my own heart.

We made quick time. I was provided with a police badge in case any of the local constables should object to our rate of travel. On the road I studied my map and got the lay of the land in my head.

It was twelve-five when we reached Greenwood City, or fifty minutes before the train was due. As we passed the railway station I saw a car already waiting there, and I wondered idly if that would have anything to do with my case. It was a very distinguished-looking car of a foreign make with a dark green body of the style the French call *coupé de ville*. It seemed a little odd that any one should choose to ride in a closed car in such hot weather. An impeccable chauffeur and footman waited near.

We turned into Suffolk street, and hastened on out of town out to Ringstead plains. It was all just as Blondy had given it to me over the phone. There was the last house at the edge of the plain, and half a mile ahead stood the lonely locust tree beside the road. The house looked as if it might belong to a small farmer or market gardener. There was a small barn behind it. Ahead of us there was no other habitation visible as far as we could see.

We kept on. It is a well-known motor road, and we passed cars from time to time. Earlier and later it would be quite crowded I expect, but this was one of the quietest hours. About three-quarters of a mile beyond the locust tree there was a wood that I had my eye on. It was not of very great extent, but showed a dense growth of young trees.

Reaching it, I found to my great satisfaction that there was a rough wagon track leading away among the trees, I had the chauffeur turn in there. There was no other car in view at the moment. Within a few yards the wagon track curved a little, and we were lost to view from the road. I got out and made my way to the edge of the trees. From this point I found I could overlook the locust tree with the aid of my binoculars.

This was all I wanted. I gave the order to return to Greenwood City. A little further in the wood there was a clearing sufficient to enable us to turn. One gets over the ground quickly in a car, and when we got back to Greenwood we still had twenty-five minutes before the train was due. This place, by the way, is not a city at all, but merely a village embowered in trees. The handsome green car was still waiting at the station. I went to a hotel to

telephone.

To my joy I got Lanman on the phone without delay.

"I am here at Mitchell's with three of the cars," he said. "The other two were sent by a slightly longer route. They will be here directly."

"Take three cars and proceed by the shortest route to Greenwood City," I said. "Make haste because I expect my man on the train from town in twenty minutes, and you must get through the village before he arrives."

"We can be there in five," said Lanman.

"Turn to the right on Suffolk street and proceed out on the plains. A mile and a half out of town you come to the last house. It is a grey house without any trees around it; there is a small barn behind it. Stop there and put up your cars in the barn in such a way that you can run them out quickly. I don't know the people in the house. I have no reason to believe that they have any connection with the man we want, but you'll have to use your judgment."

I went on to explain to him just what Blondy was going to do, and how I expected our man to turn up shortly afterwards.

"The East windows of the house overlook the locust tree," I went on. "Station yourself at one of them with your glasses, and you will be able to see whatever happens at the tree."

"I get you," he said. "What about the other two cars? One of them is just turning into the yard now."

"Let them leave Ringstead by Merton street," I said, consulting my map, "and proceed East to the Joppa Pike; thence North to the Suffolk pike and turn back towards Greenwood City. About two miles and a half before reaching the village, more than a mile beyond the house where you will be, there is a small wood on the left hand side of the road. There is a wagon track leading into it. They are to turn in there and they will find me a little way inside."

"All right," said Lanman. "The last car is coming now."

"Listen," I said. "Our man without doubt will come in a car. After he picks up the keys I expect he will keep on in the road. In which case he falls into my hands. But if he should turn around and go back it's up to you."

"I understand," said Lanman grimly.

Ten minutes later I was back at my observation post at the edge of the wood. I had not been there long when through my glasses I saw a car turn into the farmer's place. A second and a third car followed at short intervals. In a quarter of an hour the first police car joined me, and a few minutes afterward the second. Each contained two men in addition to the chauffeur.

We turned the cars around and stationed them in line where, though they were invisible from the highroad, they could run out upon it in a few seconds. The other side of the highway was fenced. Having completed our arrangements, there was nothing to do for a while, and I told the men to take it easy.

According to my calculations Blondy would appear in view about one-thirty. It was a long walk from the station and a hot day. Exactly on schedule I saw a speck in the distance which presently resolved itself through the glasses into the figure of a solitary pedestrian. As he neared the tree I saw that it was Blondy. So far so good.

I was lying on the ground at the edge of the little wood with the glasses steadied on a fallen trunk. The whole flat plain was spread before me. The cars were about thirty yards behind me, each chauffeur at his wheel. Between me and them I had the four men stationed at intervals so I could pass a whispered order back.

While Blondy was covering the space between the house and the locust tree a green car hove in view behind him, which I presently recognised from the irreproachable chauffeur and footman as the *coupé de ville*. It overtook

the walking figure, and came on up the road, past the wood, and past us. I wondered if our man was now inside.

Blondy reached the tree at last. I suspected that he welcomed the shade. It seemed perfectly natural for him to sit down under it. He remained there ten minutes. Several cars passed to and fro and one of them stopped. This puzzled me for a moment, but I supposed that it was merely some good Samaritan who offered the perspiring boy a lift. While Blondy was sitting there the green car went back. I was pretty sure now that it contained our quarry.

At last Blondy got up and started back. These periods of waiting try a man's nerves. Mine were pretty well on edge by this time. It seemed to take an age for the boy to retrace his steps over the visible part of the road. About two hundred yards beyond the farmhouse there was a bend in it which concealed the rest from my view.

A minute or two after Blondy disappeared from my sight, the big green car again hove into view around the bend. My heart hit up a few extra beats.

"Get ready," I sent word along the line.

To my great disappointment it did not stop at the tree. It came on, and passed the wood again with the loud purr of new tires. However, I explained it to myself by the fact that there was another car in view at the moment. I set myself to wait in the expectation of his return.

In five minutes return he did, but this time there was a car close behind, and once more he passed out of sight without stopping. I hoped that Lanman had marked the passing and re-passing of the fashionable car.

It was now past two o'clock, and the hottest part of the day was coming on. A haze of heat undulated shimmeringly over the plain. Our tempers suffered. There in the little wood we were in the shade, it is true, but there was not a breath of air stirring, and the mosquitoes were busily plying their trade. The men breathed hard, and wiped their faces. At first they had taken their coats off, but finding the insects could bite through their shirtsleeves they had put them on again. I had thrown off my hot wig. A disguise was unnecessary now.

Once more the green car turned into sight beyond the farmhouse. This time the road was empty and my heart beat hopefully. Sure enough it stopped opposite the locust tree.

"Start your engines," I whispered along the line.

A man alighted from the coupé and walked to the tree. A Panama hat shaded his face and I could not get a good look at it. He walked around the tree and seemed to be gazing up in its branches, as well as looking down at the roots. I could not understand this evolution, still I was pretty sure that I saw him stoop and pick something up.

He returned to his car, and it started forward.

"Go ahead," I said to my men.

They knew what they had to do. I lingered a moment to see whether he was going to turn around or come on. He came straight, faster than he had been travelling. I ran after my cars.

According to instructions they moved out in line across the road, completely blocking it. I timed it as closely as I could, but unfortunately the road was perfectly straight. With the appearance of the first car out of the wood, the green car took the alarm. We heard the screech of the brakes. They came to a stop in a cloud of dust. Those town cars can turn almost in their own length. Around they went and back with the exhaust opened wide.

We jumped aboard our cars and as soon as we could disentangle ourselves took after them. They were half a mile away when we got straightened out. Now if only Lanman did not fail me!

To my joy, away ahead I saw the police cars slowly move one, two, three across the road. We had him trapped! Once more the green car stopped in a cloud of dust.

Lanman and I approaching from opposite directions, reached it simultaneously. We had our guns out.

"What's the matter with you?" the angry, frightened chauffeur cried.

We paid small attention to him. I and my gun looked into the coupé together. Lanman ran around to the other door. In the corner of the seat I saw, exquisite, immaculate—Alfred Mount!

"*You!*" he gasped.

"*You!*" I cried.

Of the two I was the more surprised. For the moment I was incapable of moving.

He did not speak again, nor attempt to get up. Through the front window of the coupé he saw the small crowd of detectives gathering. The light died out of those bright, black eyes. He clapped the back of his hand to his mouth as you have seen women do in moments of despair. The hand dropped nervelessly in his lap. Before my eyes his face turned livid. His body stiffened out in a horrible brief spasm, and he fell over sideways on the seat—dead!

My eyes and Lanman's were glued alike in horror to the corpse. The left hand, a hand too elegant for a man's had now dropped to the floor. A glance at it explained the tragedy. An immense flat emerald on the ring finger was sprung back revealing a tiny cup beneath. The chief and I looked at each other in understanding.

We were recalled to practical matters by the imperious tooting of a horn up the road. One oncoming chauffeur naturally objected to the barricade of automobiles. Lanman and I alike dreaded the irruption of foolish curiosity-seekers. At a word from me he hustled the detectives into their respective cars, and got them straightened out. They were all ordered back to headquarters. All this happened within a few moments. I don't believe any of the detectives realised that the man was dead.

None of the engines had stopped and we quickly had the road clear. Lanman and I thought so much alike in this crisis that it was hardly necessary to talk. We got into the coupé with its ghastly burden and without touching it, sat down on the two little seats facing it. A glance at the police badge was sufficient for the chauffeur.

"Your master has had a stroke," I said to him. "Take us to his home as soon as possible."

Lanman nodded his approval.

When we got Mount's body to his rooms, we sent for his doctor, one of the most famous practitioners in town, also for the commissioner of police and for Mr. Walter Dunsany.

When the five of us were gathered together, we consulted, and finally put it up to the commissioner to decide what ought to be done in the interests of good citizenship. After listening to me, to Mr. Dunsany and to the doctor, all of whom felt the same, though for different reasons, he voted with us. We agreed that Mount had taken the best way out under the circumstances. None of us wanted to drag his dead body through the mire. As much of the loot as could be recovered was already recovered. None of us wanted to see any more scandal aired in the newspapers. Therefore it was given out that Mr. Mount had committed suicide while motoring in the country, and no cause for the act was assigned.

Of course I told Roland and Irma the truth, so that no shadow might dim their future happiness.

Little more remains to be told. For weeks afterwards the case was threshed out in the newspapers, but nothing was brought out that you do not already know. No suspicion attached to Mount's chauffeur and footman. They had met him at the Greenwood City station according to orders. He had exclaimed at the beauty of Ringstead plains, and

they thought that was why he had himself carried back and forth so many times. On the last journey he had remarked the locust tree, speaking of the rarity of the species, and had ordered them to stop so that he could examine it. They knew nothing about trees, of course. They had not seen him pick up the keys.

The news of Mount's death took all the fight out of Lorina. Whatever human feeling there was in that woman was all for him. It appeared that her devotion to him was so abject, that she was even willing to help him in his plotting to secure Irma for his wife.

The thieves were sent up for terms more or less corresponding to the degrees of their guilt. Lorina and Foxy are still there. Jumbo is out now, and professes to have reformed. He seems to bear me no malice, and occasionally braces me for a small loan. One of the gang, Bella Bleecker, escaped for lack of evidence. I knew that she was one of Lorina's creatures, whom Mount had placed near Irma as a spy, but there was nothing to connect her with the thefts.

There was one mysterious feature of the case which the trial did not clear up, i.e., the source of Roland's handsome legacy. I had my suspicions but no proof. Mount's doctor was one of his executors and I was permitted to examine the dead man's papers. I found that on the last day of March previous he had drawn \$40,000 in cash.

This was pretty conclusive, but there was a link of evidence still missing. Continuing a search of Mount's effects I found a receipted bill from an obscure lawyer for legal services rendered about this time. I looked the man up.

He proved to be a seedy, servile little creature, one of the desperate hangers-on of the outer fringe of a respectable profession. Mount being dead and no longer a possible employer it was easy to make the lawyer talk.

Whether or not he knew what he was doing, I can't say. He claimed that Mount had told him he wished to do something for a worthy young fellow who was too proud to accept anything from him direct. He then laid out the scheme of the mysterious, unhappy lady who was supposed to have died leaving Roland Quarles her fortune. Mount, the lawyer said, supplied the ingenious letter that was sent to Roland. The lawyer carried the money to the trust company.

This information dissipated the last bit of mystery. The more I thought over it the more I marvelled at Mount. Certainly there was something magnificent in his villainies. Fancy giving your rival forty thousand dollars in order to ruin him! It was clear now why the order had come down from above to Jumbo to sell Irma's pearls to Roland at a reduced price. I wonder if ever a more devilish plot was hatched by one man to ruin another. And how nearly it had succeeded. Mount had shown the devil's own cunning in playing on the weak spots in Irma and in Roland.

The period of the trial was a hateful time for all of us. Our own happiness was not to be thought of until that ordeal was over. A blessed peace descended on us when the last verdict was rendered.

The blissful event occurred in October. Irma and Roland insisted that Sadie and I must be married at the same time they were.

The double event took place in the Little Church Around the Corner. Only Mr. Dunsany, Blondy, the Doctor and a few others were present. We all felt as if we had had enough publicity to last us the rest of our lives.

Roland insisted on returning the balance of his legacy to the Mount estate. I thought he had the best reason in the world for hanging on to it, but that was Roland. He actually wanted Irma to turn over her pearls to the executors, less what she had paid for them, but we all fought him on that. She had purchased them fairly, I insisted, and if Mount had named too low a price that was his affair. He gave in when I pointed out that was the cause of her giving up a lucrative profession, and he had no right to deprive her of her property also.

The famous blue pearls were sold. Part of the proceeds was devoted to the purchase of a fine old manor and a farm on the Eastern shore of Maryland. Roland and Irma have forsaken the footlights forever. Farming is their true vocation, they say, and nothing could ever tempt them back.

Mr. Dunsany has ever remained my firm friend. He insisted on rewarding me very handsomely for my work on the great case, though I considered the reputation it brought me enough. The honour seems likely to last me as long

as I am able to work. With the money Sadie and I decided to buy a smaller place adjoining our friends. Sadie has turned farmer, too.

I can't be there as much as I would like. After the dust and danger of my work it is like Heaven to run down home. At first Sadie objected strenuously to this arrangement. She said she expected to continue to help me with my work. That was what she married me for, she said. But the one fright was enough for me. I don't hear so much about her desire now. Sadie has other things to occupy her mind. Yes, three of them.

THE END

[The end of Thieves' Wit by Footner, Hulbert]