

DEAD
MAN'S
HAT

HULBERT
FOOTNER

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DEAD MAN'S HAT

By HULBERT FOOTNER

When New York's most powerful criminal gang plans to get control of the largest city bank, Dave Westover, a clerk, found himself inextricably involved in the maelstrom of events. First, lovely Paula Wrenn's appeal for help sent him riding around New York in a taxicab with a dead man at his feet; then, accused of two more murders, he spent days and nights avoiding both the police and the underworld, his face on the front page of every paper, his life constantly in danger. Checked at almost every turn, he managed to get enough evidence to convict the man whose unscrupulous use of his power was threatening the safety of the city's banks—the man responsible for scores of hitherto unsolved murders. It is a book packed with thrills—one it is impossible to lay aside. Mr. Footner follows up his two recent successful mysteries with a third, equally vigorous and with all the deft characterization and vein of humor Footner readers have come to delight in. Here is a different kind of novel which does not lose sight of real people in the midst of its rapid-fire adventure.

BY THE AUTHOR OF:

ANYBODY'S PEARLS

A BACKWOODS PRINCESS

CAP'N SUE

THE DOCTOR WHO HELD HANDS

EASY TO KILL

THE MYSTERY OF THE FOLDED PAPER,

Etc.

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

EASY TO KILL

THE MYSTERY OF THE FOLDED PAPER

THE DOCTOR WHO HELD HANDS

THE OWL TAXI

ETC. ETC.

Dead Man's Hat

By HULBERT FOOTNER



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M A N ' S
H A T



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Chapter I

ELEVEN o'clock at night in the collection department of the Chambers National Bank. Dave Westover and his friend and room-mate Bill Fielder, were still at work searching for a stubborn ninety cents that refused to come to light. It was the last day of the month, when a general balance had to be struck. Bill was reading off figures from a sheaf of adding-machine slips, while Dave checked them on the carbon copies of the day's collection sheets. The other eighteen clerks in the department had left.

Each time Dave paused to turn over a sheet, Bill took occasion to glance through a doorway in the front of the room, where he could see a fair-haired girl busy at her desk. Bill was a tall, gangling young man, all abroad, light-headed, a general favorite. "Little Wrenn is working late tonight," he remarked.

"Yeah?" said Dave, coolly. He often looked through the doorway himself, but took care not to let Bill see him do it. Dave was much the hardier specimen of the two; notable for his steady, level glance and firm, humorous mouth.

"I don't see what she has to work late for," said Bill. "There are no books in the correspondence department to be balanced."

"Well, that's her business," said Dave.

"Wish we could ask her out to supper," said Bill.

"Go to it, my lad!"

"You do it."

"Yours was the idea!"

"Gee!" said Bill. "I'd as lief ask Mrs. Vanderbilt to go out with me, as high hat as **she** is!"

"She isn't so, really," said Dave. "She just puts that on to discourage the pills around here."

"Well I must be one of them," said Bill, cheerfully. "I admit she's got me scared. . . . Such a darn pretty girl, too!" he added, regretfully.

The two men lit cigarettes.

“Hanged if I can make you out,” Bill presently went on. “Here you’ve been working almost alongside Paula Wrenn all this time, and you’ve never addressed a word to her except in the way of business. You’re not usually so backward about coming forward.”

“I know enough girls,” said Dave.

“That’s a lie,” said Bill; “no fellow could. And you don’t know any half so attractive as she is.”

Dave said nothing.

“You’re so darn secretive I never know what’s cooking inside your skull,” Bill continued. “I believe you’re crazy about the girl, and you won’t go near her because she’s got a better job here than you have.”

“Forget it!” said Dave.

“Now I’m sure of it,” said Bill. “Because she’s the one girl you won’t talk about.”

“You must have taken a correspondence course in psychology.”

Bill glanced enviously at Dave’s shapely brown head and wide shoulders. “If I had your personal attractions I wouldn’t stand on pride,” he said.

“Let’s get on with the work,” said Dave.

“Have you noticed she’s had a funny look in her eyes all afternoon?” said Bill. “As if she’d seen a ghost or something.”

“For God’s sake cut out the romancing and get on with the work,” said Dave, with an unnecessary heat.

“Well, it’s nothing in my life,” said Bill, arranging his slips.

Dave glanced through the doorway in a manner suggesting that the girl in the front room meant a great deal in **his** life, though he had never spoken to her.

Bill droned out the figures, and Dave checked them on the slips.

The collection department was on the second floor of the bank building. The door from the stair hall was a little way ahead of where the young men sat, and to their left. In a moment or two it opened, and to their great astonishment the vice-president of the bank entered, followed by the

president himself. Nobody had ever heard of these dignitaries remaining at work so late.

Bill instinctively dropped his cigarette and put a sly foot on it. Not so Dave. He looked at the approaching officials, and went on smoking. The vice-president, J. J. Stuart, who was in advance, ran up his eyebrows at the sight. He was a tall man in his 'sixties, with a hard, sanctimonious face.

“What! Smoking?” he said. “You know the rules, Mr. Westover.”

Dave was not one to take kindly to reproof. At any rate not from Stuart. “It’s after hours,” he said. “I thought we were alone here.”

“The rule applies to all hours, sir,” said Stuart, severely.

“Mr. Beekman is smoking,” said Dave, quietly.

Beekman was obliged to put his cigarette to his lips to cover his smile. This was the famous Irvin Beekman, whom Wall Street called “the boy bank president,” though he was hardly a boy. Still, he was young enough to have a fellow feeling for Dave.

Stuart was so outraged he could scarcely speak. “Upon my word!” he gasped. “Upon my word! Such insolence! You may report to me at my office tomorrow morning at nine, Mr. Westover.”

“Very well, sir,” said Dave.

Bill, angry on Dave’s account and flustered, blurted out, “I was smoking too.”

“Very well,” snarled Stuart. “You can come with your friend.”

Beekman stepped into the picture. “Don’t be too hard on the men, Mr. Stuart,” he said, persuasively. “It’s eleven o’clock and they’ve been at it fourteen hours today.”

“The smoking I might condone,” said Stuart, bitterly, “but not such gratuitous insolence!”

“You are absolutely right,” said Beekman, placatingly, “but I ask you to overlook it. Because, you see, I **was** smoking.”

“You are the head of this institution. You can do what you like about the matter,” said Stuart, stiffly.

“No,” said Beekman, smiling; “it’s up to you. I’m just asking mercy for them like any outsider.”

“I wouldn’t presume for a moment to set up my judgment against yours,” said Stuart, priming his lips together and marching away. He disappeared through the door of the board room at the back.

Beekman lingered, rubbing his lip. Dave, and Bill could see that he was hard put to it to keep from laughing, and they wanted to laugh, too. Any spark would have produced an explosion of laughter. However, they succeeded in restraining themselves. Beekman, a handsome, confident, frank man, said to Dave:

“Look, Westover, I wouldn’t ask you to apologize to him direct. Because . . . well, I know what it is myself. But do you mind if I carry your apology to him by proxy, just to smooth down the old man’s feelings?”

“Why, certainly, Mr. Beekman,” said Dave. “I spoke too quickly, anyhow.”

Beekman gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder. “Good man! . . . I expect you were surprised to see us turning up at this hour,” he went on; “just as we were surprised to see you still working. As a matter of fact, we are going to have an important meeting here directly, and I want to ask you men to say nothing about it. It’s not bank business, but a public matter. There’s dynamite in it if it gets out.”

“It won’t get out through me,” said Dave.

“And what Dave says goes for me,” put in Bill.

“Thanks, both of you,” said Beekman, and went on into the board room.

“Gosh! he’s a wonder!” said Bill, admiringly. “He’s the greatest man in New York. He’s . . . He’s . . .” Speech failed him entirely.

Dave smiled at his friend’s extravagance. “He’s just a man like you and me,” he said, provokingly. “He’s a **white** man. That’s praise enough for anybody. I’m for him.”

“What a fellow you are!” said Bill, accusingly. “What you want to get Stuart started for, anyhow?”

“Old Salt Cod just naturally riles me,” said Dave, frowning at the recollection. He looked at Bill and his face softened in a friendly grin. “What for you want to get yourself fired just because I was?”

“Aah, I wasn’t going to stand by and see him put on you,” said Bill, scowling.

Dave gave him a friendly shove with his shoulder. "You are a soft guy!" he said. "But you're a good fellow at that. . . . Come on, let's get on with this."

Presently other men began to arrive for the meeting: Snowden of the First National Bank; Gray of the Steel Trust; Hochschild, the famous international banker; Richmond of the Stock Exchange; and others. Dave and Bill glanced at them out of the corners of their eyes as they passed by. All these individuals were frequently pictured in the rotogravure supplements.

"Gosh! Some of the biggest men in town!" murmured Bill. "What the dickens do you suppose is doing in there?"

"You can search me," said Dave.

"This must be something nation-wide in scope!"

"You talk like a newspaper," said Dave. "Mind you say nothing about it to the fellows tomorrow. Your tongue is hung in the middle and wags at both ends."

"I know it," said Bill, ruefully, "but when I look at you I'll remember to tie it down."

Beekman appeared at the door of the board room behind them. "Oh, Fielder," he said, "will you do me a favor?"

Bill hastened to him.

"The cigars have been forgotten," Beekman said, with a twinkle, "and we can't very well remind our guests of the rules. I hate to ask you, but would you mind hopping in a taxi and running up to my house at one hundred and eight Washington Square North? Ask my valet to give you a box of the special cigars, and bring them back here quickly. I will certainly be obliged to you."

"Glad to do it, Mr. Beekman." Bill ran into the coat-room alongside Dave's desk, and seizing hat and coat on the fly, clattered on down the stairs.

Left alone in the room, Dave was free to look at the fair-haired girl without danger of being caught at it. She distracted him from his work. However, he presently found the ninety cents. With an expression of the relief that every bank man knows, he marked the offending slip, and clipping the papers together, thrust them into a drawer.

Then he could look at her again. She was not working. She sat with her chin resting in her palm, staring into vacancy. She was as blond and pretty as a movie queen, but discouragingly business-like. Only her dark blue eyes seemed to speak of things far from the office. Suddenly she looked straight at Dave, and he turned away his head in confusion. The next thing he knew she was beside him and speaking.

“You’re working late tonight, Mr. Westover.”

Dave scrambled to his feet. There was a quality of poignant feeling in her voice that nobody in the bank had ever heard before. He looked into her face to seek the cause of it. She quickly lowered her eyes.

“One of the boys made a mistake,” he said. “I just found it. . . . You’re here late, too.”

“Yes,” she said, evasively. “I had a lot of letters to get out.”

There was a silence. She said, nervously: “Funny, isn’t it, that we’ve never spoken before.”

“Often wanted to,” said Dave.

“Why didn’t you?”

“Well . . . being just one of the adding-machine gunners, I thought that you . . .”

“You’re not like the others,” she said, quickly. “I could see it from the first. You’re not broken to the adding-machines.”

Dave seemed to add an inch or two to his stature. Another silence. He still searched her face for an explanation of the shake in her voice, the look of pain drowned in her eyes.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, suddenly.

“Oh! . . . Why do you ask that?” she countered, startled.

“I could see it all afternoon. . . . Something wrong.”

“Do I show it in my face?” she asked, in plain fright.

“Well, I could see it . . . because . . .” He pulled himself up, growing red.

“I’m almost afraid of you,” she murmured.

“That’s funny. Why should you be?”

“Never having spoken before, and all at once to be talking so intimately.”

“Why not? It seemed like a terrible hurdle to take . . .”

“What did?”

“Speaking to you the first time. Now it’s perfectly natural.”

“It’s true, I am in trouble,” she said very low. “I want to tell somebody.”

“Will I do?”

“You’re the one I picked out to tell.”

Dave flushed, and then paled again. He wanted to say a whole lot, but nothing came. “Here, let’s go somewhere where we can talk by ourselves,” he said, gruffly, as a cover for his feelings.

“Where can we go?”

He considered. “All the downtown places are closed now. . . . Would you mind going to a speakeasy?”

“Why should I mind?” she answered, with a faint smile. “I’m a business woman.”

“I know a good place, then. Let’s go.”

She hung back in embarrassment. “Wait a minute. You . . . you room with Mr. Fielder, don’t you? I don’t want him to know.”

“All right.”

“Is he . . . a sound sleeper?” she asked.

Dave laughed in pure surprise. “Sleeps like the dead. What of it?”

“What must you be thinking of me?” she murmured, in distress.

“I’m for you,” he said quickly, “whatever it may be.”

“I hate to have everybody around the bank talking about our going out together.”

“You’re dead right,” he agreed. “And Bill couldn’t keep his mouth **shut**.”

She turned away her head. “Could you . . . go home and go to bed the same as usual. And get up afterwards . . . when he was asleep. And come to meet me?”

Dave perceived that there was more in this than what appeared on the surface. “Sure!” he said. “If it wouldn’t be too late for you.”

“I don’t mind how late it is, if you don’t.”

“Plenty of other nights for sleeping,” said Dave.

“I’ll meet you at the speakeasy at one o’clock.”

“Couldn’t I call for you?”

“No. No,” she said, nervously. “I’ll go in a taxi.”

“It’s Adolph’s, forty-one West Forty-first,” said Dave. “Ask for me at the door.”

She nodded and slipped away.

Chapter II

IN the board-room of the Chambers National, ten of New York's most famous leaders of finance and industry were seated around the long table. Among them Snowden, thick bodied and arrogant; Gray, meager and ascetic as a monk; Hochschild, the suave international banker, at home in all the palaces of the world; Richmond with his handsome presence, instinct with the pride of race. Every face present was familiar to the public; to have caught them together would have made a photographer's fortune.

Beekman, the youngest man present, presided. Stuart was the eleventh at the table. Obviously of lesser caliber than the others, he took no part in the discussion, but acted as secretary to the meeting.

They had fallen into some disorder. "You've had a hundred thousand," cried Snowden to Beekman, angrily. "It's all spent and nothing has been accomplished. Nothing **can** be accomplished if you ask me. This sort of thing is out of our line. I vote we dissolve. It's very distasteful to me to be associated with something that isn't making good!"

Beekman listened with a resolute smile. "We'd be sorry to lose your support," he said. "But the work will go on if I have to carry it myself. I didn't say that nothing had been accomplished. I said that we had not yet accomplished our aim. What do you expect for your hundred thousand? The object of this committee is to destroy the evil power that is ruling and ruining our city. We are out to put Jim Mann behind the bars. We are up against a man whose income is said to reach a million dollars a month!"

"Where does he get it?" asked Gray.

Beekman consulted a memorandum. "Well, for one thing he has forty high-class gambling-houses scattered around town at strategic points. I have a list of addresses here. In addition, there are scores of smaller places, while the pool rooms and policy shops must run into the thousands. You can't bet a nickel in this city without a part of it finding its way into Jim Mann's bottomless pocket."

"If you have the addresses, why don't you turn them over to the police?"

Beekman merely spread out his hands expressively.

“Do you mean by that,” Gray persisted, “that the police are in with Mann?”

“I make no such charge,” said Beekman. “Frankly, I don’t know. If I turned this list over to the police they would do their duty; they would raid the places. And what would be the result? All forty would open up the following night at new addresses. Every speakeasy in town has rooms upstairs that they are glad to rent to the gamblers because it brings business to the house. There is no difficulty in finding new quarters. And every waiter and barman is an agent to tell the customers where to go.”

“Can’t you reach Mann through these raids?”

“No. They are not his houses. He hasn’t a dollar in them. He’s too wise. He merely collects fifty per cent of the profits.”

“For what?”

“Protection.”

“Then he is in with the police?”

“It is futile to take that line. I used the word protection in the racketeering sense. Try and start a game without seeing Jim Mann and you’ll find out what I mean. What do you suppose is the answer to the dozen unsolved killings in the middle of town during the past year?”

“I am told that they have ceased,” said Snowden. “No gambler has been killed in three months past.”

“And why not?” said Beekman. “Because Mann has consolidated himself. He’s beaten out every rival. He’s got gambling sewed up. Through gambling he controls the retail liquor trade, and God knows how many other rackets. Everything is running as smooth as velvet for him. He is the king!”

“Well, if he can keep the lawless element in order, I say let him do it,” said Snowden.

“Hear! Hear!” chimed in other voices.

“Does he bank with you, Snowden?” asked Hochschild, slyly.

“If he does, I’m not aware of it,” said Snowden, stiffly.

There was a general laugh around the table.

Beekman’s powerful glance traveled around, arresting their attention. “None of us here are sentimental reformers,” he resumed; “but doesn’t the good name of our town mean something to us? My family has played a part

here for five generations. Every one of us around this table has made good by hard work and square dealing. Well, are we going to let this dirty wop from nowhere put our town in his pocket? **Our** town? This thug, this three-gun man, this murderer?"

"You exaggerate, Beekman," said Snowden, mounting his dignity. "I don't doubt he's all you say, but what has it got to do with us? Let him lord it over the criminal element, and be damned to the lot of them!"

"What has it got to do with us?" repeated Belmont, ominously. "They tell me he called up a judge of Special Sessions last week, and ordered him to discharge a prisoner who was coming up that day. And the prisoner was discharged. Don't you feel that as a personal insult?"

There was no answer.

"Nothing to do with us! Presently he will be turning his attention to the banks, and you'll all be paying through the nose for the privilege of conducting your own business. Gentlemen, there are no bounds to this man's ambition. He's got a Napoleon complex. Are you going to stand for it?"

Beekman paused. His hearers frowned and made marks on their scratch-pads. Presently the speaker continued:

"I confess it riles me to see the twenty-thousand-dollar armored car speeding through the streets with the fat wop inside bowing and smiling to the populace like royalty! I was born a free man. Have you ever been in the theater when he came in attended by his bodyguard of twenty men all in faultless tuxedos? And have you seen them rise as one man when the master went out into the foyer to smoke a cigarette? How did you like it?"

"His name heads every charity subscription list. Well, he can afford it. Scarcely a day passes when he doesn't appear as the hero of some front-page story in the newspapers. Through such publicity he has built up a well-nigh impregnable position, I tell you. The people run after him in the streets, cheering!"

"And not only in the streets. Jim Mann is being received into society now. It is considered very smart to have him at our parties. Well, women are only human. The halo of lawlessness and murder and power that he carries around with him excites them. Are you going to stand for that, too? Gentlemen, it was on the day that I walked into a fashionable reception and found Jim Mann ogling my wife and boasting to her of his adventures—it was at that moment I made up my mind this town was not big enough to contain him and me together. Are you with me?"

“I’m with you,” said Hochschild, promptly.

“And I, And I,” the voices went around the table.

Only Snowden still grumbled a little. “Where do we stand at present?” he asked.

“I have dug up a pretty complete history of Jim Mann’s past,” said Beekman, “but I have not yet got sufficient evidence to let the story break. I am hampered by the fact that Mann sooner or later buys up every agent and investigator that I hire. I must again impress upon you gentlemen the necessity for absolute secrecy. There is a leak somewhere. Mann seems to learn everything I do as soon as I do it. It is as if I were surrounded by a cloud of invisible spies.”

The men around the table glanced at one another uneasily. Beekman suddenly rose and flung the door open. But the main office outside was completely empty.

“Mann has been clever in destroying the evidence of his crimes,” Beekman resumed, returning to the table, “but I’ll get it if I live. I’m not going to take it into court at first. It would be useless to try to obtain a conviction as long as he occupies his present pinnacle of popularity. I propose to publish the story in the newspapers with evidence to back up every charge. What publicity can set up publicity can destroy!”

“That’s all right,” grumbled Snowden. “The only thing that gravels me is, we put up the money and you get all the credit.”

“It was at your own request that your name was kept out of this,” retorted Beekman; “all your names. Do you want to change places with me?”

“Well . . . no!” said Snowden.

“It’s true you’re putting up the money,” said Beekman, quietly. “But I’m putting up my life.”

There was complete silence around the table. The members of the committee took out their check-books. Vice-president Stuart gathered up the checks with a peculiar smile.

When the meeting broke up, Stuart lingered in the board-room. To Beekman he said:

“Don’t wait for me. I’ll clean up the room so that there will be nothing to show we had a meeting here tonight.”

Except for the watchmen, Stuart was the last to leave the bank building. Lower Broadway was like the main thoroughfare of a deserted city. The hands of the clock in the little old City Hall tower opposite, pointed to midnight. Looking over his shoulder to make sure he was unobserved, Stuart crossed Chambers Street and dropped in an all-night cigar store. Entering a telephone booth, he called a number. When he got an answer he said, cautiously:

“Let me speak to the boss.”

“Who are you?” asked the voice at the other end.

“Just tell him it’s John S.”

“Okay.”

A thick, good-humored voice drawled over the wire: “Hello, John, old catamount! What’s the good word?”

“The meeting is just over,” said Stuart, primly. “I called up to tell you about it.”

“Well, shoot!”

Stuart proceeded to describe what had taken place around the board table. He concluded by saying: “None of them showed any stomach to keep up the fight against you. It was Beekman heated them up to it.”

A comfortable fat laugh sounded over the wire. “I’ll take care of Beekman,” said the voice. “It’s a shame, ain’t it? such a promising young guy! . . . Say, I’m going down to Adolph’s speak’ on Forty-first in a little while. Meet me there in half an hour, and we’ll talk things over.”

“A speakeasy!” said Stuart, in horror. “Think of my position!”

The fat laugh sounded again. “Cheese, John, what do you do to get warm? . . . Well, come to my place tomorrow morning at nine.”

Chapter III

DAVE WESTOVER and Bill Fielder shared the third floor front in Mrs. Bradley's boarding-house on East Seventeenth Street. It was a large and cheerful room with furniture of the black-walnut and marble-slab period, and a carpet that had been reduced by service to a color that Bill called elephant's breath.

When they got into bed that night Bill was struck by his partner's remarkable stillness. "What's the matter with you?" he said. "You're as garrulous as an oyster!"

"Don't want to talk," said Dave. "Sleepy."

"The hell you are," said Bill. "You got something on your mind."

No answer from Dave.

"All through supper you looked at me as if there was nobody there. My cracks were wasted on you."

"Oh, for God's sake stop gabbing!" said Dave, exasperated.

Bill laughed. "It relieves my mind to hear you cuss. . . . Did you talk to little Wrenn tonight while I was getting the cigars?"

"No," said Dave, steadily.

"What a chance! You and she alone there together!"

"I told you I knew enough girls already."

"Just the same, I believe you're lying," said Bill. "I noticed you looked a little pink around the gills when I came back."

"Sign off! I want to go to sleep!"

"Is that so? . . . Nice girl, too, but hard to talk to, I should think. The usual line of porridge wouldn't go so hot with her. Must be fierce to try to charm a doll when you got a sneaking idea all the time that she's got a better bean than you have. . . ."

Dave was breathing deep and slow, and Bill couldn't get any answers out of him. Bill soon got tired of listening to his own voice. He yielded to

suggestion. His voice gradually trailed away and he, too, began to breathe from the bottom of his lungs.

Instantly Dave sat up in bed, watching him, and listening. Bill never stirred, and Dave put his feet to the floor.

Silently gathering up his clothes, he carried them into the bathroom, where he could turn on the light, and shave and dress with care. He wanted to look his best. When he got out into the street, it still lacked half an hour of one o'clock, and he walked up to Forty-first Street to kill time; through that dark and furtive stretch of Broadway between Union and Madison Squares, and up the spacious emptiness of the Avenue with its quadruple lines of mellow golden globes climbing Murray Hill. Dave and the prowling cats shared the deserted sidewalks.

At Adolph's all was light and life. Norah, the coat-room girl, greeted Dave warmly. He was an infrequent visitor to the house, for a good reason, but Norah had a soft spot in her heart for a handsome young fellow who gave generous tips because he couldn't afford it. Norah affected a cute brogue.

"Sure, Mr. Westover, it's a dog's age since I seen you. Where you been all this time?"

"To the Springs, Norah."

"No! French Lick or White Sulphur?"

"Wrong both times. The Bed Springs."

"Ain't you a card!"

"I'm expecting a lady shortly. I'll be up in the bar."

"What! are you falling for them now? I thought you had more sense, Mr. Westover."

"Wait till you see her, Norah!"

Adolph occupied a handsome English-basement dwelling that had become an elegant speakeasy with very little alteration. The bar was on the parlor floor in the rear. Dave found the big room full to capacity. There was not a vacant space at the mahogany, and he was obliged to seat himself in the rear of the room at a table already occupied by two keen-faced young men not in evening dress. They had the look of reporters.

There was a sense of excitement in the crowd, and Dave looked around to discover the cause. In addition to the line-up at the bar, and the full tables,

he saw a number of hard-eyed men in evening dress standing around the wall, not drinking, but merely watching. The arched opening into the restaurant was filled with diners pressing forward to have a look, some with their napkins still in their hands.

As in a theater, every face was turned towards a man leaning with his back against the middle of the bar, supporting himself on his elbows. The hand that grasped the highball glass was decorated with a diamond that glared like a little headlight. He was slightly tight, and obviously enjoying the center of the stage. Dave's entrance had interrupted a speech he was making.

"Take the gentleman's order, Judo," he said. "I'm treating."

The roly-poly waiter came bustling up to Dave.

The star performer was a man of middle height, still in his thirties, judging by his smooth, unlined face, but already growing corpulent. He was dressed in an elegantly cut tuxedo, and wore a soft black hat with the brim rakishly pulled down over one eye. He had the look of an Italian; small keen eyes under fierce black brows; thick cruel lips. At present the whole fat face was wreathed in a good-humored smile. He looked around at his audience with the confident air of one who knows he has them going, and doesn't give a rap.

"Drink up!" he said. "All friends here together, and to hell with the reformers. We're right guys, we are. And ladies!"

"Who's the generous guy?" Dave asked his table companions.

They looked with pity on his ignorance. One said: "Where you been, fellow? Don't you know Jim Mann?"

Jim Mann! Dave looked at him with fresh interest. The biggest shot in New York!

Though the reporter had spoken low, Mann heard it. "Yeah, Jim Mann!" he said, casting an eye in their direction. "Everybody knows me! To hear the preachers hollering, a person would think Jim Mann was a devil complete with horns and tail! What don't they call me—leech, blood-sucker, corruptor of youth! Well, take a look at me, folks. I'm a plain guy like yourselves. I enjoy going home to the missus and the kids and turning on the radio just like any of youse!

"Me, I'm just a business man. There's a demand for a certain line and I supply it, that's all. Is that a crime? I don't ask anybody to come to my

houses. Nobody stands at the door and pulls them in. But any customer who comes to me knows he's going to get a square deal. That's the secret of my success!"

This speech was received with immense applause. A figure lurched out from the crowd at the bar.

"Jim, we're all with you!" he said, thickly. "Put it there, old fella!"

"Such is fame!" murmured one of the reporters to Dave.

"Set 'em up again, Cholly," cried Mann to the barman. "All good friends of mine."

More cheers. Everybody at the bar crowded around the fat man, trying to take his hand or to clap him on the back. With a good-natured outward thrust of the thick arms he won clear of them.

"I'm going to take a whirl upstairs," he said. He made the motion of spinning an ivory ball. "Nothing like sampling your own goods, eh?"

As soon as he moved, all the watchful sentinels around the room came to life. They prepared to fall in behind him.

On his way out Mann stopped beside a table where a single figure was sitting. It was a man in evening clothes who was drunk and pretty near all in. His legs were stretched out before him, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his chin sunk in his rumpled shirt-front.

"Now for a little sob stuff," murmured one of the reporters, cynically.

"Jim Mann plants these down-and-outers so he can show the world what a big-hearted guy he is," his companion explained to Dave.

"Ain't I seen you before somewhere?" Mann asked the fellow at the table.

"Reckon you have," returned the latter, raising a sullen face. "You got every cent I own. I'm cleaned!"

Mann chuckled good-naturedly. "You're a fool to gamble away your capital, friend. Gambling is only for them who can afford it." Drawing a thick roll from his pocket, he peeled off the top bill and tossed it on the table. The onlookers murmured when they read the figures on the bill—\$1,000. "Put that in your pocket, friend. Take it home to the missus, and for God's sake stay away from the tables until you make your pile."

Louder cheers. Mann waddled out, well pleased with himself, his bodyguard at his heels. Most of the crowd followed him noisily, including the two men at Dave's table. The cynical one said, "We pick up what he drops." The diners went back to their tables in the restaurant, and the bar resumed its customary quiet aspect.

Presently the doorman came to Dave's elbow. "Lady asking for you, Mr. Westover. She's in the dressing-room."

Dave ran downstairs. He had to wait a moment or two for Paula to appear. Another couple entered the house. Dave caught them staring at him hard. A young fellow of about his own age, very smartly dressed in a cinnamon-colored suit. His ensemble was a little too striking for a man; cravat, handkerchief, gloves, spats, all in harmonious shades of brown. His face was like a dissipated ivory mask with a cigarette drooping out of one side. He had pale blue eyes. His companion, a sturdily built brunette, expressed the last word out of the night clubs. A handsome girl, brilliantly made up; black hair slicked back like wet fur.

Paula came out of the dressing-room wearing a simple blue evening dress exactly suited to her blond beauty. She smiled enchantingly and slipped her hand under Dave's arm. He instinctively pressed it against his ribs. They started up the sweeping shallow stairway. The other couple exchanged a glance.

"You're so satisfying!" murmured Paula.

"And you . . . you're like a dream come true!" said Dave.

"I meant what I said," she said, reproachfully. "And you're just flattering!"

He shook his head dumbly.

"How I wish we had got acquainted before . . . before . . ." Her voice trailed away wistfully.

"Before what?"

"Oh, when we could just have had a good time together without thinking."

He led her into the small room back of the main restaurant. It was less crowded. They took a table against the wall. Dave offered her the menu.

"I couldn't eat anything," she said, deprecatingly. "What is the most harmless thing I can have to drink?"

“A glass of sherry?” he suggested. For himself he ordered a highball.

“How many did you have while you were waiting for me?” she asked, like a privileged old friend.

“Just one, and I didn’t finish that.”

The young man in the cinnamon-colored suit and his companion entered the room, and sat down across the narrow aisle. Not more than five feet separated the two tables.

“Don’t look right away,” whispered Paula. “Those two followed me here from my place.”

Dave scowled. “Thought there was something funny about them. I’ll punch the fellow’s head.”

“Oh no!” she said, nervously. “That type of man is always armed.”

Dave’s face hardened. “You’re right,” he said. “What the devil are they spying on us for?”

“I don’t know,” she said, helplessly. “I have got caught in a whole tangle of mystery!”

Dave’s eyes searched her through and through. The blue eyes clung to his imploringly, honestly. He was satisfied with what he read there. “Well, whatever it is, I’m for you,” he said. “Spill it!”

“Give me a little time,” she murmured. “You are still strange to me.”

He saw that her hand trembled slightly when she put the wine-glass to her lips. In order to help her out, he began to talk about himself in a light vein—about his folks upstate, his early days on the farm, and so on.

“My brother is to get the home place,” he said. “So I came to the big city to scratch for a living.”

“I haven’t got anybody belonging to me but my mother,” said Paula. “We live together. She worked for both of us until I grew up.”

They found the smallest details of each other’s past lives extraordinarily interesting. They planted their elbows on the table and their heads drew close. There was no end to question and answer. They lost count of the time. Across the aisle the other couple exchanged a glance and a sneer.

“He’s elected,” murmured the man.

Finally a silence fell between Dave and Paula. Dave said:

“Well, you know all about me now. Let it come out!”

She did not answer right away, but looked at him with a smile on her lips and a world of pain at the bottom of the blue wells of her eyes.

“Why do you look at me like that?” he asked.

“I was wondering if you were like everybody else . . . hard-boiled; on the make. I don’t think you are.”

“What can I say? Try me.”

Still she did not speak. He took one of her hands in his. “I would do anything for you,” he said. “And count myself lucky to get the chance!”

“They are watching us,” she whispered.

He withdrew his hand with a muttered curse. But his ill-humor soon passed. “I hope it’s something dangerous,” he said, grinning. “I’m fed up with the adding-machines. They caught me young. I never got the breaks.”

“You will!”

Another silence.

“Well, don’t I measure up?” he asked, all ready to be sore.

“Oh yes,” she said, quickly. “But it doesn’t seem fair to drag you into this.”

“To hell with fairness if it’s anything exciting!”

Paula came to a resolution. “I’ll tell you,” she said. “But I can’t do it here. Those two are listening to everything we say.”

“Where can we go?”

“Come to my place.”

“Good God! It’s near two. What would your mother say?”

“She’s an invalid. Day and night make little difference to her.”

“But if you brought me home at two o’clock.”

“I’ll make it all right with her. She’s a good sport. You’ll be surprised when you meet her.”

“Then let’s go!”

Dave paid the waiter and they descended the stairs. While they were waiting for their things in the foyer, the other couple came slowly down,

putting on the dog for the benefit of any listeners. Their crude voices gave them away.

“Cheese! there’s no fun around this dump! It’s like a funeral parlor without the flowers.”

“Take me up to Barney’s on Fifty-second, will you? There’s a hot blues singer up there.”

Dave scowled. “Clumsy camouflage!” he muttered. “If they come tailing after us I’ve got to do something about it.”

“No!” warned Paula. “Let’s make out we’re not on to them, until we find out what their game is.”

His face cleared. “You’re right, Lady. As usual!”

Chapter IV

THEY got into a taxi at the door. Paula said to the driver:

“Put us down at the corner of Second Avenue and Forty-ninth Street.”

Little was said during the short drive. Dave tucked Paula’s arm under his own, and murmured, happily:

“Isn’t it nice to be driving in the dark?”

“If that was all!” she answered, sadly.

When they got out, Dave looked around him, surprised at the character of the neighborhood—the rusty elevated railroad running overhead; the ancient, sordid tenement houses on every side. Paula read his thoughts.

“I live on the corner of First Avenue,” she said. “It’s better over there. But I didn’t want to drive up to the door.”

They walked through Forty-ninth Street, which was like a canyon between the tall, dark tenement houses on either side. Late as it was, some of the little stores were still dimly lighted, and a few hoodlums stood about on the sidewalk, eyeing them curiously as they passed.

Halfway through, Dave looked back. Down near Second Avenue he thought he could distinguish the flirt of the dark girl’s red skirt.

As they approached First Avenue the neighborhood improved. Tall, modern apartments were being built on both sides of the wide street, and it was rapidly becoming one of the best sections of the city. It was a main automobile thoroughfare, and taxis were still running up and down.

A hundred feet short of the corner, Paula stopped. “Can you . . . can you walk up fourteen flights of stairs?” she stammered.

Dave laughed in surprise. “Sure!” he said. “My heart action’s good.”

“Ah, don’t laugh at me!” she murmured. He discovered that her hands were icy cold.

“Listen,” she went on. “It will be all right with mother to have you come in, but the doorman would think it strange. That’s why I didn’t want to drive

up to the door.” She pressed a key in Dave’s hand. “There’s only one man on duty after midnight. When he leaves the door he locks it. Let me go in first, and while he is taking me up in the elevator, you let yourself in and come up the stairs. Our apartment is Fourteen C.”

“Okay,” said Dave.

All was carried out according to her plan. Dave gave her a half-minute’s start of him, and then crossing the empty foyer of the apartment house, opened a door to the stairs at the back. In these modern houses the stairs are built in a fireproof well from cellar to roof, with steel doors on every floor. They are intended as a fire escape, and are rarely used otherwise. Dave plodded up the entire fourteen flights, hearing, seeing nothing.

On the fourteenth floor the door marked C was almost opposite the stair door. Paula had left it a little ajar behind her, and Dave walked in. She was waiting for him, looking pale and drawn under the lights. Helping him off with his overcoat, she led him across a little foyer into a long living-room, warm and inviting with its deep cushioned seats and shaded lamps.

“After Mrs. Bradley’s boarding-house this is like heaven,” said Dave.

To his surprise, he saw her shiver slightly. She said between stiff lips, “Wait here for a moment until I get mother ready to receive you.”

Left alone, he looked around him with a smile. Everything seemed exactly right—rugs, pictures, the way the lamps were arranged beside the easy-chairs. Not too much of anything. He saw Paula’s hand in all. In fact, the room **was** Paula. It started a daydream in his mind.

The physical plan of the room was simple. In the end wall farthest from the door were two windows looking down on Forty-ninth Street, flanked on either side by doors in the side walls. There was a third door near the back corner of the room. In the middle of the right hand wall was a wood-burning fireplace with a deep sofa in front of it.

Paula returned to the foyer and beckoned him. As they went through a short passage she whispered:

“Don’t let **her** see that we have any troubles.”

She opened a door admitting Dave into a rosy-colored bedroom that had no suggestion of a sick-chamber. A middle-aged lady was sitting up in bed, wearing a pink negligée, and smiling delightfully. Her hair was gray, her thin face marked with the lines of laughter, her eyes, blue like Paula’s, full of life.

“Hello, Mr. Westover!” she said, holding out her hand. “It was nice of you to come and see an old woman like me.”

“I’m afraid it’s pretty late to pay a call,” said Dave.

“Oh, time was made for slaves,” said Mrs. Wrenn, with a wave of her hand. “It’s all right with me because I can sleep all day, but I expect it will be hard for you to get up in the morning and go to the bank.”

“It’s worth it!” said Dave.

“Nice man! . . . He’s a big fellow, isn’t he?” she added to Paula.

They all laughed. “What do you expect?” asked Paula. “I don’t care for pygmies.”

In that room Paula could smile, too. There was no hint of pain or foreboding in her eyes now. In the interim she had rubbed a little rouge in her cheeks to help her get away with it.

“And very good-looking,” said Mrs. Wrenn, with sly humor.

“Oh, spare his blushes!” said Paula. “He’s a modest man.”

“Why should I? The blush is becoming. And I reckon he likes it, anyhow.”

“Of course I do,” said Dave.

“That’s right. I always speak my mind, and I expect everybody else to. Sit down on the edge of the bed and tell me all your hopes and fears.”

“My hopes are that I’ll be allowed to come often,” said Dave, “and my fears are that I’m going to be chucked out immediately.”

“Not by me,” said Mrs. Wrenn, laughing. “Paula is the dragon here. I love company by night or by day. I tell Paula I’d be much better off in the public ward of a hospital where I’d have all kinds of comical patients around me, and people coming and going at all hours; but she won’t hear of it.”

“I couldn’t see you there but once a week,” said Paula. “They don’t allow visitors at night.”

“As it is, she’s a slave to her invalid,” Mrs. Wrenn went on. “She has to run home every day at noon to feed me, and at night I can’t drive her out.”

“Well, you’re pretty good company,” said Paula.

“Of course I am, but you need a change occasionally.”

“Well, here’s Dave Westover for a change.”

“Dave’s all right,” said Mrs. Wrenn. “You know,” she added to him, “Paula tells me about everything down at the bank. I feel as if you were all my friends. There’s the fellow whose desk is next to yours, the long-legged one who lopes like a kangaroo.”

“Bill Fielder,” said Dave, laughing.

“Where’s Bill tonight?”

“Listening to the feathers.”

“You must bring him with you sometime.”

“I will. . . . What did Paula say about me?”

“Now, mother,” said Paula, warningly.

“I must tell him,” said Mrs. Wrenn. “I want to see his face when he hears it.”

“Good God! What’s coming!” said Dave.

“Paula said you reminded her of a wild horse among the adding-machines. She was always looking for you to tromple them.”

They laughed together.

When Paula led him out a little while later, Dave said, “She doesn’t seem like a sick woman.”

“She doesn’t suffer,” said Paula. “It’s her heart. She can’t get out of bed. Any exertion would be fatal. Or a shock.”

“What a swell mother-in-law she would make!” murmured Dave.

Paula appeared not to hear him.

The heat had been turned off for the night, and a chill was spreading through the rooms. The ever-present hum of the city streets was dying down at last. New Yorkers are not conscious of it until it stops. An unnatural silence filled the air.

There were two doors between bedroom and living-room, and Paula closed them carefully as they passed through. When they got into the big room Dave was shocked by the change in her face. Her eyes had a frantic expression; the spots of rouge looked as if they had been plastered on her pale cheeks.

“Paula, are you ill?” he cried.

Neither of them noticed that he had used her first name.

She shook her head. "It's just the strain . . . of trying to hide things from her," she murmured. "I can't keep it up!"

"You don't have to now," he urged. "Tell me what the trouble is. She can't hear."

Paula dropped on the sofa and covered her face. "It's too terrible, too terrible! I don't know what to do!"

"Tell me!"

"Can't you feel it?" she murmured, wildly. "It fills the place!"

He glanced around him, half infected with her terrors. The room looked as before. A little clock over the fireplace struck once, half past two, and both started.

"I see nothing wrong," he said.

Her tormented eyes searched his face. "Tell me that you think I'm on the square," she said, imploringly.

"I do!"

"I wouldn't lie to you to save myself!"

"I know you wouldn't!"

In the effort to get a grip on herself, she clenched her hands until the knuckles turned white. Looking straight ahead of her, she said, huskily: "When I came home at noon today . . . I found . . . I found . . ." She pointed to a chair near the windows. Her voice scaled up hysterically. "In that chair. It was turned around the other way then. I found . . ." Her face worked painfully. She was unable to speak further.

Dave covered one of her trembling hands with his. "It's all right," he said. "Tell me."

"I can't say the words," she whispered. . . . "Look behind the door in the corner."

When he stood up she gasped: "Oh, keep a tight hold on yourself! Don't cry out!"

Dave, as pale as she was now, crossed to the back corner of the room. He laid a hand on the knob and, drawing a breath to steady himself, opened the door. When it was opened a light came on inside. He saw a deep closet with

the usual household impedimenta neatly stowed away. But on the floor at his feet a grotesque kind of doll was huddled with waxen flesh and open, sightless eyes. A middle-aged man doll with sparse faded hair all awry on his skull, and his arms and legs sticking out awkwardly.

Dave closed the door softly and leaned against it, trying to get his breath. There was a long silence in the room.

From the sofa came Paula's pitiful husky whisper.

"Oh, say something! Say something!"

Dave opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

"I didn't do it!" she wailed. "I didn't do it!"

"I didn't think you did," he muttered.

He returned to the sofa, moving like a sleep-walker with blank eyes. Paula was stretched at full length, face down, shaking all over in violent hysteria, but making no sound. A frightful effort must have been required to hold in her cries.

"Oh, let it come out," he said, pityingly.

"I can't!" she gasped. "She would hear!"

Sitting on the end of the sofa, he laid the flat of his hand between her shoulders to steady her. Gradually she quieted a little.

"He was all slumped down, half in the chair, half on the floor," she said, in a toneless, hurrying voice. "There's a dagger sticking in his back. The handle's broken off. Blood all over the seat of the chair, and the rug. I had to get some material and recover the chair in a hurry. Does it look all right? . . . Does it look all right?"

"Like a professional job," said Dave, glancing at the chair.

"I scrubbed the rug and put a little rug over the place to hide the wet spot."

"That was wrong. It won't dry that way. You should put something under the big rug to hold the wet place clear of the floor."

Another silence.

"How could he have got in here when you were out?" asked Dave.

"I always leave the latch off, so that if mother needed help somebody could get in to her. The telephone's beside her bed."

“Could he have known that the door would be open?”

“I suppose he tried it. He’s been here before.”

“Then you know him!”

Silence from Paula.

“Who is he?”

Her reply was scarcely audible. “My father.”

“O my God!” breathed Dave. His face sickened with horror.

“He means nothing to me,” said Paula. “He deserted us when I was a baby, and I haven’t seen him since, until just lately.”

“Does your mother know he came back?”

“She hasn’t seen him. She knows nothing about it.”

“What did he come back for?”

“To try to get money out of me.”

Dave’s face softened in pity. “What a swine!” he murmured. He leaned over the recumbent Paula and stroked her hair.

After a moment he asked, “Have you any idea who killed him?”

“No.”

“What was the nature of his business?”

“I suppose he wasn’t doing anything, because he had no money.”

“What did he used to do?”

“He was an actor.”

“Had he any enemies?”

“I know nothing about his life. . . . When I found him here, what was I to do?” she burst out, passionately. “If I had called in the police, the shock, the excitement would certainly have killed my mother. After all, he was her husband. She must have been fond of him years ago.”

“No, you couldn’t call in the police,” said Dave.

“What am I to do, then?”

“We’ll have to get him out of here somehow.”

Chapter V

DAVE pulled the body out of the closet and closed the door. His flesh crawled at the touch of the cold clay. It was a small man, perhaps a hundred and thirty pounds in weight, but his arms and legs had stiffened awkwardly and he would be a difficult load to shoulder. Dave tried to straighten him out somewhat, swallowing the repulsion that made his gorge rise.

Once upon a time he might have been a good-looking lad, but now his face was mean and ugly. He had played a losing game with life. His clothes, which had been of flashy cut and material, were much worn. The ragged bottoms of his trousers lay against old-fashioned elastic-sided shoes, and soiled frayed cuffs hung down over his quiet hands. Cheap sport was written all over him. An odor of stale alcohol hung about him.

Paula's face was still hidden in the sofa. "I can't look at him!" she said, in a muffled voice. "It's too awful!"

"There is no need," said Dave.

"What are you going to do?"

"Carry him downstairs. You can give me ten minutes start, and then ring for the elevator. Think up some excuse to keep the hallman in talk while I'm getting out of the lobby."

"I'll tell him I've run out of digitalis for mother, and ask him to get me some at the all-night drug store. He's done it before."

"Good!"

"What will you do when you get out in the street?" she faltered.

"I don't know. I'll do what I can. I'll just have to drop him somewhere and beat it. . . . First I'll make sure that there's nothing on him that could connect him with you in any way."

"I think he's already been searched," said Paula. "One of his pockets was hanging out."

"I'll search him again."

Dave went carefully through the dead man's clothes. There was no money on him, and no writing that could cast any light on his identity. Only an old pocketknife with the blades sharpened away to nothing, a packet of cigarettes, a comb with some of the teeth missing, a soiled handkerchief, unmarked. It was obvious that he had been searched before.

Dave turned him over, the better to hoist him. He saw the butt of the knife blade sticking out of his back. It must have been driven directly through his heart, for he had bled but little. It was broken off short where the blade enters the handle. One little steel cross piece was still affixed to the butt of the blade; the other had broken off with the handle.

“Are you sure the handle is not lying about?” he asked.

“I looked,” said Paula. “The murderer must have carried it away with him.”

“Was there no sign of any struggle?”

“No. The chair was not moved. He had just slipped down. . . . There couldn't have been any noise, or mother would have heard it.”

“Perhaps they killed him outside, and carried him in.”

“There was no blood anywhere except beside the chair.”

“If I was only a detective, maybe I could piece the thing out,” muttered Dave.

He hoisted the body over his shoulder. The dead man's arms hung down behind Dave's back, and the half-bald head lolled with every step. A cold sweat sprang out on Dave's face. He set his teeth. Paula looked at last, and a soft cry escaped her.

“His hat!”

“I couldn't keep it on him,” muttered Dave.

“How will I get rid of it?” she said, in terror. “I have no way of burning anything in this place.”

Dave lowered the body to the floor again. “Give it to me,” he said. “I'll lose it somewhere.”

Paula fetched the hat out of the cupboard—an old, carefully brushed derby, greasy around the brim. Dave crushed it flat between his hands, so he could stow it away. In so doing his eye was arrested by an edge of white

sticking over the sweatband. He pulled out a piece of paper folded into a narrow strip.

“Hello! Here’s something the searchers missed!” he said. He spread it out. It was covered with writing on the inside, and bore the imprint of an official seal. “This may be evidence. It’s an affidavit of some kind. I won’t stop to puzzle it out now. Put it in a safe place.”

Paula took it.

Dave shoved the crushed hat inside his vest, and hoisted the body over his shoulder. “Open the door,” he said, “and take a slant outside.”

Obedying, she nodded to tell him the way was clear. He went out, Paula shrinking with averted head from his burden. He crossed the hall and, pulling open the stair door, started down.

Back and forth down the endless stairs went Dave, bent under his burden. In spite of his care to tread softly, his steps echoed as in a vault. There was a light at every turn of the stairs, and at every turn he looked around, sweating fearfully, half expecting to meet somebody. But when his steps stopped all was silent. The chill of the thing he carried seemed to strike into his very marrow. Long before he reached the bottom his frame ached intolerably and his knees were giving under him.

At the bottom he was faced with a new difficulty. How was a man to measure ten minutes in his mind? How could he tell when the coast was clear? The stair door faced the desk where the doorman usually sat, and he could not open it without betraying his presence. Lowering the body to the ground, he pushed the door open a fraction of an inch and put his ear to the crack. He heard the sound of a yawn outside. So he waited.

Presently the elevator indicator clicked and a chair scraped back. The doorman crossed the foyer and the elevator door slid to. Dave heard the whine of the current when it was turned on. He hoisted his burden again.

He pushed open the door with his foot—and instantly drew back, sweating again. For, outside the street doors he had seen the shadow of a man, fumbling with the lock. Dave lowered his burden, and held himself ready to spring up the stairs if he had been seen.

A long wait succeeded. The man came into the lobby, and evidently went to the elevator to ring. Dave could hear him moving back and forth. Then the elevator returned and greetings were exchanged.

“Evening, Pat.”

“Evening, Mr. Walters. You’re late tonight.”

“Hardly worth while coming home, eh?”

The elevator door closed and, hastily shouldering his load, Dave stepped out. He crossed the lobby with the dead man on his back, shrinking under the bright lights. As he approached the street doors he saw that there was a taxi standing in front. He stopped and looked behind him desperately. The indicator showed the elevator descending. He plugged blindly ahead. Anything to get out.

When he got out he saw that the taxi was empty, the engine shut off. A breath of relief escaped him. The next instant he saw a policeman standing on the corner, hardly fifty feet away. His back was turned to Dave as he stood, idly swinging his night stick. Towards Second Avenue there was no cover within a hundred feet or more. The policeman might turn around any second. Dave had no choice. Opening the door of the taxi, he boosted the dead man in on the floor.

He had no time to run; his hand was still on the door when the taxi-driver came running around the corner. “Taxi, sir? Taxi?”

Dave hung there for a ghastly second. It would have been suicidal to run, with a car there ready to chase him and a policeman on the corner. He did the only thing he could do—opened the car door again, and climbed in over the corpse.

Meanwhile the driver slid under the wheel and stepped on his starter. “Where to, boss?”

Dave was unable to get a word out. The driver looked around in surprise. “Where to, boss? Don’t you know where you’re going?”

“I . . . I’m a stranger,” stammered Dave.

The driver laughed. “Well, you seem to know where to get it, stranger. What’s your next stop?”

This gave Dave his line. “Sure I been drinking a little,” he said, thickly. “But I know what I’m doing. Hotel Prince George, Twenty-eighth Street.”

“Okay, boss!” The car jerked into motion.

The body lay cold against Dave’s shins. He had a difficulty in getting his breath, but at the same time he could hear himself breathing noisily. Gripping the edge of the seat, he clamped down the screws of self-control.

His driver was a little fellow with a wizened boy's face and a quick black eye. A dirty bandage wound many times around his neck suggested that he suffered from a chronic sore throat. He was one of these casual lads who appear to drive by a sixth sense which makes it unnecessary for them to look where they are going. He was disposed to be sociable. He said:

“Bit of luck, picking you up. I just brought a guy to that house from Central Park Casino. And say, maybe I didn't shoot a scare into him! I was snorting down Park about fifty, kind of racing like with a taxi, and the other fellow had me crowded over near the curb. And all of a sudden a car turned in short from Fifty-sixth just under my bumper. I crammed on my brakes, and damn if we didn't shassey clean around, and start back uptown without losing speed. On the wrong side the parkway you understand. And a whole mess of cars behind us. I snaked through them without taking a scratch. Cheese! What cussing! A couple of guys lost their heads and sideswiped, and junked theirselves against the curb. I fluffed down to Lexington to get out the way of it.

“My fare he hollers out, ‘Can't you look where you're going?’ And I says, ‘I'm a good looker, boss! I'm twice as good a looker as them two guys plastered against the curb!’ Boy! I got eyes all round my head! Driving a car comes as natural to me as eating my dinner. I always say the faster you drive, the better chance you got of getting by. It's the cautious guys that gets jammed!”

They sped across Second Avenue and across Third. These blocks were quite empty and silent, but Dave knew that they would presently turn into Park, where there is traffic at any hour of the night. Keeping his eyes fixed on the talkative driver, and nodding occasionally to keep him going, Dave softly opened the door on the left. The driver sat on that side, but in half turning to speak to his fare, he had the back of his head to the door. Dave let the door hang open, and stooping, got his hands under the body, preparatory to easing it out.

A draught of air warned the driver. He looked around the other way. “Shut that door!” he yelled, and stepped on the brake.

Dave dropped the body and pulled the door to. He sat back on the seat and wiped his sweating face.

“What's the matter with you?” cried the driver. “Do you want to commit suicide?”

“Just wanted a little air,” said Dave.

“Air! Will nothing less than a hurricane cool you!”

Thereafter he drove more slowly, glancing suspiciously at Dave from time to time.

Dave exerted himself to make him forget his suspicions. “Me, I like New York,” he said, drunkenly. “It’s one swell little old town! I come down from Albany yesterday morning, and I scarcely touched ground since! What I mean is, I like New York!”

“Oh yeah?” said the driver, sarcastically.

In a few moments they drove up to the door of the hotel. Dave who had his money ready, handed it to the driver through the front window. He hopped out, closed the door quickly, and started into the hotel. The driver did not pull away immediately, but sat watching him curiously. Dave quickened his pace a little.

Inside, the big public rooms of the hotel were dark. Only the main corridor was lighted. There was nobody in sight but a watchman with some sort of a timing-clock hanging on a strap around his neck, and halfway through the corridor a sleepy clerk behind the desk. Dave had stopped in this hotel on first coming to New York, and knew that there was a rear entrance on Twenty-seventh Street. He walked through, not too fast, with an innocent and business-like air. The clerk gave him a careless glance as he passed the desk.

He had almost reached the rear door when a commotion arose in the front of the building. The little taxi-driver burst in through the revolving door crying:

“Stop that man! Stop that man! He passed a dead one on me!”

Dave flung himself against the revolving door in front of him. It resisted him. He shook it with all his force. It was locked. The door into the taproom near by; locked too. He looked around him wildly. He was trapped in the end of the corridor.

In an instant they were upon him—watchman, clerk, and taxi-driver. The watchman seized him and patted him all over, looking for a gun. Dave made no resistance. What was the use? The watchman retained a viselike grip on his arm. Meanwhile the taxi-driver was squealing in a voice that cracked with excitement:

“That’s the fellow! That’s the fellow! Tried to plant a stiff in my cab! A dead man! He’s cold already!”

“For God’s sake shut up!” said the clerk. “We’ve got him! Do you want to start a panic among the guests upstairs?”

Dave had gone pale and clammy. He instinctively tried to brazen it out. “The man is crazy!” he said.

“Crazy, am I? Look at him sweating! If you don’t believe me, come and see for yourselves!”

“Keep a hold of him,” said the clerk to the watchman. “I’ll telephone for the police.”

They returned to the sidewalk in front of the hotel. The rear door of the taxi stood open and the dead man lay inside for all the world to see. His head was just inside the sill, twisted back, and the lights of the hotel entrance showed up the thin spears of hair on his skull, the open eyes, the hanging jaw with horrible distinctness. Dave averted his face with a shudder.

At the first noise of excitement, people seem to spring out of the pavements in New York. Late as it was, a little crowd pressed around, and the taxi-driver told his story over and over—how he had left his cab to get a cup of coffee, and when he came back the tall young fellow was standing with his hand on the door. And so on. And so on.

A policeman came running along the pavement; a fine specimen of young manhood in his coat of military cut, neat blue collar and black tie. “What’s the matter here?” he demanded, shouldering his way through the crowd. A glance informed him. The taxi-driver told his story for the last time. The policeman and Dave sized each other up. They were about the same age.

“Well, if you’ve driven all this way with him,” said the policeman, “you can drive on to the station house. Get in.”

Dave quailed from it. He had had all he could stand. “I won’t do it!” he said. “I’ll pay for another cab.”

“It’s all the same to me,” said the officer. Several cabs had drawn up, and he hailed the nearest. To the first taxi-driver he said: “Drive on to the police station. We’ll be right behind you.”

“I’m losing money!” whined the little driver. “Who’s to pay me?”

“We’ll take it off this guy if he has it on him.”

The little driver slammed the door on the dead man, slid under his wheel, and drove away.

In the following cab with the policeman, Dave began to shake, and once he started shaking, he couldn't get a grip on himself again. A groan was forced from him.

"You look like a square fellow," he said to his companion. "Can't you see I'm on the square like yourself?"

"I often been fooled," said the young officer, grimly.

"I didn't do this thing!"

"Don't tell it to me, fellow."

"Do I look like a murderer?" cried Dave.

"I don't know," said the officer, philosophically. "There are all kinds."

Chapter VI

WHEN they drove up in front of the police station there was no other car in sight.

“Where did the other fellow go?” the officer asked their driver.

“When he stopped for the light at the Avenue,” the driver replied, “a fellow run out from the curb and hopped on his running-board. I thought it was somebody rubbering. I couldn’t see if he got in with him, because there was a car between. When the little fellow turned down the Avenue he drove faster that I wanted to go with a cop inside, and I never seen him again.”

The policeman scratched his head. “Damn funny thing,” he said. “You better come inside and tell the lieutenant.”

This little colloquy had the sound of a reprieve to Dave. He lifted his head again.

Inside, behind the old-fashioned raised desk flanked by two lights, a fat lieutenant sat all squashed down in his chair like a fatherly bullfrog or a Buddha. The patrolman told his story briefly, and Dave was booked. He gave a false name and address. He had a good hold on himself again. As long as the hideous corpse was not in evidence, he could put up a bluff.

“Where’s the body?” asked the lieutenant.

They told him what had happened.

He grunted impassively. “What have you got to say?” he demanded of Dave. “Anything you say can be used against you.”

“I’ve got nothing to hide,” said Dave, glibly. His tongue, it seemed, started to lie of itself. He didn’t have to think anything up. “I’m a stranger in New York. I was calling on a friend on East Forty-ninth Street. . . .”

“Where did he pick up the cab?” asked the lieutenant.

“In front of number 398 East,” said the officer.

“That isn’t where my friend lives,” said Dave, quickly. “It’s across the street. I saw the cab waiting there, and I crossed over.”

“What’s your friend’s name?”

“I refuse to say. Don’t want to drag anybody else into this.”

“Go ahead.”

“When I opened the door of the taxi I saw the dead body inside. It gave me a nasty shock. I lost my head sort of. The taxi-driver came up, and I was afraid to say anything, thinking they might try to hang it on me, being a stranger. I thought the easiest thing to do was just to drive where I wanted to go, and get out and let them settle it.”

“Hm!” said the fat lieutenant, grimly. “That’s a new one. You thought nothing of taking a little joy ride with a dead one, eh? Must have good nerves!”

“The driver said he tried to open the door while they were going, and throw it out,” put in the patrolman.

“The door flew open by accident,” said Dave.

The lieutenant’s stubby forefinger suddenly shot out. “What’s that making your vest bulge out?” he barked.

The patrolman ripped open Dave’s vest, and took out the old crushed derby. Dave’s head sank again. He had forgotten he had it.

“Where did you come by that?”

“I . . . I don’t know,” stammered Dave.

“Is it the dead man’s hat?”

No answer.

“Hm! This don’t look very good for you, young fellow! Likely it’s an accomplice of yours who’s got the body. At any rate, it’s a case for the Homicide Bureau. Handcuff him and take him down to Headquarters, Crehan. They’ll make him talk. I’ll send out an alarm for the other taxi.”

Crehan handcuffed Dave’s right wrist to his own left. “Will you pay for a taxi down to Headquarters?” he asked.

Dave nodded dumbly.

They went on in the same taxi that had brought them to the police station. As they were getting in, Dave noticed under a light down at the end of the block a car standing by the curb which had not been there when they went in. It had the look of a gunman’s outfit—a touring-car with the top

down and four quiet figures sitting in it. Dave gave it no particular thought until they started, when, happening to glance through the rear window, he saw that the touring-car had started, too. This suggested that it had some connection with his own confused situation. Crehan did not notice it.

They circled back into the next cross street, and returned to Third Avenue. Crehan was disposed to be friendly now. "You don't happen to have a cigarette on you, do you?" he asked. "I'm not allowed to pack them on duty."

"Sure," said Dave. They lighted up together.

"That goes good!" said Crehan, blowing a cloud of smoke through his nostrils. "I miss it on the night tour. . . . I never have no feeling against the guys I pull in," he went on. "I figure they're just the same as me."

"You're a good fellow," said Dave.

"Aah, we're all human. A uniform don't make no difference in a man's nature." He looked Dave up and down. "You had ought to have joined the force yourself. You've got the physique for it. It's a good way to keep out of trouble."

"Well, it's too late now," said Dave, with a bitter laugh.

Crehan studied him. "It's a fact you don't look like a killer," he said, thoughtfully. "You don't look like a crook at all."

"I'm no more crook than you are!"

"Then what about the little taxi-driver? Looks like he was snatched, don't it, to get the body out of the way?"

"If he was, no friend of mine did it."

"And the dead man's hat, how did you come by that?"

"Where is it now?"

"Buttoned up inside my coat."

"I don't know who killed that guy," said Dave. "I only know I'm in a jam!"

"Cheese! I wouldn't like to be you if you can't explain that hat!"

When they turned into Third Avenue, Dave glanced through the rear window again. The touring-car was still following. Both cars headed

downtown, traveling at a high rate of speed on the trolley tracks under the elevated railway.

It was the quietest hour of night, and after crossing Fourteenth Street, which still showed some life, Third Avenue was completely deserted. The old-fashioned brick house-fronts showed no lights; the little stores were shut up; the side streets were merely lanes of silence with little pools of light around the street lamps.

A new sound from behind caused Dave to glance back again. He saw a big truck turning out around the touring-car. It was being driven as no truck is ever driven through town, fifty miles an hour perhaps. It bore down on them, running in the adjoining track. A strained white face could be seen over the wheel. Crehan heard, and looked back.

“Cheese! that driver is crazy!” he muttered.

A moment later it overtook them, bouncing and swaying wildly. It carried no load.

“That’s no truck-driver!” said Crehan, sharply. He turned to Dave. “By God! are these some more of your friends?”

The truck turned in sharp ahead of them. The taxi-driver yelled a warning. Crehan made a move to open the door of the taxi, jerking frantically at the fetters which bound him to his prisoner. The brakes of the truck were applied. Between the truck and the elevated pillars there was no possible escape for the taxi.

There was a blinding crash and a shower of glass. They had hit a pillar. The taxi spun around and crashed a second time against the motionless truck. Dave and Crehan were wrenched violently apart, breaking the handcuffs, then flung together in a heap. Both lay motionless.

The touring-car turned out around the double wreck, and came to a stop just ahead of it. Two men leaped out of the rear and ran back. The driver of the truck was standing by his engine, swaying uncertainly.

“Are you all right?” growled the first man to reach him.

“Right enough,” he mumbled.

“Then get in the car quick!”

The truck driver staggered towards the touring-car and was helped in.

The other two ran around the truck to the wrecked taxi. The taxi-driver was lying outstretched on the pavement, bleeding from a head wound, but

they paid no attention to him. It required their combined strength to wrench open the jammed door of the cab. One reached in and dragged out the limp form of Crehan.

“Leave him lay!” said the other.

The first man reached in again and dragged out Dave, anyhow.

“Is he mashed up?”

“No blood on him.”

“Find his hat! Here, take his feet and I’ll take his shoulders!”

Carrying the unconscious form between them, they ran to the touring-car, flung Dave in behind, and climbed after him.

“Step on it, Shad!” growled the one who appeared to be the leader. “Turn the first corner!”

Chapter VII

THE touring-car with top down slid noiselessly away from the scene of the crash, and turned the corner. The two or three men who had run up to the spot stared after the car dumbly, and gathered around the inert figures of the taxi-driver and the policeman stretched on the asphalt. Before any other policeman arrived, the touring-car was out of sight.

It sped through the sleeping streets dizzily, turning one corner after another. On the front seat a nonchalant young driver at the wheel, and a girl partly disguised by a man's hat and overcoat. They had the driver of the truck between them. His head had fallen on the girl's shoulder. On the back seat two more wary young men with their coat collars turned up and their hat brims pulled down. Between them slumped the figure of Dave Westover. Nobody in the car spoke.

Dave stirred and groaned. The man on his left, watching him with steely eyes from under the hat brim, took a little tin box of surgeon's tape from his pocket. It was already cut into strips of the desired length. These he clapped over Dave's eyes and his mouth. His hat was pulled down over his face to hide these decorations. He struggled feebly, but with an arm locked within the arm of the man on either side, he was helpless.

Hearing no sounds of pursuit, the driver slowed down. "Where to?" he muttered.

The man on Dave's left appeared to be the leader. He was wearing a cinnamon-colored hat. "We got to frisk this guy," he said. "Take us to Heinie's, and me and Rudy will do it. You go on and take Fish home to his old woman, and ditch the car somewheres uptown. Then you and Rina go to the Dump and wait until you hear from me."

"Okay!"

Shortly afterwards they stopped in front of an old high-stoop dwelling in one of the nondescript streets south of Houston. The house had an ostentatious look of emptiness and neglect; paint peeling off the bricks; dirt caked on the windows; blinds pulled down inside; but there were no "To Let" signs hung out.

“Get out and ring,” said the man on Dave’s left to the girl in front. “We’re watching this guy.”

She went to the basement entrance, which was protected outside by a steel gate filling the space under the steps. After a certain delay a half-dressed man appeared behind the gate. At sight of the girl his jaw dropped.

“You can’t come in,” he stammered. “We’re closed. We’ve gone to bed!”

“Tell him it’s Pompey,” growled the man in the cinnamon-colored hat. “No wise guy wants to close his door to Pompey.”

With a shrug of helplessness, the man opened the iron gate. Dave was seized on each side, hustled across the pavement, down a few steps, and into the basement corridor. The iron gate clanged behind him. The girl had gone back to the car, and it drove away. When the proprietor of the house saw Dave’s condition under the lights of the corridor, he was seized with a fresh terror.

“What you going to do with that guy?” he stammered. “I can’t have no trouble here. They’d close me up!”

Pompey cursed him coldly. “We ain’t going to hurt the guy. He’s a friend of ours. Shut your trap and go cook us up some supper.”

The man disappeared. Dave was shoved into the front basement room and released. Pompey switched on lights. The moment his arms were freed, Dave tore away the strips that covered his eyes and mouth. The place was a sort of humble restaurant. Like all such places after closing hours, it had a desolate look. The tablecloths were dirty and a stale smell of cooking hung on the air.

Pompey was standing with his back to the closed door, idly playing with a limber, leather-covered blackjack that was attached to his right wrist by a thong. With the collar of his ulster turned up and his hat pulled down, Dave couldn’t get a good look at him, even under the lights. But he knew from his voice that it was the same man who had followed Paula earlier in the night. From under the cavern of his hat brim his eyes fixed Dave like two points of chilled steel. The pale eyes had an uncanny effect in the yellow face.

“You’re all right if you keep quiet,” said Pompey, with a cruel grin. “We’re friends of yours. If it wasn’t for us they’d be sweating you at Headquarters right now.”

Dave’s strength had returned. “Much obliged,” he said, giving Pompey grin for grin. “For nothing! What do you want of me?”

“We’re going to search you.”

“What for?” said Dave, in surprise. “I’ve got nothing on me but a few dollars in my pants pocket. Take that and let me go.”

Pompey laughed. “A bank clerk’s spending money! You can keep it, fellow!”

“How do you know I work in a bank?” said Dave, staring. “I never saw you before tonight.”

“We got ways of finding out,” said Pompey. “Take off your overcoat and chuck it to my partner.”

In the lighted room it was apparent that the second man had been badly shaken by the events of the night. Pompey had addressed this one as Rudy. His mouth was twisted to one side; his hands were shaking slightly. “Wait a minute,” he muttered.

“What the hell . . . !” began Pompey.

“I’m all right,” stammered Rudy, endeavoring to straighten up. “That cop on Third Avenue . . . his neck was broke . . . I could see it when I pulled him out of the cab! I don’t know about the taxi-driver. That makes three since yesterday. . . .”

Pompey silenced him with an oath. “You better take a vacation,” he added, sneering.

“I’m okay . . . okay . . .” stuttered the other man. Turning his back to them, he made a rapid pass from his pocket to his face. He threw his head back. A small white paper fluttered to the floor.

“Coke!” said Pompey, contemptuously.

“I don’t have to have it,” stuttered Rudy.

“That’s what they all say!”

When Rudy turned around he had got a grip on himself. Throwing aside his overcoat and hat, he caught the coat that Dave tossed him, and went over it with nimble fingers to make sure nothing had been slipped between cloth and lining. He was a young fellow of the black-haired Irish type, handsome but for his ghastly pallor, and turned out with an elegance that showed up strangely in the squalid eating-place. Gray suit tailored and pressed to a nicety; pearl Fedora; spats; mirror-polished shoes.

Rudy's small trim hands explored the rest of Dave's clothes; suit coat, vest, trousers, shirt. Dave studied him at close range. A small man, but very trimly made. Scarcely more than a boy, his strained, paper-white face suggested that the experience of several lives had been crowded into his few years. In his gray scarf he wore a big emerald carved in the likeness of a beetle, and showing the gleam unmistakably of the real fire.

"You're wasting your time," said Dave.

"Yeah?" answered Pompey. "We'll know that when we get through."

Not until Rudy had reached Dave's skin were they satisfied that he spoke the truth. Pompey was scowling and biting his nails.

"Where's the guy's hat?" he asked, suddenly.

"Whose hat?" returned Dave, staring.

"The stiff's."

"Oh!" Dave grinned slightly. "The cop had it."

"What!"

"The cop in the taxi with me. They took it off me and gave it to him to take to Headquarters. He had it stuffed inside his coat."

"What were you doing with it?"

"I couldn't keep it on the dead man's head, so I crushed it flat and stuck it inside my vest, meaning to lose it somewhere."

Pompey showed his teeth. "Was there anything inside it?" he snarled.

"Inside it?" repeated Dave, with an innocent stare.

"Inside the band! Inside the band!"

"Gee!" said Dave. "Maybe there was. I never thought of looking."

"Maybe the girl found it?"

Dave shook his head in an unconcerned way.

"How do you know she didn't?"

"She told me everything that happened. She would have told me that."

Pompey broke into a low, furious cursing. "The cop had it!" he muttered. "And we had the cop in our hands!"

Dave demurely buttoned up his coat. The white-faced Rudy laughed jeeringly. “How about it, Pompey? Who slipped up this time?”

Pompey cursed him down and made for the door. “I got to see about this,” he said. “You take care of this guy.”

“What’ll I do with him?” asked Rudy, indifferently.

Pompey returned into the room a step, and bored into Dave with his steel points of eyes. He hesitated. It was obvious that Dave’s fate was hanging in the balance. Dave kept his head up and faced him out, but he grew a little white about the lips. His hands were empty.

Pompey fired an unexpected question at him. “What for did you wait outside the girl’s house tonight when she went in?”

“She didn’t want the doorman to see me. She went up in the elevator and I took the stairs.”

“And nobody saw you?”

“Nobody.”

“How about when you brought the stiff out?”

“Nobody saw me. I carried it down the stairs. The lobby was empty.”

Pompey smiled. “That’s a damn lucky break for you, fellow. . . . Known that girl long?”

“Never spoke to her before tonight.”

“Anybody know you were going there?”

“No. I went to bed with my room-mate, and got up after he went to sleep. I can get back into bed before he wakes. I’ve got a perfect alibi.”

A hard smile cracked in Pompey’s stony face. “You’re good!” he said, jeeringly. He turned to Rudy. “All right. Let the guy go. . . . But take off his bracelet,” he added, pointing to the handcuff that still clung around Dave’s right wrist.

Dave slowly relaxed, and the warm color came back in his face. Pompey was not quite through with him. “Look, fellow, I’m telling you!” he said, with dangerous softness. “You ain’t done nothing against us. And as long as you keep out of the hands of the police we’ll never trouble you. This business is finished for you. You can go ahead and marry the girl.”

He paused, and his voice hardened. “But if the police nab you again, we’ll never let you come to trial, see? We got our private reasons for not wanting it. And we got ways of getting you though they stick you in a cell behind three steel doors. Hear me? It’s up to you.”

“I’m not going to let the police take me,” said Dave.

“All right. Just one thing more. . . .” Pompey’s voice became smooth and pregnant with meaning. “If you happen to find a paper lying around the girl’s flat that don’t concern you, I advise you to hand it over to me. See? It would be healthier for you. **And for her!**”

“Sure!” said Dave. “Where could I find you?”

“I’ll be seeing you.” Pompey ran out.

Chapter VIII

THE proprietor of the humble speakeasy, with his suspenders still hanging, brought a tray of food into the front room. His depressed face lightened somewhat upon finding that Dave had not been murdered on the premises. The two young men were smoking at one of the tables amicably enough. He put the tray before them, and snapped up the window shades. It was about seven o'clock, and the dull November day was breaking.

Rudy said, pointing to Dave's bracelet: "Have you got a hack saw, Heinie? . . . a cold chisel? . . . a pair of steel cutters?"

In answer to each question the man shook his head. "You want a hack saw," he said, gloomily. "They put hard steel in them things."

"We'll wait till the stores open," said Rudy.

"I want to get home before the alarm clock lets go at eight-twenty," suggested Dave.

"Where you live?"

"East Seventeenth."

"You can make it."

The man went back to his kitchen. Dave attacked the food with good appetite, and Rudy picked at it. The handsome boy with the twisted mouth and weary eyes resented Dave's freshness.

"Feeling fine, ain't you?" he said, with a sneer.

"Why shouldn't I be?" said Dave. "I never expected to move out of this joint under my own power."

"Yeah," drawled Rudy. "We saved you for the bank. Cheese! What a life!"

"You're right," said Dave, good-humoredly. "But how's a fellow going to beat the game?"

"No bank for me!" said Rudy, boastfully. "Handling other guys' jack and none of your own! Every day the same! Fellow might as well be in a cell!"

Dave looked at him from under level brows and said nothing.

Rudy could not leave the subject alone. He kept darting resentful glances at Dave through his lashes—lashes as long and beautifully curved as an infant's. "Here's me, and here's you," he said. "A man only lives once. I want to get something out of it. I want to feel I'm alive." Dave's silence irritated him. "Do you hear what I'm telling you?" he demanded.

"Sure!"

"Well, what about it?"

Dave was in a difficult position. Man to man he could have doubled up the little fellow like a jackknife, but he was well aware that Rudy had two or three guns conveniently stowed about his person. One of them he could see slightly pressing out the left breast of the elegant gray jacket. It was not advisable to irritate so deadly a wasp. So Dave laughed.

"That's right," he said, agreeably. "If I get out of it all right, I'll call this a good night. It's a change from the bank, anyhow."

As soon as Dave agreed with him, Rudy's mood changed. A haunted look came into his face. "Wonder if the taxi-driver kicked out, too?" he muttered. "He was a young guy."

"I don't know," said Dave. "I was in the gauze myself at the time."

Shortly before eight o'clock Rudy telephoned for a friend who drove a taxi. While they were waiting, he produced some more strips of tape. "Shut your eyes," he said. "We don't want you coming back here any time."

"But it's daylight," objected Dave.

"You can pull your hat down. I'll steer you to the cab. Once we turn the corner you can pull them off."

Dave submitted.

They had themselves put down at Cooper Square, not far away, and walked up Fourth Avenue. Dave kept his right hand buried in his pocket. Soon they came to what Rudy was looking for, a large hardware store, but it was not yet open for the day. They walked on a little way and came back. A clerk came up from the other direction, and started unlocking the door. Rudy stepped up to him. He took pains to be affable.

"'Morning, Jack. Are you ready for business?"

"Sure!" said the clerk, "whenever the door's unlocked."

They followed him in. Rudy whispered to Dave, “You let me handle this. Keep your trap shut.”

The clerk went behind the counter. He was a fellow of about their own age, unwholesomely plump, half-baked.

“I want a pair of cutters,” said Rudy. “Something that will go through quarter-inch steel.”

After a brief search the clerk laid the desired article on the counter for inspection. “This is the finest quality,” he began in his best manner. “It will last you a lifetime. Of course we have a cheaper line, but I can’t recommend it. . . .”

“Yeah,” said Rudy, dryly. “This is what I want.” Suddenly he had a gun in his careless hand. His eyes were half closed; a cigarette drooped out of the corner of his mouth. “Just cut this little souvenir off my friend’s wrist, will you? Keep your mouth shut and it will go no further.”

The clerk’s mouth dropped open; his face turned greenish and moist. He had no thought of resisting the demand. With trembling hands he adjusted the blades of the cutter inside the handcuff, and with a single snip Dave was free of it.

Rudy put the handcuff in his pocket. “Much obliged, Jack,” he drawled. “Hope to return the favor sometime.” He and Dave turned towards the door. “Don’t run,” he whispered. The clerk appeared to be nailed behind the counter. They walked out sedately. Outside, Rudy said, “Now scam!”

There was a taxi loafing along beside the curb, and Dave boarded it unthinkingly. He didn’t see where Rudy went. It was only six short blocks to the boarding-house, but the alarm clock was due to let go in five minutes. An impulse of caution led him to stop the cab at the Fourth Avenue corner of Seventeenth Street. He proceeded down the block on foot.

By great good luck he met nobody in the halls of the house. When he slipped into his own room, there lay Bill Fielder, sleeping, dead to the world, just as he had left him eight hours before. The alarm clock on the bureau was registering 8:19. Dave turned it back five minutes, threw off his clothes, and crept into bed.

When the alarm went off he put on the usual show of stretching and cursing, just like Bill on the other side of the bed.

“Another day!” groaned Dave.

“Well, you’ve had eight hours’ sleep. What do you want?” said Bill.

Dave swallowed a grin. "The more you have, the more you want," he said.

After long practice Dave and Bill had succeeded in getting down the business of shaving, dressing, snatching a breakfast, and reaching the office to forty minutes. Thus they could take nice long evenings for their personal recreations. But they had little time for talking in the mornings. Dave studied himself surreptitiously in the mirror. He bore no marks of his adventures except a large bump on the back of his head. Fortunately he had plenty of hair.

They were a little late at the office, much to Bill's surprise. Everything was exactly the same as usual: the orderly rows of desks; the men he knew so well; the matter-of-fact business going on. Dave's eyes gleamed with pleasure as he looked around him.

He glanced with intense eagerness through the door of the Correspondence Department. Paula was sitting quietly at her desk just as on a thousand other mornings, but today he saw her with new eyes. Her beautiful, quiet face, giving nothing away; her bright hair lying close against her head in regular waves; her simple dress, a dull red this morning with white collars and cuffs, as crisp and fresh as if it had just been lifted from its box. She was glorified in his eyes. Suddenly realizing that he must be betraying his feelings, he bent over his work.

Later, he felt her glance on him, and lifted his head. She was looking at him with an agonized inquiry in her eyes. What happened last night? Sometimes it was necessary for the clerks in the Collection Department to call on the Correspondence Department for help, and Dave manufactured such an occasion now. He carried a check in to her.

As soon as she saw him coming she became the business woman again. In her office the two stenographers were tapping away, and the filing girl was slipping letters in the cabinet. Paula looked at him with polite inquiry.

"Will you write to the Second National of Schenectady," said Dave, "and tell them that a check of theirs listed as \$23.83 ought to be \$23.38." He laid the check before her, and this gave him an excuse to lower his head until he could smell the delicious sweetness of her hair.

Paula studied the check. "What happened last night?" she whispered.

"Plenty," said Dave.

"But you're all right?"

“So far.”

“Oh, Dave,” she whispered, “how can I . . . how can I tell you what I feel?”

He turned red then pale again. “Don’t try,” he murmured. “If you’ll call me that I’ll go through it twice over, gladly.”

“Can’t we let on now that we are friends?”

“Better not until we see the afternoon papers. There’s going to be a terrible sensation. Worse than you think. I can’t tell just how it will break.”

“But I’ve got to talk to you!”

“I’ll slip into your flat during the lunch hour. Or telephone.”

He saw the filing clerk looking at them curiously, and went back with his check.

The noon hour never came for Dave that day. About eleven the doorman from the main banking-floor came into the Collection Department, bringing a stranger. One look at the stranger was enough for Dave; his neat, inconspicuous clothes; the hard, keen face with tight-shut lips—detective! As softly as a zephyr of wind Dave slid out of his chair and through the door of the coat-room, three feet away. Snatching hat and coat from its hook, he ran downstairs and lost himself in the sidewalk crowd of lower Broadway.

Chapter IX

JOHN J. STUART, vice-president of the Chambers National Bank, a tall, spare figure, very elegantly and correctly dressed, was ascending in the elevator of the loftiest and most magnificent office-building in midtown. He got out on the seventy-fifth floor and entered the offices of the "Atlas Development Company." The reception-room was superbly furnished with beautiful oil paintings, rich Oriental rugs, and mahogany upholstered in Russia leather. There was nobody in the room but a young woman who appeared to have been lifted from the Ziegfeld chorus, and an athletic, well-turned-out gentleman, sitting beside the door leading into the farther rooms. Stuart, giving his name, asked for Mr. Mann.

"Have you an appointment?" asked the young lady, sweetly.

"I have."

"Please be seated, Mr. Stuart."

She murmured into a telephone, and in a moment or two a young man who looked like a Rolls-Royce salesman with a gardenia in his buttonhole, bustled into the room with a glad smile. "Good morning, Mr. Stuart. Mr. Mann is expecting you. Will you follow me, sir?"

In the second room there was nothing at all except more superb furnishings, and another athletic man about town sitting by the door. In the third room several beautiful stenographers, some of them tapping haughtily on noiseless typewriters and some merely decorating the room; another athletic person trimming his nails by the door. In the fourth room a couple of high-class executives, and behind a partition to the side four more men, not looking so high class without their coats, playing cards at a table. But the caller could not see this quartette.

Passing the guard at the final door, Stuart was ushered into an immense corner room with windows overlooking the lower part of Manhattan Island, the East River, the North River, the Upper Bay, and a glimpse of the distant sea. The young man with the gardenia faded away. In the corner, behind the most imposing desk ever made, sat Jim Mann, tipped back in a swivel chair,

comfortably rolling a cigar between his fat lips. He exuded well-being and self-satisfaction like a perspiration.

“Hi, Jack! Sit down! Have a cigar!”

Stuart accepted both invitations primly.

“How you like my new offices? And the force? Swell, eh? Cost me something, but what the heck? I can afford it!”

“Very fine,” said Stuart.

“Did you come in by the private entrance and use my elevator?”

“Oh no,” said Stuart. “Everybody in town knows that that is your door. I couldn’t be seen entering it.”

“Might as well,” said Mann. “It’s all over but the shouting. Everybody in town will soon know that you and me is partners. You got to get used to it.”

Stuart looked so distressed that Mann burst out laughing. “You despise me, don’t you?” he said, with cruel contempt. “Well, I despise you, so there’s no loss either side.”

Stuart smiled bleakly.

“I don’t deny you’re useful to me,” Mann went on, “you’re so God-damned respectable-looking. I’ll be switched if I ever see so respectable-looking a guy since I was born! And that’s my line from this time on. Respectability. I’m going to be a banker. What a sap I was to risk my life in the beer racket and afterwards the gambling racket when I might of been a banker. A banker never gets put on the spot. He can live to be eighty years old!”

“About the meeting last night,” put in Stuart.

“Well, spill it!”

Stuart amplified the report he had already made over the phone.

“So Beekman talked them out of another hundred gran’!” said Mann, with a comfortable chuckle. “A hundred gran’ to put Jim Mann behind the bars! Cheese! How funny! A million wouldn’t do him no good without he has the front to carry it through, and we’re going to slice the front off him as neat as a surgeon takes your appendix, ain’t we, old Sourdough?”

Stuart acknowledged the compliment with a thin smile.

Pulling open a drawer, Mann produced a packet of rectangular papers caught within a band. He flung them towards Stuart. "There's your proxies for the shareholders' meeting tomorrow. Over fifty-five hundred shares, a clear majority. The Chambers National was just a nice old-fashioned conservative plum for Jim Mann to pick. Averaged over twelve hundred a share, but even so I got control for less than seven million. A year from now they'll be worth double. Oh, I'll bring in business, though my name don't appear amongst the directors! A word here and there in the right direction! The possibilities of the banking business ain't never been touched yet!"

Stuart's eyes widened in fear as he listened. "I hope," he stammered—"I hope you don't mean to. . . ."

"Aah! the heck with it!" said Mann, contemptuously. "All you got to do is sign on the dotted line, see? You got an elegant-looking signature. It's going to put more dollars in your pocket in a year than you ever had all your life before, so let that satisfy you. Hear what I'm telling you!"

Stuart nodded dumbly.

Mann tapped the bunch of proxies. "With these you elect your board of directors tomorrow morning according to the list furnished you. They'll be on hand. All good-sounding names. Strong men. No trouble for Jim Mann to collect a board of directors. They're all crazy to hitch to a rising star. Your new directors will elect you as president along with the other officers. Why, the whole thing won't take but fifteen minutes. And then Mr. Irvin Beekman can take his hat and go home!"

"Some other bank will offer him a presidency," said Stuart, "with his reputation."

"Not when I'm through with him," said Mann, calmly. "I want you to bring me a list of all the phony investments and the bad loans the bank has made since Beekman was president."

"The bank is in marvelous condition!" cried Stuart.

"Sure! Sure!" said Mann, wagging his fat hand. "But every bank's got plenty rotten loans."

"Where did you learn about banks?"

"I hired lawyers to tell me," said Mann, grinning. "It's a great game! Bring me full particulars, and I'll hand it all over to my literary guys, and they'll cook it up to look like Beekman pretty near wrecked the bank, and

that's why he was kicked out. And you can put it out to the press in an interview, see?"

"Beekman will come back at me!"

"Not a chance! I got some of the best literary guys in the country on my staff. They know how to put a thing so the other fellow's got no comeback. They'll write you a story about 'the financier who desires that his name remain unknown'—that's me, see?—'who has come to the support of this ancient institution!' And the stock will go up. Anyhow, so my lawyers tell me. I'm new at the business."

"I don't know," said Stuart, pulling at his lip. "Beekman's a fighter."

"I'll take the fight out of him," said Mann. "Every man has got his weakness. Beekman's is his wife. Beautiful woman that. Couple months ago I was at one of these, now, gab-fests; you know, where they pass around, and you stand up and eat. Yeah, funny place for Jim Mann to be, but I changed my way of life now, and it's all good publicity. And I was talking to Cora Beekman. Cheese! What a face! What a figure! How do these society dames do it? Looking like a young girl yet, and with all the devil of an experienced dame in her!"

"Well, as I say, I was handing it to her, and she was handing it to me. She liked me, all right. She could recognize power in a man if he did come out of Cherry Hill. They all can. And her husband come in. He give me a look, and I seen right away that it was him or me. He had nerve and brains, and confidence in himself. I seen that he was the one man in New York I had to fear, and next day I started buying up the stock of his bank."

"How are you going to take the fight out of him?" asked Stuart.

Mann grinned, and rolled the cigar over with his tongue. "Publicity and applause and hurrah is as necessary to that doll as snow to a cokie. She won't stick to Beekman when he loses his job. . . . I'll see to it that she don't."

"Good God!" stammered Stuart. "What will you . . . what will you. . . ."

"Cheese, Jack, I'm just started," said Mann, with contemptuous good-humor. "I'll make that little bank a big bank. I'll take in the other banks as they come, one after the other. I'll work some big combinations. Money attracts money. There ain't nothing a man can't do in this country with money. There never was no guy before me who tried to see how far money would take him. Their conscience held them back. Me, I ain't got no conscience. I'm for Jim Mann, first, last, and always! I was born in this

burg; Cherry Hill, the worst dump in town. I went West and made a name for myself; now I've come back to be the biggest guy in my own home town."

Stuart watched him, fascinated. The fat man brooded over his cigar. His contempt for Stuart was so great that he thought out loud in his company.

"Money plus the right publicity," he presently went on. "It's wonderful what publicity will do. Surprises me myself, sometimes. My literary guys they write the stories, and I act them out for the reporters. It don't cost me nothing. Jim Mann is always news. It's publicity has put me where I am, and it's publicity will carry me as far as any guy ever went, maybe further. Nothing can stop me but. . . ."

The good-humored expression faded, the heavy brows drew together, and the small eyes peered from beneath with the ferocity of a gorilla. At such moments the change in his face was startling. Stuart's gray skin turned grayer still when he saw it.

"Nothing can stop me but the wrong publicity," muttered Mann, "but, by God! I'll kill that!"

"That's what Beekman said," said Stuart, nervously.

"Yeah!" said Mann with a sharp look. "That guy's dangerous. But I'll draw his fangs. A man can't command no publicity when he's down. I'll keep him down. Maybe some day when his knees is coming through his pants I'll give him a job as doorman of the bank. That would make me feel good."

He fell to brooding again, and Stuart was afraid to speak. "Wrong publicity!" he muttered. "If any guy was to dish up them old stories in a nasty way it would be bad! That is, if he had the evidence. I've hired men to go over my tracks for years past, buying up and destroying evidence. There's damned little left. Only one thing. . . ."

He threw off the black mood. "The hell with it!" he cried, dropping the ragged cigar in a cuspidor and taking a fresh one. "If anything **should** turn up, I still got the boys on my payroll!"

"What boys?" stuttered Stuart.

"The torpedoes, Frozenface!"

Chapter X

WHEN DAVE escaped from the bank the first editions of the afternoon papers were out. As soon as he was satisfied that he had not been followed, he bought one, and retired into a sunny doorway to read the story of the previous night's happenings. His eyes scanned the lines tensely. The story which everybody else was reading with a mild interest had a terrific significance for him.

It had all the mysterious elements so dear to the public, and they had been played up to the full. Headlines clear across the front page. The unknown young man riding around town in a taxi with the corpse of a man who had been dead for some hours. A handsome, athletic young fellow who didn't look like a criminal. Disappearance of the corpse and taxi on the way to the police station. Rescue of the prisoner by means of a crash with an empty beer-truck on Third Avenue. Policeman and second taxi-driver killed in the crash.

The beer-truck had been abandoned, but there was no clue to its ownership. It bore stolen license plates. Bystanders had told of a gray touring-car which carried off the prisoner. This car was found abandoned in an uptown street. It had been stolen earlier in the evening. The first taxicab had also been found, but there was no trace of the driver. The inference was that he was dead, too.

One of the most curious things about the case was the desperate risk that the prisoner's friends had taken to rescue him. They might just as easily have killed their friend as the driver and the policeman. Some of the witnesses were not sure but what the handsome young man had been killed and that it was only his body which had been carried away in the gray touring-car. Another gangster crime! The whole police force was roused by the death of their comrade. The Commissioner promised the public that the whole matter would be cleared up within twenty-four hours.

Dave's face turned grave as he read. Three more dead! It was through no fault of his that their lives had been snuffed out, but he was fatally mixed up in it. The talkative little taxi-driver with the rag around his throat; the good-

looking young policeman; the second driver whom Dave had scarcely taken notice of, beyond the fact that he, too, was young! An ugly business!

There was no suggestion in the story that the police had any clue to the prisoner's identity, but this story had been written a couple of hours before, and a whole lot might have happened since. Dave looked apprehensively up and down the street before venturing out of his doorway.

As he proceeded through one street and another, he bought each of the afternoon papers in turn, and as he read it he tossed it in a trash-can. They all told much the same story.

When he had read everything that was to be had, he came to a dead end. Stood on the corner for a while; then, fearing to be conspicuous, walked on nervously; came to a park bench and sat down in it blindly; was astonished to discover that he had drifted to the Battery. Finally the clock in the tower of the Produce Exchange told him that it was within a few minutes to twelve. His face cleared and he made for the Second Avenue Elevated.

On approaching the house where Paula lived, twenty minutes later, he was unpleasantly surprised to discover a crowd milling around the entrance. He had failed to take into account that curious crowd which always gathers on the scene of an interesting crime. He skirted around it warily. A uniformed policeman was guarding the door of the house, and through the glass he could distinguish other figures, one of whom was certainly a detective. He kept on walking.

Crossing First Avenue and turning down that street, he looked up at the windows of the apartment house longingly, and wished for wings. He observed that this immense building at the corner of Forty-ninth Street had an immense twin on the corner of Forty-eighth. The two filled the whole end of the block. Alike in every particular, it was probable that they were under the same ownership.

He crossed back at Forty-eighth, and finding the door of the house on that street unwatched and unguarded by the police, he entered, and had himself carried to the top floor. Walking briskly away down the corridor, as soon as he heard the elevator door close he came back and went up the stairs to the roof. Here he found a passage leading between the penthouses to the roof of the Forty-ninth Street building, where a door gave him entrance to the stair well.

He descended to the fourteenth floor and tried the door of C14. It was unlocked. In the little foyer he saw Paula's hat and coat and a newspaper

lying on the chair where she had dropped them. She heard him, and ran out of her tiny kitchen which opened off the living-room on the left. Her face was pale and strained with anxiety. At sight of Dave her soft lips trembled, her knees gave under her. He ran forward and caught her in his arms.

But she had strength enough to push him away and to stand alone. “No! No!” she said, firmly. And then with lovely inconsistency: “Oh, thank God you’ve come!”

Dave tried to kiss her, but she would not have it. Her hand was between his face and hers. “We mustn’t!” she murmured. “Oh, what have I done to you! It’s driving me crazy!”

“Done to me! You can make me the happiest man alive!”

“No! I have wrecked your life!”

“It’s not so! It’s up to you to make it worth living!”

She nervously freed herself from his arms. “We cannot forget ourselves . . . not for one moment . . . the danger is too great! . . . We must talk!”

Dave led her to the big sofa. “One kiss,” he pleaded. “It’s my price for last night!”

Paula ran her fingers distractedly through her hair. “No! We must decide what is best for you to do. I have just time enough to feed mother and get back to the office. What are we going to do?”

“Suppose I stay right here until you come back this evening,” suggested Dave, “and get some sleep. I had none last night.”

“Yes. That’s best. . . . Oh, you poor boy! . . . Yes, I can get through the afternoon all right if I know where you are. . . . Now you must let me go. I’ve got to feed mother . . . and you.”

“One moment. . . . That dick who came into the bank this morning. It was me he was after?”

“Yes. Everybody down there knows it now.”

“But you have not been drawn into it?”

“No. Nobody suspects that you and I are even acquainted.”

“Thank God for that! . . . There must be two hundred apartments in this building. It will be impossible for the police to establish that the body came from this particular one. It might just as well come out of the house across Forty-ninth Street, which is as big as this house. You are pretty safe.”

“Oh, never mind me! What are you going to do?”

“I’ll make out, don’t fear! . . . Did the dick happen to say how he ran me down?”

“Yes. He told the officers of the bank. A clerk in a hardware store reported to the police that he had removed a handcuff from the wrist of a man such as they were looking for.”

“So that was it!”

“The clerk saw you get in a taxi at the door, and he took down the number and furnished it to the police. They found the taxi-driver and he told them he had put you down at the corner of Seventeenth Street. From that point they were able to trace you to Mrs. Bradley’s. Everybody in that block knows you by sight.” Paula’s eyes searched his face sadly. “Everybody remembers what you look like,” she murmured, “because there’s no other like you.”

Dave pressed his head between his hands and groaned. “O God! a wide-open trail! What a fool I was! What a fool! If I had walked home . . . if I had walked only one block before taking a cab we’d be safe now!”

Paula squeezed her hands together. “Dave, you mustn’t!” she protested. “I can’t bear to hear you blaming yourself! You’ve never had any experience with the police! How should you have known?”

“I’ve got to be a whole lot sharper from this time on!” he muttered.

“It’s all my fault!” mourned Paula. “I got you into this!”

Dave straightened up and took her hands. The old smile came back to his face. “Listen, honey! Let’s cut out this who’s-to-blame stuff for good and all. It hurts like the devil now when you go on making out that I’m just a stranger that you had no right to call on. If this was your business in the beginning, it’s mine now. I went into it with open eyes. We’re in it together, and we’ll get out of it together or sink together!”

“Oh, Dave!” she murmured, helplessly. “Oh, Dave, I . . . I . . .” She was unable to go on.

“What is it, honey?”

She mutely shook her head.

He tried to draw her to him. “Seal it!” he whispered.

She tore herself away. “No! I must get the lunch!”

“Can I help?”

“No! You would only upset me!”

“Okay,” murmured Dave, sleepily. The instant she disappeared in the kitchen he toppled over among the cushions.

He dreamed that her fragrant cheek was pressed against his own. When he opened his eyes her face was only a few inches from his, but her eyes were lowered; he could not read them. “Eat your lunch while it’s hot,” she whispered. “You can sleep all afternoon.”

There it was, all beautifully arranged on a low table beside the sofa. “This is like waking up in heaven,” said Dave.

“I must eat mine with mother,” said Paula.

As she moved towards the bedroom, carrying a tray, he saw her stop and pick up the newspaper in the foyer. “Paula!” he whispered in alarm. “You can’t let her see that!”

Paula came a step or two back into the room. “I must,” she said. “I bring it to her every day. I can’t keep the newspapers from her. They pass the hours for her.”

“She will immediately connect that story with my visit here last night. The address of this house, the time and all.”

“I know,” said Paula, “but she is very loyal to those she likes. She will believe the story you told the police, though nobody else does, that you found the body in the cab. I’ll tell her that she must deny knowing you if the police should ever question her. She will lie for a friend.”

“You’re right,” said Dave. “It’s the only thing to do.”

Paula went on through the little hall leading to the bedroom.

When the food had been eaten, the dishes gathered up, and Paula was getting her hat and coat, Dave begged hard for five minutes more.

Paula hesitated desirously. “I’ll be late for the office.”

“Well, you’re the head of a department.”

She put down her things. “Oh well, they’re all so excited about you they’ll never notice me.”

“Excited?” he said.

“Mr. Fielder says to everybody: ‘He slept beside me all night! He slept beside me all night!’ And nobody believes him!”

“Good old Bill!”

Paula turned up a corner of the rug and drew out the paper they had found in the dead man’s hat. “We ought to study this,” she said.

“That would be one of the first places they would look for it,” suggested Dave.

“I’ll find a better place. I’ll hide it under the dust inside the carpet-sweeper.”

Sitting side by side on the sofa, they spread out the paper between them. It was a brief legal affidavit, a little yellowed by time and badly worn along the creases where it had been folded. But every word was still legible. It seemed to have been prepared in haste, for it was written in longhand on half a sheet of foolscap, torn across at the bottom. Nevertheless, it had been properly attested to before a notary, the impress of whose seal was still clear. It read:

I, Mitchell Evers, being in fear of death and wishful of making my peace with the Almighty before I go, do hereby depose and swear that I was present and a witness to the murder of Salvatore Rossi in the beer saloon of Frank Houlihan number —— State Street Chicago on the night of August 19th, 1923.

I was standing at the bar with Giacomo Uomo, sometimes known as Jake Yuma, and Monk Seely, both of whom were well known to me. Bat Crear was serving bar. Salvatore Rossi came in from the street and was greeted by all those present. Uomo or Yuma went up to him saying, “Hello, Salva!” and shook him by the hand, and held his hand. While he held Rossi’s right hand, Uomo took a gun out of his pocket with his left hand. It was what they call a belly-gun with a sawed-off barrel. Uomo pressed it against Rossi’s stomach and fired four times, and Rossi dropped. Uomo then pitched the gun behind the bar where it was afterwards found, and says to me: “Keep your mouth shut about this, Mitch, or you’ll get the same!” and he and Crear went out together.

I wish to say that what I previously testified in respect to this case was false. I lied because Bat Crear the other eye-witness has been found shot dead since, and I was afraid the same would be done to me. Being sick in hospital now and like to die, I have

nobody to fear but my Maker, and this is the truth, so help me God! Amen!

Alongside the signature appeared the names of two witnesses—Walter Wrenn and Henry Wessels. The notary's name was Enoch Bland.

“What do you make of it?” asked Dave.

“A murder nine years old!” murmured Paula. “Another murder! We are surrounded by murders!”

“Your father witnessed the document. Do you recognize any of the other names?”

She shook her head. “I know nothing of my father's life at that time, or who his friends were. He had abandoned us years before that.”

“He was undoubtedly murdered for this paper,” murmured Dave, thinking the matter out aloud. “It bears the stamp of truth on it, and that's what makes it so dangerous to somebody. Gosh! if I was only a detective I'd know what to do with it!”

“You're something better than that,” whispered Paula.

“So you say,” said Dave, with a quick smile. “Here's the situation,” he went on, seriously. “The police are after me hotfoot, and the gang is after this paper. Of the two, the gangsters are more dangerous. Now you're my partner in this, and I'm obliged to put it up to you. What do you say? Shall I hand this paper over to Pompey with a polite, ‘You're welcome!’ Or shall I keep it in spite of his threats?”

“That's up to you,” said Paula, faintly.

“But you must tell me what you think. Of course, if Pompey gets the paper it will automatically shut off all danger from that side and I can concentrate on keeping out of the hands of the cops.”

“You make it so hard for me,” murmured Paula, “putting you in further danger!”

“Speak your mind plainly and I'll speak mine.”

“There have been four murders over this,” she said, very low. “If we handed it over to the murderers now we'd be lining up with them, wouldn't we? We'd be sharing in those murders! I don't think you want to hand it over. I don't want you to!”

Dave's eyes blazed up. "Oh, great!" he said, softly. "That's what I was hoping you'd say! If I handed that paper back I'd have to crawl through life like a worm! Paula, you're a queen! . . . Paula. . . !" He held out his arms to her.

She sank into them, wreathing her arms around his neck. "Oh, Dave!" she murmured, brokenly. "Oh, Dave. . . !"

He pressed her close. "Paula, I love you better than life!" he whispered.

"Oh, Dave, what have I got you into!"

"The dickens with that stuff!" he said, laughing. "This is the best way to find love! In danger!"

They kissed.

"Oh, I'm done for now!" she murmured, faintly smiling. "But I couldn't hold out against you any longer!"

"Why did you try to hold out?"

"I was afraid. So little time; so much danger. I didn't see how, if I ever let myself go, I could get back again! . . . But you knew, anyhow. You could feel it."

"Just the same, I wanted to be told."

"I **must** go now!"

"You haven't told me yet. Say it straight out. Do you love me?"

"Love you?" she cried, a little wildly. "After all that has happened? I adore you!"

They had another moment of divine forgetfulness.

Paula dragged herself out of his arms and stood up, swaying slightly. "I'm like a drunken woman now," she murmured, with an enchanting, wistful smile. "My head is going round. How will I do my work?"

"I'll be here when you come back," he said.

He stood up. She held up her hand imploringly. "I'm not going to," he said, smiling. "I can wait."

Dave detached his watch from its chain. "Take my grandfather's clock to the Provident Loan when you get a chance," he said. "It won't keep time, but it's got about a quarter pound of gold in it."

"Oh no!" she said. "I've got plenty of things to pawn."

“Take it! It’s been there before. That’s all I keep it for.”

She dropped the watch in her handbag; hid the affidavit in the place she had chosen for it, and in a moment she was gone. Dave tumbled among the pillows of the sofa again, stretched himself with a delicious feeling of well-being, and was almost instantly asleep.

Chapter XI

WHEN IRVIN BEEKMAN returned to the bank after lunch that day, he dropped into the vice-president's private office. Handsome, confident, and good-humored, the young president had the look of a man who enjoyed life and had made his mark on it; but today his usually smooth brow was corrugated.

"Anything new about Westover?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Stuart, dryly. The vice-president was sitting behind his desk in a correct and unbending attitude, making memoranda in his private notebook in a neat microscopic hand.

"He hasn't been caught, then?"

"Not yet."

"Confound the man!" said Beekman, irritably. "He's upset the whole bank! He's upset me! I'm fit for nothing today. I hope to God he won't be caught!"

Stuart ran up his eyebrows in cold disapproval.

"Oh, I know we don't agree about him," Beekman went on, pacing back and forth, "but I feel confident that if he can keep out of the hands of the police for a day or two some other explanation of this horrible affair will come out."

"What other explanation could there be?" asked Stuart. "He was traced to his boarding-house. And this morning, the moment the detective officer entered, he slipped out. He must have had a guilty conscience. . . . I was not surprised," he went on, with prim satisfaction. "I pointed out last night that . . ."

"Oh, sure! sure!" said Beekman, impatiently. "But if this young man is guilty of what he is charged with, I know nothing about human nature! I shall have to begin to learn all over again! I've marked him several times among the crowd that we employ here—for his look, I mean, open and resolute. I was struck with it afresh last night, the way he looked at us without the least cringing; all ready to fire up at an unjust reproof, and

equally ready to laugh. A very attractive fellow. I simply can't believe that he is an associate of gangsters, a murderer."

"Hm!" said Stuart.

"Oh well, to the devil with him!" said Beekman. "Anything else come up?"

"Nothing new."

"Are you all set for the meeting tomorrow?"

Stuart smiled in his wintry fashion. "That isn't troubling me," he said. "It will be the merest formality. All over in fifteen minutes."

"How many proxies have we got?"

"An overwhelming majority. I really haven't counted them. There is not the shadow of any opposition to the present management. How could there be in the face of the year's business we have done? And in bad times, too. The bank is in magnificent condition!"

"Sure. But I've been just a little bit bothered by the number of transfers of stock that have taken place lately. When we're doing so well, why the devil should men want to sell their stock?"

"That is easily explained," said Stuart, smoothly. "The times are bad, and many men have been obliged to realize on their securities. At such times a man's impulse is always to sell the best he has in the hope that his weaker securities may recover later."

"That's right," said Beekman. "I've asked several of my friends why they sold out, and they all said simply because they were hard up. The new names that appear on the transfer books are unknown to me. Have you secured their proxies?"

"Every one of them," said Stuart. "I have made a special point of it."

"Well, it's in your hands."

"You may have noticed that I myself have been a heavy purchaser of the bank's stock lately," said Stuart.

"Why, yes! Where did you get the money?"

"I have been fortunate in my investments," with a little laugh like the rattling of thin dry reeds.

“I wish I could say the same,” said Beekman, ruefully. “I make a lot of money, but it’s all swallowed up, somehow.”

Stuart smiled with cold politeness.

Beekman laughed good-humoredly when he saw it. “Oh, I know you have your own ideas about the way I live,” he said. “Just the same, we make a first-rate team here. Your long experience in the banking business, and your conservative point of view, are invaluable to me. I was so well aware of it that when the presidency of this bank was offered to me three years ago, I stipulated that you must be made first vice-president.”

“I have not forgotten it,” said Stuart, dryly.

“We may differ about most things, but I respect your integrity, Stuart.”

“Thanks. . . . By the way, there is one small matter I wanted to bring up with you.”

“What’s that?”

“That young man in the Collection Department, William Fielder, I think we ought to let him go at once—today. We can pay him a couple of weeks salary in order to avoid any discussion.”

“But why?” asked Beekman, in surprise. “What’s he done?”

“He is Westover’s closest friend. They live together. It is impossible that Fielder should not be aware of Westover’s criminal activities. He is obviously lying when he says that Westover never left his side last night. I think we ought to fire him before the newspapers begin to comment on the fact.”

“Westover’s criminal activities have not yet been proved,” said Beekman. “He is only charged with them.”

“He ran away.”

“That may have been just an impulse of panic.”

“Am I to keep him on the payroll?” sneered Stuart.

“Certainly not! . . . But about Fielder. I had a talk with him in my office this morning. The poor young fellow has been knocked simply galley west by what has happened. He can’t understand it.”

“I dare say,” said Stuart. “That sort of thing is easy to simulate.”

“I can’t permit it, Stuart,” said Beekman, firmly. “At least not until I have something more to go on.”

“You are the doctor,” said Stuart, with his disagreeable smile.

Beekman went on to his own office.

Chapter XII

IN his sleep Dave heard the muffled sound of a telephone bell. It aroused the instinct of danger. Instantly wide awake, he sprang up and, opening the door leading into the little corridor of the apartment, made his way noiselessly to the second door and put his ear to the crack. Within the bedroom he could hear Mrs. Wrenn's pleasant, youthful-sounding voice speaking into the instrument.

“Who is it? . . . The police! What do you want? . . . My daughter won't be home from business until half past five. . . . But I'm an invalid, chained fast to my bed. How can I help you? . . . Oh, you're making a round of all the apartments. Very well, you may come up. . . . The door of the apartment is not locked. My daughter leaves it so in case I should need help while she is away. . . . Please station a man at the door to keep out reporters or curiosity-seekers. I am helpless, you know.”

Dave waited to hear no more. He slipped back to the living-room, pale and shaken. “Good God! what if I hadn't waked up!” he muttered. A little start of laughter escaped him. “What a surprise the police would have got!” Glancing around to make sure that he was leaving no souvenirs behind him, he snatched up hat and coat and opened the door. Nobody in the corridor outside. Darting across to the stair door, a breath of relief escaped him when he got it closed.

Ascending to the roof, he crossed over to the Forty-eighth Street building the way he had come. A few minutes later he was walking the streets again. He headed west toward the center of the town. He had no particular place to go. He hesitated outside a drug store, debating whether or not to telephone Paula at the bank. He decided against it. The danger was too great that the switchboard operator at the bank might listen in. There were also the three girls working in Paula's room to be considered. All the women at the bank were jealous of Paula, and slyly watched her every movement.

He headed for a newsstand, intending to buy the latest editions. In the act of drawing money from his pocket, he stopped as if he had been suddenly petrified. From each of the row of papers spread along the stand

his own face was staring up at him. His own face! Big pictures and small pictures. It was like an icy douche on his bare skin. He hastened on. He dared not buy a paper at any stand now, for fear somebody might see him doing it and glance from the paper to his face.

Dave knew then what an animal feels when it is hunted. There were millions hunting him. He was convinced that everybody in town had studied his picture and was out to look for him. It brought on an acute attack of self-consciousness. He picked out the quietest streets to walk in, but in New York in the daytime no street is empty. Every time he met anybody Dave's head went down, and he suffered an agony of fear until he was safely past.

It was mid-afternoon, and the sun was shining warmly for the season. People were standing about on the corners, or in doorways. Many of them were reading newspapers. Reading about Dave. He had to pass these people. He felt as if he could go neither forward nor back. There is no place in New York that has not got people in it; no hole to crawl into.

He realized that by looking afraid he was going the best way about to attract people's attention, and he struggled hard to keep his head up. He dared himself to look every man he met in the face. Few of them looked at him. It occurred to him that he would be safest in a crowd where there are so many faces that it becomes difficult to single one out. He drifted up to Forty-second Street, and kept on pushing westward where the crowds were thicker.

Coming to Grand Central Station, he turned in with the throng that is always pouring through the main entrance. In the crowded concourse and waiting-room he would be comparatively safe from observation, he felt, and he would be able to sit down and think things out quietly. Halfway down the incline, he suddenly turned and walked out again. It had occurred to him that the police always pay special attention to the railway stations.

Two blocks farther west he reached Bryant Square that sad-looking open space that has shed all its trees as a man loses his hair. Dave turned in without thinking, and sat down on a bench. He immediately realized his mistake. Bryant Square is always carpeted with newspapers. It might be called the seat and center of the newspaper-reading industry. In the brief period of afternoon warmth the benches were filled with the unemployed, all reading newspapers. By sitting down, Dave had furnished them with an opportunity to study his face at their leisure and compare it with the photographs. Behind him stood a trash-receptacle made in the semblance of tree trunk with plenty of knots. He hastily reached into it and, getting a newspaper, opened it up and buried his face behind it.

He became absorbed in the latest account of what the newspapers were beginning to call “the taxicab mystery.” It was only a rehash of things that he knew already, but a man never fails to find interest in a story of which he is himself the hero—or the villain. Then there were the photographs. Where do the photographs spring from when there is a market for them? There were four in this paper. Two were snaps that he recognized as having been found in his own bureau; the third was a cabinet photograph he had given to a girl in Brooklyn—how quick she had been to sell it to the press!—the fourth he couldn’t identify, though it was clearly a picture of himself.

He was studying this when a man dropped into the seat beside him, and he heard a husky, drawling voice close to his ear, “What the hell you doing here?”

Dave jerked his head around with a gone look. His face immediately hardened when he saw—Pompey. He was dressed in blue today, with an ultramarine scarf, and a black derby of expensive make. A perfect little gentleman with an ivory mask and sinister pale eyes. His eyes turned in the mask like mechanical eyes, empty as glass. A cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth.

“What are **you** doing here?” countered Dave.

“Told you I’d be seeing you,” muttered Pompey. He spoke out of a little hole in the corner of his lips. The cigarette in the opposite corner was undisturbed.

“Yeah?” said Dave, as Pompey himself might have said it. “Want me to think you just busted into me here?”

“Yeah!” said Pompey. “Think what you like. The dumb cops never thought of that house on Forty-eighth Street, but me, I don’t take no chances. I had a guy there, watching the door, and when you went in he phoned me. When you come out I followed you here.”

“What for?” asked Dave.

“Just to look out for you?”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah! . . . Did you find that paper I wanted?”

“No.”

“Did she?”

“No. I asked her.”

“Too bad,” said Pompey, with an evil inflection. “I didn’t, neither.”

“What was in it?” asked Dave, looking simple.

“If you don’t know already, don’t crowd your luck,” said Pompey.

There was a silence.

The pale eyes turned in Dave’s direction, and a spark shot out of them like the flicker of an adder’s tongue. “You heard what I told you this morning,” said Pompey.

“Sure.”

“What you trying to do, then? Commit suicide?”

“Don’t be foolish!”

“Sitting here with all these bums reading their papers, and looking at you. Any one of them would sell their mother to the police for a square meal. Why don’t you get a hideout?”

“Got no place to go,” muttered Dave.

“No friends?”

“I won’t drag them into this.”

“Cheese! Give me the common people!” said Pompey, disgustedly.

“What do you suggest?” asked Dave.

Pompey glanced at him through narrowed lids, and looked at his wrist watch. “I got to fly down to Baltimore at four to see a guy,” he said, carelessly. “You can come with me if you want, and I’ll give you a hideout there.”

“Haven’t got enough money,” grumbled Dave.

“I’ll pay.”

“The airport would be watched.”

“Sure! Leave that to me.”

Dave looked at him appraisingly, and said nothing.

Pompey made the sound that passed for a laugh with him. “You’re thinking I’m a dangerous guy,” he said, coolly. “And you’re not far wrong, neither. But I wouldn’t harm you as long as you was playing my game, would I? It suits me to keep you out of jail, and I’m willing to spend a little money on it.”

“I got business here,” said Dave.

“Meaning the girl. Sure I been nuts on a doll myself. I know how it is. But you can’t keep out of the hands of the cops. You’re too simple. If they take you, it’s good-night for you . . . and for the girl, too, if maybe she’s fallen for you,” he added, shrewdly.

Dave averted his face. It was set and hard with pain.

“Don’t you know,” Pompey went on, “that when a general alarm is sent out for a guy, the cops always watches the public squares? Because when a guy is hard up against it, he just naturally sits down on a park bench to try to dope things out.”

Dave glanced at him, startled, and said nothing.

“Look over there by the Fortieth Street side,” said Pompey out of the corner of his mouth. “There’s one of them now. It’s lucky you have me with you. Alongside the little house by the entrance, talking to the sweeper.”

Following the direction of his glance, Dave saw another specimen of the type he had come to dread, the hefty, well-dressed, hard-faced man who appeared to have nothing to do, but whose sharp glance gave the lie to his idleness. He left the park sweeper and walked slowly along the path with his hands behind him, studying the benchers on either side.

“Take him about two minutes to get here,” remarked Pompey, meaningly.

There was a struggle visible in Dave’s face. Then he made up his mind. “Okay,” he said, recklessly. “Let’s go!”

They went out by one of the Forty-second Street entrances, and hailed the first passing taxi.

“Pennsylvania Station,” said Pompey. “Seventh Avenue entrance.”

Chapter XIII

ROLLING along in the taxi, Dave, when he thought Pompey was looking the other way, studied him warily; and Pompey, when he thought himself unobserved, narrowed his eyes and looked at Dave. Each had his own thoughts. When their eyes chanced to meet, each glanced quickly out of his respective window.

Dave nodded towards their driver. "This guy might recognize me," he said, softly.

Pompey lifted one shoulder slightly. It was a trick he had. "Ain't but one in a thousand is quick enough to recognize a guy in passing," he said, coolly. "If we meet that one we're out of luck."

Quarter of an hour later they were on their way to the Newark airport in one of the big cars operated by the aviation company. They had the rear seat to themselves. Dave was now wearing a pair of black-rimmed glasses, and smoking a cigarette in a long holder à la Edgar Wallace. Pompey had bought these articles in the main corridor of the station.

"It's them little things changes a guy's appearance," he said. "They wouldn't fool your friends none, but it makes you look different from the photographs."

"I reckon you've had a lot of experience," said Dave.

"Never needed no disguise myself," said Pompey, dryly. "I depend on something else again."

He lifted his right arm to adjust his cuff, and Dave out of the corner of his eye caught a glimpse of the pistol barrel hidden inside.

At the edge of the flying-field stood a neat building containing waiting-rooms, a lunch-room, newsstand, and so on. Along in front of it ran a fence with a gateway in the middle, and the different planes rolled up in front of the gateway one after another and took on their passengers. For Montreal; for Boston; for Buffalo. At one side of the gate stood an official, taking tickets; at the other side a stony-faced man in a melton overcoat and trim derby, apparently waiting for somebody.

“There’s the dick,” whispered Dave. “I told you he’d be here.”

“Keep away from the windows,” said Pompey, “and watch me fool him.”

The plane for Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington rolled up and stopped in front of the gateway. Pompey glanced at the waiting-room clock. “We got three minutes yet,” he muttered out of the corner of his mouth. “Hold back a bit.”

Pompey strolled to the newsstand and bought a paper, paused to light a cigarette in a nonchalant manner. Dave, a little pale with excitement, watched the clock and sweated gently.

When it marked one minute before the hour Pompey whispered: “Let’s go! Keep a little way behind me and look natural. It’s a simple trick, but I never seen it fail yet.”

They issued out of the waiting-room. The detective’s attention was immediately attracted to Pompey, who walked up to him with a well-feigned air of agitation, saying, “Are you a police officer?”

He replied, staring, “What is it to you?”

Pompey said, rapping Dave’s picture in the newspaper with his forefinger: “I just seen this guy in the waiting-room. Dave Westover. He’s watching you through the window.”

The detective’s reaction was instantaneous. He walked rapidly towards the waiting-room, overlooking Dave altogether. Pompey handed his tickets to the official, and he and Dave entered the plane and took their seats. The door was closed, the engine roared, and the plane began to run along the ground like a gigantic insect before taking to the air. Pompey permitted the ivory mask to crack in a brief smile.

They seated themselves, one on each side of the narrow aisle. The plane left the ground, and Dave for the first time saw space beneath him. He viewed his usual habitat as seen by a soaring bird. Wider and wider as they rose; the Hackensack meadows, the towers of Manhattan, the Hudson and the distant sea. Then south like a migrating bird over the checkered farms of New Jersey and the long lines of suburbs clinging to the different railways.

Conversation was impossible, owing to the noise of the engines. Pompey handed the newspaper to Dave and proceeded to go to sleep. Dave’s attention was divided between the sweeping panorama below and the yellow

face of his companion across the aisle. Even in sleep Pompey's face remained masklike; slightly inhuman. Dave did a lot of thinking.

Three-quarters of an hour later they descended at the Camden airport. Pompey, to all appearances, was still sleeping soundly, and Dave, with a wary look in his face, quietly left the cabin with the Philadelphia passengers. He slipped into the men's wash-room off the waiting-room, and stood with bent head, tensely listening for the plane to start again.

Moments passed. There was evidently some delay in starting, and Dave began to sweat again. He felt trapped in the little room. Finally the door opened and Pompey looked in. His eyes were blank, his face smooth, the cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth.

"Come on," he drawled. "They're holding the plane for you."

Dave followed him with a hangdog look. Pompey was for making out it was an accident, but Dave insisted on bringing things into the open.

"I'd be best off by myself," he said.

"Yeah," said Pompey, dryly. "Even the Philadelphia police couldn't help but run you in. You advertise yourself on every corner! . . . Might as well get as far as Baltimore, anyhow," he added, smoothly. "Your fare's paid."

"All right," said Dave. "But in Baltimore we part company, see?"

"Suits me," said Pompey, indifferently. "I don't want to wet-nurse you."

An hour later they came down, in Logan Field, Baltimore. It had become dark. Pompey was the first out of the cabin. There were several cars standing outside the waiting-room, and Dave followed Pompey to what he thought was the car furnished by the company to transport passengers into town. It was a big, luxurious limousine of a somewhat old-fashioned model.

Not until they had started did Dave perceive that the rest of the Baltimore passengers were making for another car. It was then too late to do anything about it. Dave said nothing, but sat back in his corner, watching Pompey closely without appearing to.

The glass that separated them from the chauffeur's seat was pushed back, and Pompey carried on a desultory conversation with the driver, whom he addressed as Claude. Claude was a blond youth with thick neck and chunky shoulders. He had oddly high, wide cheek bones, and little eyes almost lost in their sockets. Like Pompey, he was dressed with an eye to a smart effect, but the Baltimore product was a much less finished specimen.

“How’s things?” asked Pompey.

“Rotten. We got a tip last night we had to close.”

“For how long?”

“How do I know? Until the stink dies down, I reckon.”

“Then you ain’t busy tonight.”

“No.”

Like all airports, Logan Field was remote from the center of town. Dave could only catch brief glimpses of their surroundings when they passed under a light—bare fields, a suburban village, a factory, a string of freight-cars. The road was smooth under their wheels, and they passed a good many other cars. They appeared to be following the main highway to town. They drove fast.

Suddenly they turned sharply and began bumping. Dave watched Pompey narrowly. The latter was leaning over against his corner, smoking a cigarette with the greatest nonchalance. They passed under no more lights, and saw no cars.

The limousine stopped, and Dave became taut all over. He could see nothing outside but the dim shapes of trees alongside the road. The driver muttered something about his feed line being stopped, and slipped from under the wheel.

“Cheese!” drawled Pompey. “Why can’t you tune up before you start out?”

Dave’s eyes were fastened on Pompey. Suddenly the door beside him was jerked open and he involuntarily turned his head. The instant he did so, Pompey sprang like a cat, jerked the blackjack out of his side pocket, and struck Dave over the head.

Dave, half-stunned, fought back blindly. He tried to yell for assistance, but a hand was clapped over his mouth. The man outside dragged him out of the car. His hat fell off. Pompey, following, struck blow after blow on his skull.

Dave went limp in the arms of the man who held him. They flung him back on the floor of the car, and tossed his hat after him. The driver slid under the wheel and started his engine. Pompey went back to his corner, with the cigarette still hanging out of the corner of his mouth. The car moved on.

Chapter XIV

IRVIN BEEKMAN was dressing for dinner in his gracious old house on North Washington Square. His bedroom was a large, square apartment with two big windows filled with little rectangular panes. It conveyed a sense of the serene old-fashioned luxury that has almost disappeared nowadays. Though the house possessed a modern heating-plant there was a fire of cannel coal burning in the grate because Beekman liked to look at it. He looked around him now with eyes full of quiet pleasure.

“How I love this house!” he said.

His wife answered him through the open door of the dressing-room which filled the middle of that floor. Her bedroom lay in the front of the house. Her voice was querulous. “And I have to dress in this poky hole! I haven’t even a boudoir where I can receive my women friends!”

“You have one of the most beautiful bedrooms in town,” he replied, good-humoredly. “With the Park outside, and sunshine in the windows all winter.”

“Nobody in our position lives so far downtown. If you must have a house, it ought to be in the Sixties or Seventies.”

“Those narrow streets are dark as the tomb, my dear!”

“Well, an apartment is smarter, anyway. There is no lack of sunlight in a penthouse.”

“Penthouses are so new!” he complained, smiling. “The increment of four generations is stored in this old shebang! My great-grandfather built it. When my dad lost his money and it had to be sold, there was weeping and gnashing of teeth in Gideon! It was that which spurred me on to make some money of my own. And I bought it back!”

He was answered by an impatient exclamation from the next room. “You won’t be serious about anything!”

There was a discreet tap on the door from the hall, and Croyden, the Beekman butler, entered. “If you please, Mr. Beekman, there’s a gentleman calling.”

“Somebody calling at this hour?” said Beekman, in surprise. “Who is it?”

“A Mr. Mann, sir.”

Beekman was tying his tie before the mirror. “I don’t know any Manns,” he said, calmly. Then his expression changed. “You said a gentleman, Croyden?”

“Well, he is expensively dressed, sir,” answered Croyden, in distress. “It’s hard to tell nowadays.”

“What does he look like?”

“A dark person, sir. Italian-looking. Fat.”

Beekman’s face turned red with anger. “Send him away,” he said, quietly. “Tell him if he has anything to say to me he can write it.”

“Very well, sir.”

Beekman became thoughtful. “Wait a minute,” he said. “I’ll tell him myself.” He picked up a smoking-jacket and slipped it on over his dress shirt.

“What’s the matter, dear?” came the voice from the dressing-room.

“I am honored by a call from Mr. Jim Mann!” said Beekman, sarcastically. “I’m going downstairs to put him out.”

“Jim Mann!” gasped Mrs. Beekman. “Oh, be careful, Irvin! Be careful! . . . Wait a minute!”

Beekman was already on the stairs. “Where is he?” he asked Croyden, who was at his heels.

“I scarcely knew what to do with him,” stammered Croyden. “A . . . a person like that. I showed him in the library. If I had known it was **Jim** Mann I should have closed the door in his face, sir!”

“He might have sent a bullet through it,” said Beekman, with dry humor. “I should have been sorry for that. It’s a good door.”

“Shall you . . . shall you require my assistance, sir?”

“I think not, Croyden.”

The butler, with a relieved face, continued on to the basement. The library was under Beekman’s bedroom. He paused on the threshold. Jim Mann, wearing a black overcoat with a rich sealskin collar, was standing

with a negligent elbow on the mantelpiece, and a smile on his thick lips. The man's infernal aplomb took Beekman back for a moment. They surveyed each other without speaking. Then Beekman said, dryly:

"So this is what you're like!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Mann, with a good-humored chuckle. "You're a good guy, Beekman. You and me ought to be working together."

"Thanks."

"Mind if I sit down?" asked Mann.

"Just as you please."

Mann looked around and chose the most comfortable chair. "Better sit, yourself," he said. "It's more friendly."

"Thanks, I prefer to stand," said Beekman. "What do you want?"

"Me, I don't go to see no guys no more," said Mann, with cool arrogance. "I don't have to. I send for them to see me, and they're damn glad to get the chance. But I knew you was a proud man, and I come to see you to save your face."

"Well!" said Beekman with assumed surprise. "Decent of you! Did you think I'd come if you sent for me?"

"No. I knew you wouldn't. And that would have been too bad."

"For you or for me?"

"For you!"

"Indeed! What's the object of your visit?"

Mann looked around the room with a good-humored sneer. "Swell place you got here. I never seen anything just like it before. Old-timey!"

"Get on with your business," said Beekman.

Mann's face hardened. The heavy brows drew down, the glittering eyes fastened on Beekman's face like those of a bird of prey. "I got you sewed up, Beekman," he said harshly.

"What's this?" cried Beekman.

"I own over fifty-five hundred shares of your bank."

"You lie!" cried Beekman, flushing red.

"Yeah? It'll all come out tomorrow morning."

“Stuart told me only today that . . .”

“Yeah, Stuart,” said Mann, with an evil chuckle. “You was foolish to leave it to him. He has the proxies for my shares all made out in his own name.”

All the blood left Beekman’s face. He dropped involuntarily into a chair. It was a hideous shock, and the hardest thing to bear was that he had to take it in the presence of his enemy. His chin dropped on his breast. It was not his loss which crushed him, but the fact that he had been betrayed. “Stuart!” he murmured, incredulously; “**Stuart!**”

Mann’s eyes were fastened on his face, eagerly and greedily sucking up his triumph. The thick lips moved as if they were rolling a cigar.

Beekman’s confusion was only momentary. He jumped up with a laugh, took a cigarette from a box on the table, and lit it with a steady hand. “If you and Stuart have got it all fixed up together,” he said, coolly, “what do you come to me for?”

Mann looked disappointed. “Aah!” he growled. “Stuart ain’t good enough for me. He’s a small-town banker.”

“You’re a little late in finding that out, aren’t you?”

“Cheese! I can get plenty better men,” said Mann, coolly.

“What do you want of me?”

Mann did not answer immediately. He took a cigar out of his pocket, looked at it, and put it back again. His face smoothed out. He smiled. There was a world of cunning behind it. He said, slowly: “My policy is, when I meet a good strong guy, I try to make a dicker with him before I fight him. Saves a heap of money sometimes.”

“Well?”

“How would it suit you to go on being president of the Chambers National?”

Beekman’s face hardened like steel. “So,” he said, “that’s it. You’re ready to kick Stuart downstairs now, after he’s done your dirty work!”

Mann shrugged. “What’s that to me? I ain’t beholden to Stuart any, nor to you, neither. I do what I like!”

“Stuart has the proxies now.”

“Aah, we can make out new ones with a later date. Or I can have my men present at the meeting to vote for you in person.”

Before Beekman could answer, a rustling sound at the door caused both men to turn their heads. Cora Beekman floated into the room, tall, blond, willow slender. Coming direct from the ministrations of her maid, she brought an air of fresh loveliness with her that seemed magical. She wore an all-revealing gown of soft white satin without any touch of color. Pearls were hung around her neck. Both men, being men, were affected by the vision. Beekman’s face softened, and Mann’s hardened. Into the latter’s eyes came a look of rapacity partly veiled by his drooping lids.

Cora bore herself with a consciously unconscious air suggesting that she knew precisely what effect she was creating. “Oh!” she said to Beekman, with charming surprise. “I didn’t know there was some one with you. I’ll fly!”

“Don’t go!” said Mann, in a purring voice.

Cora’s eyes darted from one man to the other, trying to read what was happening. “Why, Mr. Mann! What a surprise to find **you** here! Nice to see you again!” She swam towards him with outstretched hand.

Beekman abruptly turned his back on them. Mann glanced at Beekman covertly, and took her hand. An insolent desire blazed up in his eyes. Cora’s eyes skated away.

“Say, you’ve got them all beat!” he purred.

Cora through her lashes made sure that her husband’s back was turned. Suddenly she gave Mann the depths of her lovely eyes—a glance to drive men mad—and quickly lowered them again. Then she abruptly turned her back on him. “Would you like a drink?” she asked, addressing Beekman.

“No, thank you,” he said, without looking at her.

Cora looked hurt—this was for Mann’s benefit. “There’s nothing wrong, is there?” she asked, glancing from one to the other.

Mann laughed comfortably. “Wrong!” he said. “That’s funny, that is. Me and Beekman’s got a little business to talk over, that’s all.”

“Business!” said Cora. “Then I’ll run!”

“Don’t you do it,” said Mann. “Stay and talk on my side. I’m putting the chance of making money in Beekman’s way.” He wagged his hands back and forth. “A whole lot of money! All the money there is!”

“Oh, Irvin!” murmured Cora, in a tone that forced him to look at her. “Oh, Irvin!” That was all. She stood before him for a moment, unspeakably lovely and wistful, while the man looked at her painfully and hungrily. Then she went quickly out.

Beekman looked moodily on the ground. Mann’s eyes followed Cora, full of a shameless, carnal amusement. His look said as plainly as if the words had been spoken: “I may not be used to high society, but I got **that** doll’s number all right!”

A silence followed Cora’s departure. Both men were listening to her running up stairs. Her perfume lingered in the room. Finally Mann said, meaningly:

“Where would you be with her if you lost your job?”

“Damn you! leave her out of it!” said Beekman, tensely.

“I’ll leave you and her to talk it over,” said Mann, smoothly. “You can call me up.”

“Take your answer with you!” said Beekman, violently, but not loud enough to carry upstairs. “The hell with you! Do you hear? The hell with you!”

Mann recoiled, snarling. “Aah! you’re a fool! You got no money. You got to work for somebody!”

“All right! I’ll choose my master!”

“You won’t get no other job. Your rich friends will rat on you when you’re down. Just like Stuart did. All men are the same!”

“All right! I’ll fight alone! For decency’s sake!”

“Aah, boloney!” sneered Mann. “Ain’t nobody here but us!”

“All right! I’m speaking to ease my own mind! You dirty wop! You thug! You murderer! Get out of my house!”

Beekman took a step forward as he spoke. With a movement so quick the eye could scarcely follow it, Mann whipped a gun out of the pocket of his overcoat and pointed it. At sight of it Beekman stopped short; his face broke up; he laughed harshly.

“True to form!” he said.

There was a moment’s silence. A new and powerful look came into Beekman’s eyes. “Go ahead and shoot me!” he said, more quietly. “That

would win my fight for me, though I passed out of the picture! Shoot me! You couldn't get away with that!"

Mann, with the gun in his hand, was cool and sure again. "I'll plead self-defense," he said, grinning.

Beekman turned his back on him, careless of the gun. He crossed the room and pressed a button alongside the fireplace. Croyden must have been waiting close outside, for he appeared almost instantly in the doorway. The butler was pale and shaken, but his eyes were steady.

"Croyden," said Beekman, casually, "I want you to take note that this man has a gun in his hand. I want you to take note that I am not touching him, nor threatening him in any way."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go to the front door, set it open, and come back here so that the way will be quite open for our friend to retire."

Croyden disappeared. Beekman and Mann watched each other. Losing confidence in his gun, Mann began to waver. In order to conceal that fact he scowled like a gorilla.

The butler returned to the doorway. "The front door is open, sir."

"Step inside out of his way," said Beekman. "Now get out!" he said, crisply, to Mann. "Or shoot me if you'd rather."

Pressed against the wall, the butler watched them, as pale as death.

With his little eyes darting from one to another, and his lips drawn back like an animal's, Mann backed out of the room, gun in hand. He backed down the length of the hall, the other two following him slowly. He disappeared through the door.

Beekman closed the door and leaned against it, laughing a little wildly. "Just like what you read in the newspapers!" he said.

Croyden, white-faced, stared at him as if he had become demented. Beekman, seeing his face, laughed afresh.

"Can I . . . can I get you anything, sir?" stammered the butler.

Beekman, sobering, clapped a friendly hand on his shoulder. "You're a good fellow, Croyden," he said. "The bravest man is the one who sees it through when his knees are knocking together. I shan't forget that you stood by me."

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“Now go downstairs and say nothing about what happened.”

Neither man noticed the blond head peeping around the turn of the stairs. Croyden disappeared below, and Beekman, returning to the library, dropped into a chair and pressed his head between his hands.

Chapter XV

DAVE WESTOVER came to himself in the dark. He discovered that he was lying naked on a mattress, with a sheet pulled over him. The place was warm. Above his head was a mysterious pale oblong that he puzzled over for a long time. It was just a little lighter than the surrounding blackness.

Getting out of bed, groggily at first, but gradually becoming stronger, he felt around the walls of the room. He stumbled against a table, a bureau, a chair, and finally came to a door. It was locked. Feeling up and down the wall alongside, his hand struck an electric switch. He pressed a button and his prison was flooded with light.

It was a small common-looking bedroom, furnished with what appeared to be the cast-off articles of a household—a scarred iron bed, a rickety little table, a cheap bureau, two broken chairs. There was no window and but the one door. The oblong overhead resolved itself into a scuttle in the roof filled with corrugated glass. The room looked as if it had not been used in some time. There were no personal belongings visible. Table and bureau were thick with dust. A swift search soon satisfied Dave that his clothes had been taken away.

Like any creature finding itself trapped, he instantly set to work to discover a way out. First the door. It was a heavy affair of oak, and it opened inward; no hope of bursting it out. In any case, if he tried to smash his way out, the people who had put him in there would come and beat him over the head again. His hands were empty.

This put the thought of a weapon into his mind. He looked around him. The table! It was a small antique table, strongly built, but rickety after years of service. Dave turned it upside down, and standing on it, wrenched off one of the legs without making too much noise. This provided him with a good hard wood club about three feet long. He stood in the middle of the room, grasping it in both hands and trying it, a man reduced to the simplest elements.

He looked up at the scuttle. It covered a low trunk in the middle of the ceiling, and was hooked down at one end. Dave planted a chair on the bed

and gingerly climbed on it. He unhooked the scuttle, and gripping the edge of the trunk, drew himself up, lifting the frame as he rose. He climbed out on the flat roof.

The November air struck a chill to his bare skin, but he couldn't stop for that. Moving quickly to keep up his circulation, a hasty survey showed him that he was upon the roof of a large three-story mansion facing on an old-fashioned street with trees and other old houses with mansard roofs across the way. At one side there was a yard with a driveway in from the street; at the other side the blank brick wall of a modern building towering over his head.

He was soon satisfied that there was no way of escape from the roof. Neither could he call for help from passers-by in the street below. The people inside the house would get to him first. But there was another scuttle in the roof, not far from the one he had climbed out of. Dave returned to his prison, procured the club, and the sheet from the bed; and climbed out on the roof again.

Using the club as a lever, he wrenched the hook of the other scuttle from the old wood without difficulty, and lay the frame back on the roof. He peered into the well of blackness below, and spoke softly: "Anybody there?" No answer; no sound of movement. Tying a corner of the sheet around the hinge of the scuttle, he dropped it into the hole, and let himself down, gripping the club between his teeth. He landed on a bare floor.

He found the door and a switch beside it, and turned on lights. It was a room similar to the one he had left, and must have adjoined it. This room was completely empty; the floor was thickly covered with dust. He saw the key in the door, and a breath of blessed relief escaped him. He switched off the lights again.

Opening the door with infinite care, he peeped out. He found himself looking into the central hall of the big old house, with the top of the stairs at his left. It was dimly lighted by a single bulb in a wall bracket, and comfortably carpeted. The house was occupied, then. There were doors all around the hall, all closed. Behind some of those doors there must be clothes. One door towards the front showed a crack of light beneath it. Dave's face hardened when he saw it. He crept towards it, grasping the club.

Halfway to the door, he heard voices approaching from below, and hastily retreated into the empty room, closing the door and putting his ear to the crack. Two persons came up the stairs and, passing the door, opened a

door in front of the building and closed it behind them. Judging from the sound, it was the door of the lighted room.

Dave waited a moment, and ventured out again. He turned towards the stairs. Since there were at least two of them, and perhaps armed, he had no intention of troubling these newcomers. But a murmur of conversation arrested him. After all, it was important for him to learn what kind of house this was and what he was up against. He stole back to the lighted room. He opened the door of the dark room adjoining, so that he could slip in if necessary. He put his ear to the door of the lighted room.

The first words he heard caused him to forget everything else. It was the clipped, husky voice of Pompey speaking. "Walter Wrenn, the guy's name was; Spider Wrenn they used to call him; a little guy. It was Rudy had the job of stopping him, and he balled it all up."

"How?" asked another voice. Dave recognized the Maryland accents of the blond Claude.

"Rudy tailed the guy to his wife's flat. He found him sleeping there in a chair, and stuck a knife in his back."

"Why didn't he smoke the guy?"

"Because his wife was sleeping in the next room. Cheese! What a dumb play!"

"Why? Didn't it stop the guy?"

"Sure it stopped him. But Rudy went away and left him there."

"What's the difference?"

"Because them two women, Wrenn's wife and his daughter, were the only two people in New York who knew him, see? He had just lately come there. If Rudy had smoked him anywheres outside, and just left him lay, there wouldn't have been no trouble. He wouldn't have been identified. He left him in the only place where he could be identified."

"But he wasn't identified."

"That was just because the girl didn't want no fuss. She got her fellow to carry out the stiff and dump it in the street. It's no thanks to Rudy he wasn't identified. That guy's gone yellow. He's sniffing snow. He washed out on this job absolutely."

"How?"

“Wrenn had the affidavit on him when he croaked, and Rudy never found it.”

“How do you know he had it?”

“Because I searched Wrenn’s room while Rudy was tailing him, and it wasn’t there. He had it inside his hat. When I put it to him Rudy had to admit he forgot to look in his hat. That guy is cocoo.”

“Did the police get it?”

“Nah! The hat was stuffed inside the coat of the policeman whose neck was broke. Well, I got good connections at Headquarters. I hooked up with a guy who was present when the dead cop was brought in and laid out there and searched. He told me how they found the hat and opened it up, and there wasn’t nothing inside it. Either the girl got the affidavit or this guy Westover.”

“Well, he ain’t got it on him, that’s certain,” said Claude, with a laugh. “There’s his clothes.”

“I frisked him twice now,” said Pompey. “I thought maybe she give it to him today. . . . Well, she has it, then. I’ll search that flat tomorrow.”

Hearing this, Dave clenched his teeth until the muscles stood out in lumps on his jaw.

“But first-off I got to see Rudy,” Pompey said, in a casual, deadly voice.

“What!” said the startled Claude.

“That guy is dangerous. He’s turned yellow. He’s cracked up. I got to put him out before he does harm. He sleeps at the Darius Hotel on Bleecker Street.”

“Gee, Pomp, what a guy you are!” murmured Claude, in accents of awe.

Dave could hear Pompey’s voice thicken with gratified vanity. “Me, I’ll never crack up! I got no nerves. Nerves was left out of me. And I got a skin so thick nothing can get under it!”

There was a brief silence, then Claude asked, “What for did you bring Westover down to Balto for?”

Dave pressed closer to hear the answer.

“Aah, he’s a dunkhead!” grumbled Pompey. “I’m sick of nursing him. Me, I got something better to do. I’m going to put him where the police will never find him. I couldn’t let him be found anywheres around New York, or

the girl would raise hell, and it would all be spread in the papers. So I brought him down here.”

“You can’t smoke him in there,” said Claude, nervously, “or the niggers downstairs would hear. And if you put a knife in him . . . the blood . . .

“Cheese! There’s other ways of putting a guy out,” said Pompey, coolly. “A cord around his neck, twisted. I’ll show you the trick. We can both be holding him down. No noise, and no mess after. We’ll tie him up in a sheet with weights inside—Got anything for weights?”

“Plenty of stuff in the cellar.”

“Okay. We’ll carry him to some bridge, and heave him over into deep water. He’ll never be found.”

“Okay, Colonel. There’s plenty bridges round Baltimore.”

“I’ll show you how to make a noose . . .”

Dave waited for no more. He shivered as he crept away towards the stairs, and it was not because he was cold.

The sight of the key in the door of the room where he had been confined gave him an idea. He left that key where it was, but softly opening the door of the empty room adjoining, he took out the key, locked that door, and carried the key with him. Thus if his enemies, when they found he had flown, should undertake to follow him over the roof and into the empty room, they would find themselves trapped there, at least for a moment or two.

He went slowly down the stairs, peering over the rail to the floor below, and pausing often to listen. The second floor of the house was luxuriously furnished; the central hall was but dimly lighted. Instead of doors there were arched openings on either side. The rooms beyond were dark. No sound of movement reached him. From outside the house came the faint noises of the city.

Reaching the foot of the stairs, he kept on around by the rail, wary as an animal. On this floor there was but one big room on either side the hall. He saw tables covered with dustcloths. A gambling house; roulette on one side, and different-size tables for various games on the other. All dark. Dave threw the key under a sofa.

He looked down the last flight of stairs. Nobody in sight. He started down step by step. He could hear voices from below now, but muffled as if there was a door between. The lower hall was brightly lighted. There was an

opening on the right leading into a dark room. Opposite, an opening immediately at the foot of the stairs, and a lighted room within it.

In order to avoid showing himself in this opening, he went over the stair rail, and dropped noiselessly to the floor below. Snaking along the floor, he looked around the lowest step. From this point he commanded a view of part of a restaurant or dining-room filled with small tables. The room was empty, and only one table showed signs of having been used lately.

While Dave looked, a young mulatto waiter came through a swing door with a tray, and started to gather up the soiled dishes. Dave crouched and gripped his club. It was the man's clothes that his eyes were fixed on covetously. However, there were two or three others behind the swing door; those were the voices he had heard. Any unusual noise would bring the gunmen springing downstairs. Dave sank back, gritting his teeth helplessly, and the waiter carried his tray into the pantry.

While Dave crouched alongside the stairs, scowling in uncertainty, he heard a sound from below that galvanized him into action again. It was the shake of a furnace grate, a sound everybody recognizes. Under the stairs at the back he found a door. It led, as he foresaw, to a cellar stairs disappearing in the darkness below.

Softly closing the door behind him, he stole down, testing each step before trusting his weight to it. He found himself in a widespread cellar extending under the whole house. It was dark except for a single bulb hanging in front of the furnace at the far end. Under the light a heavily built white man in rough soiled clothes was shoveling ashes from under the furnace and emptying them into a can.

Dave's eyes brightened at the sight of him. Coal had not yet been put on the fire, and he had plenty of time. The wooden beams of the floor overhead were supported on square concrete pillars, and he dodged from one to another of these, always drawing closer to the furnace. Crouching, moving without a sound, a triangular furrow fixed in his forehead, and his eyes fastened on his prey, he had become a creature of pure instinct.

Straightening himself behind the last pillar, he awaited his chance. The furnace man went about his work apathetically; a middle-aged man with a heavy, dull face. The coal-bin was against the back wall under a window, and he had to make half a dozen steps with each shovelful of coal. Each time he returned for more, he presented the broad of his back to Dave, but the latter did not move; he was afraid of the clatter of the iron shovel on the

concrete floor. There was another stairway at the back leading to the kitchen. The servants could be heard moving overhead.

The man was slow in all his movements. He finally leaned his shovel against a post on the other side of the furnace, closed the door of the firebox, and adjusted the draughts. He pulled smoking materials out of his pocket, and slowly filled his pipe. When he got it going he seemed to fall into a daze, staring at nothing. At last he turned away to pick up the old sheepskin coat he had thrown down. Then Dave slipped from behind his pillar, and coming up behind him on noiseless feet, raised the club in both hands and brought it down on the man's head.

He thudded limply on the concrete without uttering a sound. Dave's face showed neither regret nor pity. Always keeping half an eye on the door at the head of the rear stairs, he started dragging the man's sweater over his head. He unlaced his shoes; he pulled off his overalls, together with the woolen trousers beneath. These he judged sufficient to keep himself warm, and he left him the rest of his clothes. The man was breathing stertorously, and Dave expected to see him open his eyes at any moment.

Dave gathered up what he had taken from him, together with his outer coat and ragged cap. A few steps at the back and a door showed how the man was accustomed to enter and leave the cellar. A minute later Dave found himself under the blessed free air of heaven. He put on the clothes.

Chapter XVI

IN the house on North Washington Square Irvin Beekman sat in his library, thinking hard. The fighting look was in his face. He was lost to his surroundings. The sound of Cora's light step on the stairs recalled him to actuality. His face turned towards the door eagerly.

She came in with a white-fur evening wrap over her arm, and a pair of long white gloves dangling. There was a half-smile on her childlike lips, her blue eyes were carefree, and she hummed snatches of a song under her breath. Laying wrap and gloves over the arm of a chair, she moved around the room, making believe to put things in order. She appeared not to look at her husband.

Beekman followed her with eyes full of appreciation, but wary. He had been married to her for twelve years; he knew her pretty well; and he suspected what this seeming gayety was leading up to.

"We'll have to start in fifteen minutes," she said, lightly. "Hadn't you better go up and finish dressing?"

"Must we go to that damned dinner?" said Beekman.

She laughed. "It would be a little late to decline now, wouldn't it?"

"Same old people! Same old food!"

"Would it be any better staying home?" she asked, casually.

He suddenly pounded the arm of his chair. "You are right!" he said, decisively. "We'll go, and we'll brazen it out!"

Cora made believe not to hear the last remark. She came and stood in front of him, slim, white, and ravishing; looking at herself in the mirror over the fireplace, turning her head this way and that, patting her shining hair. "Like my new dress?" she asked, offhand.

"Lovely!"

"You're not looking at it!"

He didn't answer.

She moved to the table behind him, and getting a cigarette from the silver box, presented it delicately to his lips, and afterwards lighted it. Beekman inhaled deeply. Cora perched on the arm of his chair, flung an arm around his shoulders, and couched her cheek in his hair. Beekman drew her hard against him.

“That’s nice,” she whispered.

There was a silence.

“It’s all right between you and Jim Mann, isn’t it?” she said, with an innocent air.

“You know very well that it’s **not** all right,” he said, quietly. “Why make pretenses with me?”

Cora jerked herself away from the chair. Her beautiful face broke up like a child’s, and angry tears came into her eyes. “Why don’t you say at once that I’m a liar!” she cried. “You’re always hinting it!”

Beekman looked into the cold fireplace. “Won’t make things any better for us to quarrel,” he said.

“Why don’t you tell me what happened?” she demanded. “Or is it none of my business?”

“It is most decidedly your business,” he said, gravely.

“What kind of a proposition did Mann make you?”

“He has secured control of our bank,” said Beekman. “He came to offer me the presidency.”

Cora allowed her face to clear beautifully. “Well!” she cried, “that’s all right, isn’t it? He couldn’t very well do anything else. Of course he wants you to be president. He’s asking a favor.”

Beekman looked at her straight and hard. “Cora, you’re no fool,” he said, quietly. “Why make out that you are?”

Tears threatened again. She stamped her foot. “There you go! Always insinuating that I have a mean and horrible nature when I don’t happen to agree with you!”

“Don’t let’s get into a wrangle,” he said, reasonably. “This is the biggest thing I was ever up against in my life. The question is, are you going to stand by me?”

“Why should I stand by you if you take a course of which I don’t approve?”

“Listen, Cora,” he said, patiently. “Would you like to see me become Jim Mann’s man? After I have sworn to break the power of that scoundrel and put him behind the bars, what would you think of me if I turned around and humbly accepted my job at his hands?”

She shrugged angrily, and pressed her lips together.

“What sort of a figure would I cut in the eyes of other men?”

“It would soon be forgotten,” she said, impatiently.

“Yes,” he muttered; “that’s the trouble with this damned world! Everything crooked is soon forgotten.”

“What did you say to him?” she demanded.

“I showed him the door.”

“Oh, you fool!” she cried, twisting her hands. “Jim Mann is riding on the crest of the wave. Nobody can stop him now! He’ll ruin you!”

“I doubt it,” said Beekman, stubbornly. “And in any case I’d sooner be ruined than ruled by him. It will be a good scrap.”

“You can’t fight a man like Jim Mann. If you get in his way he’ll simply have you shot!”

“Well, I’m not going to stop fighting him just because it’s dangerous.”

“That’s just talk!” said Cora, angrily. “Tall talk! How men like to reel it off! Jim Mann isn’t deceived by it. He’s a practical man. . . . Call him up before we go out.”

Beekman looked at her in surprise.

“Call him up!” she urged. “He’ll be expecting it. He’ll overlook what you said before. You can’t insult a practical man. He’ll laugh it off. Call him up and leave the way open.”

“Cora, you miss the point of this,” said Beekman, quietly. “It is futile to argue with a man when his back’s against the wall. He’s got to fight then, not argue. **I will not knuckle under to Jim Mann!** There’s no argument.”

Her attitude changed subtly. She glanced in the mirror and rubbed out an imaginary spot or powder on her cheek. “The shareholders’ meeting is tomorrow, isn’t it?” she asked, languidly. “When will you lose your job?”

“If the directors elect a new president tomorrow, I’ll be out tomorrow,” he said, dryly.

“Then what will you do?”

“Get another job. What the devil! I’m known. I’ve got plenty of friends!”

“Every man has plenty of friends when his star is rising,” she said, quickly. “But when he collides with a bigger star what happens to him? And where are his friends then?”

“That’s what Mann said—in slightly different words,” answered Beekman, coolly. “We’ll see who’s right. After all, decency has not been done away with.”

She cast a glance of irritation in his direction. “In the meantime I suppose we’ll be very poor,” she remarked.

He rose and approached her, smiling. “For a while, perhaps. We can stand that, can’t we?”

She evaded him. “You must go and finish dressing!”

“Give me a kiss!” he said, warmly, “and I can lick my weight in wildcats.”

She looked at him inscrutably through her lashes—but at the same time obediently raised her lips.

“That’s not much good,” he complained. “Give me a real one!”

“It’s the best I can do now,” she said, leaving him. “I don’t feel loving.”

“Cora,” he said, cajolingly, “when we started we were poor.”

“That was different,” she said, with a glance in the mirror. “I’m thirty-five years old now.”

His face changed as if she had unexpectedly stabbed him. His eyes widened; a vein stood out on his forehead. “Cora!” he said, hoarsely. “What do you mean by that?”

“Take it as you please.”

“It sounds,” he said, slowly, “as if you were suggesting that you hadn’t much time left to get another man!”

“Don’t be crude, Irvin!”

“No!” he went on, passing a hand across his face. “That couldn’t be! Not after these twelve years! I love you more now than I did in the beginning, though I would never have believed it possible then. For twelve years you’ve been letting me love you. And for twelve years you have been making me believe that you loved me. I can’t believe that you’re no more than a boarder in my house who is prepared to move as soon as the accommodations are no longer satisfactory!”

“Must you be melodramatic?” she asked, sarcastically. “It went out ages ago. Everybody is practical nowadays. They say what they think.”

“That’s what I’m doing,” he said, somberly. “What do **you** think?”

“I refuse to be catechized.”

“This is a vital matter to me. I’ve got to know where I stand.”

“There’s the telephone,” she said, delicately.

“No, by God! you’ve got to tell me plainly what’s in your mind. If Mann wins the first round, if I am downed for the moment, do you mean that you will leave me?”

A look of fear came into her face. She hesitated.

“Cora, answer me!” he cried, in a powerful voice.

“I . . . I don’t know,” she stammered.

“O God!” he groaned, “that’s answer enough!”

She was standing by the mantelpiece, with her graceful head hanging, and the toe of her satin slipper tracing a pattern in the rug. Half raising her head and turning it, she looked at him as she knew how to do, wistful, passionate, maddeningly seductive. “Irvin,” she murmured, “am I not worth keeping?”

He did not melt to that look now. “I’ve got to deal with Mann first,” he said harshly; and left the room.

Cora’s face broke up. She looked like a beautiful fury then. Her eyes darted insanely this way and that, longing to smash and destroy. But she caught them in the mirror and was frightened by what she saw. A beauty of thirty-five couldn’t afford it. She quieted down, and fetched her compact to repair the damage.

When she heard her husband moving about overhead she went to the telephone. The instrument in the library was on a private wire. She quietly

gave a number, and when she got an answer spoke close to the transmitter:

“I couldn’t do anything with him. He’s like a madman.” She listened to a communication over the wire, and said: “All right. Tomorrow afternoon.”

Chapter XVII

A DOOR in the back fence let Dave into an alley, and the alley in time brought him to a street with trolley cars running up and down and an occasional store sandwiched among the dwellings. A sign on the corner informed him that it was Fremont Avenue, but that meant nothing to him. He turned in the direction of the brightest lights.

One of his first acts was to search through the pockets of his borrowed clothes. They yielded a partly used packet of cheap tobacco, a box of safety matches, and various odds and ends that were of no use whatever to him. Not a cent of money.

A mirror in the window of a drug store caught his eyes, and he paused to survey himself with a rueful look. Ragged cloth cap; worn leatherette jacket with a sheepskin lining; dirty brown trousers ragged at the bottoms, and clumsy workman's shoes. However, it was a pretty good disguise for a wanted man. In order to improve it, Dave pulled a lock of hair from under the brim of the cap, and let it blow in his eyes.

A young lad with a vacant eye came gangling along the sidewalk, and Dave stopped him. "Say, fellow," he said, "where's the railway station?"

The lad stared. "Railway station! Which one?"

"Oh, anything you've got," said Dave, cheerfully. "Trains to New York preferred."

"Say, you must be a stranger here!"

"You've guessed it!" said Dave, dramatically. "Alone in Baltimore!"

"Union Station's clear across town. Take a car down to the center and transfer North on Calvert."

"Much obliged, pal. Unfortunately, I lack a dime!"

"What good is a railway train to you if you ain't got carfare."

"I'll tell you," said Dave, confidentially. "I just like to look at the trains. It's my hobby!"

"Say, you feel pretty good, don't you?"

“Sure! So would you if you had just escaped being strangled. By the neck, see? Cllk! Just like that! Gee! it’s good to be breathing!”

With a frightened face the lad moved away crabwise, his head over his shoulder. “Say, I think you’re loony!” he whimpered. “Leave me alone!”

Dave went on, laughing. The only thing that troubled him was hunger. When he passed a bakery or a lunch-room he turned away his head.

He reached the station at last. A sign informed him that an express for New York was due to leave in a few minutes, but a ticket-taker guarded the stairway that led down to the platform. Dave quietly set about to explore the station. He discovered that the baggage-room on the floor below opened directly on the tracks. There were only two baggage-handlers on duty at this hour. Choosing a moment when they were both engaged, he slipped across the baggage-room and gained the platform. When the train came in he boarded the smoker.

Upon the conductor, when he came through for tickets, Dave exerted all his eloquence. “I was kidnapped in New York and carried down to Baltimore,” he said. “All my clothes were taken from me, and my money and everything. I had to knock a guy out to get clothes. That’s why I look like this.”

“Yeah?” said the conductor, dryly. “That’s a new one. You ought to be writing fiction, fellow.” He passed on.

Dave was thrown off at the first stop an hour later. “You’ve had near sixty miles’ ride at the company’s expense,” said the conductor. “The story was worth it.”

“Much obliged,” said Dave. “Truth is stranger than fiction.”

The town proved to be Newark, Delaware. It appeared to have gone to bed by this time, and the only life that Dave could find centered about an all-night restaurant on the main street. He hung about the door, looking receptive. He couldn’t bring himself to the point of begging but he hoped that somebody might offer him a meal. The majority of the customers were motorists. The cars passing up and down bore the license plates of various states, and Dave judged that he was on a main motor route. Having in mind that Pompey might well pass in one of the cars, he pulled down his cap and turned up his collar.

A small blue sedan, wanting paint, stopped in front of the restaurant, and three men got out, all young or youngish, and all looking a little wall-eyed. One said:

“Where hell are we?”

Another replied, “Damfino.”

The third said, with an air of dignified surprise—he was as tall as a stork and had to bend down to address his companion, “You’re driving, aren’t you?”

The driver replied, “Well, I just follow the other cars.”

They went into the restaurant without noticing Dave, and took a table near the door. They were in there a long time, though they ate but little. All produced pocket flasks which were indiscriminately passed back and forth with much business of toasting. They were all right as long as they remained indoors, but as soon as they struck the outer air again they went to pieces. They leaned against the show window of the restaurant, supporting each other. The one who had been driving was the worst off—a little fellow with heavy eyebrows and close-set eyes like an ape. He pursed up his lips pitifully.

“Cheese, I’m drunk!” he whimpered.

The stork bent over him protectingly. “That’s all right,” he said. “I’ll drive!”

“You’re just as drunk as me! I wouldn’t trust you!”

“I can read every word on that sign yonder.”

“Yeah, when you close one eye!”

The third member of the party began to laugh uproariously. “Well, I know I’m drunk!” he cried. “Good and drunk! No question or doubt about that!”

He suddenly began to stagger sideways. Dave caught him and leaned him carefully against his friends.

“What you waiting for?” demanded the middle one of Dave, suspiciously.

“Trying to bum a ride,” said Dave.

“Where to?”

“To New York or any way station.”

“Can you drive?”

“Sure!”

“Fellows,” said the little man, impressively, “here’s our chance! Just like . . . like manna from heaven.”

Both the others objected. “No! No! We don’t know this guy. Leave him alone.”

“He’s sober.”

“How do we know if he’s sober when we’re drunk?”

“Haven’t had a drink since yesterday,” said Dave, laughing.

“We got to get home ’fore morning,” whimpered the little man.

“He might be a gunman,” said the stork, hoarsely. “Leave him be!”

“Search me,” said Dave, holding his hands over his head. “I haven’t even got a five-cent piece on me!”

The little man gravely patted him all over. “No gun,” he said.

The third one, who was long on nose and short on chin, murmured, pensively: “We could all sit on the back seat and sleep!”

That decided them. They started for the car. “Come on, fellow!”

“I haven’t eaten since noon,” said Dave, casually.

They were all so busy climbing into the rear of the car, and quarreling over the rug that was to cover them, that nobody paid attention.

“Ah, the hell with it!” said Dave, philosophically. He slid under the wheel, turned the switch, and stepped on the starter.

At the first main crossing he stopped to get his bearings from the road signs. Wilmington was the next town on his route. The engine of the little car was running sweetly, and he pushed it for all there was in it when he could see his way ahead. His three passengers, fast asleep in the rear, troubled him with neither directions nor admonitions as to speed.

It was good to get a steering-wheel between his hands, to feel the wind on his cheek, and to eat up the miles that separated him from Paula. He kept glancing at the speedometer in satisfaction. His headlights made a funnel of light in the dark, picking up the endless ribbon of the concrete road, and rolling it under, sharply delineating the fences, telegraph poles, trees, that sprang towards them and faded past. The fields smelled good.

There had been heavy rains, and in places the water was over the road. They cut through it, sending out a wide silver sheet on either side. Past the

occasional farmhouses or through a silent village street without slackening speed. The whole countryside seemed to sleep under the heavy sky, but traffic on the road never ceased altogether; an occasional big truck, a bus full of sleeping passengers; a passenger car driven at wild speed. Night birds.

The cities offered the principal bar to fast time. First Wilmington, then the endless suburbs of Philadelphia, and the Quaker City itself stretching for mile after mile across its flat plain. Dave had heard that there was a way to go around it, but he could not find it in the dark. The street lights beamed down innumerable vistas of empty pavements. It seemed to him that he lost hours in Philadelphia.

Every sight of a policeman made him nervous, for he feared that the fact of such a rough-looking character as himself driving three well-dressed drunks through the night might arouse the suspicion of the law. And if a policeman started to question him, who could tell where it might end? However, his passengers were well hidden behind, and nobody bothered him.

On the other side of Philadelphia, another stretch of open country, then the Delaware River, and a tortuous course through the city of Trenton, another city of the dead with thousands of lights shining in the empty streets for nothing. Beyond Trenton he struck an express highway across the State of New Jersey, with scarcely a curve in it, and never a town to make him slacken speed.

Some time later the lack of sleep and food began to make itself felt in Dave. The swift journey through the night lost its zest for him. In spite of himself his eyes would begin to close, and the car veer erratically. Finally he came to with a start to find that he was careering wildly down the wrong side of the road. He stopped and beat himself violently to drive away the desire to sleep.

But each time he started, again it would be the same. The broad concrete path seemed to have a hypnotic effect. His eyes were dragged down as if by leaden weights. He crawled along the edge of the road at fifteen miles an hour, and when he saw the lights of a town off to the left, he turned out of the through highway, and went in search of it.

He stopped in front of what used to be called a lunch-wagon. They have grown, shed their wheels, and become "Pullman diners" now. Flashing with lights from every window, it appeared to be the only thing awake in town.

Dave slid out stiffly, and opening the rear door of the sedan, started shaking the man who happened to be nearest him. It was the stork.

“Hey, wake up! Wake up!” cried Dave. “I’m all in. I got to have coffee and grub if you want me to drive you through!”

It was a weary business to bring him back to consciousness. Finally the stork thrust a hand in his trousers pocket, groaning, and pulling it out, offered it to Dave full of loose change. Dave chose the largest coin he could see, a half-dollar, and the stork shoved his hand back in his pocket, spilling part of the change on the floor. Settling back in his corner, he immediately went to sleep again.

Dave entered the lunch-car. Famished and chilled as he was, the hot steamy atmosphere laden with the smell of cooking food made him feel a little dizzy. He gratefully expanded his lungs with it. “Gee! Is this heaven?” he asked, looking around with a grin.

Only a truck-driver down at the end of the counter, busily stoking a late supper or early breakfast, got it. He grunted appreciatively. The other three men in the place ignored Dave.

Dave seated himself on a stool. “Ham and eggs and French fried,” he groaned, “and coffee, for the love of Mike!”

Two smartly dressed young men topped with pearl Fedoras looked around at him coldly, and continued their talk. Dave, reminded that a roughneck is not expected to push himself forward in better dressed company, said no more. The two young men were not eating, but merely gossiping with the man behind the counter. Dave looked slightly bewildered upon discovering that they were talking about himself as if they were his personal friends.

“Dave’s a smart guy,” said one. “The police ain’t seen hide nor hair of him since he drove away in the gray car.”

“And they won’t, neither,” added the counterman. “Let me tell you Dave is smart! I mean he’s smart, all right!”

“Dave’s a dandy-looking guy and a swell dresser,” said the second young man, with envy in his voice. “Cheese! Fellow like that must get a great kick out of life! Working in a bank by day, and leading his mob at night!”

“Where you get a kick working in a bank?” objected his friend.

“That was just to put up a front, naturally. Nobody would suspect a guy working in a bank.”

“Pretty tiresome price to pay for your fun at night. Dave could have had his fun just the same without working in a bank.”

“Yeah, if you ask me, that looks funny,” put in the counterman. “Working in a bank. I’ll say it’s funny.”

“This is how it was as I see it,” said the second young man. “Dave he was a respectable fellow. He had his family and all to think about. He wasn’t aiming to be an out-and-out crook.”

“Yeah, I can see that. When he bumped off a taxi-driver or a cop he didn’t mean it serious.”

“Yeah, nobody wouldn’t never have known it if he hadn’t been found out.”

“Yeah. Reckon there’s a plenty of respectable guys in the daytime goes out nights with a mob. They get a double kick out of it.”

“Yeah. You said a mouthful!”

The truck-driver, having finished his meal, approached from his end and threw money on the counter. He winked at Dave and jerked a grimy thumb in the direction of the Fedora hats. “Gas-heads!” he said, hoarsely. “It’s only the weight of their feet keeps them on the ground!”

The two young men glared at the truck-driver fiercely, but did not speak. When the door closed behind him, the first young man jumped up.

“No guy can say that to me and get away with it!” he cried.

However, he allowed himself to be pulled back on to his stool. They smoothed their ruffled feathers, and the conversation was resumed.

“Funny thing,” said the counterman. “Every man, woman, and child has seen Dave’s pictures before this, but he ain’t been found.”

“Aah! Some doll is giving him a hideout,” said the first young man. “They fall for those guys.”

“Yeah,” said his friend, with some bitterness, “a fellow’s got to be a bad actor nowadays to please the women!”

“Dave might come in here some night, Joe,” said the first young man. “What would you do if Dave come in that door?”

“I got it all doped out what to do,” said the counterman, confidently. “Me, I wouldn’t touch the guy. He prob’ly carries four guns. He’s six foot one inch tall, and weighs one hundred and seventy-five pounds.”

“Brown hair with lighter shades in it,” added the second young man, “and gray-green eyes.”

“Yeah,” said the counterman, “I’m watching for him. He won’t get by me, that guy!” He began to dramatize the scene. “Dave comes in that door. I’m alone here, maybe. I don’t let nothing on. I take his order and I begin to fool with my stove, see? I says: ‘My gas ain’t flowing right, fellow. Excuse me a minute and I’ll fix it outside.’ I slips out the end door, closing it after me. I runs into the house and wakes the little woman. I tell her to call up the police and tell them Dave Westover is eating in Joe’s diner. In less than a minute I am back here, cooking up his eggs or his hamburger or what the hell. When a guy comes in here to eat he’s good for ten or fifteen minutes. Dave will never get by me!”

Dave threw his half-dollar on the counter. “Take it out of that, fellow,” he said.

The counterman, still talking, rang up his cash register, and taking fifteen cents from the drawer, threw it on the counter in front of Dave, with scarcely a glance in his direction. Dave turned away without hurrying. As he went through the door the man was saying:

“Yes, sir, Dave Westover will never get by me!”

Chapter XVIII

IT was five o'clock in the morning and as dark as midnight when Dave drove into Jersey City, and the mouth of the Holland Tunnel yawned before him. Fearing to venture into the brightly lighted tunnel with policemen stationed every few hundred yards, he turned into a side street, and drew up at the curb. Opening the rear door, he shook the stork violently.

"Hey! Wake up! We're here! Jersey City!"

"All right, fellow! All right!" murmured the stork, sleepily.

As soon as Dave let go of him he fell asleep again. Dave left the three of them with a silent blessing, and went his way.

He crossed the river by ferry, and called up Paula from a booth on the New York side. The wire ran direct to her bedside, and he could say what he wished. When he heard her anxious voice over the wire, such a rush of feeling overcame him that he could not answer for a moment.

"Paula! This is Dave, honey!"

"Dave!" All her heart was in that cry. "Oh, Dave! You're all right?"

"Right as rain! And you?"

"Yes! But nearly crazy, wondering what had happened to you."

"I'll tell you. Was it all right for me to call you so early?"

"Why of course!"

"It didn't scare your mother too much?"

"No. She's right here listening. She's for you, Dave. But she says you must give yourself up to the police."

Dave grinned into the transmitter. "Tell her I'll think it over. . . . Listen, honey, could you get right up and dress and come meet me?"

"Surely!"

"The reason I suggest it is, they would never expect you to leave the house so early, and I don't think they'll be watching. Did you pawn the

watch?"

"Yes."

"Bring the money with you. . . . Listen. You must make sure that you are not followed. If you find you are followed, turn around and go home again. It would near break my heart not to see you, but if you don't come I'll know why it is. Take a taxi to some hotel, then change to another taxi, and come to the Christopher Street ferryhouse."

"Yes, Dave."

"And Paula, bring the affidavit with you."

"Oh, why?"

He did not tell her the real reason. "Those guys have searched me twice for it, and they won't expect me to be carrying it now."

"Very well."

"Paula, I must tell you, I look terrible now; all ragged and dirty. I haven't been able to wash. I haven't even got a shirt on."

"Dave! Do you think that makes any difference to me?"

"Well, I thought I'd better warn you. . . . Listen. Have you got any old common clothes you could put on?"

"Why?"

"Well, if anybody was to see a nice little lady like you kissing a common tramp it would certainly attract attention!"

"All right," said Paula, with a crinkle of laughter in her voice, "I'll manage something. I won't disgrace you."

Dave laughed. "Good!" he said. "All's well if you can still make a wisecrack!"

Dave slept in the ferryhouse while he waited. He awoke to find her standing before him. A guard, shoving back the door to admit passengers to the boat, was watching them, and Dave swallowed the laugh that made his throat shake. In a funny long coat, shoes burst out and run over at the heel, pale streaked face and battered hat pulled over her hair, she looked like a little cleaning-woman on her way to work. She was dismayed at Dave's condition, for his rags and dirt were very real; but she did not shrink from him.

“Don’t kiss me,” she said, nervously. “The man is looking.”

“I wouldn’t think of it,” said Dave, grinning. He was eating her up with his eyes. “Come on, let’s go over to Hoboken.”

Embracing her arm within his, he led her on the ferryboat. “You look so comical in your old clothes!” he murmured. “I wish I could keep you like that! Nobody but me to know how pretty you were!”

Paula seemed scarcely to know what she was saying. “Oh, Dave! The shoes were the worst. I had to spoil a good pair! . . . Oh, Dave! I’m so thankful to have you close to me again!”

There were but few passengers on the boat. On the upper deck nobody in sight. It was still dark out-of-doors. Dave held her close.

“My Paula,” he murmured, brokenly. “I laugh, but I’m hard hit! I never knew there was a girl so square and plucky as you! You have made a new world for me!”

“Don’t!” she protested. “I give nothing; you give all.”

“Nothing to it!” he said. “I reckon we’re both lucky. It doesn’t come to many like this.”

When they returned to earth they sat on the bench outside the cabin, with Paula nestled under Dave’s arm. While the ferry crossed the dark river he had to tell her in minute detail of his adventures in Baltimore. Paula listened with breathless attention, exclaiming in horror at the dangerous parts.

Dave laughed again. “Gosh! it’s great to have such a sympathetic listener. I only wish I had more to brag about.”

“It’s terrible,” she murmured, “to have you in danger, and me just working at the office!”

“You needn’t feel sorry for me,” he said. “I wouldn’t change with any man alive. Within the past two days I have learned what it is to be alive!”

Paula pressed herself against him. “I’m the lucky one,” she whispered. “Every woman dreams of it and few find him.”

“What?”

“A reckless lover!”

“Paula, when you admire me I feel like a king!”

“If we could only be together through it all!”

“Together! Don’t, honey. You make my head giddy!”

They had still much to discuss when the boat entered her slip in Jersey City. A deckhand came along to see that all the passengers were off. He took their fares for the return trip with a quizzical glance that seemed to say: Funny time of day to go cruising! It was too cold to remain sitting down, and they walked slowly around the deck, arm in arm, heads close together. The day was beginning to break, and the unquiet river heaved under the pale sky, showing the lights and shades of blued steel.

“Is there anything new up here?” asked Dave. “Do the police suspect that there is any connection between you and me?”

“No,” said Paula. “They questioned mother while I was at the bank, and she put them off so well, they have never troubled me.”

“Good. When you leave the flat today, honey, you had better lock the door behind you.”

“Why, Dave?”

Not wishing to alarm her too much, he said, carelessly: “Well, after having searched me again, I think they might try to search the flat next.”

“Very well. I’ll do it.”

“If your mother heard them trying to break in, she could telephone for a policeman,” said Dave, lightly.

“Surely. . . . Dave, now that you have a little money, you ought to get out of New York again. I can get more.”

“No,” said Dave, firmly. “I’m not going to let them keep me on the run indefinitely. I’m going to take the offensive now. Don’t laugh when you look at me! I’ve already found out who killed Walter Wrenn and they can’t put me in the hot seat for it. I’m no detective, but I’m going to work to find out what is behind this whole business. It’s the only way I can clear myself.”

“But every policeman in New York is looking for you!”

“That doesn’t bother me so much as it did. I have learned that most men can’t see what is under their noses.”

“Have you any plan, Dave?”

“Yes. I’m going to get in touch with Rudy. I know where he lives. I’m going to try to win him over to our side.”

“But if he’s the actual murderer, he couldn’t come in with us. He couldn’t admit anything.”

“I don’t expect him to incriminate himself, but when I tell him that his gang has put him on the spot he will certainly turn against them. He ought to tell me enough to blow up the whole racket.”

As they were rounding the shore end of the boat, a line of five or six cars was slowly moving on board below. The first was a big, old-fashioned limousine, and at the sight of it Dave stopped as if he had been rooted to the deck. On the front seat he had a glimpse of a blonde square head at the wheel, and beside him a yellow mask with a drooping cigarette. Then the car passed under the deck.

“Good God!” he muttered. “There they are!”

“Who, Dave?”

“Claude and Pompey. They’re crossing on the ferry to avoid observation in the tunnel!”

All the color faded out of Paula’s face. “And you’re not armed!” she murmured. She pressed close to him. “Oh, I’m glad I’m with you!”

He flung an arm around her. “You’re the real thing!” he whispered, warmly. A rueful smile flitted across his face. “Just the same, I wish you were safe home in your little bed!”

“What shall we do?”

“There’s very little danger,” he said. “The trip is so short they’re not likely to get out of the car. We’ll be safe on the upper deck. . . . But we ought to keep an eye on them.”

They hastily returned to the other end of the deck. The limousine had come through below, and they looked straight down on its roof. It was impossible to see inside, but a wisp of cigarette smoke floating out of the front window, satisfied them that the men were there. Dave and Paula moved back from the rail.

“If I could follow them,” muttered Dave, “I’d find out what they were up to!”

“Follow them!” echoed Paula, dismayed. “How could you? Before you could get a taxi on the other side they’d be far away.”

“There are other cars on the boat. Perhaps I can hire one of them.”

“Dave!” she protested, “it’s too dangerous!”

He pressed her arm under his. “You said you wanted a reckless lover,” he reminded her.

“A man can be **too** reckless!” she pleaded. “Think of me?”

“Have you got your taxi fare home, all right?”

She nodded miserably.

“I’ll call you up at the flat at twelve thirty if it’s humanly possible. But don’t worry, anyhow. I’ll turn up like a bad penny!” He kissed her and hurried away.

He went down to the main deck and made his way among the cars from the rear. Besides the limousine there were five cars on the ferryboat. Three of these were trucks on their way to work in the city, and obviously they wouldn’t serve Dave’s purpose. The fourth car was a sedan containing a couple on tour. The rear compartment was piled high with their miscellaneous effects, and the wife looked sour; so Dave passed them up, too. The fifth car was a Ford runabout driven by a young man who looked like a salesman or a collector. This was more promising. Dave said to the driver:

“Want to earn a couple of dollars?”

The young man looked him over quizzically. “Yeah?”

“Never mind my clothes,” said Dave. “I can pay for what I order.”

“What’s the big idea?”

“There are two crooks in that limousine at the head of the line, and I’ve got to tail them.”

“A detective, eh?” said the young man, with more respect. “Disguised!”

“Yeah,” said Dave, dryly. “I’ve got a hunch those guys are going to report to their boss. I want to learn where he hangs out.”

The young man was interested. “Fifty cents a mile,” he said, indicating the speedometer. “It’s a fair offer.”

“Okay,” said Dave, “if you stay with them. Put on your side curtains will you, so if they look through the back window they won’t recognize me.”

The ferryboat made her slip on the New York side. The limousine turned north on West Street, and continued uptown at a high rate of speed. The Ford

held her.

“Gosh!” said the young man. “If a cop gives me a ticket I’ll get in bad with the firm.”

“He’ll have to stop them first,” said Dave.

“I don’t know,” said the other, doubtfully. “That car carries a Maryland license. They always bear harder on the local boys.”

They mounted the elevated highway. The men in the limousine, unaware that they were followed, or perhaps indifferent to it, led them directly to the middle of the town and east to Park Avenue. The big car drew up before one of the side doors of the Surrey Towers, the newest, the greatest, the most sumptuous, New York’s wonder hotel, covering a whole city block and rearing its twin towers more than five hundred feet towards the sky.

Dave was puzzled. “What the devil is he coming here for!” he muttered.

“**Some** hangout!” said the driver, laconically.

Pompey got out and appeared to be giving his chauffeur some instructions. The limousine moved on.

“Want I should follow the car?” asked Dave’s driver.

“No,” said Dave; “it’s the guy in the blue overcoat I’m interested in. . . . Say, do something for me,” he asked, suddenly. “You’re dressed all right and that guy doesn’t know you. Follow him inside the hotel, and try to find out who he came to see.”

The young man had quite entered into the spirit of the chase. “All right,” he said. “Anything to see a bit of life!” However, he took the precaution of removing the key of his car.

He was gone three or four minutes. Returning to the car, he said:

“The guy in the blue overcoat seemed to be known there. Didn’t send up his name, but went up in one of the elevators that serve the tower apartments. I noticed by the indicator that he stopped at the forty-seventh floor. When the elevator came down I asked the operator where he took him, but he was a fresh guy. Told me it was none of my business, and threatened to call the starter.”

“Forty-seventh floor,” said Dave; “that’s something.”

“Say, them servants in there act like they was dukes or something,” the young man went on, bitterly. “Just as soon as I get fifty dollars I’m going to

stop there for a day just for the pleasure of telling them where to get off at!”

“Drop me off at some cheap lunch-counter, will you, fellow?” said Dave.
“I feel a little out of place in this swell neighborhood.”

Chapter XIX

HAVING stopped for a meal on the way downtown, it was about quarter past eight when Dave got to Bleecker Street. Lined with ancient tenement houses which have broken out into bright modern stores and spaghetti palaces on the street floor, Bleecker is one of the most colorful streets in New York. It serves as Main Street for one of the several little Italys scattered about the island. The sidewalks were well filled, while a stream of traffic moved over the asphalt.

The most imposing building west of the elevated railway was Darius House, one of several hotels built for workingmen by a famous millionaire of the previous generation. He built so well that his hotel is still an ornament to the town. Dave entered it with a good deal of uneasiness, it was so much finer than he expected; a handsome marble corridor filled in, with an office at the end, that shone with plate glass and polished brass. However, he soon discovered that his rough clothes attracted no attention whatsoever. Darius House was used by all sorts and conditions of men.

There was no use stopping at the office, because he didn't know whom to ask for. He kept on up a half-stairway at one side, which brought him to an immense lobby or lounge forming one of the interior courts of the building. Windows opened on it all around tier above tier, and it was lighted by a glass roof high above. It was well filled with men, since times were hard and many of the patrons obviously had no work to go to.

Dave slowly circulated among them. Every type of man was represented, from the seemingly well-to-do to the humblest workman; white-collar men and no-collar men; only the incorrigible bums were excluded. A cloud of tobacco smoke hung over them. Dave did not find Rudy; he did not expect to; Rudy would certainly be in bed at such an hour. He was looking for somebody who might know Rudy.

Among the unexpected types in the place, Dave saw a clergyman in the habit of the Episcopal Church. He was smoking an old brier pipe and moving about, talking to one man and another, doing a little missionary work, perhaps. His manner was friendly and unpretentious and he appeared to be a general favorite. Dave approached him.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said. “Do you happen to know a young man living here by the name of Rudy?”

The clergyman was immediately interested and friendly. “What’s his other name?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” confessed Dave. Feeling that some further explanation was required, he added: “He told me he lived here. I was to meet him here at eight o’clock.”

“What does he look like?” asked the clergyman.

“Nineteen or twenty years old, but looks older. Black hair, gray eyes, Irish type. A handsome lad, but looks like a bad one. Dresses very smartly. When I saw him yesterday he was wearing a gray suit, gray hat, gray spats and a gray tie with a big emerald pin in it.”

The clergyman looked at Dave as much as to say: What do you want with such a one? But he was too polite to ask it. Instead, he said, “What’s his line?”

“I reckon he’s a sporting character,” said Dave, with a twinkle in his eye.

The clergyman marked the twinkle. He was an understanding man. “Ah!” he said.

“This is a funny kind of place for such a fellow to live,” remarked Dave.

“Oh, all kinds live here,” said the clergyman. “It’s cheap, and it’s first class in its own way. It’s the most democratic place in the City of New York. Nobody feels out of place here. . . . I live here myself,” he put in, dryly. “I’m a curate in St. Barnabas’ Church. This is a great place to see life. I expect there’s more than one ‘sporting character’ among us. You see, it’s so safe and respectable. Even a ‘sporting character’ wants a place where he can lay his head in peace and quiet.”

“You’re right,” said Dave. “I never thought of it that way.”

“Your friend may be known under another name here. I’m sorry I can’t help you more.”

“Much obliged, anyhow,” said Dave. “I’ll just keep on inquiring.”

“Let’s go ask old Gus Eichler,” suggested the clergyman. “He’s the oldest patron of the house, and proud of it. He watches all who come and go here, and makes friends with as many as he can.”

He led Dave into a long room opening off the lounge in front, where they found a respectable old German workman playing draughts with a friend. He left the game while he listened to Dave's description of the man he was looking for. As soon as Dave came to the emerald pin old Eichler clapped his thigh.

"Sure I know that young guy," he said. "I marked the pin. I never see such a pin anywhere. It was carved in the shape of a beetle, like."

"That's my man," said Dave.

"Don't know him personally," said Eichler, "because he's a surly lad. Close-mouthed. But I seen him coming and going, and I asked who he was. He passes here by the name of Tim Ahearne."

"Much obliged to you both," said Dave. "I'll ask at the office for him."

The office of Darius House was arranged more like a banking-office than a hotel. The counter, running across from wall to wall, was topped by a glass partition with several small openings in it each stopped with a brass grill. Inside, several clerks and bookkeepers were at work, and through a door at the back the manager could be seen sitting in his private office.

To the clerk who came to ask what he wanted, Dave said: "I'm looking for a man called Ahearne, Timothy Ahearne."

"Number Three twenty-one," said the clerk. He ran his hand smartly along a row of letterboxes, and slapped it in a certain one. "Key's here," he said. "He's out."

"Oh!" said Dave, disappointed.

"Have you looked through the public rooms? He may be sitting there."

"I've looked."

"Come to think of it, he went out just a few minutes ago," said the clerk. "I didn't see him myself, but I found the key lying on the desk."

"Well . . . I'll wait for a little while," said Dave, at a loss. He scarcely knew what to do next.

He was still standing by the desk, watching the procession of men passing in and out of the corridor, when he saw a cleaning-woman come through a door at the back of the office. Her wild appearance instantly arrested his attention; ghastly pallor, staring eyes, a clenched hand pressed hard against her mouth.

She entered the manager's office and said something to him, afterwards clapping a hand over her mouth as if to hold back a scream. He pushed her into a chair and came hastily into the front office.

Thus far Dave was merely an interested spectator. But when he heard the manager say, sharply: "Number three twenty-one. Who's got that room?" all his faculties leaped to attention.

"Ahearne, sir, Timothy," said the young clerk. "He's just gone out."

"Oh no!" said the manager, in a queer voice. "He's up there."

The clerk stared. "What's the matter?" he stammered.

The manager said something Dave could not hear. The clerk staggered back a step. "Why . . . why this man was just asking for him," he stuttered, indicating Dave.

The manager came through a door at the end of the counter. "Do you know Timothy Ahearne?" he asked, in a shaken voice.

Dave made his face a blank. "Yes," he said, at a venture.

"What is he to you?" demanded the other, suspiciously.

"No relation, if that's what you mean. Just a fellow I know."

"Well, you'd better come with me. There's been an accident. For God's sake keep quiet. We don't want to start a stampede here."

Dave, conscious that he was being watched, betrayed nothing; but his mouth hardened with the realization of danger. He followed the manager into the elevator, and they were carried to the third floor. A porter was awaiting them there. When the elevator went back the manager asked the porter:

"Have you been in the room?"

"No, sir. Waiting for you. . . . Who's this?" he asked, with a jerk of his head in Dave's direction.

Both men regarded Dave with suspicion for no reason except that his clothes were rough and worn. Out of the tail of his eye Dave marked the position of the stairway in case of need. He followed the two through a cement-paved hall. The manager tripped along on smart, neatly shod feet. He wore a well-tailored cutaway and elegant striped trousers like the manager of a fashionable hotel. The porter slumped heavily like a gorilla.

They stopped before the door marked 321. The manager put the key in the lock and turned away his head. His face was all screwed up with repulsion. "Go in first," he muttered. "I can't stand it."

The door opened. Dave and the porter looked into a small bedroom; neat, bare, and very clean. It had a narrow window looking south over a garden project. It contained only the most necessary furnishings; narrow bed just inside the door, bureau at the foot of the bed, and on the other side washbowl, small table, and chair. No personal knickknacks or pictures.

The bedclothes were tumbled. Face down on the floor alongside the bed lay a youthful figure clad in gay blue-silk pajamas; his bare feet were towards the door, the sleek black head towards the window. One carefully tended hand lay palm upward, as if in mute appeal, the other was under his head. A wet crimson stain was spreading through the silk of the pajama coat.

The two men stood beside him, looking down, the porter's face heavy and gaping; Dave's lean features like a sculptured mask. From the open door the hotel manager looked in.

"Is he dead?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"Dead as mutton," said the porter, callously.

Dave dropped to his knees.

"Don't touch him till the police come!" warned the porter.

Dave shook his head. He laid a hand on the boy's bare leg. "He's warm!" he gasped, startled out of his immobility. "This has just happened! . . . How long have you been on this floor?" he asked, excitedly. "Did you see anybody leaving?"

"I was downstairs," said the porter. "The cleaning-woman told me as she came by."

"Clean through the heart," murmured Dave. "That's why he has bled so little. It was a knife, I reckon, a shot would have been heard. This gang is partial to **knives!**"

"What gang?" asked the porter.

Dave made believe not to have heard the question. He saw what he had missed at first glance, an automatic lying on the floor beyond the chair. Careful not to touch it, he put his nose down and smelled of it. "This gun has not been discharged lately," he said. "It must have been in the dead man's hand when he fell."

The manager, coming a single step within the door, glanced at Dave with growing suspicion.

Dave arose and looked down at the dead boy. The head was turned on one side, revealing the comely profile, still as wax. All the vice had gone out of Rudy's face now. His long curled lashes swept his cheeks like a sleeping baby's. Dave's eyes were full of regret. It was such good human material to be spoiled so young.

"What do you know about this man?" demanded the manager.

"Not much," said Dave, cautiously. "He's just a fellow I met around different places. I saw him yesterday in a speakeasy on Houston Street, and he told me if I came around today he would help me get a job."

"What was he in?"

"I don't know of my own knowledge, but judging from his smart clothes and the gun and all, looks like he belonged to somebody's mob."

"A gangster crime!" said the manager, bitterly. "If I'd known what he was he would never have got a room here!"

Dave looked around, piecing things together in his mind. "It's easy to see what happened," he said. "This lad was in bed. There was a knock at the door. He got up to see who it was with his gun in his hand. It was somebody he trusted and he let him in. As he walked away from the door he was stabbed in the back."

"Quite a detective!" sneered the manager.

"I wish I was!" murmured Dave.

Dave was now standing beside the bureau. He looked at the bureau drawers longingly, and at Rudy's elegant gray suit hanging over the chair. He couldn't make a search, of course, with two men watching him. The gray silk tie was lying on the bureau. He examined it closely.

"Look," he said to the manager. "He was wearing this tie when I saw him yesterday. There was a big emerald stuck in it. He was famous for that pin. You can see the pinholes in the silk if you look close, but the pin is gone. When they find the man that has that pin they'll have the murderer."

"Is that so?" said the manager. From his look it was clear that he would have liked to search Dave then and there.

He began to pull out the drawers of the bureau, one after the other. Dave looked eagerly over his shoulder. The first small drawer was full of elegant

handkerchiefs, silk socks, mufflers, and so on.

“More than I own,” said the manager bitterly.

The corresponding drawer on the other side contained innumerable neatly folded scarves in all the colors of the spectrum. Down in front lay some small white folded papers.

“Ha! a drug addict, too!” exclaimed the manager. “A nice kind of lodger to be in my house!”

Almost hidden under the scarves Dave saw something that made his eyes glisten. It was a knife handle that had been broken off the blade, a plain and well-made affair, bound around with narrow strips of leather to afford a good grip. Dave coolly reached and picked it up.

“Drop that!” said the manager. “Nothing must be touched until the police see it.”

Dave obeyed—but not until he had taken a good look. A glance identified it as the handle of the knife that had stabbed Walter Wrenn. One of the little cross pieces on the shaft of the knife was still imbedded in the handle; the other was missing.

Footsteps were now heard in the hall outside, and a small crowd began to press into the tiny bedroom; a plainclothes man, a police doctor, a uniformed officer, and miscellaneous individuals following in their train.

Dave, quietly alert to danger, politely made his way around back of these gentlemen as if to give them room. He edged without hurry through the crowd blocking the door, and lingered for a moment or two, looking into the room over their shoulders. All necks were craning to get a glimpse of the corpse, and nobody paid the slightest attention to Dave. He moved off slowly, rounded a corner of the corridor, and ran for the stairs.

Within the bedroom, the doctor knelt to examine the body, and the plainclothes man took out his notebook.

“Victim’s name?” he asked the manager.

“Timothy Ahearne.”

“How long has he lived here?”

“I’ll have to consult the books downstairs.”

“Who found the body?”

“Mary Dolan, a cleaning-woman. She’s in my office downstairs.”

“What do you know about this guy?”

“Nothing whatever. But he has a friend here. . . .” The manager looked around him. “Why . . . where is he?”

Instantly the little room was full of excitement. The plainclothes man cursed savagely.

“Why didn’t you point him out to me when I came! Have you got no sense! A man in your position. You’ve let the murderer escape!”

They elbowed their way through the crowd at the door. A moment’s investigation proved that Dave was not among it. Manager and detective ran for the stairs. But Dave had half a minute’s start of them, sufficient to permit him to lose himself in the sidewalk crowd on Bleecker Street.

Chapter XX

WITHOUT paying any heed to his direction, Dave walked through the streets as fast as he could without attracting attention to himself. His face was smooth and blank. He was learning that people's eyes skate off such a face and do not remember it afterwards. He took care not to look behind him, but he was listening keenly.

When he had gone half a dozen blocks and no alarm was raised, he ventured to relax and slacken his pace so he could think things out. After a spell of cogitation, he turned into a drug store and bought a sheet of paper, envelope, stamp, and lead pencil. On a side counter, out of range of anybody's vision, he printed the following letter, while a dry smile hovered about his lips. After all, the situation had its humorous aspects.

To the Chief Inspector of Detectives,
Police Headquarters;

Dear Sir:

In the top right-hand drawer of Timothy Ahearne's bureau in Darius House (This is the man who was found murdered there this morning) you will find a leather-covered knife handle that has lost its blade. Please keep this safe among the other evidence pertaining to the taxicab mystery. If that case ever comes to trial the writer is prepared to come forward, and can prove that this is the handle of the knife that stabbed the taxicab victim.

Yours truly,
A LOVER OF JUSTICE.

Dave sealed, addressed, stamped his letter, and carried it to a mail-box several blocks distant from the store where he had written it.

As he turned slowly from the letter-box, pondering his next move, the inclination to smile froze on his lips. He discovered that he **was** being followed without any alarm having been raised. A man wearing a blue melton overcoat was watching him from across the street. The hat was different today—a soft black felt pulled down in front, but the yellowish

cheeks and the crooked mouth with languid cigarette identified the wearer as Dave's enemy, deadlier than a cobra. Pompey had his right hand in his overcoat pocket.

Twenty-five yards down the street a touring-car with the top down rested against the curb. Its engine was running. Under the wheel slouched the squarehead Claude, feigning to be half asleep. Bolt upright beside him sat Rina, Pompey's brunette; scarlet beret pulled on one side; scarlet lips and cheeks; smoking a cigarette with a brazen air; coolly watching to see Dave shot.

It was a narrow, busy street in the older part of town, lined with small stores on each side. Traffic rolled back and forth between Dave and Pompey; a truck, a sedan, a delivery car; a pushcart crawling along the curb; a horse jogging at his own pace, his rattling wagon behind him. On the sidewalks scores of people shuffling along, weaving in every direction, stopping to gaze in store windows, passing in and out of doorways; all with inward-turning glances, busy with their own thoughts.

Pompey started slowly across the street, head a little down and thrusting forward. Dave had a glimpse of the steely pale eyes under the hat brim. They were the eyes of a killer. Pompey had the green scarab stuck in his gleaming blue tie. What was another murder more or less to him? Panic seized Dave. His eyes went wild. Where could he run where Pompey could not follow? What did any of the shuffling people care except to save their own skins?

With an agonizing effort he held himself down. To run would have sealed his fate. He walked away. There was a man in a sailor's reefer walking quickly in the same direction. Dave put himself in front of him. Looking down and back he saw Pompey's neat legs coming up behind. The sailor thrust Dave to one side with an oath. An open doorway yawned beside him. He sprang through it, slamming the door shut. It was a bakery crowded with women. Like a gleam of hope itself, he saw beyond the counter another open door.

Dave vaulted over the counter scattering the cakes. All the women screamed like one. Pompey got the outer door open and fired. Everybody in the store fell to the floor. Dave was already through the rear door. This gave on a kitchen. A screaming woman, seeking to escape, opened another door. Dave violently thrust her aside, and ran out into a yard. A high wooden fence faced him. Springing for it, he hauled himself up and rolled over. Pompey fired again.

In the adjoining yard a man ran out and grappled with Dave. There was no time to explain anything. Dave savagely beat him off and sprang for the next fence. As Pompey did not appear over the first fence, he ran along the tops of the fences separating the back yards towards the rear of houses facing on a side street. Windows were flung up everywhere, and people leaned out, yelling at him savagely. He who runs is doomed.

He dropped into the last yard. Quiet here; an ailanthus tree spreading its naked branches. An old-fashioned basement kitchen faced him. The door was unlocked, and he ran through, a petrified woman gaping after him, spoon in hand. Through a tailor's shop in front, with a row of men sitting cross-legged on a bench, all their needles poised in air.

Springing up a few steps into the street, he started running with all his might away from the street of shops. No alarm had been raised in the side street yet. For a moment or two Dave appeared to have shaken off pursuit, but upon looking over his shoulder, he saw the touring-car turning the corner, with Pompey riding on the running-board.

However, there were several cars between, and traffic was coming in the other direction. Dave left the sidewalk and concealed himself among the moving cars, running along with them, darting in and out like a cat. A few people looked after him curiously and forgot him. The touring-car, passing several others, came up, Pompey smiling evilly in anticipation. Dave slipped behind a closed car going in the same direction. The touring-car fell back. Dave, holding up his hand, darted in front of the closed car, which jammed on its brakes, screeching. He gained the opposite side of the street.

On his left hand rose an old-fashioned building painted white and having a pair of green lights flanking the steps. In the fanlight over the door he caught the word "Precinct" half obliterated. A man was coming out of the door. Like a snake Dave slipped behind him and through the door.

The front room of the police station was well filled with people, and nobody took any notice of Dave's entrance. He leaned against the wall alongside the door, trying to conceal the fact that he was sobbing for breath. Glancing through the window sideways, he saw the touring-car disappearing up the street. Pompey was not in it. Hanging around outside, waiting to see what happened, no doubt. However, Dave felt that he had found one place where Pompey dared not follow, and the furious pounding of his heart eased down.

On the back wall of the room hung a bulletin-board having a broadside pinned to it with the words: WANTED FOR MURDER! and several

photographs of Dave reproduced beneath. Dave could afford to grin at it hardily, having escaped so much worse a fate outside.

There was a noisy crowd gathered in front of the desk. A storekeeper was accusing his competitor of unfair practices, there were witnesses on both sides, and the air was filled with recriminations. The lieutenant pounded on the desk and shouted them down. Finally the affair was adjusted somehow, and two policemen shepherded the crowd out through the door. They gathered in a knot on the sidewalk, still jabbering.

The elderly lieutenant at the desk looked at Dave. "Well, what do you want?" he asked. He was a dark man whose face had become grim and hard through long acquaintance with wickedness; but he looked square.

Dave took off his hat respectfully, contriving at the same time to pull his hair a little further over his face. His heart began to beat again as he stepped forward; however, the photographs of himself were not in the lieutenant's direct line of vision where he sat. "I want shelter," said Dave, with an humble air. "I'm down and out."

The lieutenant looked him over casually. No spark of recognition showed in his face. He was hardly expecting Dave Westover to walk into the station house. "So's a couple of hundred thousand others," he said, bluntly. "There's not much we can do for you. You ought to go to the Salvation Army."

"It's too far to walk," said Dave. "I'm dead beat. Haven't slept in two nights. If I sit down anywhere outside I'll go to sleep, and maybe get pneumonia. I thought maybe you'd let me sleep in a cell for a couple of hours."

"If I put you in a cell I'll have to lock you up," said the lieutenant, uncompromisingly. "We can't have anybody walking around the cell-house."

"Suits me," said Dave.

"All right! . . . Roark!" he called. A superannuated policeman stumped through a passage at the rear. He looked like an old watchdog with red-rimmed eyes. "This guy wants a sleep," said the lieutenant. "Lock him up. You can let him out when he wakes up."

"Much obliged, Lieutenant," said Dave.

"Don't mention it," returned the officer, dryly.

Through force of habit the old policeman took hold of Dave's arm and led him back through the passage. Through an open door Dave caught a glimpse of a large room with the reserves sitting around playing cards or snoozing. He was led through a rear door, down a few steps, and across a paved yard into the cell-house. A moment later the cell door clanged behind Dave. Not a pleasant sound. The old keeper retreated.

As soon as the outer door closed after the keeper, Dave began to hear cautious voices from up and down the cell row. "Hey, fellow, do I know you? I'm Buck Statler. . . . What are you in for, guy? . . . What time is it, fellow?"

"Cut it out, you guys," answered Dave, good-naturedly. "I'm all in. When I wake up we can talk. It's ten o'clock now."

"Sure!" answered a humorous voice. "I'll keep these bozos quiet. But say, if you had a cigarette it would save a dying man!"

"Sure," said Dave. "How can I get it to you?"

"Say, you must be a first-offender! Stick your hand through the bars low down, and throw it to the right the width of your cell."

"Got it?"

"Sure! Cheese! you're a white man!"

The walls of the cell were of brick painted a dirty gray and scribbled all over with the literary effusions of former tenants. For bed there was only a wide plank let down from the wall by chains, and having a thin blanket folded at the foot. Dave lay down on it as gratefully as if it had been stuffed with feathers, and pulled the blanket over him. A delicious feeling of peace and security enfolded him. He was almost instantly asleep.

Chapter XXI

THE board-room of the Chambers National was on the second floor of the bank building in the rear of the Collection Department. The clerks in the Collection Department paid but little attention to the gentlemen arriving for the annual meeting, because heretofore it had always been a perfunctory affair. The shareholders themselves never came; only a few gentlemen holding the necessary proxies. Year after year they reelected the same board of directors, who in turn confirmed the appointments of the bank's officers. It never lasted more than a quarter of an hour or so.

Today only the chief clerk, who had been with the bank for thirty-five years, remarked that there seemed to be a good many new faces coming to the meeting.

After the meeting had started, the clerks towards the back of the room heard the voice of President Beekman ringing in anger, and glanced at one another questioningly. Even through the double glass of the partition they recognized the tone of a man speaking out of the fullness of an indignant heart. When Beekman burst out of the room they knew that something was seriously amiss. His handsome face was red; he strode to the stairway, looking neither right nor left.

The clerks gathered together to discuss what it could mean. The chief clerk himself, forgetting discipline, left his desk to join in the talk. Nobody could suggest a reasonable explanation. In the minds of all of them Beekman and the bank were indissoluble; Beekman **was** the bank and the bank was Beekman.

Downstairs, when Beekman entered his private office, Miss Billings, his secretary, looked up, surprised and smiling. "Is it over already?"

He did not answer her.

"There's a Mr. Satterwhite waiting to see you," she said.

"He doesn't want to see **me!**" said Beekman, in extreme bitterness. "I am no longer the president of the bank. Let him see Stuart when he comes down from the meeting."

The girl stared at him, speechless with dismay. Her eyes slowly filled. “Why . . . Mr. Beekman,” she stammered, “what has happened?”

“I’m too angry to talk about it!” he cried, helplessly clenching his fist. “Not with you, of course! Forgive me! . . . Oh, it’s damnable! damnable! The power of one scoundrel, I mean! . . . I need air!” He snatched up his hat and coat and hurried out of the building.

Miss Billings ran into the adjoining room to tell her friend, Miss Rennert, who was Stuart’s secretary. Miss Rennert had not the same respect for her employer that Miss Billings had for hers. “Stuart president?” she said, scornfully. “Impossible! He isn’t man enough!”

“Mr. Beekman said so,” mourned Miss Billings.

They ran to tell Miss Connors, the second vice-president’s secretary. Then the three girls separated, and within five minutes the news had run through the entire bank like a fire in straw. Consternation reigned in every department. All work ceased. Down in the banking-office lines of angry customers formed while the clerks put their heads together behind the cages.

“Hey, you! Is this a bank or a conversazione?”

“Excuse me, mister, but I just heard a piece of news that’s knocked me cold!”

In his agitation Ackerman, the chief teller, paid out a thousand dollars too much on a check. Luckily for him, the customer handed it back. In every department of the bank the sentiment was the same: “Every one of us has lost a friend!”

When the news reached the Collection Department, the clerks looked at one another, saying, “So that was it!”

Bill Fielder added, gloomily: “This means my number’s posted. Stuart’s got it in for me!”

The chief clerk turned on him with a snarl. “Who’s thinking about you at such a time!” There were actually tears in his elderly eyes. “It’s the old bank we’ve got in mind. This marks her downfall!”

When the meeting broke up and the newly elected directors and officers came out of the board-room, the clerks eyed them keenly. It was afterwards agreed that, though Beekman had been voted down, he had won a moral victory, because the new men all wore the secretly uneasy look of those who have been forced to listen to unpleasant truths. They laughed a good deal and made out to be extremely friendly in order to hide this.

When the new president passed his desk, Bill Fielder expected to be fired on the spot, but Stuart had other things on his mind. A bright pink spot burned in either of his gray cheeks, and his Adam's apple worked up and down convulsively.

Stuart had not long returned to his own office when he was called on his private phone. An inimitable fat, drawling voice sounded over the wire. "Hi, Stuart! How did everything go?"

"Excuse me just a minute," said Stuart. He spoke to his secretary: "Miss Rennert, will you please get me all the papers pertaining to the Blaine loans. You'll find them in different departments." The girl went out, and Stuart addressed the phone again: "Are you there?"

"Shoot!"

"Everything at the meeting went just as we planned. Beekman was extremely vicious and abusive. I couldn't shut him up. But of course he was helpless."

"Any reporters present?"

"No."

"Then what the hell?"

"Beekman has gone home. He will certainly gather the reporters together at his house."

"It won't have the same effect after he's fired. Have you given out your stuff to the papers?"

"Yes."

"Then that will get printed first, anyhow. The hell with it. . . . Listen, Stuart, there's something I want you to do."

"What's that?"

"There's a girl working in the bank called Paula Wrenn."

"Yes?"

"Well, fire her. And fire her quick!"

"Wh—what for?" stammered Stuart.

"That's my business. I want her fired within quarter of an hour. Give her a month's wages if you want. That will stop her squawking. Call me up when you've spoken to her."

“But she’s a good girl,” objected Stuart. “She does her work well. A man in the same position would cost us double.”

“What do I care about that? I’ll take care of the girl.”

Stuart primmed his lips together. “But, Mr. Mann, in matters concerning the employees here I think that I ought to. . . .”

“Do what you’re told,” said Mann. “Or sell apples!” He hung up.

The pink spots in Stuart’s cheeks deepened in color. He puffed out his cheeks and sucked them in again. He scratched his chin; he fussed among the papers on his desk. He had just attained his life’s ambition, but it tasted sour. However, he took down the house phone and spoke into it, asking that Miss Wrenn be sent to him.

Paula entered his office, paler than usual, but perfectly collected, and looking in her own miraculous way as if she had just that moment been freshly dressed. None but a trained psychologist could have seen that there was a world of pain and anxiety in the bottom of her blue eyes. At the sight of her blonde youthfulness, Stuart softened in an unpleasant fashion.

“Miss Wrenn,” he began, “there has been a great change here this morning. Mr. Beekman has resigned from the bank and I . . .”

“Yes, I know,” she said, quietly.

“You know it!” he said, staring. “It only happened quarter of an hour ago.”

“Everybody in the bank knows it now.”

“Well . . . well. . . .” said Stuart. He adjusted his cravat. He cleared his throat. “This will necessitate a complete reorganization here,” he went on, pompously, “and I shall be compelled to do certain things which, personally, I deeply regret.”

“What do you mean?” asked Paula, anxiously.

“I am forced to ask for your resignation.” He did not look at her as he said it.

Paula looked at him without speaking while it sank in. Her face, pale before, became absolutely bloodless. But it remained firm; she would not beg for her job.

“Well?” said Stuart, a little sharply.

“Excuse me,” murmured Paula. “This is so completely unexpected. . . . Has not my work here been satisfactory?”

“Oh, eminently so! eminently so!” said Stuart. “As I said before, I am forced to take this action in the interest of larger considerations.” He waved his hand.

Paula ignored the fine phrases. “When am I to go?”

“As soon as you like,” said Stuart, brightly. “My rule is, when a painful thing has to be done, do it quickly. I’ll send a check up to your desk for two weeks’ salary in lieu of a more extended notice.”

“Then that’s all?” said Paula.

“That’s all. Except my very best wishes for your future.” He glanced at her out of the corners of his eyes. “Er . . . you might give me your telephone number in case anything turns up.”

Paula scarcely heard him. A haunted look had come into her eyes; that look which silently figures up the cost of rent, food, medicines, and doctors’ bills, and asks: What am I going to do? What am I going to do? “It’s in the book,” she murmured, turning out of the room. Going along the corridor slowly, she put out a hand against the partition, because her knees felt uncertain.

Back in her own room, she dropped into her chair and stared sightlessly at the desk before her. The two stenographers, who watched her every move, glanced at each other significantly and went on working their machines with a self-conscious air. Barbara, the little black-haired girl who filed away letters, was more human. She came to Paula’s desk, asking solicitously.

“Don’t you feel good, Miss Wrenn?”

Paula looked at her witlessly. “No . . . yes,” she said. She pulled open a drawer of her desk and blindly started gathering together certain of her personal belongings. “See if you can find me a piece of wrapping-paper, Barbara.”

“Oh, what’s the matter?” cried Barbara.

“You see . . . I’m leaving,” said Paula, very low.

“You mean Stuart fired you?”

“Yes. He didn’t lose much time about it, did he?”

“Oh, this is terrible!” cried Barbara. “Don’t take it like that! Don’t look like that, Miss Wrenn!”

“I shall be all right,” murmured Paula. “It’s just the unexpectedness of it. . . . I had braced myself to face anything. I forgot this!”

The two stenographers stopped working and looked up. There was a struggle visible in their pretty faces between their settled jealousy of Paula and a newly awakened fellow feeling.

“It’s a shame!” cried Barbara. “You with your sick mother at home and all! It’s just like Stuart, the dirty wowser! It’s what we can all expect now! Slave-driving! Everybody in the bank ought to walk out on Stuart just for that! Then he’d see!”

Paula was roused to a faint smile by the child’s violence. “Hush!” she said. “It happens every day. . . . Get on with your work, girls. There will be somebody else coming in directly, and we must have the decks cleared.”

Barbara went back to her files, sniffing, and Paula started to do up her package.

The telephone rang. Taking down the receiver, Paula heard a man’s voice that was unknown to her, asking, “Is this Miss Wrenn?” It was an uneducated voice, but pleasant enough.

“Yes,” said Paula.

“This is Mr. Thorpe speaking. You don’t know me.”

“What can I do for you?”

“I heard there was some big changes down at your shop. I thought maybe you’d be looking for a job now.”

Paula’s eyebrows ran up into two little peaks of astonishment. “Why . . . how did you know so soon?”

A laugh sounded over the wire. “You’re surprised. Ain’t no mystery about it. A few of us insiders seen this coming, so it’s no surprise to us. Well, how about it?”

“It’s true I am looking for a position,” said Paula.

“Well, if we suit each other maybe I can give it to you.”

Paula’s face registered both joy and suspicion. This seemed a little too good to be true. “What sort of a position, Mr. Thorpe?”

“I’m looking for a kind of secretary.” (He pronounced it sekktetary.) “Not just a common secretary. I’m writing a book, see? And I got to have somebody to take it all down and put it in good language, see? If you’re the right person for me you can name your own figure.”

“Who recommended me to you, Mr. Thorpe?”

“One of the bank directors. When can you come and see me?”

“I can come any time.”

“Good! Come right up. I live at the Surrey Towers Hotel.”

“Haven’t you got an office?” asked Paula, doubtfully. “I can’t call on a gentleman at his hotel.”

“That’s all right,” said the voice, comfortably. “I got a big apartment here and all. My wife lives with me. She’ll receive you.”

“All right,” said Paula. “I’ll come right up. And thank you, Mr. Thorpe.”

“Thank you, Miss Wrenn.”

Paula hung up, looking a little dazed. Barbara came running back from the files. “Oh, what is it?” she cried. “Chance of a job?”

Paula nodded. “Somebody who lives at the Surrey Towers Hotel.”

“The Surrey Towers!” gasped Barbara, clutching her bony little chest. “O my God! Miss Wrenn, that’s the swellest joint in town! Only the way-ups, the gilt-edgers can live there! You’re fixed for life!”

“If I get the job,” said Paula, smiling.

Chapter XXII

DAVE awoke uneasily on the hard shelf in his cell. He glanced round at the gray brick walls, the steel bars, with terror in his eyes—then remembered and grinned. He went to the door.

“Hey, you in the next cell!”

“Cheese, Rip Van Winkle, are you awake?” came the answer. “I thought youse had died in there.”

“What time is it, for the lova Mike?” asked Dave, anxiously.

“You can search me! About three in the afternoon.”

“O, my God!”

“What’s the matter? Have you missed an important appointment?”

“You said it.”

There was a laugh from next door.

“How do you call the keeper?” asked Dave.

“You may call him, but he won’t come.”

Dave tried rattling the cell door, and kept it up until the old watchdog came stumping through the corridor. “Cheese! youse is in a sweat to get out, ain’t you?” he grumbled. However, he opened the door.

“What the hell?” demanded the man next door, in surprise, but he never got any answer.

Dave was led out into the police station. There was a different lieutenant on duty. “Who’s this?” he demanded.

“Bum sleeping in Number Seven.”

“Oh, all right.”

Dave took a swift, anxious survey from the door before trusting himself to the street. Nothing suspicious in sight. As soon as he was out of range of the station-house windows, he hailed a taxi bound north, telling the driver to keep on driving. Meanwhile he watched through the rear window. As soon

as he was satisfied that he was not being followed, he had himself put down. This was at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Waverly Place.

He turned into a drug store and called up the bank from a telephone booth. It was risky, but he had no choice. The switchboard operator at the bank was not familiar with his voice. He asked for Miss Wrenn, and waited with an eager smile for the sound of her voice. But the operator came back.

“Miss Wrenn is not here. She has left the bank.”

Dave’s mouth fell open, and his eyes went blank. “**What!**”

“Miss Wrenn has resigned her position here. Do you wish to speak to the present head of the Correspondence Department?”

“Never mind,” he said, feebly, and hung up.

As soon as he collected his wits he called up the flat on Forty-ninth Street. He heard the bell ring at the other end; there was no answer. His face went stupid with astonishment again. The telephone instrument was immediately beside Mrs. Wrenn’s bed, and Mrs. Wrenn could not leave her bed. He could hear the bell ringing with idiotic regularity.

He finally came out of the booth with a face tormented by anxiety and helplessness. There was nothing to do but wait awhile and call again.

He drifted down Waverly Place to Washington Square, buying a newspaper on the way. Sitting on a park bench, he lost himself in reading column after column of comment and speculation upon himself and the murders he was supposed to have had a hand in. The reporters had nothing new to go on and they had to spread their stuff thin. Wonder and disgust were uppermost in Dave’s face. It was difficult to understand why the whole world had turned against him so viciously.

In an adjoining column he found other matter that arrested his attention: IRVIN BEEKMAN FORCED OUT OF THE CHAMBERS NATIONAL.

A brief account of the shareholders meeting was followed by a carefully prepared statement from Stuart which, without making direct charges, intimated that various irregularities had been discovered in the bank’s affairs, hence the change in management. Dave was not deceived by it. “Dirty work at the crossroads!” he muttered. On an inside page he read Beekman’s angry statement, charging that Jim Mann had bought into the Chambers National for the purpose of turning him out.

At any other time Dave would have been greatly excited by this story; now he dismissed it with a shrug. His own painful affairs occupied his mind

to the exclusion of everything else.

He was sitting on his bench, scowling at the ground, trying to piece things together, when he heard "Extra!" being shouted along the park paths by one of the leather-lunged venders who only appear for such a purpose. Dave paid little attention until the sound of his own name made him start up in fright.

"Dave Westover! Dave Westover!" the man was bellowing it to the world with the full force of his powerful lungs. "Dave Westover. . . . Murder!" A string of indistinguishable jargon followed. By this time the man had come abreast of Dave. "Extra! . . . Dave Westover commits another murder!" he bawled almost directly in Dave's face.

Dave flinched, and quickly recovered himself. "Here!" he said, pulling out the money in a hand that trembled a good deal. The news-seller, keen only for his nickel, continued on his way, bawling. Dave dropped back on the bench and held the paper before his face. He read:

The search for Dave Westover, the handsome young bank-clerk-gangster was given fresh impetus this afternoon by the receipt of an anonymous letter addressed to Inspector Scofield at Police Headquarters. Westover, who is already wanted in connection with the taxicab murder yesterday, and the disappearance of a taxi-driver, and who is suspected of complicity in the deaths of a second taxi-driver and Patrolman Crehan in the automobile crash on Third Avenue, is now believed to be responsible for the death of Timothy Ahearne at Darius House early this morning.

Beyond saying that it definitely linked up the taxicab murder with the Ahearne killing, Inspector Scofield refuses to divulge the contents of the letter he received. It was printed in block letters on a sheet of common notepaper and collected before ten o'clock from a street box in the Greenwich Village neighborhood. Investigation by the police revealed that paper and envelope had been purchased in a drug store near by. From the druggist the police obtained a detailed description of the purchaser.

It corresponds in every particular with the young man who was present when the body of Ahearne was discovered this morning.

Immediately upon receiving the letter, the inspector proceeded to Darius House and went into consultation with Frank E.

Doremus, the manager. The inspector refused to speak when he came out, but he looked pleased, and intimated that important developments might be expected later.

Under questioning, Mr. Doremus admitted that Ahearne's mysterious friend was none other than the much-wanted Dave Westover. "He was very roughly dressed," said Mr. Doremus, "and that put me off because the newspapers have always spoken of Westover as an elegant young fellow. I was suspicious of him from the first because his speech did not seem to fit the old clothes, but naturally I was so overcome by the discovery of a murder in my hotel that I never thought of any other murder.

"Inspector Scofield has just brought me all the photographs of Dave Westover that are in his possession, and after a study of them I can unhesitatingly affirm that Ahearne's self-styled friend and Westover are one and the same person.

"Westover, when I saw him, was wearing a faded cloth cap, an old blue sweater with an imitation leather coat over it, much worn and stained, and having a sheepskin collar. He had on a pair of brown pants badly soiled, and ragged around the bottoms, and rough workmen's shoes. He has wavy brown hair with lighter shades in it. He wears it rather long, and when I saw him it looked as if it had not known the comb for some time, and was hanging down partly over his forehead."

Mr. Doremus said in conclusion: "I sincerely hope that the police, with the description I have furnished them, will soon be able to lay their hands on Westover. Such a man, who appears to have been responsible for five fatalities during the past two days, is as dangerous as a pestilence abroad in the streets."

Dave furtively shoved his hair up under his cap, and glanced to the right and left with the old hunted look. Several other people sitting along the row of benches had bought copies of the extra. He was terrified of meeting their eyes. Once again the pitiless searchlight of publicity was beating on him, from which there was no escape. He got up and hastened out of the park with his head down.

Chapter XXIII

IN the house on North Washington Square, Cora Beekman stood in the center of her bedroom, overseeing the packing and locking of various trunks about the walls. She betrayed no appearance of hurry. In her black tailored suit of sporting cut, white silk blouse, and casual little hat, she looked rare and fine. Only a beautiful woman can afford to dress so plainly. For a touch of elegance she carried a silver-fox fur over her arm.

The expressmen carrying out the trunks, looked at her out of the corners of their eyes. Cora, not unaware of their admiration, treated them graciously. From time to time she surveyed herself approvingly in a wall mirror. She had made up pale, knowing that a slightly haggard look only gave a more deeply cutting edge to her beauty.

When the last trunk had been carried out, she said to her maid: "Go get your things together, Annette, and bring them back here. We must leave in twenty minutes."

"Yes, madam."

Left alone in the room, Cora went to the telephone. She gave a number, and presently began speaking in an offhand voice without any sort of salutation. "I called up to tell you that I wasn't able to get the Twentieth Century. Irvin came home in the middle of the morning, and was here until lunch time, talking to various people. I couldn't start packing until he was out of the house. I am ready now, and shall take the five-o'clock train. I have reserved a drawing-room and a compartment for my maid."

In answer to a question she continued. "I don't know. I haven't had any talk with Irvin. He went out to consult with his attorneys. I shall be gone when he gets back."

She listened for a moment, and said, decidedly: "Certainly you can't come to the station to see me off. There are sure to be people taking that train who know us. What would be said if we were seen together?" . . .

"Yes, I know they'll talk, anyhow. But there's no use pouring gasoline on the flames!" . . .

“Very well. After I establish residence, I don’t suppose I’ll have to stay there all the time. We can meet in Chicago later.” . . .

“I’ll let you know. Good-by.”

Evidently there was a protest from the other end of the wire. Cora smiled somewhat contemptuously. “Very well. Good-by . . . Jim.” She hung up.

Her maid returned to the room, and Cora, lighting a cigarette, languidly directed her as to the packing of her traveling-bag.

In the middle of this she raised her eyes and saw her husband standing in the doorway. She was immediately aware that he had met the trunks on the way out of the house. The maid, with a terrified glance in Beekman’s face, faded out through the dressing-room.

There was a silence, each trying to force the other to speak first. The man was no match for the woman at that game. He said at last, with rather a pleasant smile—but there was an ugly white band around his lips:

“May I ask where you’re going?”

“To my mother’s for the present,” said Cora.

Without a word, Beekman crossed the room and took up the telephone.

“You’re only making trouble for yourself when you do that,” said Cora, sharply.

He put down the instrument. “So you’re lying,” he said, quietly. “That was what I wanted to find out.”

“I merely wanted to spare your feelings,” she said, angrily.

Beekman began to laugh, and having begun, seemed unable to stop. He leaned one hand on the back of a chair, and pressed the other against his side, laughing uproariously, though his eyes looked as if he were being hacked with knives. Cora glanced at him sullenly and uneasily. She did not understand laughter.

“Excuse my outburst,” he said, bitterly. “When things reach a certain point there’s nothing to do but laugh! . . . I know we live in a cynical age,” he went on, “but, by God! this goes cynicism one better! I meet with a serious reverse in the morning, and my wife leaves me in the afternoon! Fast work, Cora! Fast work in a fast age!”

“What’s the use of talking?” she said. “You must see that my mind is made up.”

“Oh yes,” he said, laughing harshly again. “I met the trunks on the sidewalk. Of course I know that when a lady removes her trunks her mind is made up! . . . Where’s the money coming from for this trip?” he demanded, hardening. “I know that you travel expensively, my dear.”

“Don’t let that trouble you,” said Cora. “I shan’t ask you for any.”

“Whom **are** you asking?”

“Don’t be common! I have some money of my own.”

“That’s a lie. I know all about your finances.”

“You are making yourself ridiculous, Irvin!”

“Ridiculous?”

She gave him her full glance, cold and full of hate. “I’m through,” she said.

“Through on the day that I lose my money, eh? Have you no shame?”

She laughed delicately.

His brow became black with rage, and his eyes glowed. “That’s the modern woman’s point of view, eh? Pay up or shut up! And the modern man stands for it, the poor fool! Not me!” He came closer to her. “You have fallen in with a bad crowd. You are full of this shameless modern jabber. You are almost spoiled, but, by God! you’re mine!”

“Really, Irvin, you’ve missed your vocation!”

“You live in a world of make-believe!” he said, violently. “Make-believe love, make-believe pleasure, make-believe sin! It’s time you were reminded of reality! You live off your own vanity. You forget that it was God made you beautiful, and it’s no credit to you. If you had any sense it would make you humble-minded!”

She glanced at her watch. “I’m sorry, Irvin, but . . .”

“Take off your hat!” he said, harshly. “You’re not going to leave this house!”

Cora looked at him in affected surprise, and began deliberately to put on one of her gloves.

“Hear the truth for once!” said Beekman, violently. “There is a man’s point of view, too. You have enslaved us with your beauty, but we despise you! Ah, we’re supposed to be civilized; we smile at you indulgently, and let

you put us through our paces. But we're not all tamed. It's my own fault. I have spoiled you like a child until your pretty head is completely turned. Well, I'll cure you now! You're mine and I'm going to keep you!"

"How?" asked Cora, moistening her fingers to work the tight glove on.

"By physical force," said Beekman, lowering at her.

She smiled scornfully, but under the subtle make-up she changed color.

"Ha! that touches you!" he said. "That's real!"

"If you're going to be the old-fashioned husband," she said, "I shall be the modern wife!"

"What do you mean?"

"If you attempt to use force I'll call the police."

A spasm of rage distorted Beekman's face. He tore the half-on glove from her hand and tossed it away. Cora shrank from him. He caught her wrist. "Don't push me too far!" he said, hoarsely. "There are black places in a man's soul of which you know nothing! Don't rouse the beast in me!"

She was wildly frightened then. "Irvin! Irvin!" she gasped, straining away from him.

He caught her, and strained her slender body against his own. "O God, you're beautiful!" he groaned. "I warned you! I warned you! Look how easy it would be for me to crush you! So beautiful! It would be sweet to kill you! It would ease the pain you have given me!"

"Annette! Annette!" cried Cora, in a voice half strangled with terror.

The maid ran in, trembling.

"Telephone . . . downstairs!" gasped Cora.

Annette ran out.

Beekman flung Cora in a chair. "Annette!" he called, peremptorily.

She returned.

"After all, I am civilized," Beekman said, bitterly, to Cora. "You win!" To Annette he added, harshly: "Get your mistress ready and get out of the house. I will go out until you have gone!"

He left the room. They heard him go downstairs. The front door slammed.

Cora was huddled in the chair, shaking, sobbing in a dry fashion; no tears. “Oh, I hate him! I hate him! I hate him! The brute to treat me so!”

“Quick, madam! He may come back!” gasped Annette.

Cora roused herself. “Get me a fresh pair of gloves. Close my bag.” She glanced at her watch. “We still have time.”

While the maid busied herself, Cora looked at herself anxiously in the mirror. She composed her features with an effort, and applied fresh make-up. Two minutes later when they left the house she was smiling for the world to see.

Chapter XXIV

AFTER a second fruitless attempt to get Paula on the telephone, Dave was walking slowly east on Waverly Place with a set, hard face. His motive power was gone. He looked as if he didn't care what happened to him. He stopped at the corner of Macdougall Street, at a loss which way to turn. He stood there, eyes down, idly kicking a hydrant.

Presently he looked up to discover that a policeman was studying him attentively from across Waverly Place. Dave turned away with a great air of carelessness, but a look of panic appeared in his eyes. He had seen the policeman visibly taking inventory of his clothes—faded cap, imitation leather coat, soiled brown pants, etc.

Dave crossed Macdougall Street, taking care not to show any hurry. Out of the tail of his eye he saw the policeman striking diagonally across to follow him. Dave kept on along the northern edge of Washington Square. He refrained from looking over his shoulder. Hope died in his eyes and his lips curled bitterly. His expression said: This is the end of my run! The jig is up!

His eyes, darting this way and that, searching for any expedient, any trick that would enable him to evade capture, suddenly picked up a figure he knew. It was Irvin Beekman sitting on a bench at the edge of the Square, gazing straight ahead of him. Following a blind impulse, Dave turned towards him. As he turned he saw the policeman twenty-five yards in the rear, still coming on. He was a stout, rosy specimen, with honest, dumb blue eyes.

Dave paused by the seated figure. There was no one near. "Mr. Beekman," he said.

Beekman looked up at him dully. His thoughts were elsewhere. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Don't you know me?"

"Your face is familiar, but I can't remember where . . ."

"I'm Dave Westover."

Beekman was startled out of his apathy. “What!” he cried, staring. “It is! . . . What do you want of me?”

“Stand by me!” pleaded Dave, hastily. “The cop is going to speak to us!”

A moment later the policeman was beside them. It appeared that he was acquainted with Beekman as a resident along his beat. “Excuse me for troubling you, Mr. Beekman,” he said. “Do you know this man?”

Beekman was entirely collected now. “Why, yes,” he said, “he worked in my house as second man a couple of years ago. He’s down on his luck now. He’s been asking me to give him another chance.”

“What’s his name, sir?”

“Charles Baker,” said Beekman, unhesitatingly. “He isn’t wanted by the police, is he?”

“Not that I know of, sir. I only asked because he answers to the description of Dave Westover.”

“Oh, this isn’t Westover,” said Beekman, with a careless laugh. “I know him well.”

“Well, much obliged, sir. Sorry to have troubled you.”

“Don’t mention it, Donovan.”

The policeman strolled back to his post.

Dave sat down suddenly beside Beekman, and wiped his face with the back of his hand. “Gosh! What a close shave!” he murmured. “Makes me feel weak inside!”

“Did you kill the man in the taxicab?” Beekman asked, coolly.

Dave met his eye squarely. “No,” he said. “He’d been dead for hours when I came along.”

“All right,” said Beekman. “I believe you.”

There was a silence. Finally Beekman said:

“What made you speak to me?”

“I read in the paper about your troubles,” said Dave. “I thought it might make you feel like helping an unlucky devil who was on the run like me.”

“Good psychology!” said Beekman. “As a matter of fact, I took your part from the beginning.”

“You would,” said Dave.

Beekman laughed bitterly. “I reckon,” he said, “that you and I are harder up against it than any other men in New York tonight. Shake hands on it.”

Dave obeyed, echoing Beekman’s harsh laugh. “I wouldn’t mind what they did to me,” he said, savagely. “But they’re striking at me through my girl now. Makes me feel desperate.”

“Same here,” said Beekman.

Another silence. Neither man was inclined to talk. Beekman said at last:

“What are you going to do now?”

“I scarcely know,” said Dave. “I’m near the end of my string. The police are furnished with a new description of me.”

“You can’t sit here,” said Beekman. “Somebody else will pick you up. Come to my house and I’ll furnish you with a different outfit.”

Dave’s hard face softened. For a moment he was unable to speak. Feeling made his voice sound gruff. “Gosh! if you knew what that meant to me! A friendly act, I mean, when you feel as if the whole world had turned against you. I can’t tell you . . .”

Beekman was almost as much moved as Dave was. “Don’t try,” he said, quickly. “Didn’t I tell you there was a special bond between us tonight? We’ve got to stand by each other.”

“I will never forget it!” murmured Dave.

Beekman waved it away. “I am stouter than you,” he went on, sizing up Dave’s figure, “but my valet is about your size. He’ll lend you a suit. It might attract attention if we entered the house together. You had better go around through the alley and stop at the door in the wall marked number one hundred eight. I’ll send somebody back to let you in.”

“How about Mrs. Beekman?” asked Dave. “What would she say?”

“She is away,” said Beekman, dryly.

Upon his arrival in the house, Dave was taken up to Beekman’s bedroom. Notwithstanding his rough clothes, the servants regarded him in friendly fashion. It was evident that the way had been prepared for him. He spoke of this as soon as he was alone with his friend.

“You can trust them,” said Beekman, masking his feelings behind an ironic smile. “They’ve all been working for me a long time. As a result of

my troubles today—financial **and** domestic—they seem determined to show me they're going to stand by me in everything. Very foolish and soft-hearted of them!"

"So you say," answered Dave, lightly. This was the first he had heard of any domestic troubles. He didn't refer to it further. He glanced around the old-fashioned, warm-colored room appreciatively. "I can't sit down here," he said, deprecatingly. "I'm too dirty."

"Nonsense!" said Beekman. "What's a little dirt between friends? You can take a bath, and we'll burn your clothes."

"Do you mind if I telephone first?"

"Go to it," said Beekman, indicating the instrument.

Once more Dave called up the flat on forty-ninth Street. Receiving no answer, he turned away from the telephone, half sick with disappointment.

"Tell me what the situation is," said Beekman.

His capable, friendly, steady air had a tonic effect. Dave briefly and rapidly sketched out everything that had happened. Beekman interrupted him only once.

"Paula Wrenn! Who would ever have guessed it! I remember her well! A grand girl! You're in luck, Westover. You've kept her secret well!

"My God! What a story!" Beekman exclaimed when Dave had come to an end. "You haven't done so badly for an amateur. You know the identity of the taxicab victim; you know who killed him and why he was killed. Also you know who killed Tim Ahearne, or whatever his right name may have been, and you can prove it."

"What good does all this do me if they've got the girl!" said Dave, bitterly.

"Look!" said Beekman, suddenly. "You can't go to the house on Forty-ninth Street, but there's no reason why I shouldn't go. While you're bathing I'll drive up there and find out what has happened."

Dave's strained face warmed with gratitude. It wasn't necessary to say anything now. They understood each other. Beekman left.

Cummings, the valet, brought Dave a complete outfit of clothes. A valet was a new sort of creature to Dave, and he regarded him with some

suspicion. However, Cummings, a tall, serious-minded young fellow, proved to be thoroughly human and likable. Moreover, his taste in clothes, off duty, was very good.

“Certainly is kind of you to lend me these things,” said Dave.

“Not at all,” said Cummings. “You shouldn’t thank me, because Mr. Beekman will make it up to me.”

“I reckon he’s a pretty good master,” said Dave.

“I never expect to find a better.”

“Look here,” said Dave. “There’s something I want to ask you, but you needn’t answer if it’s a secret. Mr. Beekman said something about having domestic troubles today. I didn’t like to ask him. What was he referring to?”

“It cannot be kept secret,” said Cummings. “The mistress has cleared out, that’s all.”

“Cleared out!” exclaimed Dave. “Where to?”

“We figure she’s gone to Reno.”

“Good God!”

“Naturally, he’s all broken up about it,” said Cummings, dryly, “but if the truth were known, it’s not such a great loss. Us servants know more about her goings-on than he does. None of us will miss her.”

“Gosh!” said Dave, wonderingly. “With all that on his mind, and then to turn around and help me in my troubles!”

“Well, that’s the way he is,” said Cummings.

Beekman returned before Dave had finished dressing. Cummings had left the room. In answer to the question that leaped up in Dave’s face, Beekman said, quickly:

“It appears to be all right. Quite a simple explanation, after all. I saw the manager of the apartment house. He said that Miss Wrenn had secured a new position which would necessitate a certain amount of traveling. Consequently, she was obliged to send her mother to a hospital. The old lady was carried away in an ambulance this afternoon. She is at Dr. Sterner’s private hospital at West End Avenue and Seventy-seventh Street.”

“What’s Paula’s new job?” asked Dave.

“That the manager didn’t know. Naturally, she wouldn’t tell him.”

“Well, it’s better than I expected,” said Dave. His face had not altogether cleared. He thought it over for a moment or two. “Just the same, it looks funny,” he blurted out. “Why the devil should Paula ever have been fired from the bank? She was one of the best they had. And how come she got another job right off the bat. I don’t like it!”

“What do you suspect?” asked Beekman.

“Yesterday evening I heard those men plotting to search her flat today. This whole thing may be just a scheme to get the two women out of the way.”

“Are your relations good with the old lady?” asked Beekman.

“The best!”

“Well, as soon as you are ready you can go up and see her. She must know where Paula is.”

“I will,” said Dave.

There was silence for a moment or two. Beekman, seated beside the fireplace, was busy trying to puzzle the situation through in his own way. At length he asked:

“How the devil could this gang have reached Paula through the bank?”

“You can search me,” said Dave, gloomily.

Beekman scowled heavily. “Unless,” he said, slowly—“unless Jim Mann has a hand in it. Jim Mann seems to be aware of everything crooked that goes on in this town.”

Dave, turning from the mirror, stared at him with growing excitement.

“Perhaps it will turn out that you and I are partners in more ways than we know of,” said Beekman, grimly.

He suddenly sprang up and began to pace the room. His iron repression broke at last. “O God!” he cried, bitterly, “Jim Mann has become an obsession with me! I seem to see his evil fat face between me and everything I look at! I almost had him . . . I almost had him when he struck this blow at me today. For months I have been digging into his past and I have pieced together a pretty complete story.

“I didn’t bother with minor crimes such as beer-running, racketeering, theft. I concentrated on murder. Mann has committed eleven known murders, and God only knows how many others! Known, I say, known to

hundreds of people. Yet he's never been brought into court but once, and then he was discharged without a trial.

"I know all this as well as I know the circumstances of my own life, but I can't proceed against him because I lack concrete evidence. I haven't got the kind of testimony you can put before a jury. He has shown a devilish cunning in concealing his tracks. I have found myself blocked at every point. Ever since he turned respectable he's had men covering the scenes of his past exploits, buying up and destroying any evidence that could be used against him.

"But it exists somewhere. I am certain of it. The cleverest crook is bound to slip up once. And I would have found it. Sooner or later I would have found it if he had not cut all the ground from under my feet. Now my backers have deserted me. I can't get fresh backing. All are afraid to oppose Jim Mann."

Beekman had come to a stop, scowling at the floor. "And I suspect," he went on in a lower voice, "that he has done me a greater injury than turning me out of my bank. I dare not satisfy myself of it for fear I might go mad altogether. Even as it is I am tempted . . . O God! how I am tempted . . ."

"How?" asked Dave, full of concern.

"To shoot the grinning scoundrel," muttered Beekman. "What a satisfaction that would be! How soundly I'd sleep after it! . . . I could do it, too. I could reach him in spite of all his guards and gunmen, because he doesn't think me capable of it. He thinks I'm too civilized. . . . But a civilized man can be tried too far . . ."

"No!" said Dave, strongly. "You'd be playing his game then!"

Beekman passed a hand over his face and resumed his pacing. "You're right," he said more quietly. "You're a good fellow, Westover. I should certainly have gone crazy if I couldn't have talked to somebody. . . . You're right. If Jim Mann was shot, his successor would rise next day. Shooting's too good for him. He must be exposed. The whole foul story must be published in order to break up his organization for good and all."

Dave crossed the room and put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "And I believe you're going to do it," he said.

"How can I without money?" said Beekman, dejectedly.

"Mann will go too far. He's sure to slip up. He'll give you an opening."

Beekman shook his head. “Not now,” he said. “Since he came east and changed his name, he’s no better than he used to be, but he’s cleverer. And he has surrounded himself with advisers who are cleverer than he is. If it’s necessary to commit a murder now, he lets somebody do it for him. He is giving up murder for high finance. The only way I can hope to get him is by showing up his past.”

“What did his name used to be?” asked Dave, a little breathlessly.

“The Italian equivalent of Jim Mann.”

“I don’t know Italian.”

“Giacomo Uomo.”

For a second Dave looked at Beekman as if he had received a blow on the head. Then his eyes blazed up. “I knew it!” he cried. “I felt it coming! We have him! We have him! I’ve got the evidence right here in my pocket that will send Jim Mann to the chair!”

Beekman stared as if he thought his young friend had gone mad. “How?” he stammered. “How?”

“Look!” cried Dave. He carefully spread out the worn affidavit on the bureau and they read it together.

Dave was forced to fling up his arms, and to let out a whoop or two to ease his feelings. On the other hand Beekman became very quiet. A look of almost sleepy satisfaction appeared in his eyes.

“Yes,” he said, slowly, “this will do the trick. I know the rest of the Rossi story. The affidavit will clinch it.”

Chapter XXV

AFTER locking the affidavit in a wall safe, Dave and Beekman immediately set out for Dr. Sterner's hospital in Beekman's car, a limousine driven by a chauffeur. Beekman gave Dave a gun which the young man pocketed with satisfaction. On the way the older man recounted what he knew about the Rossi murder.

"This Salvatore Rossi was a rival beer-runner in Chicago at the time that Giacomo Uomo, or Jake Yuma, as he was commonly called, was in that business. They had a working agreement under which Rossi operated on the west side of town and Yuma on the south. They were supposed to be friends and allies, but Yuma coveted Rossi's territory. He was aiming to be supreme in the entire city.

"Rossi went to meet his friend, as he thought, in Frank Houlihan's saloon, and was murdered there as the affidavit describes. Yuma was arrested for the crime, and at a preliminary hearing Bat Crear, the bartender, and Mitchell Evers both testified against him. Monk Seely, the other eye-witness had disappeared. Jake Yuma was held for the grand jury. It was the only time he was ever arrested.

"When the case came up before the grand jury, Bat Crear had been shot, Monk Seely was still not to be found, and this Evers who made the affidavit recanted his previous testimony in fear of his life, and testified in Yuma's favor. So our friend was triumphantly nolle prossed. It was a ghastly farce.

"Two years later Mitchell Evers died from natural causes in St. Joseph's Hospital, Chicago. He made this affidavit in the hospital. I had already heard of it, but I supposed that it had been destroyed like everything else. The notary, Enoch Bland, is still alive, and also the other witness, Henry Wessels. There are also several Catholic sisters at the hospital who are familiar with all the circumstances of Mitchell Evers' sickness and death. There is no question but that we can make the case stand up.

"I have also heard something about this Walter Wrenn who witnessed the document," Beekman went on. "Wrenn started as an actor, and presumably failed to make good at it, because he turns up later as a gambler in a small way. He was described to me as a little, timid man. When Yuma started to

organize gambling in Chicago, Wrenn was driven out of town. The big fellow never had any use for him. Wrenn was a friend of Mitchell Evers', and that's how he came to be present at Evers' deathbed. I suppose he took the affidavit, and years later was driven by the pressure of want to try to use it as a club over the great man's head. And that spelled finis for him!"

"And he was Paula's father!" muttered Dave. "She doesn't owe much to him."

"Well, nowadays we know that a rotten parent may produce a magnificent child," said Beekman. "Anyhow, a child always has two parents."

"The other one's all right," said Dave.

Dr. Sterner's hospital was a small and elegant establishment in one of the best quarters of town. It appeared that there were no restrictions as to visitors, and Dave was shown to Mrs. Wrenn's room without any formality. He discovered that good clothes made an enormous difference in the way he was received anywhere.

Through the open door he saw the young-old lady sitting up in bed, wearing one of her attractive pink negligees. She was reading a newspaper. A glance in her serene and sweet-tempered face told Dave that all was well with her, anyhow. At sight of him her eyes lighted up with pleasure and she extended both her thin hands.

"My dear, dear boy!" she said. "My dear, dear boy!" Pressing his hands, she added: "You don't mind if I call you that, do you? I have been thinking of you so much lying in my bed, that you have become as dear to me as if you were my own!"

"Mind!" said Dave. He was so touched he couldn't say anything else. He bent his head and kissed her worn forehead.

"Weren't you afraid to come here?" she asked, both terrified and delighted by the danger. "Better shut the door." There was something everlastingly young in her, that caused Dave to grin with pleasure.

When he returned to the bed she said: "I was reading about you at the very moment when you came in. Look!" She rapped the story of the murder in Darius House.

"That's all stuff," said Dave. "Just like the rest of it. They've got to have somebody to hang their murders on, and why not me? I'm the most popular murderer in town."

Mrs. Wrenn laughed, even while she struggled to keep a straight face. “You mustn’t! You mustn’t!” she said. “This is serious. And it will get worse and worse as long as you evade capture. You must give yourself up to the police and let the whole matter be aired. I’ve been telling you that from the beginning.”

Dave smiled. “Rather dangerous just now when popular opinion is running so high against me. Besides, I’m one that has to have plenty of exercise to keep healthy.”

“No!” said Mrs. Wrenn, shaking her head. “You can easily make me laugh, but I mean it just the same. I’m going to give you a good talking to!”

“All right,” said Dave. “Go as far as you like, but first tell me, where’s Paula?”

“What a day we’ve had!” said Mrs. Wrenn. “But all has turned out for the best. Paula has an excellent new position. Much better salary.”

“Who is she working for?”

“A Mr. Thorpe who lives at the Surrey Towers Hotel.”

Surrey Towers had an ominous ring in Dave’s ears. He lowered his eyes to conceal his anxiety.

“An uneducated man, but apparently very rich,” Mrs. Wrenn went on, happily. “He has this immense beautiful apartment which takes in a whole floor of one of the towers, and there he lives surrounded by his family, his friends, his servants, like an old-time patriarch.”

“An old man?” asked Dave, quickly.

“No, he’s still quite young. He’s going to write a book. I believe it is to be the story of his own rise in life, and Paula is to take it all down and to put it into good English. She has always had a secret ambition to write a book, you know. Mr. Thorpe says this shall come out under her own name. A publisher has already made an offer for it. And Paula is to have all the royalties. Isn’t that generous?”

“Very,” said Dave, dryly.

“As Mr. Thorpe is a very busy man,” Mrs. Wrenn continued, “Paula has to hold herself ready to take dictation at any hour. Also it will be necessary for her to travel sometimes to get material for the book. When he told her this, she said she couldn’t take the position on account of me, and he immediately proposed to send me here at his expense.”

“Is Paula going to live at the Surrey Towers?” asked Dave, sharply.

“No. We’re keeping on the apartment on Forty-ninth Street until we see how this is all going to turn out.”

“That’s wise.”

Mrs. Wrenn appeared a little disappointed by Dave’s lack of enthusiasm. “You must admit that Mr. Thorpe does things in very handsome style,” she said. “This is one of the most expensive rooms in the house. When I arrived there were already flowers in it, a package of new books, and an enormous basket of fruit. I can have anything I want to eat at any hour. Such luxury is very pleasant to an old woman. He has also provided me with a special nurse. A Miss Foster. Such a nice girl. I am already becoming attached to her.”

“You’re fond of everybody,” said Dave, helplessly.

“Well, everybody who is nice to me.”

The door opened, and a nurse entered, bearing a tray of food. “Here she is now!” cried Mrs. Wrenn. “You see I have a visitor, Miss Foster. This is my nephew, Mr. Beddowe.”

Dave was a little startled to hear her lie so coolly. There was just the ghost of a twinkle in the old lady’s eye.

His first glance at the girl was reassuring. Capable, modest, and quiet, she looked like the typical trained nurse. But his suspicions were aroused when he saw her change color at the sight of himself. He watched her without appearing to. The dishes on the tray rattled slightly as she set it down. Obviously Dave had given her a shock and she was exerting a powerful effort to hide it.

Mrs. Wrenn, quite unaware of any electricity in the atmosphere, looked over her tray eagerly. “Creamed mushrooms!” she exclaimed. “Endive salad; strawberries! Fancy strawberries in November.” She talked on gaily.

Gradually Dave reconstructed the nurse’s face in his mind as he had last seen it; scarlet lips, scarlet cheeks, scarlet beret pulled on one side, while she waited coolly to see a man shot. This was Pompey’s girl, Rina. The starched uniform and cap, the absence of make-up, the modest air, had changed her almost beyond recognition.

The sense of danger sharpened Dave’s faculties. He smiled at the girl boldly. “I’m glad to meet you, Miss Foster,” he said. “My aunt has been singing your praises ever since I came in.”

The girl was confused by this line of attack. She laughed self-consciously as she arranged the dishes before her patient. "Well, Mrs. Wrenn is a nice person to take care of," she said.

Dave was encouraged by her confusion. His keen eyes measured her when she was not looking his way. The question was, could he bluff her into believing that he had not recognized her. After all, he had only had two fleeting glimpses of her.

"You're a pretty nice person yourself," he said, gallantly.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Wrenn, humorously running up her eyebrows. "I like that!"

"You said so yourself," retorted Dave.

"That's quite a different thing! I'm not going to have you turn the poor girl's head under my very nose."

"I reckon it would take a better man than me to turn her head," said Dave, smiling at the girl. "She doesn't fall so easily!"

"You're what they call a fast worker, aren't you?" said Mrs. Wrenn, taking a mouthful of creamed mushrooms. "I didn't know it ran in our family."

"It depends on what I'm working for," said Dave.

Having placed everything before Mrs. Wrenn, the girl started for the door, casting an invidious smile on Dave as she passed. He sprang up. He was determined to prevent her leaving the room before he did.

"Oh, don't go!" he said, cajolingly. "Sit down and talk to me while aunty eats her supper."

"I'm not allowed to sit while I am on duty," she said, demurely.

"I'll close the door, then," said Dave, suiting the action to the word. "Now we can do as we please."

The girl sat down reluctantly. However, her uneasiness was gone. Now there was a hint of contempt in her eyes when they turned on Dave. Dave lowered his eyes to conceal his satisfaction.

"I hope you'll be here a long time, aunty," he said. "So I can come see you every day."

"Wretch!" said Mrs. Wrenn, calmly.

Dave talked on in the same serio-comic vein. The girl said little to him, but kept asking Mrs. Wrenn if she required anything. Finally she got up again.

“I am supposed to get my supper now,” she said, in her slightly husky voice.

“Just five minutes,” pleaded Dave. “I’ve got a special reason for asking. In fact, I want you to do something for me.”

Mrs. Wrenn looked at him in real surprise then. A wary look came into the girl’s face.

“And aunty, too, of course,” Dave went on. “That’s really what I came for. But she can’t help me without your knowing of it.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Mrs. Wrenn, sharply.

Dave’s look appeared as open as the sky. “I’ve got a paper to hide, a kind of affidavit,” he said. “It’s a long story, and I won’t go into the details now; but there’s a gang of crooks who are dead set on getting hold of it. They’ve seized me twice and near killed me looking for it, and I’m at my wits’ end to know where to hide it. As soon as I heard aunty had gone to a hospital I thought they would never in the world think of looking for it there. And I came to ask her if she would hide it for me.”

It was apparent from Mrs. Wrenn’s expression that she thought Dave was talking very foolishly; however, she didn’t say so. “Of course,” she said, “if you wish it.”

The girl was excited and could not altogether conceal it. A faint color showed under her skin and her lips kept opening and closing. Her manner thawed towards Dave. “Her bed has two mattresses on it,” she said, eagerly, “and I could stick it between them. Nobody ever moves them but me. . . . Have you got it on you?”

“No,” said Dave, carelessly. “I left it with my friend, Bill Fielder, in the car down at the door. I have to go now, anyway. I’ll fetch it.”

“I’ll go down with you,” said the girl. “Then you won’t have to come up again.”

“Fine!” said Dick. “Certainly is kind of you.”

They left the room together. Mrs. Wrenn’s eyes followed them with a puzzled and anxious expression. She suspected that Dave had some ulterior motive for acting as he did, but she was unable to figure it out.

As they passed through the corridors, Rina's eagerness betrayed her. Her tongue was unloosed then, and she rolled her black eyes languishingly in Dave's direction. She overdid the part, and the contempt was on his side now.

They went down in an elevator, and crossed the ground-floor lobby. The building had been designed to include a little turn-in for cars to the front door, consequently Beekman's limousine rested immediately below the step.

Dave opened the rear door and stuck his head in. "Oh, Bill," he said, "give me the paper. The nurse is going to take it up." At the same time he laid a hand warningly on Beekman's knee.

Beekman had his wits about him. He mumbled something which might have been taken for an answer to anything.

"Step a little closer to the door, Miss Foster," said Dave, lowering his voice mysteriously. "You never know who may be watching you."

The girl unthinkingly approached the open door of the car. Dave slipped behind her, and suddenly seizing her low around her thighs, heaved her inside with all his strength. She fell in a heap at Beekman's feet. A frightened half-scream escaped her. Dave flung himself upon her. Before she could use her whole voice, he had clapped a hand over her mouth.

Beekman amazed, nevertheless saw what he had to do. Reaching out and pulling the door shut, he said swiftly to the chauffeur: "Beat it! Beat it! Get away from here quick! Anywhere!"

The car started.

Rina was struggling frantically under the weight of Dave's body. Rage and terror were lending her the strength of three women. Dave began to laugh and to curse her in the same breath. "Whoa! Whoa! She's a wildcat! For God's sake lend me a hand, Beekman! I can't hold her!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Give me something for a gag. She's trying to bite my hand."

Beekman produced a pocket handkerchief.

"When I hold up her head, pass it under."

Rina managed to emit one strangled scream when they forced the gag between her teeth. A moment later it was knotted hard at the back of her neck. By this time her struggles had exhausted her. She suddenly went limp under Dave, groaning and sobbing under the gag. Dave wiped his face.

“Whew! that was a good workout!” he said.

“Now that we have a breathing space,” said Beekman, dryly, “you might tell me what it’s all about.”

Dave laughed. “Must have been a bit of a shock to you. I’ll say you rose to the situation nobly. . . . This is Pompey’s girl, Rina. You remember, I told you about her. I found her installed as a nurse to Mrs. Wrenn. That told its own story.”

“Sure; I get that.”

“Well, I baited my hook with the affidavit, and she swallowed it without looking.”

“But what do we gain by carrying her off in this high-handed fashion?” asked Beekman.

“I had no choice,” explained Dave. “I was obliged to kidnap her to prevent her telephoning her boss that I was resurrected from jail. I’ve got to surprise him.”

“Right!” said Beekman. “Home,” he said to the chauffeur. “Don’t drive fast enough to attract attention. When you get there, run us into the rear alley.”

Chapter XXVI

RINA allowed herself to be carried through the back yard of 108 North Washington Square, and into the house, without any further struggle. The servants—cook, maids, butler, second man, and valet—were astonished at the apparition of the gagged woman in a nurse’s uniform; but their loyalty to their master remained unshaken. So much had happened in his house during the day that they were becoming hardened.

Rina was carried to the top floor and put into an inside room having no window. Her gag was removed.

“You will not be harmed,” said Beekman, “as long as you are quiet. If you start anything, there are three menservants here who have instructions to tie you up and gag you again.”

Rina cursed him savagely and turned her back. They locked the door on her.

Outside, Beekman said, frowning, “She is too quiet to suit me.”

Dave said: “Well, you must remember that if she should attract attention to her plight she is in no position to make explanations. That’s where we have her.”

They went down to the library. “What is our next move?” said Beekman.

“I must go to the Surrey Towers,” said Dave. “Paula is working for a man called Thorpe there.”

Beekman betrayed no surprise. “That’s Jim Mann,” he said.

“I guessed as much,” said Dave.

“The hotel was afraid of unfavorable publicity. They refused to rent him space under his own name. But it’s an open secret, of course. Everyone up there knows who Thorpe is.”

“Why did they take him at all?” said Dave, scowling.

“Well, it’s a bad year for luxury hotels,” said Beekman, dryly, “and he pays them a hundred thousand a year rent, or more.”

“I know I haven’t any right to ask you,” said Dave; “but will you come up there with me?”

“You have every right to ask me,” protested Beekman. “You’re the main guy in this case. What are you going to do when you get there?”

“I don’t know,” said Dave, scowling. “I’ll get her out, somehow.”

“We are not quite ready to move against Mann,” said Beekman, cautiously. “You can testify that Tim Ahearne, alias Rudy, killed Walter Wrenn, and that Rudy was in turn struck down by Pompey. But we have not yet linked up Pompey with Jim Mann.”

“He went to the Surrey Towers early this morning.”

“I know. But that’s no proof. There are several hundred other people living there.”

“I can’t wait until our case is complete!” cried Dave, excitedly.

“They would never dare harm her in the hotel.”

“Sure! But they could let her go home. And follow her. And she’d never get home!”

“Just give me a couple of hours,” pleaded Beekman. “Let me talk to two or three men.”

“You go see your men,” said Dave. “I’m going to the hotel. I’ll get in somehow. I’ll raise such a row they’ll have to satisfy me.”

Beekman smiled dryly. “I reckon I’d better go with you,” he said, “or you’ll do something foolish. I’ll introduce you to the manager. I have had business dealings with him.”

Dave quieted down.

“Good man!” he said, gruffly. “How lucky I am to have you back of me!”

“We make a pretty good pair,” said Beekman, smiling. “Before we go I’ll telephone to my friend, Inspector Scofield, at Headquarters, and give him an outline of what we’re up to. Just as a measure of safety. Scofield is an honest cop. He has been with me from the beginning in my fight against Jim Mann.”

“Better not mention my name to him,” said Dave, grinning.

“I won’t.”

Ten minutes later they were seated talking to the manager of the Surrey Towers in his office on the mezzanine floor of the hotel. Mr. Abarbanel, the manager, an important figure in New York life, was a suave and astute gentleman with a continental appearance and manner. He frowned when he learned the nature of their errand. Any mention of Mr. Thorpe, alias Jim Mann, was inclined to make him frown. Mr. Abarbanel didn't want the big boss in his hotel, and he couldn't do without him.

Beekman had introduced Dave as "Mr. Johnson." He said: "Johnson has reason to believe that there is a young lady being detained in Jim Mann's apartment against her will. How would you suggest that we satisfy ourselves as to the matter?"

"I wish Jim Mann was in Hades, as far as I am concerned," said Mr. Abarbanel irritably. "I assure you, gentlemen, that it is far from agreeable to me to receive such a person as a guest in my house. But what am I to do? Every day he looms bigger. Instead of keeping custom away from the hotel, he attracts it. My board of directors has already suggested that I allow him to drop the Thorpe."

"I sympathize with you entirely," said Beekman, dryly.

Dave was grinding his teeth with impatience.

"Such a situation could never exist outside of America!" said Mr. Abarbanel.

"Oh, I don't know," said Beekman. "The effect of publicity is much the same the world over. Even in slow-moving England they had their Horace Bottomley a few years ago."

"What can I do?" said Mr. Abarbanel, spreading out his hands. "Mann's servants would not admit your friend to his apartment. If I go up there myself, he will let me learn nothing but what he wants me to know. I can't have his rooms searched without a warrant."

"And that would result in such unfortunate publicity," said Beekman, dryly.

"Oh, terrible!" said Mr. Abarbanel, with a shudder.

"Johnson wants to get in in disguise," suggested Beekman, casually.

"In disguise?"

"Yes, as a waiter."

“Oh no!” exclaimed Mr. Abarbanel, with a look of horror. “I couldn’t permit it! Not for a moment. It’s too risky. He would almost certainly be discovered. And then where would I be?”

“You needn’t know anything about it officially,” suggested Beekman.

“No! No!” said the manager, waving his hands. “If he were found out there would be a terrible uproar.”

“There would be a worse fuss kicked up if a crime is committed in the hotel,” said Beekman, gravely.

“I take the risk,” Dave pointed out.

“What am I to do?” said Mr. Abarbanel, pitifully. “My hands are tied!”

“Before I came here I called up my friend, Inspector Scofield, at Headquarters,” said Beekman. “He advised us to take this course in order to avoid unnecessary scandal. If Johnson fails to get in, or if he is thrown out, the police will enter. The Inspector will be here directly.”

Abarbanel spread out his hands. “In that case,” he said, “I must submit. But personally I refuse to have anything to do with it. I will have nothing to do with it!”

“We quite understand,” said Beekman, soothingly. “All you have to do is to manufacture some excuse for getting Johnson into the apartment.”

“Could you play the part of a waiter and get away with it?” the manager demanded of Dave.

“I’d have to get away with it,” said Dave, coolly. “When it’s a matter of life and death a man can get away with anything.”

Mr. Abarbanel shuddered. “Well, let us go to the chief steward’s office. He will provide the necessary outfit. Mann eats in his apartment. Every night just before seven we send up a waiter with a menu to get his order. Mr. Johnson can take that waiter’s place tonight. But I am to know nothing about it—nothing about it!”

Chapter XXVII

MR. THORPE'S apartment occupied the entire forty-seventh floor of the more southerly of the twin pinnacles which gave the Surrey Towers its name. It consisted of sixteen or eighteen rooms arranged in a square surrounding the central elevator hall and fireproof stairway of the tower. The Big Boss's private study, or office, was a large room in the southwest corner. Originally furnished by a world-famous decorator in the English style of the eighteenth century, various incongruous notes had been introduced, such as a large ornate desk for the master, a smaller desk for his secretary, and a double, sound-proof telephone-booth built in one corner.

Paula Wrenn was seated at the smaller desk, typing a letter. Finishing it, she laid it on top of a pile of letters in a basket, and placed the basket on the larger desk. She then pressed a button on the desk.

After a moment a young man appeared, very sleek as to his outward appearance, short and thickset under his elegantly fashioned clothes. He had a smooth Italian face which bore a watchful cynical expression beyond his years.

"Where's Mr. Mann?" asked Paula.

"Busy." The young man's face remained smooth, but an insolent, familiar look came into his eyes that caused Paula to stiffen.

"Very well," she said. "When he is disengaged please tell him that I have finished my work and gone. If he needs me again tonight I will be at my apartment." She passed in front of the young man with her chin lifted. He said nothing, only followed her with his insolent cynical eyes.

Paula turned a corner of the corridor, and entered a small, tastefully furnished bedroom where her hat and coat lay on the bed. She put them on, and issuing out into the corridor again, made several more turns, and came to the outer door of the establishment. This door was made of steel carefully painted to represent wood, and was locked on the inside by a pair of thick steel bolts working on a lever, like a prison door. Sitting idly beside it was a hard, leathery-faced individual like a prison keeper.

Paula stood politely in front of the door, waiting for him to open it. He remained sitting tipped back against the wall, with his heels on the rung of his chair, staring at her with brutal indifference. Paula took a long breath to steady her temper.

“Please open the door,” she said.

“Have you got the boss’s say-so?” croaked the man in the chair.

The red flag of anger flew in Paula’s cheeks. “I have finished my work,” she said, sharply.

“I didn’t ask you that. I says have you got the boss’s say-so!”

“Am I his secretary or his prisoner?” demanded Paula.

“Aah! tell it to him, sister,” retorted the keeper, using a toothpick. “You can’t get by me without his say-so.”

Paula, disdaining to argue with such a one, turned about and went back to the office. She met nobody, and all the doors in the corridor were closed, but there was the feel of people behind them. She walked up and down the office, pressing her fingers to her temples, visibly struggling to be cool and self-possessed.

She pressed the button in the desk again. Nobody came. There was a telephone instrument on the desk. She picked it up, only to find that the wire was dead. She tried the door of the booth in the corner. It was locked. Returning to the desk, she put her finger on the button, and kept it there until the thickset young man appeared in the doorway. The smooth dark face bore a scowl now.

“What’s the matter with you?” he snarled. “I got something to do but come to a woman’s call.”

“I want to see Mr. Mann,” said Paula.

“You may want. I told you he was busy.”

“When can I see him?”

“He’s with his family. How do I know?”

“I **will** see him!” said Paula, dangerously.

“Yeah?” drawled the young man, with unspeakable insolence.

“If you don’t take word to him that I want to see him, I will break the glass of the telephone booth and telephone to my friends.”

The young man's head sank between his shoulders and he moved forward threateningly. "Say, our orders was to treat you good, see? But there's a limit. If you want to be treated good you got to act good, see?"

Paula laughed scornfully and stood her ground. "You can't intimidate me! You heard what I said!"

He cringed a little. "All right, I'll tell him," he snarled. "But you mind what I said for the future."

In a moment or two he returned, saying, ill-temperedly, "He says you can come in."

Paula followed him, sticking her chin a little higher to hide the fact that she was afraid. This place of many closed doors with people behind them struck a chill through her veins. The young man opened a door halfway down the corridor, admitting her to a sort of foyer with more doors all around. He pointed to one of them and disappeared.

Paula knocked and was bidden to enter. She found herself in another mellow English sitting-room disfigured with additions such as tablecloths with long fringe and an immense pink easy-chair that looked like a theatrical property. Jim Mann was seated in this chair, with his feet on another, smoking a cigar and twiddling his fat bediamonded fingers.

A slender, pretty, frightened-looking Italian woman was sitting in a plain chair across the room, sewing rapidly. A pale, big-eyed child was silently playing with an expensive doll on the floor. The frightened eyes of both mother and daughter kept flying furtively to the face of the fat man in the overstuffed chair.

Mann did not move at Paula's entrance. "Come in, Miss Wrenn!" he said, unctuously. "You see I don't stand on no ceremony with you. You find me in the bosom of my family, as they say. Sit down and smoke up."

Paula declined the cigarette. She sat stiffly in a beautiful Chippendale chair, striving hard to control herself. Her stormy eyes and the red and white chasing through her cheeks made her look lovelier than she was aware of. Mann's eyes dwelt on her in undisguised sensual pleasure.

"I asked to see you . . ." began Paula.

"Hell! You don't have to ask," said Mann. "Come right in at any time."

"I think I'd better speak to you alone," said Paula.

“Oh, unload what’s on your mind, my dear. You’ve already met the wife. This is my little girl, Francesca. Shake hands with the lady, Ceccina.”

The pale child came dutifully, and with averted face laid her hand in Paula’s. Paula shivered slightly at her cold touch.

“Me, I’m a great family man, I am,” cried Mann, jovially. “The missus and the kid always comes first with me. You can ask anybody.”

“I think I had better speak to you alone,” persisted Paula.

“All right! All right!” He looked commandingly towards the woman, and jerked his head towards the door. She snatched up the little girl’s hand in a panic, and dragged her out. The door closed behind them.

“You and I must have some sort of explanation,” said Paula, firmly.

Mann laughed with a note of surprise, as at the antics of some odd little animal. “Explanation?”

“Why am I not permitted to go home when my work is finished?”

“Oh, that!” He laughed afresh. Meanwhile his little eyes ran over her greedily. “You know who I am now . . .”

“I ought to have been told before I came!” Paula put in, stormily.

“Nobody tried to keep nothing from you,” he said, coolly. “I have to call myself Thorpe here under my agreement with the hotel. What the hell! If I wasn’t Jim Mann, wouldn’t be no book to write, would there?”

Paula made no answer.

“You know what my life’s been,” he went on, “because we talked it over for the book. There’s maybe twenty guys waiting for the chance of putting a slug through my liver. That’s why I got to take all these precautions. Ain’t aimed against you personally. That’s why you was searched when you come. I treated you like a lady, didn’t I? Had my wife search you.”

“And was that why my pocketbook was tampered with?”

“Pocketbook?” he said, with a great air of surprise, but he was grinning still. “I don’t know nothing about no pocketbook. If anything was taken I’ll make it good to you.”

“Nothing was taken but the key to my apartment.”

“Aw, you lost it somewheres.”

“That’s what I thought. But a little while ago it was returned.”

“I’ll inquire into it,” he said, with his cynical grin. “Any other complaints?”

“Can I go now?” said Paula.

“Aw, stay and have supper.”

“Thank you, no,” said Paula, impatiently. “There are some things I have to do.”

“You can telephone your old lady right here,” he said, waving his hand towards the instrument.

“I like to talk to my mother in private,” said Paula. “If I could use the booth in your office . . .”

“Nothing doing,” said Mann, coolly. “That’s a rule of the house. Nobody uses that phone but me.”

“Then I’d like to go to see my mother for a while. That was part of our agreement.”

“I’ll be wanting you later,” he parried. “I got a free night tonight. I’m going to start the book. That was part of the agreement, too.”

“I’ll come back,” said Paula.

He studied her from between narrowed lids. “Maybe you wouldn’t come back,” he drawled.

“Oh, what’s the use of this fencing?” Paula burst out. “Tell me plainly can I or can’t I go?”

Jim Mann drew down his black brows, and the whole character of his face altered. The oily, smiling appearance of good-humor that he so carefully cultivated was gone. He looked wolfish. “No!” he growled. “Not until I say so!”

Paula stared at him, fascinated, frozen with horror. There was a silence. Mann, taking her in all over, softened in an ugly fashion without ceasing to look wolfish.

“By God! you’re a handsome girl,” he said, thickly. “You might do worse than stay here!”

As if a spring had been released in her, Paula turned and fled, through the door, across the lobby, out into the main corridor, and around two corners to the door of the little room that had been allotted to her use. Half senseless with terror, she felt blindly inside the door for a key. There was

none; no bolt; no way of fastening the door. With shaking arms she fetched a chair and jammed the back of it under the door handle. It was a flimsy defense.

She ran to the window and flung it up. It was past six o'clock and dark. The marvelous towers of the city rose here and there jeweled with lights from top to bottom. Looking straight down, she saw the street five hundred feet below, with tiny automobiles creeping along. Suddenly the strain broke and tears came. She flung herself face down on the bed.

“Oh, Dave! . . . Dave! . . . Dave . . . !”

Somebody tried her door. It caught on the chair. A frightened feminine voice spoke her name.

Paula sat up and, carefully schooling her voice, asked, “What is it?”

“The boss is asking for you in the office. He wants to dictate.”

Paula drew a long breath. Her weakness had passed. “Very well. I’m coming!”

Chapter XXVIII

MR. ABARBANEL conducted Dave and Beekman to the chief steward's office in the lower regions of the hotel, and after briefly explaining what they proposed to do, left them there. The steward, a harassed German, almost swamped under the detail of his vast establishment, did not regard the scheme with any enthusiasm. Looking Dave over, he said, gloomily:

"I can dress him up like a waiter, but he won't look like one."

"I will take care of that if I may use the telephone," said Beekman.

He called up Oscar Reamer, the famous theatrical wig-maker and artist in make-up, whose shop was not far away. Lured by the promise of a fat fee, Reamer turned up within ten minutes, bringing his satchel. By this time Dave was outfitted with a neatly fitting uniform in the well-known green and gold of the Surrey Towers.

The wig-maker, who by the perversity of nature was himself as bald as an egg, after studying his subject from every angle, said: "This is a very difficult problem that you have put up to me, gentlemen. The young gentleman has an air of distinction and of abounding vigor. Nothing could be more unsuitable to a waiter. It is the opposite of what I am usually called on to do. However, the difficulty of the task intrigues me. I will do my best."

He knew his trade. First he gave Dave a haircut and neck-shave in the style of a cheap barber. He then applied a liquid to his hair which took the shine out of it temporarily, greased it, and combed it with a roll at one side, such as none but a waiter sports nowadays. Next he applied a wash to Dave's skin which reduced it to a grayish tone; painted his eyebrows a mousey color, and added other little touches of make-up which gave him a pinched look.

Standing off to observe the effect, he said: "Of course daylight would reveal my art. But under the electric lights the effect is excellent! excellent! I am satisfied."

He departed with his fee.

Meanwhile the steward gave them some additional details concerning Jim Mann's establishment. "He keeps between twenty and twenty-five people up there. They are served from a menu that we make up from week to week. Spaghetti is the principal item. But the big boss orders his own dinner every night, and eats alone."

The waiter who usually took Mann's order was brought in and put through his paces so that Dave could study his manner. When the long menu was put into Dave's hands he exclaimed, ruefully:

"Gosh! I can't pronounce the names of these French dishes!"

"Well, neither can Jim Mann," said Beekman, dryly.

Dave debated whether or not to go armed. Finally he slipped the gun in his back pocket. "Won't be much good against twenty men," he said, with a hard smile. "But, anyhow, it's a satisfaction to feel the weight of it on me."

At quarter to seven all was ready. The steward gave Dave his final instructions at the door of the service elevator. "The service entrance has been walled up by Mann's orders. When you get to the Forty-seventh floor you have to pass between the elevators to the main entrance. You can't miss it because it's the only door on that floor. . . . It's a steel door, installed at Mann's own expense," he added, dryly.

Dave was carried upstairs. There was a push-button at the entrance to the apartment, which he pressed. The door was opened a few inches on a chain, and a hard leathery face looked through the aperture. Seeing the green-and-gold livery, he indifferently slipped the chain and opened the door.

"Where's the other guy?" he asked, idly.

"He's home sick, sir," said Dave.

"Do you know which is the boss's office?"

"No, sir."

"Turn to the right in the corridor, and it's the last door on the left. Don't turn again."

"No, sir. Thank you, sir."

The doorkeeper sneered at his humility.

Dave went along the corridor slowly, in order to take in as much as possible. Several of the doors were open at this hour, and other hotel waiters were passing in and out. Immediately inside the entrance door he looked

into a small room where four hard-looking men were eating at a small table. This corresponded to the guardroom of the fortress. Farther along in a handsome dining-room a larger party was seated around a long table, including several women. Pompey was not among them. They were noisy at their meal.

Dave turned the angle of the corridor, and knocked on the last door. From within Jim Mann's thick voice asked:

"Who is it?"

"The waiter, sir."

When Mann was in his office the door could be opened only by the pressure of a button under his desk. The latch clicked and Dave entered.

Paula was seated at her desk, immediately inside the door. She instantly recognized Dave. It put her powers of self-control to a terrific test. She went as pale as snow, and her mouth opened for breath. She put her hands on the desk to hold herself upright. Luckily, her back was turned to Mann.

Dave proceeded to the big desk. Mann threw him the half-glance that one gives a waiter, and held out his hand for the menu card. He tipped his chair back while he studied it, and Dave ventured to glance at Paula. She had not turned around.

"Cheese! The same old hooley!" said Mann, disgustedly. "Don't they speak no English in the kitchen?"

Dave simpered as he had seen waiters do when the customer makes a wisecrack.

"First-off bring me salami, green onions, radishes, and anchovies," said Mann. "Can't find it here, but bring it, anyhow."

"Yes, sir." Dave wrote it down on his little pad.

"And soup. Cheese! What a mess of soups! . . . Hey! here's New England bean soup. Their French broke down when they come to that. Put it down."

"Yes, sir."

"All the rest is a total loss," grumbled Mann. "They might as well scramble their letters for all they mean to me. Can't you help me out?"

"Sorry, sir. I don't speak the French language," said Dave.

"What the hell do you speak?"

Dave took refuge in a simper.

“Yes, sir; no, sir; sorry, sir,” Mann mimicked in coarse good-humor. “Ain’t waiters never human?”

“After working-hours, sir,” said Dave, demurely.

Mann guffawed. “You’re all right, fellow! Have a cigar.” He pushed the box towards him.

Dave gravely took one and stowed it in his pocket. “Thank you, sir.”

Mann returned to his scowling study of the menu card. “Miss Wrenn,” he said, “can you understand the French language?”

She took a breath before she answered, “Fairly well.”

“Come here and help me out!”

She came to his elbow. Dave was on the other side of the desk. They took care not to allow their eyes to meet. Slowly Mann worked his way down through the menu. The dishes he ordered filled two sheets of Dave’s little pad. He boggled at a word among the desserts.

“Profit . . . profit! What the hell is that?”

Paula had to bend down in order to read the word. “Profiterolles,” she said. “Those are little cream puffs with chocolate sauce poured over them.”

Mann slyly put up his fat hand and drew it over Paula’s cheek. Dave quickly lowered his head. An ugly deep furrow appeared in his forehead, and the knuckles of the hand that gripped the desk turned white. No sound escaped him. Mann never looked in his direction. Paula straightened up and went quietly back to her own desk.

“Profiterolles!” said Mann. “That’s a hell of a name for little cakes. Put them down.” He threw the menu card on the desk and took a fresh cigar. “You can double that order, Jasper, and serve it for two, see?”

This time the “Yes, sir” stuck in Dave’s throat. Mann took no notice of the omission.

“Excuse me, Mr. Mann,” said Paula. “But I would prefer to eat in my own room, as I said.”

“Nothing doing!” said Mann, coolly lighting his cigar. “Got to be sociable.”

Paula was about to make an angry retort, but Dave had turned around, and she saw by his face that he wished her to appear to submit. She swallowed her anger. "All right," she said. "But I couldn't possibly eat all those things you have ordered."

"All right, darling," cried Mann, with cynical good-humor. "Order anything you like! Go take the lady's order, Jasper."

Dave picked up the menu card and carried it to Paula.

"Give me your pencil," she said, "and I'll check what I want."

Her back was turned to Mann. Holding the card so that he could not see it, she wrote on it, "I am a prisoner here," and handed menu card and pencil to Dave. Dave said:

"I have to copy it on my slip, miss, so I can hand it in with the other."

He wrote on a slip: "When I am out of the room come after me on the pretense that you want to change your order." He showed it to Paula. "Is that right, miss?"

"That's right," said Paula.

"Rush that order through, Jasper," said Mann, with his air of derisive good-nature.

"Yes, Mr. Thorpe, sir; yes, sir," said Dave, humbly. "This order will take precedence over every order in the kitchen."

He left the room without another glance at Paula, carefully closing the door after him. He turned the corner into the main corridor of the apartment. This passage was wide and thickly carpeted. There were several elegant pieces of furniture standing against the walls, and a number of beautiful modern oil-paintings hanging above. Dave shuffled along with a busy air.

The rest of the household had finished eating and the other waiters were gone. All the doors were closed, but from the large dining-room issued the sounds of loud talking and laughter. Nobody was in sight but the doorkeeper sitting down at the far end.

Dave had proceeded about halfway when Paula appeared around the corner behind him. "Waiter! one moment," she called, and Dave waited for her to catch up with him.

She took the menu card from him and made believe to study it. Dave standing close to her, pointed out items with his pencil. "What is it you want me to do?" Paula whispered.

“Does Mann suspect anything?” Dave whispered.

“No. You have fooled him completely.”

Dave made believe to write on his little pad. “Yes, miss,” he said, aloud. Then he whispered: “Let me get to the door, and then stop me again. A woman is privileged to change her mind. Give me some patter about your order that the doorkeeper can hear, and wait there. Hold yourself ready to make a break.”

They parted, and Paula started to go back. After a moment she turned again, and called:

“Wait a minute! I want to change that order, please.”

The doorkeeper already had his hand on the lever. He waited. Dave stood close by the door waiting with a respectful air for Paula to approach.

“I’ll take the profiterolles instead of the coupe St. Jacques,” she said, speaking impersonally as a pretty woman does to a waiter.

Dave made a note on his slip. “Yes, miss.”

“How can you keep the sauce hot?” asked Paula.

“Oh, miss, I bring it in a hot-water jacket.”

“Very well. Bring plenty of it. That’s all.”

Dave glanced humbly at the doorkeeper. He pulled his lever and opened the door. Paula was watching idly. Dave, moving like a flash of light, seized her wrist and pulled her out through the door after him. He turned, thrusting her behind him.

“Press the button for the elevator,” he whispered, swiftly.

Pad, pencil, and menu card went flying. Dave got his gun out, and when the doorkeeper came charging through the door after him, he found himself looking into the muzzle, and stopped with great suddenness. There was a brief pause.

Without taking his eyes from the man, Dave said to Paula, behind him: “Run down the stairs and take the elevator from a lower floor. Go to the manager’s office.”

“I won’t leave you,” murmured Paula.

“For God’s sake do what I tell you!”

“I won’t leave you.”

The four men in the room beside the door, hearing the running feet, now came edging cautiously through the door. The first to appear had a gun in his hand. "Put it away!" said the leather-faced one, hoarsely. "Boss's orders. No shooting inside."

The man put away his gun sullenly. Dave smiled hardily. "If you shoot me you'll go to the chair," he said. "But I can shoot you and get away with it because I'm protecting my girl!"

However, it was impossible for him to watch all five simultaneously. Nor could he hope to stop them all before being brought down himself. The leather-faced man was standing perfectly still in front of the doorway, holding back a man on either side with outstretched arms. Beyond them, on either side, a man was stealing out, one edging towards the elevators, the other towards the door that gave on the stairs. When Dave looked at one, the other would gain a few inches. Each time either of them moved, the space Dave had to cover was widened.

Seeing that he was about to be outflanked, Dave fired at the one by the elevators. The man saw his intention and dropped to the floor, untouched. Before Dave could fire again the man behind him had leaped on his back, pinioning his arms and bearing him down. The gun was discharged again, harmlessly. Paula screamed.

In an instant four men were upon Dave, beating him with their fists. At the same time the doorkeeper seized Paula and started dragging her towards the open door. The strength of her resistance took him by surprise. She tore free of his grasp and flung herself on the struggling mass in the middle of the lobby, trying to drag off the men who were beating Dave. The doorkeeper seized her around the body, but she hung on.

"Get him on his feet!" the doorkeeper said, hoarsely, to his friends. "Shove him inside and you'll have him right!"

Dave was hauled up, and the whole struggling mass began to move towards the open door. Slowly, however, for Dave was still fighting desperately. Paula, too, had got her arms around Dave, and was resisting the push of the other men with all her might.

They were still in the lobby when one of the elevator doors slid back and a man wearing the glittering cap of a high police official stepped out. Beekman was behind him, and a number of other men who were obviously policemen in plain clothes. At the first sight of the gold braid the five men

dropped their captives and scuttled inside their door like rats. The door slammed to and the heavy bolts shot across.

Dave and Paula, bruised, panting, torn as to clothes, had eyes for no one but each other. “Why didn’t you run downstairs when I told you?” demanded Dave, scolding and hugging her together.

“I helped, didn’t I? I helped!” cried Paula, still flashing with a mighty rage.

Dave suddenly melted in laughter. “Oh, you darling little fire-eater!” he murmured, gathering her close.

Chapter XXIX

INSPECTOR SCOFIELD said to Dave: “Is it true that the young lady was kept a prisoner in Mann’s apartment?”

“Yes,” said Dave.

“He got me out,” asserted Paula, gazing proudly at Dave.

“Did Jim Mann himself have a hand in it?”

“Yes,” said Paula. “It was he who detained me.”

“He will have to answer for it,” said the inspector. He moved forward and pressed the bell button beside Mann’s door.

Dave drew Paula a little to one side. “Now will you please go down and wait in the manager’s office,” he pleaded. “The worst is over. You can’t do any more. Look. Your clothes are coming off you.”

Paula, aware for the first that her dress had been torn off one shoulder, blushed, and held the pieces together. “Very well,” she said, meekly.

The elevator was still standing at the floor, with the operator peeping out fearfully, ready to slam his door if any shooting began. Paula got in and was carried down.

There was no answer to the Inspector’s ring. He kept his thumb on the button, and the bell could be heard going inside. With his other hand he felt over the steel door. “Hm!” he said, with rueful humor. “Machine-gun bullets would flatten against that like bread pellets. We’ll have to fetch up a cannon to blow it down.”

Suddenly, to everybody’s surprise, the door opened and Leather-face showed himself, trying his best to look innocent and surprised. “What is it, gentlemen?” he asked, buttering his harsh voice.

“I want to see Jim Mann,” said Inspector Scofield.

“Sorry, Inspector. He ain’t home.”

“That’s a lie,” put in Dave.

“Honest, Inspector, I wouldn’t lie to you,” whined Leather-face. “That guy’s just making trouble. The boss ain’t home. You can come in and look for yourself.” He opened the door wide.

“All right,” said the Inspector. “Come on, men.”

He started in. One of his men made a move to draw his gun. Scofield signed to him to put it up. “Jim Mann won’t shoot at the police,” he said. “He’s got too much to lose.”

Beekman was for following the others in, but Dave put a hand on his arm. “Let them go,” he said, quietly.

The door closed, leaving them alone together. Beekman looked at Dave questioningly.

“He isn’t in there,” said Dave, “or they wouldn’t have invited the police in.”

“He must be there,” said Beekman. “There’s no other door.”

“There are windows.”

“But the street is five hundred feet below.”

“The windows of the next floor are only ten feet below. Easy enough to make it with a short length of rope ladder. I’ve been sure from the first that Mann had some means of getting away. This was the only thing I could dope out. He could get one of his men to hire a room on the next floor. Come on.”

They passed through the door and ran down a flight of stairs.

“Have you got your gun?” whispered Dave.

“You bet your life!”

Each of the stair doors in this building had a little oblong of glass let in at eye height. This floor was planned quite differently from the floor above. It had corridors running to the right and left of the elevators. By pressing himself against the door and squinting sideways through the glass, Dave was able to command the corridors.

They waited.

“Steady,” whispered Dave. “Here he comes. He’s got a man with him. They’ll take the stairs. The door opens towards us. Get behind it. I’ll take Mann and you take the other. Stick your gun in his belly and fire if he makes a move to draw!”

A breathless instant of waiting, then the door was pushed in smartly and Mann came through, followed by a swarthy little gunman. When they felt the pressure of steel muzzles against the softest part of their bodies, their hands flew over their heads without waiting for an order. The guns spoke a language that they knew.

“The waiter!” snarled Mann, showing his teeth in balked rage. The youth behind him said nothing. His dark face went greenish, but his eyes, venomous as an adder’s, never flinched.

Beekman was holding the spring door open with his foot. “Back through the door!” commanded Dave. “Back against the wall now. Press close together!”

When he had them in this position, he said to Beekman, without taking his eyes from the pair, “Pass your gun into my left hand, and search them for weapons.”

While Dave covered them both, Beekman patted them all over. Jim Mann was unarmed. From the young man Beekman took three guns. Also a stiletto. The sheath was fastened inside his waistband. Beekman patted them right down to their heels to make sure he had all. During this operation not a word was spoken. Mann’s terrible gaze was fixed on Dave’s face, trying to beat down his eyes. Dave’s gaze, holding true between the two men, was as hard as his own.

Dave backed away a little and returned Beekman’s gun to him. To Mann he said, grimly: “Now that your teeth are drawn, you can put down your hands like gentlemen. Keep six feet away from me, and remember that nothing would please me better than to put a bullet through your fat paunch.”

Mann attempted to smile with his old derisive good-humor. “Cheese! The kid is talking big!” he remarked.

Dave pressed the button to summon an elevator. “Sure,” he said, with a hard smile; “I’m enjoying myself. After what I’ve been through the past two days this feels great!”

“Who the hell are you?” demanded Mann, scowling.

“Look me over,” said Dave. “Can’t you guess?”

Mann knew him then. His face turned black with rage, and every vestige of self-control deserted him. He cursed Dave foully.

Dave continued to smile. “Go ahead,” he said, “if it eases you. But”—he moved the gun significantly—“I don’t seem to have very good control over my finger. It’s twitching.”

Mann relapsed into a sullen silence.

The elevator door slid back. It was the same elevator with the same timorous operator that had brought up the inspector and his men. Seeing the guns, the operator gasped and made as if to shove the door to, but Dave put out his free hand and held it.

“Get in!” he said, with a jerk of his head towards the opening.

The scowling Mann obeyed, followed by his youthful gunman. The latter’s poisonous gaze never moved from Dave’s face. His hands clenched and unclenched impotently. When his guns were taken from him he was unmanned.

Dave and Beekman entered the car. “Mezzanine floor,” said the former.

The car shot down. The operator, at his controls, watched them with his head over his shoulder, half paralyzed with terror. When he had let them out he leaned against the door frame, panting with relief. Then curiosity overcame him and he stuck his head out of the door, peering after them as long as they were in sight.

The little procession moved through the corridors of the mezzanine, Mann and his torpedo in front, Beekman and Dave following with drawn guns. This part of the hotel was given up to offices and shops, and there were not many people about at the dinner hour. From below the strains of a world-famous orchestra floated up. The few persons they met shrank back, staring as if they had suddenly been turned to wood.

It was a bitter ordeal for Mann. He plodded along with his head sunk, and whenever they met anybody, he put one of the fat bediamonded hands before his face. The gesture was significant of the height from which the uncrowned king had suddenly fallen. Dave and Beekman glanced at each other. The same thought was in both their minds. They could scarcely believe that they had been the means of bringing him down.

They entered the outer office of the manager’s suite. Paula was sitting there, with her torn dress pinned together. Her face presented a study in emotion when she saw what had happened. Mr. Abarbanel came rushing out of his private office in a terrible state of fluster.

“You can’t come in here!” he cried, wringing his beautifully manicured hands. “I can’t have any trouble in here! Oh, this is terrible! Where are the police?”

“The shooting is over,” said Dave, with dry politeness. “If the guns make you uneasy, perhaps you wouldn’t mind going up to Mann’s apartment and telling the Inspector that we have him.”

Mr. Abarbanel ran out like one distracted.

Mann and his young bodyguard were forced to sit in chairs with their backs to the windows. Dave and Beekman remained standing. Dave said to Paula:

“Why don’t you wait in the private office?”

She mutely shook her head, and came and stood close behind Dave as if the sense of his nearness gave her strength.

Mann and the other started to talk rapidly together in Italian. A look of attention came into Beekman’s face, and Mann broke off.

“Cut it out,” he muttered. “That guy is listening.”

In a few minutes Inspector Scofield and his men entered the room, the agitated Mr. Abarbanel bringing up the rear. The Inspector’s face bore a look of chagrin because Dave had stolen a march on him; but he was a square man and he said, immediately:

“A very neat piece of work, gentlemen. I congratulate you. . . . Handcuff those men,” he ordered.

The young man submitted sullenly, but Mann leaped up with a convulsed face. “A man in my position! A man in my position!” he violently protested. “I could buy up this whole hotel!”

Dave, Beekman, and the Inspector looked at one another and laughed involuntarily. Mann showed his teeth at them in impotent, stupid rage. He couldn’t understand why they laughed. He was forced to submit to the handcuffs.

“You’re headed for a cell, Jake,” said Beekman, dryly, “and all your millions can’t keep you out. I’ve been waiting for this a long time!”

“We’ll see! We’ll see!” cried Mann. “Money never failed a man yet!”

Inspector Scofield turned towards Dave. “Please give me a little further information about this affair, Johnson.”

“Inspector,” said Beekman, with a peculiar smile, “this is Dave Westover.”

The instant he said it, Scofield recognized Dave from his photographs. It was a shrewd blow to his professional pride, for he felt that he ought to have known him on sight. He scowled heavily and rubbed his chin.

“In that case I must order him handcuffed, too.”

“Hear his story first,” said Beekman, persuasively. “Maybe it won’t be necessary.”

Dave began at once: “The man who was found dead in the taxicab was Walter Wrenn. Mr. Beekman can tell you a good deal about his past life, and so can this young lady. She is his daughter. She found him stabbed to death in her flat when she came home from work. I undertook to dispose of the body. I intended to drop it in the street where it would be found and the whole matter investigated in the usual course.

“I suppose you will say that it was a foolish thing to do, but Miss Wrenn’s mother was lying in the next room. She knew nothing of what had happened. She is a helpless invalid. If the murder had been discovered there in the flat, the shock would certainly have killed her. What was I to do?”

“Go ahead,” said the Inspector, gruffly. “I am no man’s judge.”

“During the two days while your men have been searching for me,” Dave went on, dryly, “I have managed to piece things together. Walter Wrenn was murdered at Jim Mann’s order by a young gunman known as Rudy, or Tim Ahearne. I have proof of this. Jim Mann considered that Rudy had bungled the job, and he ordered another one of his men, known to me as Pompey, to put Rudy out of the way. I can prove that Pompey killed Rudy, because I saw him a few minutes afterwards wearing an emerald pin that he had taken from the dead man’s cravat.”

The Inspector began to soften towards Dave. “You ought to be on my staff, Westover,” he said, grimly.

“What the hell has this got to do with me?” cried Mann. “I don’t know Wrenn, or Rudy, or Pompey.”

“You can’t get away with that,” said Dave. He went on to the Inspector: “Wrenn was murdered because he had in his possession an affidavit charging Mann with the murder of Salvatore Rossi in Chicago nine years ago. I secured the affidavit, and it is now in Mr. Beekman’s possession.”

“Yes, and I have plenty of corroborative evidence to support it,” put in Beekman.

“Old stuff! Old stuff!” shouted Mann. “That was thrown out of court years ago! You can’t hang anything new on me! You got no proof!”

“Can you connect Mann with Rudy or with Pompey?” asked the Inspector.

“Not yet,” said Beekman, somewhat ruefully. “But we shall do so.”

Mann laughed jeeringly.

Paula stepped from behind the shelter of Dave’s back. “I can supply a link in the evidence there,” she said.

All the men turned to her in surprise.

“Mann asked me to come to see him this morning on the pretense that he had a job for me,” she went on. “I didn’t know then that he was back of all this. I was talking to him—not in his office, but in the private sitting-room of his suite—when this man Pompey came in. I knew him because he had been following me two nights before.

“Mann asked me to step into the next room. This was a bedroom. Both the sitting-room and the bedroom opened off a small foyer, and I ran around into the foyer to see if I could hear anything. I found that the door into the sitting-room was standing half open. Without showing myself, I could look directly into the sitting-room through the crack between the inside edge of the door and the frame. I could hear nearly all they said.

“Pompey said to Mann: ‘I gave Rudy his, this morning.’ Mann said: ‘Did you get the emerald beetle? I gave Rudy that pin, and maybe they could trace it back to me.’ Pompey said: ‘Sure I got it.’ He then handed Mann the pin. I caught the glint of the green stone. I couldn’t see what Mann did with it, because his back was partly turned to me, but I judged from the position of his arms that he stuck it under the lapel of his coat. Perhaps it’s there yet. He’s wearing the same suit.”

Mann leaped to his feet, but he was instantly seized and forced back into his chair. One of Scofield’s men presently turned around, holding up the gleaming green scarab. “Is this it?” he asked.

“That’s it!” cried Dave.

Beekman’s face was all alight with joy. “Now we have him!” he cried. “That completes the chain!”

“There’s another thing,” said Paula. “Mann took a large roll of bills from his pocket and peeled one off. It must have been a thousand-dollar bill, because he said as he handed it to Pompey, ‘Here’s a grand for the job.’ ”

“And that rivets the chain!” cried Beekman.

“Delaney, Morton, Horstman,” ordered the Inspector, “take these men to Headquarters and have them photographed and finger-printed. I’ll be following you shortly.”

Mann had quieted down. His strange eyes flickered uncertainly; he was smiling. “I suppose I’ll be allowed to communicate with my attorneys and my friends,” he said, smoothly.

“We’ll see about that later,” said the Inspector. “For the present, no communications.”

A spasm passed over Mann’s face, but he still forced the smile. “Take these things off,” he said, extending his manacled wrists. “You know damned well it’s not the custom with a man like me.”

“There has to be a first time for everything,” said Scofield, dryly.

Mann’s lips drew back from his teeth. “I’ll have you broke for this!” he snarled. “I haven’t begun yet! You can’t treat me like a common criminal. I’m a business man. I’m a banker!”

“Yes? I don’t know what they see in you! . . . Take them away, boys!”

Chapter XXX

SCOFIELD, DAVE, BEEKMAN, and Paula went into the private office to talk things over. "Where is this Pompey?" asked the Inspector. "Is he among the others upstairs?"

"No," said Paula. "So far as I know he never came back to the apartment. But I can give you a clue as to his whereabouts. There was more talk between Mann and Pompey that I could not hear because they lowered their voices. I think it had something to do with Dave Westover. At the end I heard Mann say: 'You go to your own place and wait there until I phone you. What's your number?'"

"Pompey gave him a number which I couldn't hear. Mann tore off the edge of a newspaper and wrote it down. Later in the day when I was alone in his office I saw the same scrap of paper on his desk, and I copied down the number. Here it is if you can trace it."

"That's easy," said the Inspector. He picked up the telephone and got a chief operator on the wire. In a moment or two he was supplied with full information.

"This number is registered under the name of Jack Smith, 10A Christopher Street," he said, putting down the instrument. "10A Christopher is a new fireproof building with stores on the street level, and one hundred four small apartments on the upper floors."

There was a silence in the room. The Inspector's face was heavy with anxiety. After a moment he said:

"Pompey will be a different proposition from his boss. I know the torpedo type. In his own place he'll have a whole arsenal of weapons and he'll shoot his last bullet before giving up. I hate to sacrifice lives a thousand times more valuable than his."

"Can't you draw him outside?" suggested Beekman.

"Not likely. As time passes and he doesn't hear from his boss, he will become suspicious that something has gone wrong."

Dave was thinking hard, too. "What's the situation upstairs?" he asked, suddenly.

"I have disarmed everybody in Mann's apartment," said Scofield, "and have locked them up in two rooms under guard. In addition, the five strong-arm men are handcuffed."

"Then nobody can telephone a warning to Pompey?"

"No."

"Let me try and see if I can't tempt him out of his stronghold," said Dave, with a hard smile.

They all looked at him in surprise. Paula went quickly, and slipped her arm through his as if to hang on to him. "No!" she cried, stormily. "It's not up to you now! You've done enough!"

"No!" echoed Beekman. "You mustn't risk your life again!"

"The young lady is right," said Scofield. "I don't feel that I ought to let anybody outside the department take this risk."

The suggestion of danger only made Dave's eyes light up. "But I can get him out," he said, with a stubborn smile, "and nobody else could."

Paula let go of his arm. "There's no use saying anything to him," she said, bitterly.

"How do you propose to do it?" asked the Inspector.

"Offer him the affidavit if he'll make a deal with me."

"Ha!" cried Scofield. "But there's no time to have it copied," he objected.

"Let him have the original."

"He would destroy it."

"No! He's got to show it to his boss first. Mann trusts nobody. . . . If there was any slip and he should get away with it, we could still try Mann for the murders of Walter Wrenn and Tim Ahearne."

"Pompey would never fall for the bait," said the Inspector.

"Let me try it, anyhow. If I fall down on it you'll be no worse off than you are now."

Dave picked up the telephone and asked for the number that Paula had given them. The other three persons in the room listened in tense stillness to

hear the result.

“Hello!” said Dave in a hushed, cautious voice. “That you, Pompey? . . .”

“Dave Westover speaking.”

There was a pause while Pompey presumably voiced his surprise.

“I’m speaking from a booth in a drug store in Harlem,” Dave went on, smiling hardily in the direction of the listeners in the room. “It’s on East One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street! . . .”

“No, the police didn’t get me this morning. I ran into the station house to get away from you. They didn’t recognize me in there. . . .”

Dave allowed a whine to creep into his voice. “I called you up to see if I could make a deal with you, Pompey. I’m up against it. . . .”

“My girl gave me your number. She’s a prisoner in Jim Mann’s apartment. I’m beat! . . .”

“How did I find it out? She got a chance to telephone from there. I got her message at the place where we had fixed to meet. I can’t help her. I can’t fight Jim Mann. I’m up against it! . . .”

“If you’ll agree to let her go, I’ll give up the affidavit. . . .”

“Sure I’ve got it. I hitch-hiked back from Baltimore, and got here at five o’clock this morning. I telephoned the girl and told her to meet me and to bring the affidavit, because I thought you’d be searching her place for it next. I’ve had it on me all day. I had it when you were after me this morning. If you had plugged me then the police would have found it on me. . . .”

“If you don’t get the affidavit you don’t have to let the girl go. I’m the one that’s taking a chance.”

There was a pause while Pompey, judging from Dave’s hard smile, protested his good faith. Then Dave said, sharply:

“No, I won’t come to your place. What do you think I am? That would be a cinch for you, wouldn’t it?”

Another pause.

“No, I won’t meet you in any speakeasy, either. The only place I will meet you is some public place where there are other people around. . . .”

“I’ll come down on the Sixth Avenue Elevated. What station is nearest to the place where you live? . . .

“Eighth Street? All right, I’ll be looking out for you at Eighth Street. You can get on the train with me and I’ll hand you the affidavit. If it’s all right you can get off at the next station. That’s fair enough for both of us, isn’t it?”

There was a pause while Pompey thought this over. He must have agreed to it, for Dave next said:

“You’ll have to give me forty-five minutes, because I’ve got to cross town to get the West Side Elevated. And say, I look different now. Paula gave me money this morning, and I bought a new outfit. Look for me in a gray overcoat and a brown soft hat. . . . Okay!”

Dave hung up, and looked at the Inspector to see if he approved.

“Damned well thought out,” said Scofield.

Dave grinned. “I made him think he was arranging it all himself.”

“It don’t sound like a police trap.”

“He doesn’t think of me in connection with the police. He thinks the police have me on the run. . . . I said forty-five minutes to give you time to prepare.”

“Right! I can have him tailed from his place to the Eighth Street station. I can have more men planted in the station, and you won’t have to give up the affidavit.”

“It will cost you one or more lives if you do,” warned Dave. “Pompey has eyes all round his head. And you may lose him into the bargain. Let me give him the affidavit. That will put him off his guard.”

“All right,” said Scofield. “I’ll plant men at all the downtown stations. I’ll also have men riding on the train with you.”

“But not in the same car,” warned Dave.

They separated. Scofield sat down to telephone for the additional men he needed; Beekman hastened away to his own house to fetch the affidavit, and Dave started for the steward’s office to change back into the clothes that he had got at Beekman’s house. Paula followed him into the outer room. She said nothing more, but her face was expressive.

“This is nothing to what we have been through,” said Dave, with a great air of carelessness. “Pompey won’t shoot me in a moving railway car. He’d have no getaway.”

Paula made no reply, but only looked at him reproachfully.

“Why don’t you go to see the old lady,” suggested Dave, uneasily.

She shook her head miserably. “I can’t. Not until I know you are safe.”

“When Pompey leaves me I’ll go on to Headquarters,” said Dave. “Meet me there about nine fifteen. Inspector Scofield’s office.”

Three-quarters of an hour later Dave was jogging downtown in one of the antique wooden cars of the Sixth Avenue Elevated. At this hour of the evening there is but little business on the lower end of the line, and the car was empty except for a few commuters bound for the downtown ferries, and a couple of sailors returning to their ship.

Dave, instinctively trying to make himself inconspicuous, slumped down in the rattan seat, and gaped at the advertisements overhead like everybody else. But his face showed that peculiar sub-cutaneous glow that only strong excitement can produce. He was steeling himself to keep an appointment with the man who had done his best to shoot him earlier in the day.

As they slowed down for the Eighth Street Station, he took a long breath and, rising, went out on the car platform. No one else was getting out there. When the train stopped, he stuck his head through the door.

“I’m expecting to pick up a friend here,” he explained to the guard.

He immediately saw the well-tailored blue overcoat and smart black hat on the station platform. Pompey saw him at the same moment. Pompey cast a sharp glance through the windows of the car to assure himself that no trap had been prepared for him, and tossing away his cigarette, came towards Dave without a sign of recognition in his fishy eyes. His right hand was in his overcoat pocket, and an involuntary shiver went through Dave. But he stood his ground, grinning.

“So you’re here,” he said.

Pompey made no answer. Entering the car in advance of Dave, he took a corner seat in such a position that Dave was obliged to sit on his right. His yellow masklike face and pale fixed eyes were like nothing human.

“Well, after this morning I never expected to be coming to meet you of my own free will,” said Dave, with a laugh.

Under the influence of excitement Dave was bound to crack a joke; Pompey, on the other hand, felt no need of conversation. He said nothing. But he had the poise of an animal crouched to spring.

When the train started, Dave raised his hand towards his pocket.

“Drop that hand!” said Pompey, out of the corner of his mouth.

Dave obeyed, staring. “What’s the matter with you?”

“I’ve got you covered,” said Pompey.

“I know you have.”

“Where’s the affidavit?”

“In my right-hand breast pocket.”

Pompey reached around with his left hand and patted Dave’s breast. Satisfied, he said: “Get it out, and don’t put your hand anywheres else, see?”

Dave produced the affidavit.

“Spread it out.”

Dave obeyed, and Pompey read the affidavit looking over Dave’s shoulder. He saw at once that it was what he wanted, and his masklike face broke up in an odd fashion as if it hurt him to express any feeling whatsoever. But even Pompey could not conceal his triumph upon getting what he wanted.

“Fold it up and hand it over,” he said.

He slipped the paper in his pocket and favored Dave with a cunning stare. The train rounded a curve and rattled through Third Street, almost touching the second-story windows of the houses on the right-hand side. Pompey said in a false and wheedling voice that would have warned a child:

“That’s all right, pal. I called up the big fellow after you talked to me, and he said, sure he’d let the girl go as soon as he heard from me that I had the paper. He was only keeping her till he got it. You and me’s friends now. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

Pompey’s hand still grasped the gun in his overcoat pocket. Dave swallowed the inclination to smile. “No, thanks,” he said. “As soon as I

meet up with the girl I'll be all right. She'll give me a hideout from the cops."

"You're a good guy," said Pompey. "If you want to come in with me you wouldn't need to look for no more jobs."

"Much obliged," said Dave. "I'll think it over."

The train rounded another curve, and slowed down for the station at Bleecker Street.

"Getting out here?" asked Dave.

Pompey's face suddenly turned wicked and hard. "Nah, I ain't getting out here," he snarled. "What for you want me to get out here?"

Dave stared. It was impossible to follow the moods of one so uncertain and treacherous. "What's biting you?" he said. "It's nothing to me where you get out."

"What's your game, anyhow?" said Pompey. "You're too tricky for my liking."

Dave made his face a blank. "I don't get you, fellow," he said. "You're acting cocoo, if you ask me."

The train stopped and went on again. As it gathered way for the longer run to Grand Street, the two young men eyed each other, saying nothing. When the train slowed down for the station, Pompey said:

"Get up and walk to the door."

"Watch me do it!" said Dave. "I say you're cocoo."

"Get up and walk," said Pompey, "or I'll put a hole clean through you!"

"You can't do that here," said Dave.

"I'll take a chance on it as soon as the door opens, and get away with it, too."

A spark had leaped up in Pompey's pale blue eyes. His face had become deadly. Dave saw that he had no choice. He walked to the door. While they waited for it to open, Pompey allowed him to feel the muzzle of the gun against his hip. A cold sweat broke out on Dave. After all, a young man values his bones.

Only one other passenger got out at Grand Street—a woman. Dave paused on the platform and let her pass out ahead. "Can I light a cigarette?"

he asked.

“Nah!” said Pompey. “Keep your hands where I can see them!”

He prodded Dave with the gun, and Dave had to start again. His face was as pale as wax, for he was certain that death awaited him in the station. They went through the passage between the waiting-rooms, and clicked through the turnstiles. Dave turned to the left towards the stairs.

He saw the detectives one second before Pompey saw them, and cast himself flat on the floor. Pompey fired, but his bullet went wild. The three detectives leaped and bore him down. Pompey fired again, and one detective rolled away, groaning with a bullet through his leg. Dave scrambled on hands and knees to help the other two. A blow over the head with a persuader knocked Pompey out cold.

As he lay on the station floor, limp and yellow, he didn't look like much of a man. The detectives took three guns off him. Then they took notice of Dave.

“Who the hell are you?” asked one.

“I'm the decoy. I led this duck to you.”

“You were taking an awful chance, fellow.”

“Don't I know it!” said Dave, grimly. “My scalp was crawling when I came around that corner. I could hear the harps twanging.”

“What's your name, pal?”

“Dave Westover.”

“Yeah?” said the detective, derisively. “Pleased to meet you, Dave. Me, I'm Herb Hoover, and my partner here is King George the Fifth.”

“Well, come on, let's get an ambulance for this guy, and take the crook to Headquarters.”

Chapter XXXI

BENTON, a leg-man employed by the **Herald Tribune**, was making his rounds at Police Headquarters about quarter to ten. He was stopped at the door of Inspector Scofield's private office.

"Boss is busy," said the attendant.

"Will you ask him if he has anything for me?"

"Sure."

When the door was opened Benton got a peep inside. He saw a small crowd gathered around the Inspector's desk, but failed to recognize any of them. Scofield himself followed the attendant into the outer office. His face was wearing a peculiar smile, but Benton failed to notice it.

"Anything doing tonight, Inspector?"

Scofield's smile broadened slightly. "Well, I got a little story for you," he drawled. "Nothing much, of course. May be good for a couple of columns."

"Columns?" repeated Benton, thinking he must have heard wrong.

"Jim Mann was arrested a couple of hours ago."

Benton's eyes almost popped out of his head. "Jim Mann!" he shouted. "O my God! Where's the telephone? What were the circumstances? Is he here now?"

"He's locked up," said Scofield, with dry satisfaction.

"What for?"

"Murder."

"Who did he bump off?"

"He's charged with three murders. Salvatore Rossi . . ."

"I've heard of that old case. Any new evidence?"

"Plenty."

"Who are the other guys?"

“Walter Wrenn . . .”

“When was that?”

“Two days ago.”

“It didn’t break, eh?”

“It broke, all right, but the body wasn’t identified at the time. It was found in a taxicab.”

“The taxicab mystery solved! This is too much!”

“The third victim was Tim Ahearne at Darius House.”

“But those two are Dave Westover’s murders!”

“Well,” said the Inspector, with dry humor, “Dave allows that he’s willing to let Jim Mann have them.”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” cried Benton, wildly. “How did Dave Westover get into this? Is he one of Mann’s mob?”

“Not exactly. In fact, it was Dave who caught Mann!”

“Caught him!” Benton stared helplessly. “Have I gone crazy or have you? Do you know where Westover is?”

“Sure! Right in my office.”

“Aw, let me see him, for the love Mike, Inspector.”

“All in good time. He’ll face the whole crowd of you together.”

“Let me get this straight. My head is dizzy. Were you just stalling when you gave out that you were looking for Westover?”

“I wish I had been stalling, for my own credit,” said the Inspector, ruefully, “but we were looking for him, all right.”

“And while the police were looking for him, Westover managed to turn around and hang the crimes on Mann?”

“Something like that. Irvin Beekman helped him.”

“Beekman, too! Mann, Westover, Beekman, the three biggest figures in the day’s news all mixed up together in this! O my God! This is the story of the century! Let me get to the telephone! They’ll need their whole staff for this story!”

Half an hour later, Dave and Paula were perched on top of a desk in Inspector Scofield’s outer office, facing the whole brigade of reporters.

Kneeling on the floor in front of the reporters, or standing on chairs behind them, a battery of photographers pointed their lenses, and the play of the flashlights was like summer lightning.

Paula kept one of Dave's arms close locked within her own as if she were afraid of losing him again. Dave, smiling and wary, clearly enjoyed fencing with the brisk young men of the press. He considered every question before answering it. They were all friendly enough now, but it behooved a man to be wary in dealing with these gentry. They respected a wary man.

"When did you first begin to suspect that Jim Mann was behind it all?" asked one.

"Can't answer that one," said Dave. "Inspector Scofield told me not to talk about the cases against the men who have been arrested. Let me stick to my own adventures."

"Well, were you scared when the gunman had you covered?"

"That's a foolish question," said Dave, good-humoredly. "You can bet your sweet life I was scared. I learned what a cold sweat feels like."

"What does it feel like to be hunted by the police?"

"The police are all right," said Dave. "They treat a man squarely. I can't say as much for the newspapers. Oh, we're all good fellows together tonight, but how about last night? The newspapers of New York were yapping at my heels like a pack of hounds. Every one of you had me convicted of three murders without a hearing."

The crowd laughed and made notes of Dave's remarks. A saturnine young man in the front rank said, drolly:

"We are but servants of the public!"

Another called out: "You're darn good copy, old man! We don't care what you say!"

"What you going to do now, Dave?" asked another.

"That certainly is friendly of you," said Dave, quickly. "What's **your** pet name?"

"Peter."

There was a big laugh at Peter's expense, in which Peter himself joined heartily.

"I'm going back to the bank tomorrow, Peter," said Dave.

“It’s Jim Mann’s bank now, isn’t it?”

“It won’t be tomorrow. When Mann was arrested tonight Mr. Beekman immediately foresaw that the stock of the bank would break tomorrow even worse than it broke today, and that possibly there might be a run on the institution. He called up Abner Hochschild of Hochschild, Siemann and Co, and Mr. Hochschild called up several of his friends. As a result a syndicate has already been formed to purchase Jim Mann’s stock, and an offer has been made and accepted.

“The new owners have tendered the presidency to Mr. Beekman, and he has accepted it. So we will both get our jobs back. Let the public know that Mr. Westover will be back at his desk in the Collection Department, and that there is no further cause for alarm.”

Somebody called out: “Are you and Paula—beg pardon, I mean Miss Wrenn . . .”

“The correction is accepted,” put in Dave.

“Are you and Miss Wrenn engaged?”

“I don’t know,” said Dave, with an innocent air. “Are we engaged, Paula?”

Paula found it rather more difficult than Dave to support the stares of the two-eyed men and the one-eyed cameras. “It doesn’t make any difference to me,” she said, with a shrug.

They laughed again. They laughed at everything.

“All right, if it doesn’t make any difference to her, you can put us down as engaged. You can say you were present when it happened.”

“Kiss her!” cried a photographer, holding his flash ready.

“That will be about all,” said Dave, dryly. Seizing Paula’s hand, he pulled her down from the desk. They started for the private office.

“Where are you going when you leave here?” cried a voice.

“Try and find out,” said Dave.

There is more than one way out of Police Headquarters, and Dave and Paula eventually succeeded in evading the reporters. They left the building in company with Irvin Beekman. On the way uptown in a taxicab the latter said:

“Well, it’s all over! I feel slightly flat, as one does when the curtain goes down on a good show!”

“We’ll have to start something,” said Dave.

“We will,” said Beekman. “Look, Dave, men hate to be emotional, but there’s something I want to say, and if I don’t say it right away I’ll never say it.”

“Shoot!” said Dave.

“I feel that I’ve got something permanent out of this affair. I mean I feel that I’ve made a friend.”

“Same here!” said Dave, heartily. Their hands shot out and gripped.

Paula was sitting beside Dave, holding fast to his arm, silent and happy.

Beekman said, with a touch of envy in his voice, “I expect you and Paula will be getting married now.”

“I reckon so,” said Dave, airily. “Reckon we’ll be fluffing down to the Municipal Bureau tomorrow or the next day.”

Paula said nothing.

“Irvin,” said Dave, in a more serious voice, “there’s something I want to ask you. We’re good enough friends now for me to ask you. Suppose within the next day or two you get a telegram from the West saying . . . well, expressing regret for what is past. How will you answer it?”

“I have taken the blow,” said Beekman, slowly, “and I have survived it. I shall answer the telegram, saying: ‘Proceed to Reno. I will pay the necessary expenses.’ ”

“Good!” said Dave. “That is what I was hoping I’d hear you say!”

They put Beekman down at his own house, and went on to Dr. Sterner’s hospital. They found Mrs. Wrenn sitting up in bed, reading and rereading the stories about Dave in the evening newspapers. She flushed with pleasure and excitement at the sight of them, and took off her glasses.

“Shut the door,” she said, with the air of a conspirator. “Isn’t it dangerous for you and Paula to go around together?”

“Very!” said Dave.

“Where have you come from just now?”

“Police Headquarters.”

Mrs. Wrenn stared so comically, both Dave and Paula had to laugh.

“I don’t see anything to laugh at,” she said, laughing, too.

“It’s all right, Mother Wrenn,” cried Dave. “We can make as much noise as we like. Full explanations have been made, and Paula and I are free to come and go as we da . . . excuse me! . . . please! In fact, I am on the way to become a hero, seems if! Wait until you see tomorrow morning’s papers!”

“Tell me all about it!” she demanded.

“Just a minute while I kiss Paula. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Oh, go as far as you like!”

“Thanks!” He did so. “Now let’s sit up and talk all night!”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

The butler’s name is presented as Croyden and alternatively as Croydon. Each spelling appears six times throughout the book. However, as Croyden is generally the spelling of a person’s name and Croydon the spelling of a place, the spelling has been standardised to Croyden.

[The end of *Dead Man’s Hat* by Hulbert Footner]