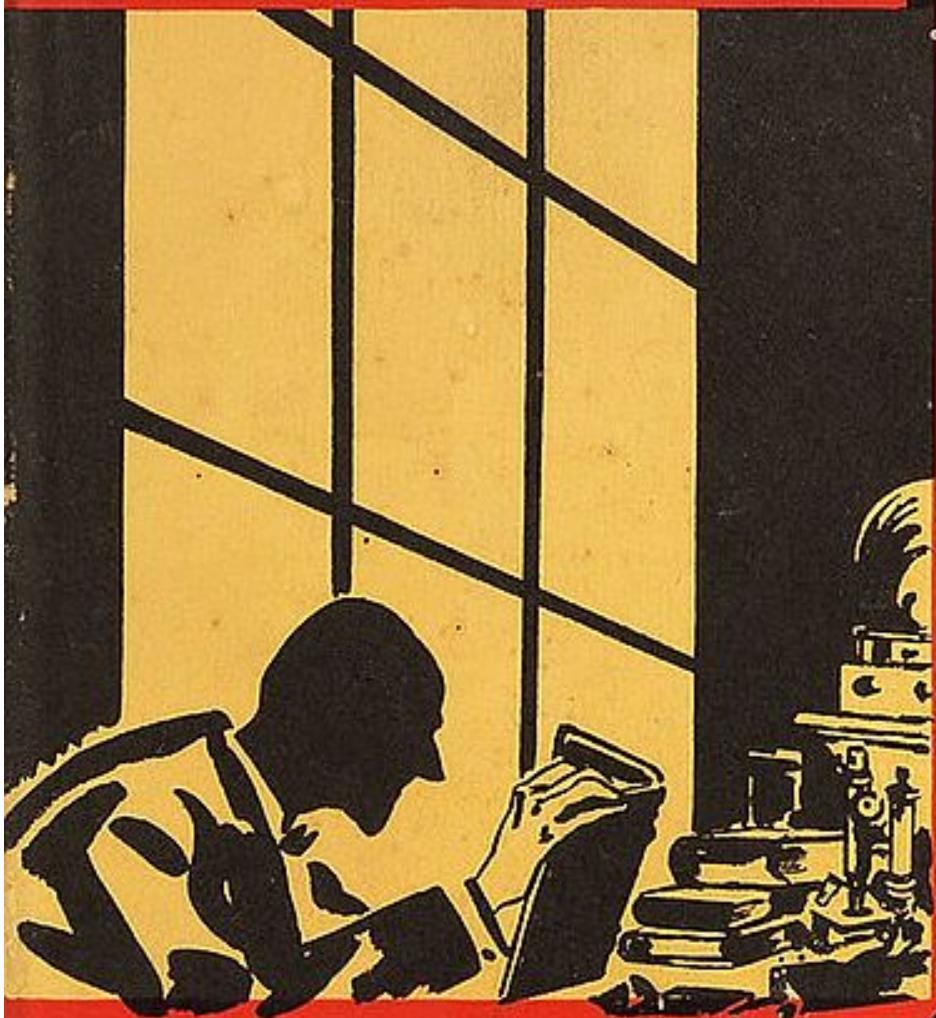


# A SELF-MADE THIEF



**HULBERT FOOTNER**

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE OWL"



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# A SELF-MADE THIEF



BY  
HULBERT FOOTNER

A SELF-MADE THIEF  
THE VELVET HAND  
CAP'N SUE  
QUEEN OF CLUBS  
A BACKWOODS PRINCESS  
MADAME STOREY  
ANTENNÆ  
THE SHANTY SLED  
THE UNDER DOGS  
THE WILD BIRD  
OFFICER!  
RAMSHACKLE HOUSE  
THE DEAVES AFFAIR  
THE OWL TAXI  
THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE  
THIEVES' WIT  
NEW RIVERS OF THE NORTH  
THE SEALED VALLEY  
JACK CHANTY

# A SELF-MADE THIEF

BY  
HULBERT FOOTNER



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FIRST EDITION

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# A SELF-MADE THIEF

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## *Chapter I*

### THE WAGER

IN the little card room upstairs at the staid old Chronos Club on Gramercy Park a heated argument was going on. It was late on a night something like two years ago, and a long succession of refreshments from the bar downstairs was, without doubt, contributing to the heat. Heberdon, Spurway, Hanwell, and Nedham, excellent fellows all, and good friends, had become involved in a discussion which had nothing to do with the game of bridge, and the cards were now lying unheeded on the table, while the players scowled and shook their fingers at each other and otherwise went through the absurd pantomime of gentlemen annoyed with each other.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“Oh, I don’t, don’t I? Do you?”

“You talk as if you were the fount of all wisdom and we were humble worshippers at the shrine.”

“Your metaphors are mixed.”

“Give us credit for some sense, Frank.”

“I will, when you show any.”

And so on. It appeared not to be a battle royal, but a case of three against one, Heberdon being the one. He was making certain asseverations on the subject of crime and criminals which the others violently and scornfully combated. Heberdon was a lawyer in his early thirties, a good-looking man of a pale, correct, and regular cast of features, and of a demeanour exact and punctilious to match. He appeared to be the calmest of the quartette, but it was a calmness more apparent than real; he had his features under better control, that was all.

Like most men of his type, his cold and inscrutable exterior concealed an unbounded egoism and a mule-like obstinacy. Opposition put him in a cold fury; contradict him often enough, and he would go to any lengths to justify himself. This weakness of character was well known to his friends, and in the beginning they had had no object save to amuse themselves by baiting him, but in doing so, as is not infrequently the case, they had lost their own tempers—all about nothing.

It had started innocently enough. Heberdon, shuffling the cards, had remarked in accents of scorn, "I see the police have got Corby."

"Who's Corby?" Spurway had asked. Spurway was a pink and portly stockbroker. His ideas were few, but he repeated them often. He was the noisiest of Heberdon's opponents.

"The hold-up man who got six thousand from a customer of the Eastern Trust Company three days ago."

Heberdon's ideas on the subject of crime were a source of diversion to his friends. Spurway had winked at the others. "What do you care?" he asked.

"Nothing," was the indifferent reply. "Only one hates to see such a display of foolishness. Why, he got clean away with six thousand without leaving a clue. Six thousand for, maybe, three minutes' work! How long do we have to sweat for six thousand, working honestly?"

"Oh, well, I guess honest work's easiest in the end," Spurway had remarked virtuously.

"It is, if you're a born fool," said Heberdon tartly.

"If he left no clue, how did they land him?" asked Nedham idly. Nedham was also a lawyer but of a very different type from Heberdon, a large, blond, slow and reliable sort of fellow, with eyes set wide apart in his head and a benignant cast in one of them; in short, a man cut out by nature to be the trusted repository of wills and family skeletons.

"The conceited fool wrote a letter to the newspapers, bragging of his crime."

"Corby a friend of yours?" Hanwell had asked drily. He was an advertising man, dark, slender, and quick. He dealt mostly in personalities, and he knew best how to get under Heberdon's thin skin.

"Don't be an ass, Han."

"Well, you seem to take it to heart, his getting pinched."

"It's nothing, of course, but one hates to see a neat bit of work spoiled by stupid conceit."

"Why don't you set up a correspondence course in crime, Frank?" Hanwell had asked at this juncture.

Heberdon ignored the flippant query. The laughter of the others annoyed him excessively.

"Oh, well, I expect if they hadn't got him one way they would in another," Spurway remarked in his heavy way. "A crook hasn't got a chance in the world. The dice are loaded against him."

Now, Heberdon's hobby was crime and criminals. He possessed quite an extensive library on such matters, and he had likewise gone deeply into the correlated subjects of police methods, locks, disguises, etcetera. He looked upon himself as an expert authority, and, therefore, it greatly increased his irritation to hear a stupid fellow like Spurway laying down the law.

"That shows how little you have thought about it," he had retorted. "That's the impression the police like to give out. That's what we tell ourselves in order to feel comfortable. As a matter of fact, the exact reverse is the truth. Wealth is wide open. All a man has to do is to help himself. With the most ordinary horse sense a crook would run no greater risks than a man in a so-called honest business."

It was these extreme statements which had really started the fray. "Come off!" they cried derisively. "What kind of dope do you use?"

"Oh, when you can't answer an argument it's easy to become abusive," retorted Heberdon with his irritating superior air.

"The movies have softened your brain!" suggested Spurway.

"I'm not interested in the movie brand of crime," returned Heberdon coldly. "I know something about the real thing."

"But according to the statistics a very great proportion of crimes are solved and the perpetrators punished," remarked Nedham.

"A very great proportion of crimes never get into the newspapers or into the statistics," said Heberdon. "In such cases it is to the interest both of those who have suffered and of the police to conceal them. Even if your argument were well founded it would only prove that criminals have no more sense than other men. I said if he had horse sense."

"In your opinion there's only one really sensible man, honest or dishonest," remarked Hanwell drily.

Heberdon ignored him.

"Haven't we got ten thousand police in this town?" demanded Spurway. "How do they occupy themselves?"

"Ten thousand patrolmen," corrected Heberdon. "They have nothing to do with solving crime. That's in the hands of the few hundred men in the Central Detective Bureau. All they do is to look wise and wait for a crook to betray himself."

"It's just a cheap popular stunt to run down the police," observed Spurway. "I don't take any stock in it."

"I'm not running down the police," said Heberdon. "I suppose they do all they can. But what can they do? In fiction, of course, the super-detective

performs amazing feats of analysis and deduction, but you've got to remember that the author planned it all out in advance and was able to make things come out just the way he pleased. In life, detectives are just ordinary human beings. If a crook makes his getaway without leaving any clue the sleuths are up a tree, aren't they? They can't get messages out of the air!"

"There's always a clue!"

"There needn't be if the crook has good sense."

"That's all right as far as it goes," said Nedham in his slow way; "but you overlook the fact that the whole of society is organized on a law-abiding basis. That is to say, every one of us is behind the policeman, while every hand is raised against the crook. He's at a hopeless disadvantage."

"Not at all," retorted Heberdon. "It's only the consciousness of our helplessness that makes us stand behind the police. It's the policeman that's at a disadvantage. The crook prepares his plans in secrecy; he can take as much time as he wants. Every crime is a surprise sprung on society, a fresh riddle to be guessed. It's easier to make a riddle for others to solve than to solve other people's riddles, isn't it?"

"It's not only a question of being caught," said Nedham. "When a man kicks over the traces he becomes an outcast, a stray dog; all the decencies of life are out of his reach."

Heberdon, in his anger, went a little further than he intended. "When a man kicks over the traces he becomes free!" he cried. "He is no longer subject to the absurd and galling rules that bind us down. He lives his own life!"

The other three stared at him in a startled way.

"The policeman has the telephone, the telegraph, the newspapers to help him." Spurway spoke with the air of one laying down an unanswerable proposition.

"Sure," said Heberdon, "so has the crook. Especially the newspapers. For the newspapers print all the doings of the police and the crook only has to read them to keep one move ahead."

"But organized society——" began Nedham, still pursuing his own line of thought.

"All bluff and intimidation!" interrupted Heberdon. "A man only has to defy what you call organized society to discover how helpless it is!"

"You seem to know," put in Hanwell drily.

Heberdon turned slightly paler. "Can't you engage in a discussion without descending to personalities?" he demanded.

It would be tedious to report the entire discussion. As in all such controversies, once they had set forth their ideas, the participants had nothing to do but repeat them, making up in increased emphasis what their statements lacked in freshness. It soon became a hammer-and tongs' affair of flat assertion opposed by flat denial. Here they stuck. The slow Nedham became rosy, Spurway turned an alarming purple, Hanwell's face showed a fixed grin like a cat's, and Heberdon's pallor took on a livid hue.

Quite carried away, the latter cried at last, "It's a cinch to stick up a bank nowadays! With a car waiting outside, the engine running, a turn around the corner and the trick is done!"

This was received with loud jeers.

"Frank Heberdon, the heroic highwayman!"

"Desperado by proxy?"

"Oh, Frank's a new type, the theoretical thief!"

"Leader of the club-lounge gang of yeggis!"

Heberdon could not take joshing of this sort. His eyes narrowed dangerously.

"If it's so easy why don't you give us a demonstration?" taunted Hanwell.

"By gad, I will!" cried Heberdon, beside himself.

The others stared, and laughed queerly. They had not expected to be taken up so quickly. Then suddenly a mental picture of the correct Heberdon in the role of hold-up man suggested itself to them, and the laughter became uproarious.

Their laughter was unbearable to Heberdon. "You think I don't mean it!" he cried. "I'll show you!" He snatched his check book out of his pocket. "I've got five hundred to put up on it. Will you match it?"

This effectually stilled their laughter. Spurway, who was the most nearly drunk of the quartette, solemnly drew out his check book and prepared to write. After he had made the first move it was difficult for the other two to draw back. Hanwell, thinking to call Heberdon's bluff, made haste to produce his check book in turn. Only Nedham ventured to remonstrate.

"Come on, fellows, this has gone too far. Think what you're doing!"

Heberdon turned on him with an ugly sneer. "I thought that would show up the short sports!" he said.

There was a hateful, jeering quality in his voice that no man with warm blood in his veins could tolerate. Nedham flushed, and, taking out his check book, wrote a check and tossed it in the centre of the table.

“I’m content,” he said shortly.

Hanwell looked anxious. He would have liked to draw back then, but he lacked the initiative. Grown men, no less than boys, are led into strange situations through their fear of taking a dare.

“Is it five hundred each?” he asked in an uncertain voice.

“Sure,” said Heberdon. “That’s only fair since I take the risk.”

Hanwell wrote his check out slowly.

Spurway had signed his. “I suppose we can have them certified in the morning,” he remarked solemnly.

“Oh, I hope we’re not bona-fide crooks,” said Nedham bitterly.

Nedham, once the die was cast, seemed more determined than any of them. “I think it’s all damned nonsense,” he said, “but since you insist on it, let the consequence be on your own head!” He drew a sheet of paper toward him and wrote rapidly.

“What are you doing?” asked Hanwell anxiously.

“Drawing up a memorandum of the bet.”

“Oh, your word is sufficient,” said Heberdon patronizingly.

“You don’t get the idea,” observed Nedham drily. “You might slip up, you know.”

“No fear of that.” Heberdon spoke confidently.

“I hope not, for all our sakes. I don’t relish being made a fool of any more than the next man. It’s just as well to take precautions. We’ll seal this and deposit it in the office, where it will be stamped with the receiving stamp and the date. If you should happen to be nabbed by the stupid police it may save you a jail sentence—or at least mitigate it.”

Hanwell’s and Spurway’s eyes bolted at the ominous sound of the words “jail sentence,” but not Heberdon’s. Anger blinded him to every consideration save the necessity of justifying himself.

“What conditions do you lay down?” Nedham asked him. “It’s your privilege to make your own.”

Heberdon affected a nonchalant air. “I undertake to stick up a New York City bank single-handed during business hours and get clean away with a sum exceeding two thousand. Of course, I can’t tell what the haul will amount to.”

Nedham wrote. Finishing this, he said, “There ought to be a time limit set. I don’t suppose any of us can afford to keep this amount of money tied up indefinitely.”

“Say within a month, or I forfeit,” suggested Heberdon.

Nedham completed writing his statement.

“What would you do with the loot?” Hanwell nervously wanted to know.

“Return it, of course,” answered Heberdon with a cool stare. “What do you think I am?”

The paper was passed around the table and signed in characteristic style, Heberdon with bravado, Hanwell with signs of panic, Spurway solemnly closing one eye, and Nedham doggedly with tight lips. It was then enclosed with the checks and the envelope sealed with wax. They carried it downstairs to the club superintendent, who, according to instructions, stamped it with the club stamp and put it in the safe. The superintendent understood only that it contained the stakes of a wager and was to be yielded upon demand of any two of the parties concerned.

## *Chapter II*

### PREPARATIONS

HEBERDON lived in a tiny but rather luxurious flat immediately across the park from the club. The same building, now altered into bachelor apartments, had been the city residence of his family for a generation, and from it Heberdon derived the modest income that barely sufficed his needs. He himself had scraped together every cent of his little patrimony to make the necessary alterations to put the house on an income-producing basis. Indeed, up to this time every act of Heberdon's life had been marked by prudence and caution—too much caution, perhaps.

His law practice was largely one of courtesy. It about paid the rent of the smallest office in a good building and the wages of an office boy, who was necessary to keep the establishment open, for Heberdon never allowed his "practice" to interfere with his afternoon bridge at the club, nor, for that matter, with golf in the mornings, when the weather was suitable. He had a standing offer to enter the office of his uncle, ex-Judge Palliser, of the State Supreme Court, but that he knew entailed real work, and he was coy about accepting it.

"Really, I can't give up my practice," he would say. That practice did yeoman's service in conversation.

Heberdon was the last of his immediate family, but he enjoyed a large and ultra-respectable connection of uncles, aunts, cousins, etcetera. Besides Judge Palliser—head of the firm of Palliser, Beardmore, Beynon & Riggs, and one of our leading corporation lawyers—there was Mrs. Pembroke Conard, leader of the old Knickerbocker set, his aunt; Professor Maltbie Heberdon, Dean of Kingston, another uncle, and so on. Heberdon, though he affected to despise them as a lot of dull owls, was, nevertheless, very sensible of the advantages of such connections, and lost no opportunity of cultivating his graft with those who counted. For years he had been "paying attention" to his cousin, Ida Palliser, the judge's eldest daughter. It was an indefinite sort of affair, entailing no responsibilities.

Other young men might have considered that Heberdon's lines were cast in very pleasant places, but never was there a more inveterate grumbler. Nobody appreciated him at his true worth, he felt. He had been born to accomplish great things, he told himself, but circumstances held him down.

Next morning he awoke, conscious of a feeling of heaviness under the occiput. His thoughts ran: "What's the matter with me? Drank too much last night! Blamed fool! Well, never again!"

Suddenly recollection of the bet rushed back on him and he sat up in bed in a panic. "Great heaven! What have I done? I must have been out of my mind! How can I get out of it? How can I get out of it?"

He got out of bed all shaky and took a stiff horn of whisky to steady his nerves. Presently he felt better.

"It's not up to me to get out of it," he thought. "At least, not right away. I have a month. The other fellows are sure to weaken. Hanwell's scared green already, and Spurway will be as soon as he sobers up. If I play my cards right they'll pay me the money not to do it. As for Nedham, he can go to hell, damn stubborn mule!"

"In the meantime I'll go ahead just as if I meant to carry the thing through. Pick my bank. Lay all my plans——"

At this point in his deliberations a queer little feeling of pleasure began to run through his mind like quicksilver. "It would be fun to plan such a job! To pit my wits against the whole of what Nedham calls 'organized' society. I have the wits and the pluck to do it, too. Never had a chance to prove them. Rotten dull life I lead. I was cut out for something better.

"They laughed at me! I'd love to show them! If I should do it, it would be perfectly safe. Nobody would ever suspect me. And those fellows would damn well keep their mouths shut. Lord! The very idea makes my blood run faster!"

"But, of course, I'm not going to do it really. And yet——"

In the course of the morning Hanwell called him up at the office. At the first sound of his anxious voice Heberdon smiled contemptuously into the receiver.

"Hallo, Frank! How do you feel this morning?"

"Great!" rejoined Heberdon, with particular heartiness.

Hanwell's voice fell. "Oh, you do, do you?" He paused.

"What can I do for you, old man?" asked Heberdon.

"Say, about that bet last night. What a pack of fools we were!" A loud but unconvincing laugh here. "You didn't take it seriously, of course."

"Do I understand you're trying to get out of it?" demanded Heberdon with assumed astonishment.

"Oh, no, no!" said Hanwell quickly. "A bet's a bet, of course. That's not what I called up about. I wanted to know—er—if you'd be at the club to-

night.”

“Sure.”

Later Spurway dropped in on him, pinker than usual and very self-conscious. His greeting was effusive. He tried to get away with the innocent candid, but he was as transparent as window glass.

“’Lo, Frank. I certainly did get beyond myself last night.”

“Oh, you had a bit of a bun on.”

Spurway passed a fat hand over his brow. “I have a vague recollection of making some bet or other. Thought I’d better come around and find out what it was. Of course I’ll stick by my part of it, though I was drunk.”

“Come off,” said Heberdon scornfully. “You weren’t as drunk as all that.”

Spurway made a heavy pretence of trying to remember. “Something about your sticking up a bank,” he said.

“Cut out the comedy,” exclaimed Heberdon. “You remember just as well as I do.”

“But when I woke up this morning I couldn’t believe in my own recollection. You surely weren’t in earnest?”

“I was.”

“Oh, my Lord, Frank! Think what you’re doing!”

Heberdon stuck out his chin truculently. “Are you trying to renege?” he demanded.

“Oh, no, no!” said Spurway helplessly. “But this is awful—awful!” He went out muttering to himself.

Finally Nedham came. Nedham was of tougher fibre than the other two, and he went directly to the point.

“Look here, Frank, that was a damn fool business we started last night. Let’s call it off. I’m quite sure that Hanwell and Spurway feel the same about it as I do.”

“I don’t know that it is exactly up to them—or to you,” said Heberdon with a disagreeable smile. “I was the challenged one.”

Nedham stared. “You can’t mean that you intend to carry it out!”

“I carry out everything I start.”

“But, my dear fellow, you’re risking everything—your professional reputation, your liberty!”

“Why don’t you say plainly that you want to get out of it?” said Heberdon with a sneer.

“I do want to get out of it,” answered Nedham earnestly. “I don’t want to be a party to another man’s suicide—worse than suicide.”

“Much obliged,” said Heberdon. “You can always stop payment on your check, you know.”

Nedham flushed up angrily and rose. “You talk like a schoolboy!”

“I don’t need you to put me right,” retorted Heberdon. “It isn’t my feet that are cold.”

Nedham strode angrily out of the office.

Heberdon immediately started making his plans. He still told himself that of course he would drop the thing as soon as Nedham *et al.* were reduced to a proper state of humility, but in the meantime he went about it as in a game with himself. That very day he dropped into several downtown banks to look around. He soon found that wealth was not so “wide open” as he had confidently asseverated.

You no sooner started to look around a bank than you found watchful eyes upon you. “How dare they suspect me of anything crooked?” thought Heberdon with a sense of outrage.

He had no sense of humour. The largest bank of all had a “pill box” elevated above the floor with ugly-looking loopholes commanding the entrances. Heberdon shrewdly suspected that this was a mere bit of stage business, but if the pill box had been constructed merely for its psychological effect, it worked in his case. The skin of his scalp tingled at the thought of defying the aim of a possible unseen watcher within. He decided that the big downtown banks with their crowds of customers and numerous guards and attendants were out of the question.

There remained the uptown and suburban banks. Their business is now mainly in the hands of two or three big institutions who specialize in outlying branches. Heberdon procured lists of the latter, and, striking out the obviously impossible ones, began to visit the others in order.

He put them through a gradual process of elimination. Some were hopeless at first glance. Others more promising he revisited and compared. He gave up his whole time to it. More and more it became like a fascinating game. At last he had an opportunity to apply his long-pondered theories on crime. His idle days were at last filled with an object. Never had his brain worked so quickly and sharply; never had life seemed so full.

From his long list he struck off one name after another. He found that small banks generally were arranged according to one of two plans; either

the banking office was a square—or round—enclosure with the cages ranged all round, or else the cages extended in a row down one side of a corridor. Needless to say, the latter plan suited him better. In such a bank all the clerks were under his eye at once, and no one could take him from the rear.

The paying teller's window was his particular object. Sometimes it was awkwardly placed in relation to his getaway; sometimes the teller himself was too determined looking a fellow. In one bank otherwise suitable Heberdon was shocked to discover an electric lock on the street door which presumably could be operated from within the cages in case anybody tried to make a hasty getaway. This he considered a low-down trick. Some banks dealt principally with stores; these paid out little money, but only took it in. Others did a business so small as to be beneath Heberdon's notice altogether.

Not to detail too minutely the different stages of his search it may be said at once that he finally picked on the Princesboro branch of the Wool Exchange Trust Company. This bank included several large factories among its customers and paid out large sums weekly for pay-roll purposes. It faced the plaza of the Princesboro Bridge. It occupied a corner store, and the cages stretched in a long line down a corridor none too brightly lighted. The paying teller occupied the cage nearest the street door, though separated from the door by the office of the cashier or manager. Most important of all to Heberdon, the paying teller was a pale, mild-appearing young man, just what he was looking for. "He'll collapse like a pricked balloon," he told himself.

With exemplary patience Heberdon returned to the bank day after day to watch and observe from without and within. The appearance of the elegant correct young lawyer, with his pince-nez, was not such as to excite suspicion readily. Those clerks who noticed him probably took him for a new customer. As a result of these visits Heberdon established the following main facts:

(a) There was a uniformed attendant—possibly armed—on guard in the corridor during business hours, a dangerous-looking customer.

(b) But he went out to lunch every day at twelve-thirty, remaining until one.

(c) Between the hours of twelve and one very few customers visited the bank.

(d) The little glass-enclosed office just inside the street door and on your left as you entered, was occupied by two men—manager, presumably, and his assistant. The former went out every day, remaining until one,

whereupon the other went out for an hour. Both were exact and regular in their habits.

(e) The pay-roll money was mostly drawn on Friday afternoons. The rush to withdraw began soon after one o'clock and continued until the closing hour. For a while before they came on Fridays, the paying teller always occupied himself in getting his cash out of the safe and arranging it on the desk in front of him in convenient form to pay out.

(f) At the street entrance to the bank were a pair of old-fashioned doors which opened inward only, and had knobs on them. Outside the doors there was a folding steel gate, but as this was always drawn back during business hours, it did not enter into Heberdon's calculations. It was perhaps the doors that finally led him to settle on the Princesboro Bank. "Oh, this is a cinch!" he said to himself.

From the foregoing may be readily deduced the reasons that led Heberdon to decide that the hour of twelve-fifty on any Friday would be the proper time to pull off his trick.

It would be difficult to say just at what moment all this ceased to be a game and crystallized into a positive intention. Heberdon himself could not have told. He was an adept in deceiving himself anyway. He discouraged what further timid overtures Spurway and Hanwell made, waiting for Nedham to humble himself. But Nedham never did, and in the end all three avoided him at the club, and took in another man to make a fourth at bridge.

Heberdon shrugged and went on planning. The elaborate imaginary structure that he reared for his amusement ended by mastering him. It became more real than reality. He became enamoured of the ingenuity of his plan; he could not bear to destroy anything so perfect; he had to try it. Still protesting to himself that it was all a game, he went on with his preparations until it was too late to turn back.

No trouble was too great for him to take in respect to the smallest detail of his scheme. He could have done it the second Friday after the wager was laid, but he took a whole extra week to make sure he had not forgotten anything, or had not overlooked any contingency. For instance, his disguise, he devoted whole days to perfecting that.

Among the members of the Chronos Club were a number of actors with whom Heberdon was acquainted. He made a practice of dropping into the dressing room of one of them who happened to be playing in town, and watched him make up. He learned that professionals commonly do not use false moustaches, etcetera, but glue loose hair to their face and trim and curl it to suit. Such appendages are almost impossible to detect.

Practising endlessly before his own mirror, Heberdon finally succeeded in making a glossy little moustache and embryo side burns that would pass closest muster. He designed to play the part of a flashy young sport of the latest model and haunted burlesque theatres, road houses, and shore resorts to study his types.

A straw hat of exaggerated pattern, a much “shaped” and bepocketed suit of a weird shade of green, loud shoes, socks, tie, and shirt altered the correct Heberdon’s appearance beyond all recognition. He left off the pince-nez, without which he had never been seen. On the day before that set for his enterprise he made up and dressed in his new clothes, in order to accustom himself to them, and spent the afternoon at Brighton Beach.

Here he boldly wooed the sun, and by evening the added pink tinge to his complexion completed his metamorphosis. He looked ten years younger; a perfect product of Coney Island and the East Side social clubs, one would have said. On his way home he came face to face with his three friends in Gramercy Park. They passed him without recognition, and Heberdon triumphed inwardly.

In his own room that night Heberdon bent all the faculties of his mind on the next day’s task. He went over and over his plan, looking at it from every angle. “It is water-tight,” he said to himself at last. “I can’t fail!” Then he went to bed and slept like a child on the eve of an excursion.

### *Chapter III*

#### HOW IT PANNED OUT

THERE is a little hotel in Princesboro, and just above it is the single taxi stand that the suburb boasts. At precisely twelve-forty next day a young fellow with a glossy little moustache and a nobby green suit issued from the hotel and hailed the first cab in line. It may be said that it was no part of Heberdon's plan to take the chauffeur into his confidence. In case of a chase, should the man prove unwilling, Heberdon carried that wherewith to persuade him.

With his hand on the door, Heberdon consulted his watch. "Must catch the one o'clock from the Nugent Avenue Station," he said to the chauffeur with a careless air. "Got to stop at the bank first. The Wool Exchange Trust on the plaza."

The man nodded. Heberdon got in and pulled the door after him. They started.

Up to this moment Heberdon's mind had been occupied with his calculations to the exclusion of aught else. But in the brief period of inaction during the ride, stage fright laid its icy hand on his breast. His heart began to beat alarmingly, and to rise suffocatingly in his throat; a cold sweat sprang out on his palms and his temples. "I'll never be able to do it! Never! Never!" something whispered to him.

He would have given anything to leap out of the cab and run for it, but a force stronger than his will kept him fast. As a matter of fact his days and nights of concentration on the plan of robbing the bank had in the end obsessed his brain. He could not conceive now of giving it up. His long preparations had created a power that carried him along in spite of himself. "Too late! Too late!" he thought despairingly.

He sought desperately to distract his mind from its terrors. Had he everything? Yes, the satchel, pistol—unloaded—the light cloth cap to replace the too-conspicuous straw later, the thin hardwood wedge, the stout double iron hook that he had made himself out of a necktie holder.

The taxicab stopped in front of the bank and the shaking Heberdon started subconsciously to go through the oft-rehearsed performance. To the driver he said with the best imitation of nonchalance he could muster:

"Let your engine run. I shan't be inside but a second."

Within the bank everything was always as he had seen it in his mind's eye: the uniformed attendant missing, the assistant manager alone in his little glass-enclosed office, at least half of the clerks out to lunch. At the door of the private office—which swung both ways—Heberdon made a feint of dropping his satchel. Stooping to pick it up he slipped his wedge under the door, and, straightening, tapped it home with the toe of his shoe.

There was but one customer in the corridor, and he was down at the receiving teller's window at the far end. Even as Heberdon looked at him he got his pass book through the window and started to leave. In order to give him time to get out Heberdon turned to the customers' desk at his right hand, as if to write a check.

Silence filled the bank. The man who was walking out had on rubber-soled shoes, and his footfalls made no sound. From behind the brass grating came a sudden loud crackle as the bookkeeper turned a page of his big ledger. He muttered to himself as he carried forward his column of figures. Then all was still again.

The silence contributed to Heberdon's demoralization. He was suddenly conscious of the furnacelike heat of the place. His hand was trembling as with the palsy. Catching a sudden glimpse of a noiseless overhead fan out of the tail of his eye, he almost jumped out of his shoes.

"This will never do!" he said to himself as to somebody else. "You'll make a ghastly mess of the affair." All the way through he had the feeling of watching an alien body carry through what he had planned. "Drop it! Drop it!" he whispered. "Get out while there's time?" but that force outside his will kept him to it.

When the departing customer passed out through the street doors Heberdon turned around to the paying teller's window. Within, the pale and conscientious young man was counting and recounting his money, and arranging the packages of bills convenient to his hand against the rush he presently expected. All of a sudden the icy grip on Heberdon's breast relaxed. His hands ceased to tremble; he drew a long breath and found himself perfectly cool. "I have the pluck!" he told himself exultingly.

The paying teller, aware of someone waiting at the window, looked up. He found himself gazing down the short barrel of an ugly little automatic pistol. Behind the pistol was a grim set face. He took his breath sharply, his jaw dropped, his hands fell nervously on his desk, a sickly green tinge crept under his skin. Heberdon had not mistaken his man.

In the soft and courteous tones he had often rehearsed, Heberdon said: "If you cry out or turn your head, I'll blow the top of your skull off. Raise

the wicket and pass out all the money on your desk!"

Even before he finished speaking the young man's trembling hands flung up the brass gate and started shoving out the tall piles of bills. His wide and fascinated gaze never left the pistol. There was no sound to be heard but the whisper of the overhead fan and the soft plop of the packages as they slid off the little glass shelf into the satchel that Heberdon held beneath.

It was all over in fifteen seconds. "Twenty thousand, if it's a dollar!" thought Heberdon, with a fearful joy. At a peremptory nod from Heberdon the paying teller let the little gate rattle down. Heberdon began to back away. The other man's sick eyes followed the pistol barrel. Heberdon turned and walked smartly to the street door. As he laid hand upon it he heard a gasping cry behind him:

"Boys, I'm robbed!"

The young man in the glass-enclosed office snatched a revolver from a pigeonhole of his desk with incredible swiftness, and, springing up, launched himself against the door. But the wedge held it, at least for the moment. Heberdon passed out into the street, and turning with a careless movement dropped his double hook over the two handles. No indifferent passer-by would be likely to catch the significance of what he was doing. He then walked sedately across the pavement and got in a cab.

"Nugent Avenue Station," he said with an offhand air. "Let her go!"

As the cab got under way Heberdon had a fleeting glimpse of white and excited faces within the doors of the bank. The doors were violently rattled. The chauffeur did not hear it above the noise of his engine, but passers-by did, and Heberdon, looking back through the little rear window, saw them stop and look. He was only going to have a few seconds' start.

"It's enough!" he told himself. "There is no other car right handy. If my chauffeur gets cold feet I have the gun for him."

His spirits soared. "Twenty thousand! The Riviera, Italy, Cairo! A whole year of delicious idleness! Choice eats, choice drinks, choice smokes, and lively company! At last I'll be able to play the part I'm fitted for!"

In his flush of triumph he completely forgot his intention of returning the money. They were crossing the plaza, at a good rate, the chauffeur, all unconscious of the storm preparing to break behind, when there came a report like a small cannon from beneath the cab. The sound had the effect of letting all the wind out of Heberdon, too.

"By the eternal, a tire!" he thought. "I'm done! Why didn't I look at the tires? What shall I do?"

The taxicab drew up beside the curb at the corner of the principal street leading from the plaza. At the same moment across the open space figures came tumbling out of the bank, and seeing the stoppage of the cab set up loud shouts. Heberdon leaped out and forthwith took to his heels down the street. The shoppers instinctively made for the doorways. The chauffeur, arrested in full motion, stood staring after his fare, a comical figure of astonishment.

The shouts from the bank gave him his cue. Suddenly he came to life and with a whoop leaped after Heberdon. Heberdon, stealing a white glance over his shoulder, saw with a sinking heart what long legs he had, and what a hard eye. Heberdon, like most city men, had not really tried out his legs in years. To be sure, Nature suggested the proper motions at this juncture, but he lacked confidence in his legs.

“I’ll never be able to do it!” he told himself despairingly, and in so thinking his sinews softened. On the other hand, the young chauffeur looked able to run all day, and half a block behind the chauffeur was a mob gathering volume like a snowball.

All the other people gave them the right of way like fire engines. The chauffeur gained on Heberdon with every stride. Heberdon could hear his quick, sure steps—quicker than his own. Finally the chauffeur cried, seemingly right behind him: “Stop, you thief!”

Heberdon, in a panic, dropped the satchel. The chauffeur stopped to pick it up, and the fugitive gained a precious thirty yards. But down the block the roar was momentarily growing louder. Those who dared not stop Heberdon were safely falling in behind his pursuers. The sound of that roar struck terror into the very core of Heberdon’s breast. He learned what it was to be hunted.

“Why do I go on running?” he thought. “It’s all up! I might as well stop!”

He almost collided with a young lady in the act of descending from her limousine to enter a shop. The hunted creature received an impression of warm, kind eyes. She drew aside a little from the door of her cab with a barely perceptible gesture of invitation. Heberdon, swerving, flung himself in. She sprang after. A roar of rage went up from the pursuing crowd. The girl’s eyes sparkled. Leaning out, she cried to the chauffeur:

“Step on her! Step on her! Turn the first corner to the left!”

The engine was running, and the car jerked violently into motion. She slammed the door. As they turned the corner, Heberdon, looking back, saw

that his pursuers had stopped another car, and, climbing aboard, were pointing out the limousine to the chauffeur.

At such a moment Heberdon was not exactly susceptible to the charms of sex. He had an impression that with heightened colour and sparkling eyes she was studying him with extraordinary curiosity. He wished to escape from the regard of those eyes.

At the moment he was not conscious of what she looked like, but he remembered well enough later; her lovely clothes—a little too spectacular for Heberdon's lady cousins; her full, red, generous mouth, her glowing dark eyes. She was very young; her whole person radiated youth recklessly, lavishly.

She was as excited as a boy. Snatching up the speaking tube, she cried: "Faster! Faster! Never mind what you break! Fifty dollars if you shake that car!"

They were in a quieter street with a bad pavement, over which the car bounced, flinging them to the roof. They turned to the right and again to the left, but the following car clung to them. It was of lighter build, and picked up faster. The pavements became worse, and, in spite of himself, the chauffeur and the limousine slowed down. His mistress snatched up the speaking tube again.

"Step on her!" she cried. "To hell with the springs! I'll pay."

Heberdon's cold heart experienced a feeling of warmth. "Splendid creature!" he thought.

They turned to the right again into a well-paved street stretching away to the south. The chauffeur "stepping on her" at last they roared down with wide-open exhaust.

"No more corners!" commanded the girl. "We'll leave them at a standstill in the straight."

Looking through the back window, they saw their pursuers turn into the street, and other cars behind them. But as she had said, they were distancing them fast. They had now left the central part of Princesboro behind them, and their way stretched ahead of them unhindered by traffic. Heberdon began to breathe more freely.

The girl was still studying him. "What did you do?" she asked downrightly, like a boy.

"Nothing," muttered Heberdon. He looked away. He was scarcely in the posture in which he cared to talk to a pretty woman. He was accustomed to patronize women from an eminence. This one had him at a disadvantage. His vanity squirmed under those candid eyes.

But feeling that she was entitled to some sort of an explanation, he went on: "There was some trouble in the bank when I was passing. I don't know what it was. But they picked on me."

The girl looked disappointed. "You could trust me," she said.

The limousine was now making fifty miles an hour. "I'm safe if those tires hold," thought Heberdon.

As if in answer to his thoughts, the girl said, smiling, "The tires are new."

Alas for their hopes! There was a railway crossing at grade in their path, and as they approached it the striped gates slowly descended. The chauffeur put on his brakes, and the car half slewed around in the road.

"Smash through!" cried the girl excitedly. "Take the gates! You have time!"

But the man, with a shake of his head, brought his car to a stop at the barrier.

"Oh, damn him for a coward!" cried the girl with tears in her eyes. "If I had been at the wheel!"

Without more ado, Heberdon leaped out. He never gave a thought to the fate of the girl. He ducked under the gates, but the oncoming train was now at hand, and he could not pass in front. It was an outbound freight, miles long, it seemed to his despairing heart, and moving slowly. There was nothing for him to do but run down the line alongside the train. The cars with his pursuers were drawing near.

Heberdon thought: "I'll swing myself on the caboose as she passes and hide inside. She's gathering way all the time. I have money to square the train crew. Anyhow, they couldn't throw me off until she slows down."

But on the rear platform stood a trainman with an uncompromising, hard eye. Heberdon ran on. His pursuers had likewise taken to the railway line on foot. Catching sight of him, they raised renewed shouts. Heberdon was now at the entrance to the railway yard. A high board fence bounded it on either hand. But long lines of freight cars stood on the spreading tracks, and these suggested good cover to the fugitive. Crossing the main line, he ran around the end of one string of cars and crawled under another. Here he felt safe enough to slow down a little and give his overladen heart a chance.

"They'll run on down through the yard," he decided. "If I stay up at this end perhaps I can double back."

He heard his pursuers, now reduced to a score or so of men, come running down the line and pause among the cars at a loss. But one of them

must have dropped to the ground and looked along underneath, for a voice was raised:

“I see his legs! Third track over!”

The fugitive took to his heels again, darting, twisting, doubling around the cars until he had fairly lost his own way in the depths of the yard. He saw nothing of his pursuers, nor did he hear them again. There must have been moments when they were close, but with a common impulse of prudence, they no longer called to each other. Heberdon did not know at what moment he might plump on them around a car. His heart was continually in his mouth. He who had lived such a sheltered and well-ordered life up to this time would have shuddered to catch sight in a mirror of the wild-eyed, hunted thing he was now.

The partly open portal of a box car tempted him. He drew himself aboard, and softly closing the door flung himself down to rest. There was no rest for his fears, though. He felt trapped. He pictured his pursuers drawing a line around the yard, and when they had every point of egress watched, starting a car-to-car search. It appeared that he had made a fatal tactical error. He ought to have kept on going until he found a way out of the yard.

He wasted some moments of agony, then, trying to screw up his courage sufficiently to open the door again. Finally he began to draw it back an inch at a time. The crack revealed nothing stirring outside, nor could he hear any sound. He opened it sufficiently to permit the passage of his body, and stuck his head out. He looked into the face of the tall young chauffeur who was flattened against the car waiting for him. The chauffeur roared with laughter.

A hand shot out and gripped Heberdon's collar. He was ignominiously hauled out and dropped to the ground. He got to his feet and stood apathetically awaiting his captor's pleasure. There was no fight in him.

“Hey, men!” cried the chauffeur. “Here he is! I've got him!”

Men appeared from several directions around the cars.

## Chapter IV

### THE WHARF RAT

HEBERDON was frisked and his gun taken from him. Forming in procession, they wended their way out of the yard and back up the line toward the street crossing where the automobiles had been left. Midway in the procession walked the chauffeur with his hand in Heberdon's collar. This connection was in sharp contrast to all of Heberdon's former relations with taxicab drivers.

The men, still heated with excitement, talked about Heberdon as if he were an inanimate object or were not there at all. They displayed no particular animus against him, but in a way were almost kindly disposed as to one who had furnished the excuse for a madly exciting and successful man hunt.

"Gee! If he'd kept on to the river, we'd never have got him. He could have slipped on a ferry."

"Aw, they always do the wrong thing, them crooks. Lose their head when they want it most."

"He don't look like an old-timer, do he? Bet this was his first job."

"Well, he's got all the pep scared out of him now all right, all right."

"Don't look right human, does he?"

"Oh, you can tell he's a bad one. Got a shifty eye."

Heberdon at first was merely dazed. But the exercise of walking restored his faculties, and the future began to roll itself before his mind's eye in colours hideously vivid. The loss of his secure and desirable place in the world—he could see his respectable relatives disowning him in horror; shame, disgrace, jail! Bitterest of all to his vanity was the thought of the triumph of his clubmates; he made sure they would triumph. Heberdon lived on his vanity. A sick feeling of desperation seized him. He looked around him furtively.

They were now streaming along the double-tracked line. The approach of another long freight, this one bound in at a good rate of speed, forced them all to take to a ditch. Heberdon saw his chance. It was a desperate one, but better death under the wheels than——

Wrenching himself free, he sprang across the track immediately in front of the looming engine. The breath of the monster was hot on his neck, but he

found himself safe on the other side—and none had cared to follow. For the moment he was safe. On the other side of the long train, let the men shout themselves hoarse if they wanted.

In a trice Heberdon was over the high fence that bounded the right of way, across a dingy yard and through a workingman's humble cottage before the startled eyes of the housewife. He cut diagonally across a main street, and turned down another that led away at right angles from the railway. From the little houses women and children looked curiously after the running figure, but prudently forbore to take up the chase. He turned two more corners, and, feeling comparatively safe, slowed down to a walk. As a walker, nobody noticed him.

He considered his situation anxiously. He was not by any means out of danger, for they had him awkwardly cornered in a peninsula of Princesboro. On his right was the East River a half-mile or so distant. The ferry houses were now well behind him, and he dared not retrace his steps. Somewhere in front of him, he knew, was the mouth of Oldtown Creek, and to the left was Central Avenue, the automobile thoroughfare which was presumably patrolled by those looking for him. The nearest bridge over the creek was that which carried Central Avenue across. He finally decided to make for Central Avenue, watch his chance of getting across, and then cross the creek by one of the bridges higher up. If it had only been a neighbourhood where taxicabs were to be had!

At the next corner he turned to the left again. Crossing the first street, to his dismay he saw figures of men far to the left, their attitude proclaiming them searchers. Before he could get out of sight one perceived him and raised a shout. The hunt was on again.

Heberdon realized that it was the bright band around his hat, visible as far as he was, which had betrayed him. How vainly he cursed it now. Why hadn't he thrown it away? He had the cap in his pocket to take its place. Luck was certainly against him!

Swerving to the right, he ran blindly down the street, with his pursuers in full cry. This was another tactical error, but he was becoming confused now. Still, he had two blocks' start, and there was no automobile to run him down. Attracted by the shouting, people rushed out of the little houses. Fearful of being tripped up or seized by some bolder spirit, Heberdon took to the middle of the road.

Two blocks ahead of him the street ended at the bank of the creek. Heberdon could see a strip of foul, black water. Before this he had realized his mistake in taking this direction, and at the last corner he essayed to turn

toward Central Avenue again. But a fresh shout greeted him from this direction. An automobile was approaching with men on the running board. Heberdon stopped short with despair in his heart. Escape was cut off in three directions. There was only one way left, to the south. Whirling about, he saw that he was cut off there, too, by a bend in the creek.

For a moment he hung in indecision at the crossroads, his wild eyes darting this way and that. The approaching men were yelling like fiends. Better the water than the men. Heberdon ran down the remaining short block and across the wharf at the end and jumped into the oily creek.

Heberdon was a swimmer—or had been a swimmer in boyhood—and he instinctively struck out, much hampered by his clothes. The stream was only forty or fifty yards wide at this point, more of the nature of a canal. The outgoing tide helped him more than his own efforts; he was carried swiftly away from the wharf. The silly hat floated away on an independent course.

Heberdon had made perhaps a third of the way across when his pursuers began to arrive on the wharf. None offered to follow him into the foul water, but all contented themselves with yelling imprecations after him. One man pulled a revolver and began to shoot. Heberdon's heart turned to water. "Inhuman brute!" he thought. "I'm done!"

He kept under water as well as he could, and what with that and the poorness of the marksman's aim, the ammunition was exhausted without any damage to the swimmer.

Before the man could reload, the tide carried Heberdon around the bend out of his range of vision. Some had started to run away, evidently in the hope of cutting him off below, and Heberdon had heard the automobile start off. It would naturally make for the bridge a quarter of a mile upstream.

Somehow Heberdon found himself across the creek. At the point of exhaustion he pulled himself up a rotting ladder on an old bulkhead. Some of his pursuers had come out lower down across the stream, but he was safely out of their reach. He was more anxious about the automobile.

He found himself in a paved way between great bonded warehouses, shuttered and silent. There was no one about on his side. He started to run weakly over the cobblestones.

The smelly water squished out of his shoes, and left a wet trail as he ran. He came out on a street paralleling the creek. There were people here, and he dared not run, though this was the street down which he expected the automobile to appear. He got around a corner and found himself in a block of lumber and coal yards and small factories.

Aware of the danger of being trapped again, nevertheless he could run no further. His heart was bursting. The tall piles of boards drying in the air offered good cover. There was no one watching at the gate of the lumber yard. He ran in and twisted and turned through the alleys between the lumber until even terror could carry him no further. He flung himself down and lay there gasping.

By and by the sound of an automobile in the street outside brought him to his feet again. It was not necessarily the automobile he feared, but the mere sound was enough to start him going. He staggered on until he came to the other side of the yard which fronted on the broad expanse of the East River. The matchless panorama brought no joy to Heberdon's heart. It was only another wall cutting off escape.

On the river front some men were loading lumber on a lighter. Heberdon was careful not to expose himself to them. By keeping behind the piles, and watching his chance to dart across open spaces, he contrived to circle around them, and to gain the boundary fence at the lower side of the yard. Here in a slip on the water front his glazed eyes were brightened by the sight of a skiff, a way of escape without returning to the street.

There were no oars in the boat, but a hasty search finally revealed them hidden under some boards. Heberdon cast off and pulled out of the slip with inept strokes; what matter if he was venturing in his inexperience on perilous waters or small boats? Anything was better than what lay behind him.

There was only one way to go, for the tide was running out faster than he could pull against it. So much the better for him; Princesboro and Oldtown Creek were left safely behind. He pulled but feebly, letting the tide carry him as it would, taking care only to avoid the ends of the piers. He was now off the district of Johnsburgh, with the great black sugar refineries stretched alongshore, and ahead of him the far-flung span of the Johnsburgh Bridge, with the trolley cars and automobiles threading their way across like spiders on a web.

As he was carried downstream the river traffic ever increased and the unpractised oarsman's heart was continually in his mouth, with the tugs, lighters, and ferries that came at him from every side, bearing down on him with contemptuous disregard for a mere rowboat, and kicking up great waves behind that threatened to swamp him. Even more alarming were the great car floats swinging around helpless in the grip of the tide. Had he escaped one danger only to fall victim to another? Heberdon, with his unstrung nerves, was ready to weep.

He reflected that a general alarm would shortly be out for him, if indeed his description was not already in the hands of every policeman in the five boroughs. The sight of a natty little launch with a big P. D. on the bow, smartly bucking the tide, reminded him that there were police on the water, too. He almost had heart failure when it bore down on him. But it passed without stopping. The next one might have later information. It was up to him to find a hiding place.

Yet he dared not land either. As long as it was daylight his drenched and bedraggled appearance would render him fatally conspicuous in the streets. A pier higher than its neighbours and with a clear space beneath offered a solution. He allowed the skiff to drift beneath it, and, making sure from the high-water mark on the piles that the tide would not presently rise and crush his skiff under the overhead sleepers, he made his painter fast and determined to wait there until dark.

For a long time he sat gazing out on the bright river from his gloomy hiding place in a daze of fatigue, not thinking about anything in particular. The tide lapped and sucked at the piles, and the sounds of the outer world reached him reverberating hollowly over the surface of the water. Gradually drowsiness overcame him. Once he heard the scamper of little feet on the overhead beam, and started up in affright. But even the thought of rats could not keep him awake. He slept.

When he awoke it was beginning to grow dark on the river outside, the water gleamed like a sapphire in the evening light. The sounds of traffic had almost ceased. He resolved to wait yet a while. He was stiff and sore all over and his head ached consumedly from the emanations of the sewer-laden water.

It was pitch dark where he was, and, what with the smell of corruption and the threatening chuckle of the water, a nightmare cavern. He imagined that he saw snaky shadows in every corner. His damp clothes clung to him heavily. How sickeningly he longed for light, warmth, and the sound of human voices! The thought of the club was like an unattainable Elysium.

He was crouching between the two thwart of his skiff. Suddenly a heavy body dropped in the stern, landing within a few inches of him, and almost rolling the skiff under. A grunt of terror was forced from Heberdon's lungs, and like an animal he scrambled to the point of the bow. He clung there, paralyzed with fear. The place suggested nameless things. He could see nothing but a darker shadow in the stern. It was creeping toward him, feeling for a weapon. His throat was constricted; he could not make a sound. The thing fumbled with an oar.

Heberdon, in the expectation of a blow, suddenly recovered the use of his limbs, and like an ape, half leaped, half scrambled to the joist overhead. He lay upon it, gripping it between elbows and knees. The creature below jabbed viciously with the oar at the place where he had just been. Meeting with no resistance, the shape crept farther forward in the skiff. Heberdon could then have dropped on its back, but not for worlds would he have come to grips with the loathsome thing.

It fumbled at the painter, freed it, and with a push against the piles propelled the boat out from under the pier. The tide was now running up. Heberdon was so relieved to be rid of the shape that he let the boat go without a thought. Not until he perceived in the fading light outside it was a man like himself, did the reaction set in and, mixed with the feeling of relief and impotent rage, convulsed him. But he did not curse him nor seek to call him back, for it was an ominously burly figure with a gorilla-like head sunk between his shoulders. Heberdon never saw his face. The skiff was quickly carried out of his range of vision.

Where the man had come from Heberdon never knew. He must have lain concealed under the floor of the pier, like a gigantic wood louse. There are, no doubt, many underground routes in the city that people who live on the surface never suspect. As for Heberdon, blocked in front and behind by girders running in the other direction, there was no possible escape save by dropping into the water. He dreaded it as a shell-shocked man dreads a battle, but finally he had to let himself drop, gasping.

In the water he pulled himself shoreward from pile to pile. It was quite dark now, but he dared not venture outside, because he heard quiet voices just overhead, working people, no doubt, taking the evening air on the water front. He could not call for help, of course, without giving an account of himself. At the shore end of the pier extended a long bulkhead, smooth and greasy, affording him no finger hold. Up and down he searched in vain for a ladder or a break. It was like the futile struggles of an insect, bumping its head against the side of a water pail.

He swam a distance of blocks, it seemed to him, and his strength was rapidly failing when he came at last to a place where the bulkhead was rotten and the interstices between the planks afforded him a precarious hand and foot hold. He drew himself out and sat down on the stringpiece to recover himself. Fortunately in this place there were no loiterers, but by that time he would not have cared if there had been.

He was in the factory district of Johnsburgh, silent and deserted at this time of night. After having wrung the water from his clothes as best he could, he started uptown, heading for the bridge terminal. Some time passed

before he could nerve himself to cross the brightly lighted plaza. He thought of the other plaza with a shudder. A street clock told him it was after ten.

He dared not expose himself in a lighted trolley car, and was obliged to drag his weary body across the two-mile span in the comparative obscurity of the promenade. And on the Manhattan side he had yet another two miles to walk to Gramercy Park.

When he finally reached his own building, it was fortunately closed for the night, the hall attendant gone. Otherwise he must still have been a wanderer. He let himself in with a thankful heart, and, climbing the stairs, closed his own door behind him with a sob of relief, and, flinging himself on the couch without undressing, slept again.

## Chapter V

### THE ALIBI

WHEN he awoke Heberdon's clock was striking six, and the little park below his window was bright in the sunshine. He lay aghast at his recollections of the day before and hugging his sense of present security. The whole affair seemed like a dream now—a hideous dream at which he shuddered and tried to put out of mind. How cozy and charming his little rooms were! Every object how inexpressibly dear to him!

He was presently aroused to the fact that he had lain in his damp clothes, and that his pleasant rooms were contaminated with a faint odour of sewage. Cursing himself for his folly, he hastened to bathe and to dress himself in his proper garments. On the clothes of the bank robber he poured benzine that he had provided for that purpose, and burned them in the fireplace. He sprayed his atomizer around the room to sweeten the air.

He was keenly curious to see the morning paper—and not without apprehensions. It was delivered at his door at eight o'clock. He had no doubt that it was already waiting downstairs. But he did not care to betray too great an eagerness for news to the hall boy. Finally when it dropped with a swish outside his door he waited until the receding footsteps had passed out of hearing, then pounced on it.

The hold-up of the Princesboro Bank occupied a prominent position on the front page. Heberdon read the story with a queer thrill. A pang of chagrin went through him when he learned the amount of cash that had been in his possession for a minute or two—twenty-seven thousand dollars. First he hastily skimmed through the story and was reassured; the thief had got away clean, it was stated, and the police were without clues. Then he read it more carefully, his vanity deliciously tickled by references to the desperado's cool nerve and resourcefulness.

He eagerly read of the girl who had aided him. She had been arrested and later arraigned in the magistrate's court. It had naturally been supposed that she was an accomplice of the thief, but she stoutly protested that she had never seen him before, and had simply yielded to an impulse of compassion, seeing a human creature hunted by a mob. A cloud of witnesses appeared in her behalf—storekeepers of Princesboro, her fashionable friends, a faithful old manservant.

Evidently she had made a conquest of the newspaper reporter; he was for her through and through, and indeed the whole courtroom must have fallen under the spell of her beauty and candour. The magistrate had discharged her with a reprimand that scarcely veiled a compliment. Her name was Miss Cora Flowerday, and she lived at No. 23 Deepdene Road, Greenhill Gardens, an outlying part of Princesboro. "An orphan, with means of her own," so ran the story, and many a poor young man's mouth must have watered at the phrase.

"Splendid girl!" Heberdon said to himself—but not so warmly as on the day before. He was glad she had got off so easily, since it cost him nothing, but he had no desire at that moment ever to see her again. That incident in his life, that nightmare, was to be sponged off clean. Never again, he told himself, would he willingly set foot on the streets of Princesboro. Oh, blessed was respectability and all its works! He thought of all his solid and respectable relatives with positive affection. How could he ever have thought them dull? He decided to go see the Pallisers that very day. And yet—'way deep down in his consciousness, unheard and unacknowledged, there was a little nagging voice: "If only that cursed tire had not burst!"

His breakfast was sent up as usual by the housekeeper of the apartment house. Heberdon lingered over it, tasting the satisfaction of a safe and ordered life with every mouthful. Never again would he call existence dull. He had a fleeting picture of himself in the grip of the chauffeur, and shuddered. He had had his fill of excitement. Anyway, it was high time he settled down.

He would think about that offer of a berth in his uncle's office—tremendously important firm. And his cousin Ida Palliser wasn't so bad by lamplight. Anyway, a man who wanted to get on couldn't afford to marry for youth and beauty. Solid family connections were the thing.

After breakfast he telephoned down to the hall boy. As landlord Heberdon enjoyed rather better service than the other tenants in the building.

"Thomas, what time do the first editions of the afternoon papers come out?"

"About ten o'clock, sir."

"Get me one, and bring it up."

"Yes, sir."

When it came, Heberdon read the usual rehash of the earlier story—but in another part of the paper there was a paragraph that caused the skin of his scalp to prickle and his palms to become moist. The blessed sense of

security was stripped from him; a chasm yawned at his feet; the old sickening hunted feeling came winging back.

“In connection with the hold-up of the Princesboro branch of the Wool Exchange Trust Company at midday yesterday, an extraordinary story has been told the district attorney by a young man whose name for the present is withheld. This young man claims to be employed as bell boy or waiter in one of the best-known clubs in the city. About a month ago, he says, four prominent young members of the club became involved in a discussion as to the ease with which crimes might be committed. In waiting on them he overheard much of their talk, he claims, and the upshot of the argument was that one of the four bet the others that he could hold up a New York City bank, single-handed, and get away clean. The police and the district attorney do not place much credence in the story, suspecting that it may be the invention of a notoriety seeker who sees his chance of breaking into the newspapers. But, of course, it will be investigated.”

Investigated! With a shiver Heberdon gazed at his timepiece. Ten-thirty; even now an emissary from the district attorney's office might be on the way! With trembling hands he made haste to dress himself for the street. Gone was his delightful feeling of affection for his little flat. His one idea now was to get away from it. As he picked up his hat the telephone bell rang, and his heart turned to water.

He instantly made up his mind what to do. He did not answer the 'phone, but stole out of the flat, and made his way up the final flight of stairs, which ended at a door opening on the roof. In a similar building two doors east Heberdon had an acquaintance who, like himself, lived on the top floor. In order to save the stairs they had visited each other over the roof, and Heberdon, knowing the way, now proceeded to this other building and descended through it to the street.

Without daring to look back, he made rapid tracks to the east, pausing not until he was safely swallowed in the comfortable throng at the intersection of Broadway and Fifth Avenue. By this time, no one having tapped him on the shoulder, he began to breathe more freely. Entering a cigar store, he made for a telephone booth and called up Hanwell's office.

Mr. Hanwell was out, his stenographer said. She believed that he might be found at the Chronos Club, as she had lately heard from him there. Heberdon called up the club and presently got Hanwell on the wire. From a

slightly tremulous quality in his voice he guessed that the other had read the disturbing paragraph. Hanwell admitted as much.

“You’d better see the superintendent about a certain paper,” Heberdon said meaningly.

“I have seen him. I got it from him.”

“Good. Have you heard from the other fellows?”

“They’re both here. We’ve got to see you at once. Can’t talk about such a thing over the ’phone.”

“I’d better not come there. Someone from the—well, we might be asked for there. I’m telephoning from a cigar store at——” and Heberdon gave the number on Broadway. “You three get a taxi and pick me up at the door. We can talk in the cab.”

“There in three minutes,” said Hanwell.

Of the conference between the quartette that presently took place in a joggling taxicab it is unnecessary to speak in detail. They all spent a bad quarter of an hour. It was Nedham who finally tried to stop the wrangling.

“Look here, you fellows, this gets us nowhere,” he said. “What’s the use of recrimination? We’re all in the same hole, and we’ve got to get out of it the best we can.”

“I didn’t stick up a bank!” growled Spurway.

“Shut up; you were a party to it.”

“What’ll we do?” quavered Hanwell.

“Deny the whole thing,” declared Spurway, “and stick to it.”

“But we don’t know how much the boy overheard.”

“He can’t know anything about the paper Nedham drew up. He wasn’t in the room then. Anyhow, what’s the word of a bell boy against us four?”

“But the publicity will ruin us even if they can’t prove anything!”

“Oh, for God’s sake, stop snivelling! Buck up, can’t you?”

“Then there’s Maynard, too,” wailed Hanwell. Maynard was the club superintendent.

“Maynard is safe. For the honour of the club, and all that.”

Nedham spoke least, and to the best effect. “Maynard is safe, all right,” he said. “But to deny the boy’s story is to keep it alive. Admit it, and it will be forgotten.”

“Admit it!” cried the other three, staring.

“Sure. Up to a certain point. Nothing need be said about the memorandum I drew up. Admit it, and turn it into a joke. Say it was all

talk.”

Heberdon, who had pursued his own line of thought, affirmed abruptly. “Nedham is right. That’s what I’m going to do.”

Hanwell and Spurway still expostulated. The former suggested that they had all better leave town. Nedham patiently set to work to convince them, but Heberdon lost his temper.

“Hang it all!” he said irritably. “Can’t you do what I say without any more argument? I’m the one that’s got to be considered in this matter, aren’t I?”

“Clumsy bungler!” muttered Spurway. Heberdon turned pale.

Nedham made haste to pour oil on the troubled waters. “Cut it out! Cut it out!” he said. “If we can’t stop quarrelling among ourselves we’re all done for!”

Hanwell and Spurway finally agreed to Nedham’s suggestion.

Nedham asked, “What are you going to do about yesterday, Frank?”

“Establish an alibi,” was the solemn reply.

“Can you make it water-tight?”

“You leave that to me.”

Having reached an agreement, they separated.

Heberdon continued in the cab to ex-Judge Palliser’s office. Here, having no appointment, he had to wait for a miserable half-hour in the outer office, still in momentary expectation of a tap on the shoulder. When he was finally admitted to his uncle’s sanctum he was paler than usual, and moist in his agitation. The older man, scenting trouble, instinctively adopted a defensive attitude.

“Judge” Palliser, as he was always called, was a typical successful lawyer who had been on the bench. Most lawyers when they ascend to that eminence take on flesh, mellow, and become rotund. It is the exercise of the wits that keeps men thin; lawyers have to think, and judges don’t. Judge Palliser had a complexion like port wine and a figure like a butt of malmsey. In voice he boomed unctuously, if one may be permitted the expression. His grand and single aim in life was to keep at bay the perplexities that interfere with a good digestion.

“Well, Frank!” he cried with the heartiness that he assumed as a cover for all sorts of real feelings. “How goes it?”

Heberdon, knowing his uncle, was not much heartened by the heartiness. “Well enough,” he answered with a somewhat sickly attempt to appear at his

ease. In his nervousness he plunged directly into the business that had brought him. "Have you read the papers to-day?"

"As much as I ever do," said the judge, with a grand carelessness. "What about 'em?"

"That hold-up in Princesboro yesterday," stammered Heberdon.

"Outrageous! Don't know what we're coming to, I'm sure! Nobody is safe nowadays. But that's nothing in our line, is it?"

"Oh, no," said Heberdon feebly. "Have you read the evening papers?"

"Evening papers!" repeated the judge, staring. "It's only eleven o'clock in the morning!"

"Yes, I know. But they start coming out right after breakfast."

"Catchpenny rags!" was the scornful comment. "Battening for idle minds! I don't bother with newspapers during office hours."

It was impossible for Heberdon to find the words actually to open the business he had come on. Instead, he took the newspaper out of his pocket, and mutely called attention to the upsetting paragraph. Judge Palliser adjusted his glasses and read it through.

"Scandalous innuendo!" he cried. "The newspapers love to start that sort of thing, confident they will never be called to account." Suddenly he looked sharply at his nephew. "Good God, Frank, you—you haven't got anything to do with this, have you?"

"Nothing, really," said Heberdon quickly. "But it's very unfortunate \_\_\_\_\_"

"What do you mean? Don't whine!"

"Well, it's a fact," stammered the young man, "that some friends and I at the club got into an argument about crime one night—and I suppose a bell boy overheard us——"

Judge Palliser turned pale under the fine network of purple veins that overspread his expansive countenance, and his eyes seemed to protrude a little farther. "And were you the one that took up the bet?" he asked.

"Yes—but——"

"Good God, Frank! You might at least have considered your family!"

"But it was all a joke," said Heberdon. "Only talk. None of us has ever thought of it since."

"Then what did you come to me for?" demanded the judge.

"Well, I suppose I'll be questioned," said Heberdon—to save his life he could not keep the whining tone out of his voice. "It's damned awkward. As

it happens, I'm not in a position to establish an alibi for yesterday."

"H'm!" said his uncle, grimly studying him.

Heberdon squirmed.

"Where were you yesterday?" demanded the elder.

Heberdon was ready with his tale. "I felt seedy," he explained glibly enough. "I went down to Brighton Beach for lunch and spent the afternoon on the sand. Just as luck would have it, I didn't meet a soul I knew."

"H'm!" said Judge Palliser again. "What can I do about it?"

Heberdon could not quite meet the irate eye. "Well, I thought——" he mumbled. "A man in your position—a word would be sufficient."

"Ah," said his uncle. "I take it you are suggesting that I perjure myself on your behalf."

"Where's the harm?" whined Heberdon. "If I had done anything wrong it would be different. But just an unlucky accident—you surely can't think there is anything in it!"

"Oh, no," said Judge Palliser. Heberdon was unable to decide whether his words concealed irony.

"And it would be damned unpleasant—for all of us, if they were to go on with the thing. I'm only thinking of you and the girls."

"That's kind of you!" This time there could be no doubt of the irony.

There was a silence while Judge Palliser stared grimly at Heberdon, and Heberdon twisted on his chair.

"What is it exactly that you want me to do?" the older man asked at last.

"If it could be shown that you knew where I was yesterday—or better still, if I was with you——"

"Ah!"

Another silence.

"Where were you yesterday afternoon?" Heberdon ventured to ask.

"I went up to Chester Hills to play golf."

"Did you go up alone?"

"Yes."

Heberdon brightened. "Well, then, how simple——"

"Hold on a minute," said his uncle. "The money was recovered, if I remember aright?"

"What's that got to do with——" Heberdon began, but changed his mind under the look in his uncle's eye. "Yes," he said meekly.

“And his pistol, when they took it from him——”

“Was unloaded.”

“But he might have unloaded it after the hold-up.”

“He had had no chance.”

“Frank,” said Judge Palliser severely, “if you had some serious work to do and weren’t loafing about all day, you wouldn’t be needing my help now. Some time ago I made you an offer to come into my office. How about it?”

Heberdon thoroughly understood the implication in this speech, and began to breathe more freely. “I had already decided to accept it, and thank you,” he said quickly.

His eagerness caused an expression of caution to appear upon the judicial countenance. “Let me see, what figure did I name?” he said.

“Twenty-five hundred to start,” answered Heberdon with a sinking heart.

Judge Palliser shook his head heavily. “Sorry, I won’t be able to do it!” he said. “Money’s so tight. I’ll make it two thousand to begin. Promotion rests with you, you know.”

“I’m satisfied,” rejoined Heberdon with a wry smile.

“Then there’s Ida,” said the judge with a fond, parental smile. “A fine girl, Ida, so intellectual; the pick of my brood! You and she have been going together since your school days. Now that you’re going to settle down, I hope you’ll soon—eh? Make us old folks happy?”

Heberdon swallowed hard. “I’ll ask her to-night to name the day,” he said.

“Good!” exclaimed Judge Palliser. “Now let’s go into the details of this foolish little other matter.”

When Heberdon got home a young man was waiting for him in the hall downstairs. To Heberdon’s satisfaction, he was a very young man, not altogether sure of himself, and visibly impressed by Heberdon’s superior style. Heberdon, as a result of his interview with his uncle, had quite recovered his usual self-possession.

“Mr. Heberdon?” the young man asked diffidently.

Heberdon bowed.

“I called earlier, but you were out. I went to your office and to your club, but could not find you. May I have a few words with you?”

“Certainly. Sorry to have put you to so much trouble. Won’t you come upstairs?”

In Heberdon's sitting room the young man said: "I'm from the district attorney's office."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Heberdon, laughing. "What am I wanted for?"

"Haven't you read the evening papers?"

"Not yet. I haven't had time."

The young man stated his errand, and Heberdon indulged in a hearty laugh, in which the other joined.

"I need hardly say that we do not believe the boy's yarn," the young man explained hastily. "The district attorney sent me to you just as a matter of form to ask about it."

"But the boy's story is true," said Heberdon, smiling.

The young man stared.

"So far as it goes," added Heberdon. "It is true that my friends and I had a discussion about the ease with which certain kinds of crime might be committed. Possibly we even went through the form of betting each other—I do not remember. But fellows are always doing that without meaning anything. None of us has given the matter a thought since. Fancy anybody taking it seriously!" He laughed again.

The young man, reassured, laughed too. "It is too bad to trouble you about such a thing," he remarked. "But would you mind describing your movements yesterday—just as a matter of form. That will silence all gossip."

"Not the least objection," said Heberdon. "I didn't go to my office yesterday morning because I had a brief to prepare, and I wanted to write in the greater quiet of my room here. In the course of my labours a knotty legal question presented itself, and I telephoned to my uncle for advice—Judge Palliser, you know."

"Of course," said the young man, much impressed.

"It was then about noon," Heberdon went on. "Judge Palliser said he was leaving to play golf up at Chester Hills, and if I'd ride up on the train with him we could discuss the matter on the way. I was tickled to pieces to have the advantage of my uncle's very considerable experience, of course——"

"Naturally," murmured the young man.

"So we took the twelve-thirty from Union Central, arriving at Chester Hills at one-twenty, I think. My uncle invited me up to the club to lunch, but I thought he wanted to be with his friends, so I declined. I found there was no train back from Chester Hills for over an hour, so I trolleyed to Yonkers

and got a train there. Got home about three, and spent the afternoon finishing my brief. Dined alone at Mellish's, and in the evening I went——”

“That is more than sufficient,” interrupted the young man. “At the time of the robbery you were on the train with Judge Palliser.”

“Yes, lucky for me, isn't it?” said Heberdon with a laugh.

“Oh, I'm sure it would have been all right, anyway,” said the polite young man. He rose, “Thank you for being so frank, Mr. Heberdon.”

“Not at all,” said Heberdon, with a wave of the hand. “By the way, in order to lay this yarn in its grave once and for all, you'd better stop and see my uncle, hadn't you?”

“With your permission, I will,” replied the young man. “Thank you, again, Mr. Heberdon. Good morning.”

## Chapter VI

### DAYDREAMS

At the end of two weeks, in the offices of Palliser, Beardmore, Beynon & Riggs, Heberdon told himself bitterly that his lot was no better than that of a hard-driven cabhorse. All the dirty work of the firm fell to his share, it seemed; the endless, tiresome searching of records, the preparation of perfunctory documents, the interviewing of unimportant people, the attendance at insignificant, long-winded trials. Every person in the establishment took his tone toward Heberdon from the head, and Judge Palliser had let it be known from the first that his nephew was to receive no special consideration. It was useless to kick; Heberdon had delivered himself into bondage, and well he knew it. Behind the old judge's bluff joviality there was a certain remorselessness.

Outside the office things were worse, if possible. His engagement to Miss Ida Palliser had been formally announced, and congratulations were in order. Congratulations rang a hollow knell inside Heberdon; congratulations riveted his chains. His fiancée's pinched nose blinded him to her very solid virtues.

The Pallisers were established up at Marchmont for the summer, and nearly every night Heberdon was dragged around to other houses in the neighbourhood, or to entertainments at the country club, there to be shown off as by a condescending proprietor. Having waited so long for her engagement the eldest Miss Palliser was not going to be denied any of the perquisites appertaining thereto. Useless for the victim to try to assert himself; she was of a strong character, and her father backed her up.

The whole numerous Heberdon-Palliser connection was pleasantly stirred by the betrothal, and there were numerous purely family parties in honour of the pair. These were the most trying of all. Heberdon secretly detested his relations, for least of all in the world did they appreciate him. They were always bringing up incidents of his childhood that made him feel foolish.

There was Aunt Florence, otherwise Mrs. Pembroke Conrad, a very great lady in her own estimation, who expected you figuratively to crawl on the carpet, and you had to do it, Ida said, in order not to compromise the handsome wedding present that was to be expected from that quarter. The same with Grand-Aunt Maria Heberdon, who was childish and slightly

palsied, but whose will—that is to say, her testamentary will, was never to be lost sight of for a moment. Then there was Uncle Maltbie Heberdon, the Dean of Kingston, a solemn bore, only a professor to be sure, but the whole family kowtowed to him because he was assumed to give it literary tone.

The younger generation consisted principally of smart young married couples who endeavoured to conceal their desperate struggles with the high cost of living behind a humorous frankness on the subject. Their only hope of salvation lay in their “expectations” from Aunt Maria *et al.* How sick Heberdon was of hearing about their babies and their servants! They had as few as possible of the former and as many as possible of the latter. The youngest of these couples took it upon themselves to patronize the engaged pair as a foolish young couple who would learn better. Ida, who had hitherto been considered almost elderly, enjoyed this, but Heberdon writhed.

Ida was above all businesslike. “What is the gross income from your apartment house, Frank?” she asked one day.

“I don’t know,” he said sulkily; “about six thousand, I guess.”

“Why, Frank! There are nine apartments in the building, and there isn’t one of them that rents for less than nine hundred and sixty dollars. And you told me yourself they were always full.”

“Well, there’s taxes and repairs and wages and coal, isn’t there?”

“I said gross.”

“Well, I know I never get more than four thousand dollars out of it.”

“If you own up to four thousand, I can safely assume five,” she said shrewdly. “And when we’re married you’ll get a thousand more for your flat. Then there’s your two thousand salary.”

“I can’t stand that long,” muttered Heberdon.

“Oh, I expect Papa is just testing you out. I’ll make him give me two thousand dollars for myself. That’s ten thousand. None of the married girls have more than that except Jessie Crittendon, and she had to take a man fifty years old. I’ll make mine go farther than any of them. We’ll take a small, perfectly appointed apartment on Park Avenue. We won’t have any children, of course. We’ll cultivate Aunt Florence’s set. They’re older than we are, of course, but they’ll die off sooner and that will leave me in a position to take the lead.”

“Dull as ditch water,” muttered the exasperated Heberdon.

“What of it?” said Ida virtuously. “We’re not in this world just for the purposes of amusement, I hope. Of course Aunt Florence is old-fashioned. The very smartest thing is to be a little old-fashioned. That’s something that

these new people can't imitate. And, after all, her lot are the best people. Nobody enjoys such prestige. That's the main thing."

So much for Ida's style. Left to himself Heberdon would no doubt have developed along similar lines, but he did not relish being dragged.

On the rare occasions when Heberdon was allowed to escape to his club, he found less satisfaction there than of yore. Never since that ride in the taxicab had his three friends referred in any way to the unfortunate wager. The memorandum and the checks had been destroyed presumably; at least the checks Heberdon had given them had never been presented for payment. He was willing, or had been willing, to pay it, but did not feel called upon to remind them of the fact.

Spurway, Hanwell, and Nedham now drew their skirts, as it were, on Heberdon's approach. They had taken in another man permanently for a fourth at bridge. Heberdon might have been considered to have a perfectly just cause for resentment in this holier-than-thou attitude, but it was not that that made him hot under the collar. Every time he saw his erstwhile friends he was reminded of Spurway's contemptuous remark, "Clumsy bungler!" Heberdon could not forget that. It had made a rankling wound in his vanity.

"Was it my fault that the damned taxicab burst a tire?" he passionately asked himself. "By gad, I'd like to show them!"

The intense disagreeableness of his present situation had the natural effect of causing Heberdon to turn to the past. The effect of the fright he had received gradually wore off. The Princesboro robbery had been forgotten under the press of newer sensations, and there was no chance of its being brought up now. Heberdon forgot the sensation of being hunted, and of having a hand twisted in your collar; forgot his ghastly fright under the pier; but on the other hand, in imagination he often returned to that thrilling moment when he poked a gun at the paralyzed paying teller, and the great, fat packages of greenbacks began to plop into the opened satchel like ripe fruit.

"Ah, that was living!" he sighed. "If only it hadn't been for that tire!"

He took up the study of crime again, feeling more than ever like an expert now. A new book of the psychology of criminals came out, which he had to have, of course. After reading it he wrote, anonymously, a long letter to the author, putting him right on several points.

More and more as a refuge from the pinpricks or existence Heberdon began to seek solace in daydreams. Daydreaming seems such an innocent pastime. You can imagine anything you like, and as long as you keep it on an imaginary plane whom does it hurt?

Every time he went into one of the several banks with which his firm did business, he involuntarily began to plan how it might be robbed; noted the armed guards, sized up the clerks and their dispositions, looked to the exits and informed himself as to the volume of business done at different hours. He robbed the Market National a dozen times over—in imagination. To be sure, there were practical difficulties in the way, but in his daydreams he always brilliantly surmounted these, and got away with an immense haul.

Under the Market National there were safe-deposit vaults he often had to visit, and this establishment stimulated his ingenuity even more than a bank. Because nobody had ever robbed a safe-deposit vault that he knew of, it would be an immense feather in the cap of the first cool hand who was able to pull it off. He thought about it endlessly, but the very simplicity of the arrangements offered insuperable difficulties.

At the foot of a stairway from the bank you were faced by an immense steel grill with bars two inches in diameter. In this grill was a gate with a most imposing array of locks and further guarded during business hours by a young man with perfect manners and an unwavering determined eye. He never left the gate. In his side pocket Heberdon saw the slight bulge of a heavy little object of significant shape.

Beside the young man on a little shelf was a great ledger, in which were written the names, numbers, genealogy and passwords of the customers, but as a matter of fact, the young man knew most of the customers and but rarely had to consult his book.

Behind the great steel fence all the little safes were ranged in tier upon tier down both sides of a wide corridor. These were in charge of a snowy-haired old gentleman with, if possible, even more delightful manners than the other. He unlocked the outer door of your safe and handed you the tin box within. It would be child's play to overcome him, Heberdon thought, but what would be the use while the young man held the gate?

Having received your box you carried it through an archway into a room which opened up at the back. This room was lined all around with booths where the customers might open their boxes in privacy. A negro maid was in charge here; she opened the door of the booth for you and closed it behind you. Heberdon, unable to evolve a scheme for robbing the vault itself, coquetted with the idea of holding up one of the other customers. They nearly all carried little satchels. The maid often went out of the room. How simple to drop a customer with a blackjack, thrust his body into one of the booths, close the door on it, and, taking his satchel, calmly walk out. The difficulty was that the crime would instantly be brought home to Francis Heberdon, lawyer. Heberdon never did succeed in getting around that.

When Heberdon and Ida dined at a wealthy and fashionable house, while Heberdon was making sprightly table talk with the lady on this side or that, his under mind would be busy appraising the hostess's jewels and the amount of plate displayed, counting the servants, noting all the household arrangements, the window fasteners, the relation of the windows to the grounds outside, etcetera, etcetera. What a sensation would it have caused had his thoughts stalked forth into the light! Perhaps the thoughts of some of the other guests were queer, too, in their way.

There was a particular piquancy in planning the robbery of Aunt Florence's house, which, in its heavy style, was the most magnificent of all the houses that they visited. It was on the Hudson, where plutocrats used to live, in style a limestone castle of 1884. Unfortunately Aunt Florence's jewels were so well known that she didn't have to wear them. Presumably they were well locked up in one of those confounded safe-deposit vaults. To be sure, there was plate by the hundredweight, but rather difficult to carry off. Anyway, Heberdon had the feeling that mere silver was beneath the notice of a really first-class crook.

One afternoon when he was waiting for an elevated train over on the Flatwick line, a single car stopped at the station, the money car. Every day it travelled up and down the line at a certain hour collecting the receipts from each station, and on Saturday morning it came around with the pay envelopes.

From boyhood Heberdon had been familiar with the sight of the money car, but now for the first time it occurred to him what a sensation would be caused if it were robbed. He saw the headlines in his mind's eye, "A train robbery in New York City!" The car had never been robbed within his memory. It ought not to be too difficult, say, at one of the lonely stations in the suburbs. To be sure, it carried a strong crew—motorman, conductor, and three clerks—but long immunity surely must have made them careless; they might be taken by surprise——

When the car stopped one of the clerks got off with his little satchel and disappeared within the ticket office. Without appearing to take any special interest, Heberdon sauntered along the platform, glancing through the windows of the car. Within it was arranged like a miniature bank, with a narrow passage running through on Heberdon's side, flanked by a wooden partition with a brass grill above. The grill was pierced with several little windows. Behind the grill the remaining clerks were working with their backs to Heberdon. The one who had got off returned to the car with his satchel, and the car moved on down the line.

Heberdon ruminated. “One would have to know the exact layout of the interior before he could do anything. When she comes back on the other track the interior will be open to the platform over there. Let me see, it will take her twenty minutes to run down to the ferry, and the same to come back. I’ll just be on hand.”

But forty minutes later, over on the other platform, a disappointment awaited him. The interior of the car had been ingeniously contrived with a view to avoid tempting the populace by a display of coin without at the same time suggesting that anything was hidden. The clerks were now facing Heberdon with the brass grill at their backs, but the back of the desk at which they worked had been built up, cutting off the lower part of the windows, and Heberdon could not see what they were doing with their hands.

“Well,” thought Heberdon, “when they pay off, the men go inside to get their money. They’re always advertising for men. I could go to work on a Friday and get paid off next day. It would only mean a day off from the office. I’ll ask for next Friday off.”

## *Chapter VII*

### ACTION

FROM that time forward every hour that Heberdon could call his own, as well as a good many stolen from the firm that employed him, was devoted to his fascinating new game of "robbing the money car." He soon had its daily schedule by heart, and contriving to be at various stations up and down the line when it was due, watched it without appearing to, and added bit by bit to his knowledge of its arrangements and the habits of the crew.

It made its rounds every afternoon just before the evening rush began to set in. Shortly before it was due, auditors called at the ticket offices to check up the ticket sellers' accounts and to wrap up the money in convenient packages. When the money car stopped at the busy stations downtown a clerk always came off for the cash, the conductor remaining on the rear platform. This offered a knotty problem to the would-be hold-up man.

But he presently learned that at the outlying stations where traffic was light and there were few, if any, passengers waiting at the hour the car came by, the clerks remained inside and let the conductor go to the ticket office for the receipts. This greatly simplified Heberdon's plan of action.

He observed that just inside the rear door of the car was another door leading to the clerks' enclosure. When the conductor got on with his satchel it was his habit to close the car gate behind him, pull the bell cord and go on inside. The inner door was opened by one of the clerks and the satchel taken from him. Then as far as Heberdon could make out from the motions of the clerks' heads and shoulders, they emptied it on the desk before them, and checked up the amount. But what became of the money after it was counted he could not be certain. It appeared as if they stooped down and put it somewhere. This was the vital point upon which he had to assure himself.

As upon a former occasion Heberdon's daydreams became transformed by insensible degrees into a definite resolve. Long after he had secretly made up his mind to put his plan into action he was still telling himself that it was all in fun. This saved him the necessity of facing consequences in his mind. It was just a pastime; he could drop it any time, etcetera, etcetera. And when even he could no longer deceive himself he said in his thoughts: "I'll return the money, of course. I just want to prove to myself that I have the wit and the nerve to pull off such a job. I'm not a crook at heart—but life is so tiresome!"

Once more he devoted many hours in his room to perfecting a disguise. This time he desired to appear as a stupid-looking, unskilled labourer. He had decided to apply for the job of car cleaner, since the better class of employees had to undergo a period of probation. Clothes from a hand-me-down merchant soaked and allowed to dry wrinkled, together with grime rubbed into his face, hands, and neck, made a startling difference in the aspect of the elegant and immaculate young lawyer.

He tried it out on the street with entire success. Heberdon knew the habits of his own house so well that by choosing his time he could go in and out at very small chance of meeting anybody. One hall boy came on at seven in the morning and worked until three; the hours of the other were from three until eleven. Between eleven and seven the outer door was closed and the hall untenanted.

In the offices of Palliser, Beardmore, etcetera, every Saturday was a holiday during the summer. Heberdon applied for Friday off in addition, and since he had been assiduous in his duties of late, had no difficulty in getting it. He obtained a respite from Ida's silken bonds by pleading an old bit of business out of town that had to be cleaned up. Late Thursday night he issued out of the house in his workman's get-up and spent the uncomfortable balance of the night in a cheap lodging. Early Friday morning he proceeded to the car barns of the Flatwick Elevated line, and applied for the job of car cleaner. He got it. It is not a job that is much sought after.

Friday was the hardest day he had ever put in in his life. Only his enthusiasm for his carefully built-up plan kept him at it. More than once he was on the point of being fired for sheer inefficiency. But he managed to come through by the skin of his teeth. Then he had the lodging house to look forward to again. But he stole home late at night for a bath and a good cigar.

On Saturday he obtained his reward when the pay car came around. It rested on a siding in the yards, and a ladder was let down at each end. The employees forming in line entered at the rear, and obtaining their envelopes at one of the little windows passed through the car and out at the front.

Heberdon, moving slowly in line, had therefore several minutes inside the car which he used to the fullest advantage. The plan of the interior was very simple, just the narrow passage on one side, and the clerks' enclosure on the other with its desk extending under the window. Heberdon observed with satisfaction that there was but the one door to their enclosure, that at the rear. There was, therefore, no direct communication between clerks and motorman.

Heberdon's eyes brightened at the sight of a safe under the desk just inside the door. This, then, was where they stooped to put the money. As they were continually putting money in it—one clerk would still be counting the receipts of a station when they stopped at the next—it was not reasonable to suppose that the safe would ever be locked unless the clerks were warned of danger. This was all Heberdon needed.

As soon as he got his pay he coolly walked off, leaving the boss of the cleaners cursing. It was a lot of trouble to take for a three minutes' glimpse of the inside of the car, but an artist knows no pains too great, and Heberdon thought of himself as an artist in crime.

Disguised as he was, he could not go home by daylight, but spent the rest of the day in settling on the point of attack. In his old clothes he experienced an odd sense of security. Nobody looked at him on the street. He meant to choose a station near the end of the line, but not, of course, the terminal at Cedar Vale Cemetery, for that was comparatively a busy place with extra men employed on the platform. He found that at the last two stations before the terminal the company maintained no ticket office on the uptown side, the supposition being that nobody would care to climb the stairs for so short a ride when there were surface cars.

The last office on the outbound side was at Cornelia Street. This office could not have taken in enough to pay its incumbent, and was, perhaps, maintained merely to provide a sinecure for an old employee. The ticket seller had exceeded the allotted span of man; he was bent and shaky, and spent most of his hours on duty asleep. Far from feeling any compunction on the score of his decrepitude, Heberdon was delighted. "He'll be a cinch," he thought. "This is the place!"

By Tuesday afternoon Heberdon was all ready. The disguise he had provided was very simple, being merely a suit of clothes such as Frank Heberdon certainly would not have worn, and a pair of heavy-rimmed glasses. In reserve he carried a little mask, a contrivance of his own that he could snap over the upper part of his face with one hand. He had in addition an extra coat and cap and two pairs of handcuffs that he had picked up in a secondhand store. All these articles he put in a suitcase, which he checked at the Morris and Sussex terminal on his way to the office Tuesday morning. He also checked the inevitable satchel for the loot.

For the purposes of his getaway he was not trusting this time to a taxicab. He had bought a light, used car of a widely known make, and had thoroughly tested it out with particular attention to its starting apparatus. The tires were nearly new. He had taken out two licenses under assumed names, and kept the car in a large garage, quite away from his usual haunts.

The money car was due at Cornelia Street Station at four-eighteen. It could be depended upon to the minute except in the case of a block downtown, very unlikely at this hour of the day. Heberdon left the office at two, bound ostensibly for the Hall of Records for the purpose of making a search. He did show himself there, but soon proceeded to the terminal, where he changed his clothes in one of the dressing rooms obligingly provided for travellers, and packing what he took off in the suitcase, left it on check. In fact, he found a modern railway terminal of invaluable assistance to him in his operations.

Proceeding across the river he got his car, drove out in the country, where he changed the license tags in an unfrequented spot and returned to Cornelia Street in good time for his job. "Nothing like thinking every detail out in advance," he told himself self-approvingly.

It was a sparsely settled neighbourhood with raw, newly graded streets crisscrossing on the bar plan. Gaunt, new flat houses rose singly here and there. The Elevated line ran out Flatwick Avenue. On the downtown side of the Avenue under the station there were one or two stores, on the uptown side only vacant lots full of weeds and waste paper.

Heberdon stopped his car on the uptown side at the foot of the stairs to the station. He had some minutes to spare which he used up in making pretended repairs to his engine. From the sidewalk he could see down the Elevated line as far as the next station. At this time of day on the Flatwick route the trains ran on a five-minute headway.

One came along, stopped at the station overhead, and went on. A single passenger descended the stairs and wandered away over the plain. According to Heberdon's calculations the money car would follow. He made sure that all was in order. The mask and the handcuffs were in his left-hand pocket, the pistol in the other. He took the extra coat and cap out of the satchel and left them rolled up in the car. The one or two pedestrians who passed paid no attention to him.

At last he saw the money car draw into the station below. Even at the distance he knew it because of the lack of the usual destination placard on the front rail. At the bottom of the stairway was an iron gate presumably for use at night after the station had closed. No one was looking at the moment, and Heberdon quietly closed it behind him for the purpose of discouraging any chance passenger. Then he quickly mounted the stairs.

At a station so unimportant there was no ticket chopper, of course. You paid your nickel through a little hole to the old man in his box, who thereupon pressed a spring that released a turnstile and let you through.

Upon reaching the box Heberdon saw that the old man was sleeping comfortably within. So much the better for his plans. He vaulted quietly over the turnstile and passed out on the platform. The station across the tracks was likewise deserted except, presumably, for the ticket agent in his box. Heberdon had satisfied himself that the agent over there could not see what went on across the line.

He passed quickly into the little waiting room that opened off the platform. This in turn communicated with the agent's box. The door to the box stood open for air—who would ever suppose that a station which did a business perhaps of a dollar a day would be held up?—and the old man was fully revealed perched on his tall stool with his cheek supported by his palm, an expression of beatific peace on his wasted face. His helplessness gave Heberdon no pause. Snapping the mask over his eyes, he went up to the old man and poked him in the ribs with his pistol.

“Hands up!” he barked. That tone was the result of long practice.

It was a rude awakening for the old soul. Blinking and gasping, he straightened up on his stool, and fell back against the wall of his box. The trembling hands went up; he had scarcely the strength to hold them there. When he found his voice he stuttered piteously:

“Mister! Mister! You got the wrong man! I don't take in nothing here. Not a dollar a day! Honest! Look in the drawer for yourself. Oh, mister, I'm an old man! Please let me go!”

Heberdon pulled out the drawer—but not for the sake of the little change it contained. He let it drop on the floor. The desk was a skeleton affair, and when the drawer was pulled out it left exposed a stout bar which had supported the front of it.

“Put your left hand out in front of you!” commanded Heberdon.

The old man obeyed, and Heberdon handcuffed him to the desk.

“You don't have to do that! You don't have to!” wailed the victim. “I wouldn't touch you! That's all I've got. In the drawer!”

“Be quiet!” said Heberdon.

He heard the money car approaching down the line. He had timed his operation to a nicety. He took off his coat and hat and dropped them on the floor of the little office. He had taken care that there should be nothing about these garments to betray him later. He closed the door on himself and the old man, who still sat on his stool gasping for breath and watching Heberdon with fascinated eyes.

The money car drew to a stop at the platform outside. The gate clanged open and the conductor was heard to cross the platform with quick steps. He

entered the little waiting room. As the door from the platform closed behind him, Heberdon let the other door swing out. The astonished conductor found himself confronted by a masked man with a pistol. A queer grunt escaped him, and without waiting for any command, he dropped his satchel and his hands shot up over his head.

“Take off your coat and hat and let them drop on the floor!” commanded Heberdon.

He was instantly obeyed.

“Get inside with you!”

The conductor backed into the little office while Heberdon backed out.

“Put out your left hand! Your right hand, you——” This to the old man.

They obeyed and he handcuffed them together.

“I’ve got two men outside,” rasped Heberdon. “If you make the slightest noise they’ll blow you to hell!”

From the petrified expressions of the two, he guessed they would give him no trouble.

Closing the door on them he hastily wriggled into the conductor’s uniform coat, and jammed the hat on his head. He let the satchel lie and took his own, which had been chosen for its wide mouth. He put the mask and the pistol back in his pocket for the moment, and, opening the door to the platform, crossed quickly with his head down. There was but small chance, though, of the clerks spotting him during these few steps, for their view was obstructed by the grill.

As he set foot within the car Heberdon snapped on the mask again, and took out the pistol. The mask was designed less for the purpose of disguise than for its demoralizing effect on his victims. One of the clerks put out a negligent hand and pulled the spring lock on the door to their enclosure. Heberdon stepped inside. The clerks looked up and froze. Not a sound escaped any one of the three.

“Down to the other end with you!” ordered Heberdon.

They made haste to back away from him, pressing close together.

Heberdon dropped to one knee before the safe and, putting the gun within instant reach of his hand, grasped the handle of the lock. If it were fast—— But it turned in his hand, and the door swung open, revealing the money piled neatly on shelves within; packages of bills above, and rolls of silver in paper below. Exultation coursed through Heberdon’s veins.

The satchel was already open. Keeping an eye on the trembling clerks, he swept the packages of bills into it in a cascade. Of the silver he took only

the dollars and halves, letting the chicken feed lie. Springing to his feet he backed out of the door and pulled it shut after him.

All this took scarcely more time than it requires to tell. On the car platform he pulled the bell cord twice before stepping off. This was to induce the motorman to pull his head in in case he might be looking out for the cause of the delay. The car started to move, and Heberdon stepped off.

The exit gate being closed, Heberdon vaulted over the turnstile and ran down the stairs—but not too quickly. No sound came from the little office where the two men were confined. In the street there was no one near his car. He got in and started her. Overhead the money car, having gone a few hundred yards, had stopped again. Evidently the clerks had communicated with the motorman. But ahead all was clear now. Let them raise what alarm they liked.

His route of escape had been carefully planned, of course; out Flatwick Avenue to Church, to Winston, to the Hardman Pike, and so on into the country. In those little-travelled streets there was no sign of pursuit. Sure of this, he stopped long enough to change from the uniform coat and visor to the extra garments he had in the car. Later in an unfrequented side road he hid the discarded clothes in thick underbrush, and in the same spot changed his license plates back to the numbers that he ordinarily used.

Returning to town by a different route he put up his car. Whether or not he ever claimed it again would depend on how the chase went. He could follow that in the newspapers.

Claiming the valise at the check-room, he changed back to his usual clothes in one of the terminal dressing rooms, and carried his two valises home, reaching there in plenty of time to dress and catch the six-fifteen for Marchmont, where he was booked to dine with the Pallisers. The little satchel with its heavy load he hid for the time being under the soiled clothes in his laundry basket.

## Chapter VIII

### 23 DEEPDENE ROAD

RESISTING pressure to stay all night at Marchmont, on the score of having to be at work early next morning, Heberdon got back to his own rooms about midnight. He had been in pretty good feather all evening; with the delightful secret he possessed, he did not find his relatives so tiresome; indeed, there was something distinctly humorous to him in the idea of the successful hold-up man taking his ease in the *crème de la crème* of respectable society.

But while he diverted himself, his mind had been ever busy with the little satchel at home. How much did it contain?—ten thousand, twelve, fifteen? He could scarcely restrain his impatience to return and count it. At the dinner table, just to be on the safe side, he related a little incident that was supposed to have occurred to him in the Hall of Records that afternoon. But he had no fear of detection. This time he had done his job up brown.

In the train he gave himself up wholly to exultation. “Gad, what a thrilling five minutes! . . . That was living! To see the old boy crumple up, and the young ones cower! . . . What a sense of power a pound of steel in the shape of a gun gives you! Pull a gun and the world is yours! . . . But the gun has to be backed up by headwork. There was nothing the matter with my head work! Everything turned out exactly as I planned. . . . My nerve was perfect, too. Oh, they’ll certainly have to hand it to me. . . .”

The only thing that mitigated his sense of triumph was his inability to let Spurway, Nedham, and Hanwell know what he had done, and to crow over them. For a while he coquetted with the idea of telling them.

“I needn’t tell them in so many words,” he thought, “nor give anything away that could be used against me as evidence. . . . A word or two would be sufficient to put them on. They wouldn’t dare give me away either, on account of their connection with the previous affair. . . .”

“But, no! You can’t tell what Nedham might do. He’s so damned self-righteous! . . . And, even if they didn’t give me away, they might hold it over me in future. I’d always have to take them into account. . . . Too risky. . . . Maybe they’ll guess it was I, anyhow.”

Arriving in town, his first acts had been to buy half a dozen Paradise Perfectos, the kind of cigar his uncle smoked, but rarely gave away, and a late paper, which carried the first story of the robbery. The details were

meagre as yet, and hopelessly garbled. The money car had been held up by three masked men, who escaped in a big touring car, firing at the citizens who endeavoured to stop them, etcetera, etcetera. Heberdon was divided between amusement and chagrin. Of course, if it were really supposed that there were three men concerned it made him safer than ever, but on the other hand his conceit was craving, for references to the daring individual who, with superhuman daring and resourcefulness, had held up five men, and so on and so on.

Reaching home he made haste to draw down the front blinds, though there was nothing opposite but the little park, and to hang a towel from the handle of the entrance door to cover the keyhole. He dug up the satchel from the laundry basket and, with sparkling eyes, emptied out the contents on his centre table. He had, of course, never possessed so great a sum in cash. It was a beautiful sight, the tumbled heap of greenbacks in packages, the fat rolls of coin. Greasy and old though the bills might be, they had a lovely feel.

He counted it all with voluptuous deliberation. Nothing to him if he made a mistake and had to begin over; it was an occupation of which one could scarcely tire. The final result was somewhat disappointing; seven thousand and odd. The bills were mostly of small denominations, and they bulked large. Still, seven thousand dollars! He went off into another dream.

It occurred to him that he had intended to return the money, but he instantly thought of a dozen reasons for not doing so. "Why, to return the money would cause more of a sensation than the original robbery! . . . It would revive that story about the bet! . . . My uncle would get on to me. He has a nasty, inquiring mind, anyhow. . . . However I might like to restore the money it's simply out of the question! . . .

"Besides—it's coming to me! . . .

"All that hard thinking and planning, and the nerve it took to pull the thing off! Seven thousand is little enough to pay me. . . . It isn't as if I was robbing the poor. The loss will fall on the Flatwick shareholders. There are thousands of them. That means a few cents apiece. What's that? . . .

"But it would be immoral to add it to my capital, and take interest on it. . . I'll have to spend it. I'll do what good I can with it by putting it in circulation. . . . Nothing like a splurge, of course. Just a little here and there.

"Meals at the club are all right for a poor man, but—I'll eat at the Madagascar after this. . . . Bernard is still the chef there. . . . I won't have to consult the prices on the menu, either. . . . I always did like things out of season. . . . And I'll smoke nothing but Paradise Perfectos hereafter, as many

as I like. . . . Always did loathe cheap cigars, cheap anything. I'll go to a better tailor.

"I could have discreet little parties here, too—I lead too dull a life. It's my own house, I guess. And the other tenants don't seem to be too particular—who could I have? . . . Hang it, everybody I know is too stodgy. . . . I need to make some new friends, a sporting crowd. . . .

"That girl over in Princesboro—gad! What flashing black eyes, what fresh and crimson lips! . . . I wouldn't be ashamed to face her now. I am my own man again. . . . And it wouldn't be exactly painful to spend money on her. . . . The Madagascar would set her off!

"Her name is Cora Flowerday, and she lives at 23 Deepdene Road, Greenhill Gardens. That stuck in my memory. . . . I know Greenhill Gardens. . . . Architecture with a capital A. Successful artists, writers, and that lot. That's what gives her that charming bohemian look. . . . A lot of good it does me. . . . I can never see her again.

"But why can't I? If she didn't give me away before she's not likely to now, is she? . . . Not in the character of Frank Heberdon, of course. . . . And not in the character of the cheap sport who tried to hold up the Princesboro bank. . . . In that rig I wouldn't be let in. . . . But what's to prevent me adopting a new character to go and see her in. She very likely wouldn't recognize in me the half-dead crook she picked up. . . . And even if she did, she couldn't very well hang on to me and holler for the police. If things don't go right, I can simply drop out of sight again. . . .

"But if I go in a new character I'll have to invent an excuse for calling. . . . That oughtn't to be too hard. If a girl likes your looks she doesn't scrutinize your excuse for scraping an acquaintance too closely. . . . Not this girl, anyhow. She's dead game. . . . I know what I could do. I could make out that I'm bringing a message of thanks from the guy she helped out that day, who's turned over a new leaf and gone to 'Frisco! . . ."

Heberdon toyed with this seductive idea for a while, but his cigar went out, a chill struck through him, and he suddenly became conscious of an immense weariness. A reaction set in in his thoughts.

"You're dreaming again! You'd better recognize when you're well off. Go to bed and forget about her! . . ."

But Heberdon's dreams, it may be remarked, had a way of mastering him in the end. When he arose next morning vastly refreshed from an excellent night's sleep, the black-eyed girl recurred to his mind, and indeed she reigned there all day. As a result of the previous day's happenings Heberdon faced the world with a new outlook. Old bonds within him

seemed to have broken, letting loose the wild spirit of which he had scarcely been conscious before.

He was aware of a new impatience with respectability, an unappeasable restlessness, a craving for additional excitement. The black-eyed girl accorded better with this new Heberdon than Ida Palliser did. Heberdon shuddered at the thought of Ida and her pinched nose. Nothing pinched about Cora.

In the first place the morning papers carried fairly accurate accounts of the hold-up of the money car, and Heberdon's vanity was red to the full by the indignation—and admiration with which the exploit filled all honest breasts. Like a successful playwright on the morning after, Heberdon bought a copy of every paper and carefully clipped the accounts. Unfortunately the praise, if it were praise, was only vicarious. How Heberdon longed to be able to tell somebody that he was the man, and observe their astonishment, horror, respect with his own eyes. . . . I believe I could tell her, he thought.

According to the newspaper stories when the youthful desperado—they made Heberdon out about twenty years old—jumped in his car and drove away, he was swallowed up from the ken of man. To be sure, the police gave out mysterious hints, and made confident prognostications that they would have the fellow behind the bars in twenty-four hours, but Heberdon, knowing the ways of the police, was undisturbed. It was clear they had nothing to go on.

All day the black-eyed girl rose between him and whatever he was about. Having dutifully presented himself at Marchmont the night before, this night was his own. The thought of spending it alone was horrible. Long before evening came, while still denying his intention to himself, he had, nevertheless, made up his mind to go out to Greenhill Gardens.

He dressed with most particular care, for he wished to remove all impression of their first meeting, and after dining at the Madagascar, as he had promised himself, he hired a car to take him out. The chauffeur had instructions to avoid the most direct route through Princesboro which had unpleasant associations for his fare.

"I'll just scout around, and if I don't like the look of the place, I won't go in," Heberdon told himself.

It was a delightful evening. Leaning back in the corner of the car, puffing a Paradise Perfecto, Heberdon felt like a king. "This is the life!" he told himself. "There's not much in this remorse business! . . . If everything goes well to-night I'll send her a bushel of American Beauties to-morrow."

At that his more prudent self spoke up. "Seven thousand won't last a hell of a long time at that rate." To which the reckless Heberdon replied: "Oh, there's plenty more where that came from." He was progressing faster than he recognized.

In the admirably laid-out suburb of Greenhill Gardens he found Deepdene Road without any trouble. At first he told his chauffeur to drive through slowly. No. 23 was absolutely reassuring, a charming little house in the English style, among oak trees. Returning, they stopped in front, and Heberdon bade his chauffeur wait, even if he were inside an hour or two.

The door was opened to him by an old man whose status he could not define offhand. He was neatly enough dressed, but he had an uncouth air that no neatness of attire could tame. He was certainly not a member of the exquisite Miss Flowerday's family, and his grim and aggressive aspect hardly suggested a servant. But Heberdon remembered having read in the newspaper of a faithful and eccentric old retainer; this must be he.

"Is Miss Flowerday in?" he asked.

The old fellow looked him over before replying. He seemed at the point of denying him, but a burst of laughter and gay voices through the portières at the left made it very evident that the lady *was* at home. Finally the old man said ungraciously:

"What name shall I say?"

"Mr. Strathearn."

The other gave him a look as much as to say, "I don't know you." Aloud he said: "Wait here. I'll tell her. She has company."

This sort of servant was new to Heberdon, who stood where he had been left, in an indignant fume. Faithful the man might well be, but his domestic training had been neglected. His manners were more like those of a bartender than a butler.

But Heberdon had not to wait long. The portières were jerked back by an energetic hand and she swam before him infinitely more beautiful than he remembered her, a vision in yellow malines, with a misty scarf of the same material floating about her bare shoulders.

Heberdon was not prepared for it; he caught his breath. He was further confused by the fact that she instantly recognized him; the look of cool inquiry gave place to warm pleasure. Her hand shot out like a boy's.

"It's you!" she cried. "I'm so glad!"

Heberdon was unable to find a suitable reply.

The old servant had followed her, and was lingering at the back of the hall.

“It’s all right, John,” said Miss Flowerday. “I know Mr. Strathearn.”

Not altogether reassured, the old man, still scowling, vanished toward the back premises.

“He thought you were a book agent, or a masher, perhaps,” she said with a laugh. “We’ve been bothered to death since our address was published in the papers. He was all ready to throw you out. You mustn’t mind him. He’s an old dear! I’ll square him later. . . . Ah, it was good of you to come!” she went on, taking a step closer to Heberdon. “It shows that you trust me, after all!”

Heberdon was turned upside down in his mind. Her unaffected friendliness, her frank recognition of the fact that they shared a secret was delightful, but—to be recognized as a thief and yet welcomed to this charming little house! He knew young girls were rapidly becoming advanced in their ideas, but what was he to make of this? He was still unable to return a suitable answer, but fortunately she required none.

“Take off your things,” she rattled on, “and throw them on the table. I’m sorry there’s a crowd, but we’ll manage to get a few minutes’ talk. I’m dying to ask you things. I did so hope you’d look me up, that’s why I took care to see that they printed my address correctly, but then I thought how could you come, not knowing——” She pulled herself up abruptly.

“Not knowing what?” thought Heberdon.

When he stood revealed in his immaculate evening clothes, she glanced him over with delightful sly humour. “Quite a change!” she murmured.

“You surely didn’t think I was what I seemed to be then?” said Heberdon.

“Oh, no; I knew,” she answered.

She pulled him through the portières into a long, narrow living room that looked bigger than it was. It was quaintly and beautifully furnished in a scheme of dull blue and dull red. The company was in gala dress. “Mr. Strathearn” was casually introduced all around; Mr. and Mrs. Ullom, Miss Starbird, Mr. Alcorne, Mr. Crommelin, and others whose names he forgot.

He could not quite place these people. They had good assurance; the rather insolent air that Heberdon instinctively adopted toward strangers did not intimidate them in the least. Their manners were very free, but then everybody’s manners are free nowadays; and if under the freedom a certain guardedness was perceptible, why that, too, is characteristic of every stratum of society at present.

Men and women alike were beautifully turned out—almost too beautifully; there was something slightly unnatural about their polished surfaces. Like successful stage people, Heberdon thought, but stage people cannot get together without talking shop, and there was no word of the theatre here. Brought up among the Bourbons of Manhattan, it was evident that these people lacked what his folk called “birth,” but Heberdon welcomed that. He was sick of his kind of people, and he wanted to find a society as different as possible. But of course in his mind he looked down on them.

They were not especially intimate with each other, because the conversation was scarcely interrupted by the entrance of the stranger. Heberdon had no sense of the talk getting under way again with a missing cylinder until it warmed up. It was idle talk about anything and nothing, with a disproportionate amount of laughter; in other words, the talk of good-looking, well-dressed people who have dined well and are thoroughly pleased with themselves.

The most noticeable figure among them was the man Alcorne. Heberdon picked on him at once as his only possible rival in the room. He did not take much share in the conversation, but sat a little apart with a scornful air. His eyes rolled strangely; he twitched in his chair. His veiled glance followed Miss Flowerday wherever she moved. “In love with her,” thought Heberdon. It gave him little uneasiness. “A dissipated wreck,” was his inward comment.

The little house had no reticences; the dining room, of pleasant proportions and warm colouring, opened off the living room. There was no one in here, and Miss Flowerday presently manœuvred Heberdon to a sofa in the embrasure of a bay window. Heberdon was sensible of the scowl on Alcorne’s face that followed them.

She was an embarrassingly direct young person. “What made you look so queer when I welcomed you?” she demanded. “What did you expect if not a welcome?”

“I hardly expected you to recognize me,” stammered Heberdon. “And when you did—and yet didn’t seem to mind; well, it sort of cut the ground from under my feet.”

She laughed as at a private joke of her own. “I see,” she said. “That was natural—under the circumstances. But if you didn’t expect to be recognized what excuse did you have for calling?”

Heberdon was rapidly becoming at his ease. He had the wit to perceive that frankness would be the surest passport to this young lady’s esteem—not

that he intended to be frank, but he could appear to be frank as well as anybody. Though dangerous there was something thrillingly delightful in the situation; had he not been longing all day to exhibit himself in his true colours, as the nerviest crook of his time?

He said, "I was going to make out that I had a message of gratitude for you from the poor devil you picked up that day."

She laughed delightedly. "And did you really expect to get away with that? How simple men are!"

"How did you recognize me so quickly?" he asked.

"From your eyes. I never forget eyes. You can't disguise eyes."

"You can wear glasses."

"Glasses are only glass. . . . Don't be uneasy about other people," she went on, smiling. "I am experienced in detecting disguises."

What a strange remark to fall from the lips of a candid young girl! Up to this moment Heberdon had supposed that her unconventionality was the result of her inexperience. What if she were not so inexperienced! He looked his question, but she turned it off with a laugh.

"How did you finally get away that day?" she asked. "According to the papers, after you swam the creek you entirely disappeared. Sometimes I was afraid——"

Heberdon gave her a rather touched-up account of the subsequent incidents of his escape.

Her eyes glowed like Desdemona's upon a similar occasion. "How thrilling!" she exclaimed. "Ah, ordinary life is so dull!"

"Well, I've no intention of repeating that affair," said he. "That was a flivver!"

"You got away from them all," she said warmly, "you fooled them! That was success. What does the money matter? It's the game!"

Heberdon was deliciously flattered.

"What have you been doing lately?" she asked.

Heberdon understood this as an invitation to relate more adventures. "Oh, that's not my regular line," he said, laughing. "That was only for a bit of excitement."

Her face fell. "Ah, you do not trust me, after all," she murmured.

This was exactly what he desired her to say. He was charmed.

"The reason I didn't come before," he told her, "was that I couldn't bear to appear in your eyes like a whipped cur, like a yellow dog chased down the

alley with a tin can tied to his tail.”

She gave him a warm glance through lowered lashes. “How conceited men are!” she said softly. “And how foolish! If they only knew it is when they are in trouble that they—that we cannot——” She finished with a shrug.

“A man has his pride,” remarked Heberdon.

“After all, it wasn’t your fault that the tire burst,” she went on. “I thought the whole affair was wonderfully planned and carried out. So did——”

“Who?” asked Heberdon.

“A friend of mine. . . . The wedge under the door that gave you time to get out; the double hook over the outside door handles! And all by yourself, too! Stunning nerve, I thought. When I read the newspapers I was doubly glad that I had been able to give you a lift.”

Heberdon, while he looked modest, thought: “Here is somebody at last who appreciates me! What would she say to yesterday’s affair?”

Miss Flowerday was studying him. “Evidently something has happened to set you up again in your own opinions,” she said acutely.

Heberdon shrugged.

“I thought of you this morning,” she went on, “when I read of the hold-up on the Flatwick Elevated road. Another brilliant and original piece of work. Nobody ever thought of holding up the Elevated road before. Such humorous touches too; I mean making a human chain of the ticket agent and the conductor; putting on the conductor’s coat and hat, and starting the car before he got free. One man against five! What a wonderful nerve!”

It was bound to come out, of course. Heberdon allowed himself to look self-conscious.

“It was you!” she cried.

He shrugged again.

She clapped her hands like a little girl. “Oh, lovely!” she cried. “And then you felt you could come to see me! Aren’t men funny? Now you must tell me all about it,” she went on. “Every littlest thing!”

Which he did, with due regard for the picturesque features of his tale. His gratified vanity was simply purring now.

She had a hundred questions to ask. “Suppose the clerks in the car had showed fight?”

“I had sized them up beforehand. You can generally tell by the look in a man’s eye.”

“But suppose they had rushed you when you were on the floor in front of the safe?”

“Nearly the whole length of the car separated us. If they had moved I had plenty of time to snatch up my gun.”

“Would you have fired?”

“Certainly,” he said coolly. “Sooner than face a jail sentence. I have more at stake than most. The other time my gun wasn’t loaded, but that was merely squeamishness.”

She shuddered. “That’s the horrible part of it,” she murmured.

He decided that in future he would suppress the violent details of his adventures.

“Suppose the motorman had come out of his box?” she asked.

“The whole business didn’t take more than a few seconds longer than their ordinary stop at a station. Maybe he was out of his box, but when I pulled the bell cord he had to get in again.”

By the time he finished his tale the cries for “Cora!” from the front room were becoming too insistent to be denied.

“Bother!” she exclaimed, standing up. “I suppose we’ll have to go!” Before she took a step forward, though, she said to him with a strange look, “I have something to tell you. I am in the same business.”

“What!” cried Heberdon, amazed. He looked incredulously around the charming room.

“Yes,” she said, following his glance. “All the proceeds of one job or another!”

“What!” he cried again. “You a——”

“Don’t!” she said hastily. “That’s an ugly word, the word other people use. Let’s call ourselves buccaneers.”

“And those people in there?” Heberdon asked, wide-eyed.

“Some of them,” she answered guardedly. “Others are just acquaintances that one picks up and lets drop again.”

Heberdon glanced toward the kitchen. “And the old man?”

“Ah, he’s the greatest one of us all,” she said, bright-eyed. “I can’t tell you his name, because I have not his permission. But he will tell you himself soon. For you must be one of us!”

Heberdon, dazed, followed her into the next room. Alcorne’s eyes rolled at him inimically as he entered.

## Chapter IX

### SHOP TALK

NEXT morning Heberdon lay in bed so long thinking over what had happened the night before that he was late for an appointment at the office. It came to the ears of Judge Palliser, who admonished his nephew sharply. Heberdon, stung, offered to resign his job.

“Go ahead,” said Judge Palliser with a steely look. “As far as I am aware your services are not indispensable to the firm.”

Heberdon wilted. He was not yet ready to take up the challenge. His prudent self was far from dead, only a little submerged. However delightful it was to indulge the wilder strain after so many years of repression, he had no intention of letting go his anchor to windward. He wanted it well understood with himself that it was only a temporary indulgence. He had to have his respectable job and his respectable relatives to fall back on.

So he allowed Judge Palliser to call his bluff, and prudence held sway all day. He was panic-stricken now when he recollected his indiscreet confessions to the alluring Cora.

“What could I have been thinking of?” he asked himself. “To give myself away to a crook? Perhaps she’s not a crook at all, but was simply drawing me out!” This possibility made him shiver. He tried to reassure himself with the thought that they had no line on him. He firmly resolved never to go there again.

This was his night to go up to Marchmont, and he welcomed the trip as a sort of bolster to his good resolution. He even went so far as to buy Grand-Aunt Maria a box of candy. The old soul almost waggled her head off at the sight of it, and informed Heberdon for the hundredth time that he was down in her will.

“Yes,” he thought, sourly appraising her, “and a fat lot of good it will do me! A stringy old fowl like you will live to be a hundred! There’s nothing to wear you out, for your wits went long ago!”

Ida observed the box of candy with prim lips, for it was not the old lady’s habit to pass candy around, nor for that matter to eat it herself. She hoarded it, to produce it, perhaps, in a month or two with a magnificent gesture of generosity.

Heberdon, determined to square himself, succeeded in being decently loverlike to Ida, and even deferred to his prospective mother-in-law, an amiable, garrulous woman disregarded by her family. The judge, observing these evidences of a chastened spirit, permitted the sun of his approval to shine forth again on his nephew.

Heberdon's secret thoughts, like every man's whom self-interest forces to be good-natured, were bitter. "That's all right!" he said in spirit to his relatives. "Grin like Chessy cats, all of you. I knuckle down to you to suit my own ends, but I despise you, every one of you!"

Back in town the following morning his restlessness broke out afresh. It was the newspapers that unsettled him. Comment on the Flatwick hold-up had by now been crowded by the press of newer news to a "stick" or two on an inside page. Heberdon felt cheated. His voracious and insatiable vanity required two-column heads continuously. 'Way down deep in his consciousness a ferment began to work. "How to break into the news again?" was the unacknowledged thought.

In this mood his thoughts flew back to Cora Flowerday. In Heberdon's mind she was linked up with the daring life. Her alluring image teased him all day. He was torn between desire and fear. If only he had not given himself away to her! If he only dared trust her!—but was it possible to trust any woman that ever lived?

He dined in solitary state at the Madagascar, and the expanding influences of terrapin, mallard, and champagne completed the undoing of prudence. The other voice gained the ascendancy.

"A girl like that, so open, impulsive, warm; all on the surface. She couldn't deceive a man like me. She's incapable of laying a trap. Besides, she's crazy about me. Anybody could see that. That other fellow was grinding his teeth. I am a fool to suspect her."

He compromised with his prudent self by resolving to write to her. No danger in that. And from the tone of her reply he could guide his future actions. As soon as he had finished eating he went to the writing room, and gave the Madagascar as his address. Before starting his letter he debated long, biting the end of his penholder.

"A bold, bluff, downright tone will be best with a girl like that," he decided.

He wrote:

DEAR MISS FLOWERDAY:

I've been thinking about you all day. You're a witch, the way you come between a man and his business. It seems like an age

since I saw you. To be sure, you told me to come again, but you set no time, and I didn't want to wear my welcome out. I suppose I've got to give the other fellows a show. Dining by myself here to-night, my lonely condition was almost more than I could stand. Even the *Terrapin Bernard* failed to please. Yet they say the great man prepares it with his own hands. And the people around me made me sick; fat, overdressed mutts, to put it plainly. There wasn't a woman in the room could hold a candle to you. Not even the famous Irma Hamerton, who was seated a few tables away. When am I going to see you?

Yours devotedly,  
FRANK STRATHEARN.

Heberdon read this over before enclosing it and prudence got in one last kick. "Too warm, too warm! Much better find out what you're up against before you let yourself go so far!" Another period of anxious pen biting followed, but suddenly the girl's image floated before him warm and alluring. He licked the envelope and stamped it shut.

"Oh, hell," he thought. "Let her go! Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!"

The next morning there was not a single word in the papers about the hold-up on the Elevated road, and Heberdon was in a rage. "If I don't get out of this jail of an office, I'll end by wrecking the place!" he thought. He looked around on his associates with a jaundiced eye. "Silly, white-livered pettifoggers! Think they can order me around. Me! I can see them quake if they knew who I was!"

It was Saturday, but a press of work on a certain case had brought them all down to the office for an hour or two. Later Heberdon made an excuse to delay his departure for Marchmont, and hung around the Madagascar all afternoon, drinking more than was good for him, and asking at the desk at half-hour intervals for a letter. Toward evening it came.

DEAR MR. STRATHEARN:

When can you see me again? That rests with you, an it please you, sir. (I make a curtsey here.) I am astonished to learn that you should have been scared off by the other fellows. I expected that a man of your nerve would do the scaring.

Seriously, though, I was delighted to hear from you, for I wanted to ask you to dinner, and I didn't know where to reach you. Will you come Monday night at seven? You can telephone. The number is Greenhill 722. Remember that, for you won't find

it in the book. You don't have to wait until Monday either. I am always at home Saturday afternoon and evening. But there's a crowd then. On Monday, I have arranged to have nobody but you.

I have told the chief all about you, and he is anxious to meet you and shake you by the hand, he says. He is sorry for the rude reception he gave you on Wednesday night. He says I must tell you his name as a token of our confidence in you. It is John Blighton.

Until Monday (or Sunday),

Yours sincerely,

CORA FLOWERDAY.

John Blighton! Heberdon whistled noiselessly. Not for nothing had he studied the annals of crime. In his estimation John Blighton was the greatest bank robber of the previous generation. The most notorious of all bank robberies, the looting of the Whitehall Savings Institution, was generally laid at his door, though the mystery had never been solved definitely. Besides, many lesser affairs, Blighton's skill in getting the coin was only equalled by his success in covering his tracks. Arrested time and again, he had always succeeded in escaping a jail sentence.

"They have put themselves in my hands now," thought Heberdon exultingly. "No further cause for me to worry." He immediately went to a telephone booth and called up Greenhill 722.

Hearing her voice over the wire, the sweetness of it unexpectedly took his breath away and his heart began to knock on his ribs. Never before had a woman been able to move the pale and proper young lawyer like this. He enjoyed the novel sensation, but it scared him a little, too.

"Oh, is it you?" she said warmly. "Coming out Monday night?"

"With bells on."

"Good! Perhaps you'll come Sunday too?"

"Sorry, I have a date up in the country."

"Ah! Speaking about other fellows! How about other girls?"

"There is no other for me."

"Yes, that's what they all say."

"But I mean it."

"They always add that."

"I swear there's no other girl in the world that figures for a minute with me!"

“Mercy! Your voltage is too high! You’ll burn out the fuses. Good-bye.”

“Oh, wait a minute! Don’t hang up!”

“What is it?”

“Nothing. But I don’t want to lose you yet. Your voice is so sweet! I never heard anything that——”

“Oh, I’m so disappointed in you.”

“Disappointed? Why?” His voice fell absurdly.

She laughed delightedly. “I thought when I saw you here the other night, so cold and ascetic-looking, that you hadn’t had anything much to do with girls. But now I find you as practised as any of them!”

“I’m not practised. It’s nature speaking out. It’s the first time——”

“Go along with you! I wasn’t born yesterday. See you Monday then. Good-bye.”

This time she did hang up, leaving Heberdon excited—and a little dubious. “Lord! I shouldn’t have let myself go like that!” he thought. “She’ll get a hold over me!”

He went along up to Marchmont, and thinking of the other girl, almost succeeded in being ardent with Ida.

On Monday night the old man admitted him to 23 Deepdene Road with a grim smile. Something sinister appeared in his face when he smiled. Sure enough, when he closed the door, he did put out a great ham of a hand and grasped Heberdon’s.

“Glad to see you!” he said. “You bring honour to an ancient trade. We’ll have a talk later. I got to see to the dinner now. You’ll find Cora setting the table. Make yourself at home.”

A strange greeting surely from an ostensible servant, thought Heberdon, but this was in all ways a strange house.

To-night Cora was wearing a soft, creamy dress against which one of the American Beauties he had sent glowed like a naked heart. Heberdon was a little dizzied by the sight. In her eyes was an expression that bade him be at home there, though her tongue still rallied him. She made him put the glasses around the table. The rest of his flowers made a gorgeous centrepiece there.

“I wanted you to wear them, not the table,” he complained.

“Goodness, the whole bunch would extinguish poor little me!” she replied, laughing.

There were three places set—Heberdon wondered who was to be the third—the cook perhaps.

“I hope you’re hungry,” she said. “Of course, it won’t be like Bernard’s, though Jack does his darndest. But there are a couple of bottles of ’04 champagne that are not so bad.”

Heberdon was charmed with the informality of the household. There was no other servant but the old man, and he, it seemed, was something more than a servant. They passed freely in and out of the little kitchen where Blighton, with a gingham apron tied around his neck, was basting a roast. There was something decidedly quaint in the sight of the old robber engaged in this lowly function.

“He’s a born cook,” said Cora affectionately.

“Every man who has a delicate tongue likes to cook,” commented Blighton. “In preparing a dinner he tastes it in his imagination. As for those that have a coarse taste they are no better than wooden men.”

“One of my neighbours tried to take him from me by offering him higher wages,” said Cora.

They roared with laughter.

Cora mixed cocktails in the dining room, and carried one out to the cook. The soup was brought in. Its delicate aroma would not have shamed Bernard himself.

“Sit down and fall to,” directed Cora. “Jack will be in with the meat.”

When the main course was served, and the old man sat down at the table, Cora remarked with a slightly defiant air:

“Frank might as well know the truth.”

The unexpected sound of his name on her lips—Cora was never one to stand on ceremony—warmed Heberdon through and through. He was prepared to swallow any “truth” then.

The old man nodded.

“Jack is my dad,” said Cora coolly.

Heberdon gasped a little at the suddenness of the announcement. Father and daughter laughed aloud at the comical face of astonishment he made.

“It was his own idea,” Cora went on. “He insisted on setting me up in good style in my own house. He said he’d shame me as a father——”

“I ain’t one of this new generation of fancy men,” put in old John; “experts on grand opera and etiquette. In my day we were rougher—and honester, I think.”

Heberdon looked a little queer.

“Honester in our feelings, I mean,” said old John without perceiving anything humorous.

“And so he established himself as my cook and general bodyguard,” Cora went on. “It’s very convenient for me, I must say.”

“And I can smoke an old clay on the back porch without my collar,” put in the old man.

“Of course, we couldn’t keep any other servants,” said Cora.

“Too noseey,” growled the old man.

“Do your friends know?” asked Heberdon.

“Only our old pals,” said Cora. “Dick Alcorne, Dave Crommelin, Grace Starbird, and so on. Not our Greenhill Gardens friends.”

“Flibbertigibbets!” muttered the old man. “Goslings! Puffballs!”

“Yet they call us the inconsistent sex!” said Cora, smiling affectionately at her parent. “Listen to him! He insisted on setting me up in this stuffy suburb when I’d far rather be near the white lights just so that I could have good society, as he calls it. And then when these people do come, he all but sticks out his tongue at them!”

“Well, nothing’s too good for Cora,” stated the old man aggressively.

“You’re dead right there,” said Heberdon.

By and by the old man gave them a toast. “Here’s to the good old days when iron safes cut like cheese, or burst open like Chinese firecrackers with a little charge of nitro!”

They drank it to humour him, though as young people, of course, they considered no days quite like their own.

“Nothing doing with these here chrome nickel-steel doors,” Blighton went on, “safe cracking has gone out for good—except country post offices, and such small stuff.”

“But there are still good chances nowadays,” objected Heberdon. It was thrillingly exciting to him to hear such things spoken out loud. Hitherto he had scarcely dared whisper them to himself.

“Oh, yes,” agreed Blighton. “This is the day of the hold-up man. He is no longer limited to dark spots on a country road or to lonely stretches of railway track. The invention of the automobile has extended his operations into the very centre of our cities. Why, they’ll be holding up police headquarters next thing you know. Ah, if there had been automobiles in my day, I’d have given an account of myself!”

“Seems to me you did, anyhow,” remarked Heberdon ingratiatingly.

“You bet he did!” from the loyal and admiring Cora.

“Not so bad! Not so bad!” said the old man. “But of course in our business we can’t hire any press agents. Some of my best work must forever

remain unknown. In regard to a certain affair I have a reputation, I believe \_\_\_\_\_”

“I know what you refer to,” put in Heberdon.

“But it’s not known for certain if I did it, and it’s not known at all how it was done. And I’m not telling. No, in our trade a man must do a good job for the love of it, for he can take no praise. The reason I had to retire was that I got too great a reputation. It’s a topsy-turvy world. I got the most credit for the easiest jobs. But I suppose that holds true of other trades as well——”

“What jobs, for instance?” asked Heberdon.

The old man gazed at the centre electric with a pleasantly reminiscent smile. Heberdon noticed that in the strong light the pupils of his eyes almost closed like a cat’s.

“Not to name any names I mind one job that made a great mystery in the papers,” he said. “Me and my pals had laid out to crack a safe in a certain big bank. This was to be our chef-dooover, as they say, and we had spent weeks of preparation on it. When the night came we went there with a regular portable machine shop and explosives’ factory combined. Six of us there was. We had an old four-wheeler with two horses like they drive to funerals nowadays. It was a big job. I can’t tell you all the trouble we went to, getting the cop off the beat and all. Well, we got in according to plan, gagged the watchman, laid out all our tools——” He paused. “What happened?” asked Heberdon breathlessly. Certain details suggested that it was the great Whitehall robbery the old man was talking about. Was he about to learn the solution of a mystery which had baffled the police for a quarter of a century?

“The cashier had forgotten to lock up!” said the old man with a loud guffaw.

But the quality of the twinkle in his eye suggested that he was not telling the whole truth, and so Heberdon found himself no wiser than he had been in the beginning.

The meal ended with a tart St. Honoré! “This came from the fool caterers,” said old John carelessly. “I don’t fool with no truck like that.”

When they finished eating, Cora disappeared into the kitchen, ostensibly to prepare coffee, but in reality, Heberdon suspected, to give the old man a chance to unbutton his waistcoat, and tell a broad-minded story or two, which he did with exceeding enjoyment. When the coffee was ready Cora called Heberdon into the living room.

“Get along in with you,” said the old man. “I’ll clear.”

Heberdon made a faint-hearted offer to help.

“Get along with you!” was the scornful answer. “You’d bust the best china. You young fellows’ hands ain’t trained like ours was.”

Heberdon halted for a moment, holding the portières apart and surveying Cora with eyes that began to burn. She made a charming picture sitting on a low chair in front of the coffee stand, looking around and up at him with her warm and candid smile.

## Chapter X

### ALCORNE

HEBERDON was not one of your headlong lovers; he did not fall to his knees beside the low chair, and crush her to him, though, he told himself, she half expected it. Like an experienced wine bibber, he preferred to roll her under his tongue for a while.

“How lovely you are!” he murmured—and that at least was sincere.

“Pooh!” she pouted. “I hate compliments. I’m no society girl. When anybody pays me compliments I don’t know where to look!”

“Then you do really hate them,” he said acutely.

“You’re too sharp!”

He drew a chair as close to hers as he could, and sat upon it gloating over her beauty. She exhaled a subtle and delicious fragrance.

“What scent do you use?” he asked suddenly.

“That’s something no true woman tells,” she retorted. “You must think of it as me, not as something that comes in a bottle.”

The white soft curve of her neck was the loveliest thing he had ever beheld. Not having been susceptible to such things hitherto it hit him hard. The pink lobe of her ear, the little curls at the nape of her neck, exquisite! A man of warmer nature would have forgotten himself entirely, but Heberdon was still “tasting.”

“I am certainly in luck!” he kept telling himself. He saw that the white hand that lifted the cup trembled a little, and he was filled with a delicious sense of power.

“Sugar?” she asked.

“Anything you like,” he answered. “I’m hypnotized!”

“Don’t be silly!” she said, handing him his cup, but avoiding his eyes.

He leaned forward so that his shoulders touched hers. She did not draw away. The warmth of her seemed to strike into his very breast—but there was a little hard, cold core there that did not melt. She fluttered at the touch. They were sitting before the empty fireplace, and she said with charming irrelevance:

“I wish there was a fire! There is nothing to look at!”

“I have plenty to look at,” he murmured with his lips an inch from her ear.

She suddenly jumped up. “Mercy! This is too exotic!” she cried with a boyishly disconcerted air. “Like a greenhouse in the summertime.”

Heberdon laughed. She had a pretty wit, it seemed. He was not at all disturbed by her flight. There was no hurry.

Coffee cup in hand she sauntered up and down the room. There was both grace and energy in every line of her young figure. “We’ve scarcely begun to get acquainted yet,” she said with meaning.

“It’s not necessary to be fully acquainted,” retorted Heberdon.

She ignored the remark. “Isn’t it funny how you feel that you know a person even after a single meeting. But every time you see them their character lengthens out like—like a telescope, until at last when you know them very well you realize that you don’t know them at all?”

“Isn’t that rather mixed up?” queried Heberdon.

“I don’t care!” she said with a delightfully free gesture. “Thank Heaven I don’t have to take thought of what I say! I have no reputation for cleverness to keep up. If there’s no sense to it, it doesn’t matter in the least!”

“What you say makes all the difference in the world,” murmured Heberdon.

“That’s not worthy of you,” she said mockingly. “That’s what Jack calls parlour porridge.”

Heberdon had a provoking sense of having lost his power over her while the length of the room separated them. “Come and sit down,” he said in that tone of cajoling peremptoriness that men employ under the circumstances.

She shook her head decisively. “You’re dangerous.”

Nothing could have been sweeter to Heberdon. It restored his self-conceit. “Are you afraid of danger?” he taunted.

She considered this with her head on one side. “Not any definite danger,” she said at last. “I love any danger that I know. But things I don’t know? . . . Yes, I confess I am afraid of them.”

“Then know them,” said Heberdon.

She took no notice of this. “Come on, and walk up and down with me,” she said gaily. “It’s good for the digestion.”

He obeyed, but not with a very good grace. “It’s so ridiculous!” he grumbled.

“Ha!” she cried wickedly. “Now I know what you’re afraid of!”

“What?”

“You’re afraid of being ridiculous!”

It was true, of course, therefore it flicked him shrewdly. For the moment he could think of no retort.

She maliciously pursued her advantage. “I’m so sorry for you! You must suffer keenly. Because everybody is always being ridiculous. You are ridiculous this minute, standing there glowering at me as if you wanted to bite me!”

Heberdon thought, “This girl needs a lesson!”

He put the empty cup on the table, and she negligently handed hers over to put beside it.

“I’m not afraid of you any more,” she said mockingly.

Anger added the necessary fillip to Heberdon’s ardour. “Be careful!” he said a little thickly.

She laughed in his face.

He seized her and crushed her to him. For an instant she surrendered and her head fell back on the thick of his arm. He kissed her. But at the touch of his lips a reaction set in. Suddenly, with a surprising strength she tore herself away, and without a backward look ran out of the room and up the stairs.

Heberdon was not greatly concerned. This was much the way he expected her to act. “She’ll be back,” he said to himself calmly, and lit a cigar. “At any rate, the ice is broken.”

He walked around the room looking at the backs of the books. They were a mixed lot; novels, politics, biography and history, many of them well worn, not at all like the standard sets in morocco that graced the libraries of his relatives. Heberdon looked for something on his own special subject; not finding it he turned away. He wasn’t in the least interested in novels, politics, biography, and history.

As the minutes passed and there was no sign of Cora’s return he became a little uneasy. He went to the hall door and looked upstairs; no sight nor sound of her there. He wondered if he were expected to follow. He knew nothing of the layout above. Risky! There was the old man in the kitchen to be taken into account, an ugly customer when roused. Heberdon decided not to follow.

“No harm in holding off a little bit,” he said to himself. “Make them anxious.” He strolled out into the kitchen.

John Blighton was wiping the dishes and humming an old song under his breath:

“Oh, George, tell him to stop!  
That was the cry of Mariar.”

Heberdon looked at him sharply, but there was no hint of a *double entendre* in his grim and grinning old face.

“Where’s Cora?” asked Blighton.

“Gone upstairs,” said Heberdon.

“I’ll be through directly, and we’ll all go up to the den. We sit there on closed nights.”

“Closed nights?” queried Heberdon.

“Times when we don’t want to be bothered with the human puffballs,” said the old man, grinning. “I answer the door and says, ‘Miss Flowerday is out, and will they please leave their names.’ ”

Heberdon became aware that he was being subjected to a keen scrutiny. He bore it with equanimity, knowing that his face didn’t give away much.

“Looka here,” said the old man with his bluff candour, “in our business ’tain’t polite to ask personal questions, but I’ve taken a fancy to you. Got any family?”

“If you mean, am I married,” said Heberdon. “No.”

“Any folks?”

“No father or mother or brothers or sisters. Plenty of other relatives, but I’m not much for them.”

“Have they cast you off?”

“Oh, no, but we just don’t travel the same beat.”

“They’re big guns, I take it, ’way up.”

“Some of them.”

“And you drifted into this business from a love of excitement, not because you were in need of the coin.”

Heberdon was flattered. “That’s about it,” he said.

“Was the Princesboro bank your first job?”

Heberdon made it a practice to tell the truth—when there was nothing to be lost by it. “My first,” he answered.

“It showed headwork,” said the old man approvingly.

When his work was done he led the way upstairs to an inviting little room at the back of the house with shaded lights, capacious easy-chairs, plenty to smoke, and a cellaret in the corner.

Seeing him glance around the old man said simply: "Cora has the art of making a place livable. It's a pleasant harbour after a stormy life."

"I expect you have lived," observed Heberdon with the object of drawing him out further.

Blighton shrugged. "I ain't no model for the young to pattern after," he said.

They had no more than settled themselves in the little room when Cora came in. In her manner there was no trace of self-consciousness; her face was as bland as a baby's. Heberdon was secretly relieved. His alarmed vanity was soothed.

"She means that the little incident downstairs is simply to be sponged off," he told himself. "She's giving me notice that I must begin all over again. I don't mind. I don't want her to give in too quickly."

"Shall we play a hand at rum?" suggested the old man. "When we are alone me and Cora play till the cows come home. It's an innocent game. But we see through each other like window glass."

"You mean I see through you," amended Cora.

"Well, a third hand will supply an unknown quantity. Frank ought to be a card player; his face is as smooth as a poker chip."

Heberdon understood that this was intended as a compliment.

"Hardly worth while to begin," said Cora. "The others will be here directly."

Heberdon looked at her in surprise and chagrin.

"We asked some of our old friends to come in late," she explained coolly. "Jack's idea being to let them understand that you were to be one of us hereafter."

But the old man had looked surprised, too.

"She telephoned them while I was in the kitchen," thought Heberdon. "She is cleverer than I thought. That's all right. I'll tame her."

Aloud he said with assumed heartiness, "That's very kind of you. I was interested in those people the other night."

He got no change out of Cora; she continued to look bland.

Miss Starbird and Mr. Crommelin were the first to arrive. The former was a handsome lady, a more or less natural blonde, who passed current as a girl, and might have been any age short of forty. She was beautifully dressed in a highly sophisticated style which became her. She affected the downright no-nonsense air of a woman commercial traveller. Heberdon quailed a little under the glance of her large, cool blue eyes; an immense experience of the

world was suggested there. He would never have dared to make love to this lady, eminently personable though she was.

Crommelin was a dour, silent, dark man about ten years older than Heberdon. He dressed the part of a sober business man, but his hands were noticeably out of character; strong, nervous, vital-looking hands, oddly scarred. Whenever Crommelin looked at Cora the dour expression broke up, the dark eyes beamed, and one perceived then that life had not embittered him, though he was permanently cast down. Heberdon saw that his affection for Cora was purely a paternal feeling.

These two accepted Heberdon without question on John Blighton's say-so, and admitted him at once into their most intimate talk. According to their own code they chatted with a careless freedom of their own affairs, but betrayed no knowledge of Heberdon's business, nor the slightest curiosity concerning it. Quite the reverse from the ways of respectable society, Heberdon thought. They left it to him to return their confidence if he chose. For the present he did not choose.

Miss Starbird, it appeared, was in the jewellery line; that is to say, she did not dispose of jewellery, she acquired it. Certain details of her operations that she let fall greatly stimulated a desire in Heberdon to hear more.

"My dears, I've taken a studio down in Greenwich Village," she said. "It's the greatest scheme ever. Really, things are getting so easy nowadays, it's a shame to take the money."

"That's what I say," put in Heberdon.

"A studio?" queried Cora, smiling. "You can't paint but one face!"

"Cat!" retorted Miss Starbird in perfect good humour. "I don't have to paint pictures. Plenty of poor devils to do it for me. Besides, most of the painters have left Greenwich Village in disgust anyhow. It's the great American nut forest nowadays; walnuts, hickory nuts, peanuts, and filberts. If Horace Greeley were living nowadays he'd say, 'Young man, be a nut!'"

"The village idea is wonderful for our business. Anybody can go anywhere down there and meet everybody. All you need is nut gall, and a line of nut talk. Anything will do. My line is transcendental angles——"

"What are they?" asked old John.

"Bless your heart, I don't know. But neither does anybody else. It has an imposing sound. That's all that's necessary."

"Still, I don't get the idea," persisted Blighton.

"Listen, darling. The biggest people in town hang around Greenwich Village nowadays; they think they're seeing life, the poor Simons! I gave an

‘evening’ in my studio night before last and Peter Chilton brought the Damrells, who brought the Corfields—you know, the dame who owns the hundred-thousand-dollar necklace—now do you begin to see a glimmer? Naturally, I made up to her, my dears. She was much flattered. Asked me up to lunch on Thursday to talk about transcendental angles.”

“Um! I see,” said John Blighton. “It is well that I lived in my own time. I should not prosper in these! What you been doing, Dave?”

“Nothing,” answered Crommelin in his dejected way. “Living on my capital and waiting for an idea. Got any?”

“Nothing definite,” returned the old man. He tapped his head. “Something stewing in here.”

“Anything for me in it?” asked Miss Starbird. “I love Jack’s jobs, they’re always so dashing!”

“I play leading lady next time,” said Cora. “It’s my turn.”

The talk was interrupted by a ring at the doorbell. Blighton went down to answer it. He remained below getting a supply of ice, and the visitor came up alone. It was Alcorne.

At the sight of him a constraint fell upon the party. Alcorne’s aspect was wild in the extreme, his eyes rolled, his head twitched, his lips were rolled back in a grin of pain. To Heberdon it seemed as if some frightful catastrophe must have overtaken the man, but upon glancing covertly around at the others, he saw that they were not alarmed, but only disgusted.

Alcorne seemed not to be aware of any coolness in his reception. He went from one to another, greeting them jocularly in a jerky, high-pitched voice. The words bore no relation to the wild and desperate look in his eyes. When he came to Heberdon he paused and looked him up and down. Heberdon was sensible of purest hatred in the insane eyes. “This man would like to see me on the rack,” he thought.

Alcorne said: “So here’s the candy kid again. The new leading man who’s going to send us all back to the small time!”

Heberdon smiled stiffly. This company was strange to him, and he did not know for sure whether this was the man’s ordinary manner or if he were going out of his way to insult him.

Alcorne did not leave him long in doubt. “Think pretty well of yourself, don’t you?” he said, sneering. “I’ve lived to see a dozen like you get their heads shaved!”

This was pretty crude. Heberdon reddened. Before he could act Cora was at his side.

“Please pay no attention,” she said quietly. “He is not himself.”

“Oh, I’m not myself, am I?” said Alcorne with a loud, crackled laugh.

Cora’s eyes blazed on him. “Be quiet, or leave the house!” she commanded.

He was afraid of her. The crazy eyes bolted; he went to a sofa and plumped himself down. Here he sat biting his fingers, his eyes rolling horribly, and darting little glances of hatred like snakes’ tongues in Heberdon’s direction. The others, affecting to ignore him, tried to take up their conversation.

Suddenly Alcorne, apropos of nothing that had gone before, broke out in the dry, shrill voice of a man labouring under great nervous tension—but there was little connection between his manner and his words.

“Won five thousand on the wheel at Standish’s last night! They say I don’t know when to stop. Played No. 23 all evening—Cora’s number. . . . No jinx for me! . . . Cleaned out twice before I killed my hog! . . . Made ’em settle in crisp, new fifty-dollar notes. . . . Oh, you crackle! . . . They’re all gone now. I’m the boy to burn ’em up! . . . Bought a present for Cora——” Here he fumbled in his pockets. “That’s gone, too. . . . Never mind! I’ll go back and get some more!”

During this, Blighton reëntered the room. Cora, with a look, called his attention to Alcorne.

“Dick,” said the old man with grim mildness, “come downstairs with me.”

“Shan’t!” muttered Alcorne.

A vein stood out on the old man’s forehead. His face became terrible in anger. Without saying anything more he pointed to the door. Alcorne thought better of his defiance, and slunk out of the room. Blighton followed. The girls sighed with relief.

“What’s the matter with him?” asked Heberdon.

“Cocaine, heroin, morphine; some drug or another,” said Cora. “He is worse to-night than he has ever been.”

Miss Starbird was pale under her rouge. “He’s always getting worse!” she cried. “What are we to do with him? If this goes on he will do something reckless that will ruin us all! Yet we can’t cast him off either.”

“He is not so reckless as he seems,” said Cora contemptuously. “He trades on this wildness.”

By and by Blighton and Alcorne came back. As to what had happened below Heberdon could only conjecture. At any rate, Alcorne was subdued

and wretched-looking now. He sat down by himself and took no part in the talk, smoking one cigarette after another held in his shaking fingers.

Heberdon, when he had an opportunity, studied him curiously. In his way Alcorne was rather a notable figure. In the veiled insolence of his manner, and the careless elegance of his dress, he would not have been out of place in the most fashionable club. His mannerisms were such as are associated with such places. He looked like the scion of a millionaire who had never been denied anything since infancy, and had gone the pace from the age of fifteen. He was of about Heberdon's years, but at present he looked almost aged.

The others treated Alcorne like a sick man, affecting to ignore his outbreak. They sought to draw him into the conversation, but he remained silent. His presence put an effectual damper on the party, and Miss Starbird departed with Crommelin before long. Heberdon lingered on, hoping to outstay the other, or at least to get a word or two alone with Cora. Alcorne sat on in dogged silence, inspired perhaps by the same idea. In the end the bluff old man cut the knot to suit himself.

"Well, boys, time to close up," he said. "Cora must have her beauty sleep."

Heberdon glanced at Cora. She kept her eyes down. Since she acquiesced there was nothing for it but to go.

Since neither young man would yield place to the other they left the house together. Cora's adieus were friendly and offhand, exactly the same to each. No night was named for Heberdon's return. "She wants to avoid exciting him again," Heberdon told himself.

Outside the house Alcorne seemed to recover some of his aplomb, and to be wishful to ingratiate himself. "Fine night," he said, cocking an eye aloft.

The prudent Heberdon was perfectly willing to put a good face on matters. "Fine!" he replied warily.

Alcorne had a car waiting at the curb, a rakish-looking raceabout that suited his type. "Give you a lift back to town," he said offhand.

Heberdon hesitated.

Alcorne laughed. The man had at certain moments an uncanny perspicacity. "Oh, I'm all right now," he said. "But you can drive her yourself if you want. I suppose you *can* drive."

"I can," answered Heberdon shortly.

"All right. Take the wheel."

They started, and for a mile or two exchanged no speech except for Alcorne's pointing out the proper turns to take. "What's he thinking about?" thought Heberdon, "or does he think at all?" No doubt the same question was in the other man's mind.

Finally Heberdon became aware that the other had drawn a little folded paper from his change pocket, and was opening it with shaking fingers. The action was significant.

"For God's sake, put it away until you get home!" said Heberdon sharply. "I can't take care of you."

Alcorne laughed. "This will buck me up," he said. "I took too strong a shot before."

He took a pinch of white powder from the paper and snuffed it up. Heberdon waited to see what would happen. If the man got obstreperous again he intended simply to stop the car, and leave him to his own devices. But a deep, unholy curiosity stirred Heberdon; his nostrils tingled with desire.

Pretty soon Alcorne began to talk rationally enough. "The night's young," he said. "Where will we go?"

"Much obliged," said Heberdon dryly, "bed for mine."

"Where do you hang out?"

"The Madagascar."

"I didn't ask you where you wrote your letters. We all use Madagascar paper."

Heberdon remained silent.

Momentarily Alcorne became more voluble. He displayed a crude desire to square himself. "Mustn't mind me," he said. "Not a bad sort if you take me as you find me. Got a rough edge to my tongue, I suppose. Don't care what I say. You're too thin-skinned anyhow. . . . Come on, I'll introduce you at Standish's."

In a supposedly purified city Standish's was well known as the most gorgeous of gambling houses. Heberdon would have liked very well to be introduced there, but he was afraid of being compromised by his eccentric companion. He shook his head.

Alcorne read his thought. "You're afraid I'll queer you. You don't know me. I'm the best-known sport in town. All the young fellows are crazy to be seen with me. Doesn't matter what I do; it becomes the style. . . ."

"You and I ought to be pals," he went on. "We're the only young fellows in Jack's bunch. I don't know what your line is, but I suppose you're good at

it, or Jack wouldn't bother with you. You and I might go in on something together. I could put you on to some good things. Got a job on hand now, and need a helper."

Heberdon thought, "Is this on the level or is he just working me? . . . When a man's drunk the truth generally comes out, but I don't know about dope. . . . Anyhow, I'll be careful, but there's no necessity of making him sore. . . ."

Aloud he said: "That would be great. But just at the moment I'm full up."

But Alcorne's sharp ears caught the insincere ring. A snarl crept into his voice. "Ah-h, you think I'm a down-and-outer, don't you? Nothing to it! You don't know me. I take an occasional shot of coke, but it hasn't got me at all. I can control it."

"I expect that's what they all say," thought Heberdon.

Alcorne went on, "Sometimes, like to-night, I deliberately take an overdose just for the thrill. My God! What a lovely jingle it starts! You walk on air, you feel like an emperor, you live! Cocaine offers you the keys to paradise. Why the hell shouldn't you enter occasionally?"

All this found a horrid echo in Heberdon's breast; he, too, liked to walk on air and feel himself an emperor.

Alcorne fumbled in his pocket again. "Here take a half a shot," he said. "Just for the jingle."

Heberdon was tempted—and terrified. "God forbid!" he said quickly.

Alcorne laughed, and put away the paper. "You'll come to it," he said carelessly. "You're the kind. You're conceited. Cocaine is meat and drink to a conceited man."

Heberdon shuddered.

As Alcorne put him down at the Madagascar he said: "I hang out at Mellish's chophouse. Look me up any time."

## Chapter XI

### THE FIRST SHOT

It was astonishing how swiftly the seven thousand melted away. There was a tiny wrist watch for Cora of platinum and French enamel, a thousand dollars cool; there was a complete new outfit for himself, nothing spectacular, of course, but everything of the finest quality and workmanship. Heberdon went to a new and more expensive tailor, and, not daring to run such a bill in his own name, was obliged to pay cash.

There were new furnishings for his rooms, including many little indulgences he had hitherto been obliged to deny himself: dressing gowns of heavy silk; fittings for his bureau of ebony and silver, personal jewellery and knickknacks.

There is nobody like your cold-blooded person for luxuriousness. And this is not to speak of the stocks of choice liquors and cigars, elaborate dinners at the Madagascar, taxicabs every time he stirred out of doors, bushels of American Beauties, etcetera, etcetera. Within a week Heberdon's money was two thirds gone, and the pressure to replenish his funds became insistent.

Meanwhile Cora was acting in a baffling way that exasperated him to the highest degree. As a matter of fact, she was so simple and candid that he could not see through her in the least. There was nothing in her actions to suggest that she did not care for him; on the contrary, her eyes continually betrayed her. But she displayed an astonishing obstinacy and ingenuity in keeping him at arm's length. He could never get her alone.

Once he asked her to dine with him at the Madagascar, thinking of the long ride home by taxicab. Her eyes brightened, but her lips became resolute.

"On one condition," she said.

"What is that?"

"That we walk to the station afterward, and come home by train."

His face fell. "Cora!"

"I mean it."

He agreed, not meaning to hold to it.

"She'll feel differently after dinner," he told himself.

But she did not. She balked at the taxicab he called, and he had to give in to her or make a scene in the street, something the proper Heberdon shuddered at.

The journey home was not exactly a happy one.

He left her at her door, and returned to town in a cold fury. Determined to teach her a lesson, he stayed away from Greenhill Gardens for three days. But no word came from her, and in the end he was obliged to go back. As a matter of fact, with every day that passed he became less capable of playing the master with Cora.

She was in his blood and in his brain too; her resistance maddened him no less than her charm.

It was Saturday night when he went back after the dinner incident. He was not expected, for Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were his regular nights at 23 Deepdene Road. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends he went up to Marchmont. On this particular Saturday he simply could not endure the thought of not seeing Cora until Monday, so he telegraphed Ida that he would be out Saturday morning, and took a taxicab for Greenhill Gardens.

Cora was unaffectedly glad to see him, but there was not much comfort to Heberdon's egotism in that, because there was no humility in her gladness. She did not appear sorry for the way she had acted; on the contrary, she showed a forgiving air that angered him afresh.

Of late Cora had always seen to it that others were present when Heberdon called, but to-night she was unprepared. To be sure, old Jack was there, but he presently announced his intention of going to "the club," whatever that was.

Evidently Cora had not taken him into her confidence as to the situation between her and Heberdon. Her pride would not allow her in Heberdon's presence to try to prevent his going out.

So Heberdon was left alone with her at last. She showed neither constraint nor self-consciousness, but held up her chin with a dauntless air that secretly intimidated the man. Now that he had his chance, true to his nature, he hung back and sulked.

In the cozy little den upstairs she tried to tease him into a better humour, but without any success. He was waiting for her to ask him what was the matter, and she would not do that. Finally she proposed a game of rum. He agreed with a great parade of indifference.

Cora, like the charming child she was, immediately became absorbed in the game. To Heberdon this was an added offence. In his irritation he made mistakes, and of course she beat him and triumphed innocently.

This was his last straw. He flung down his hand in a burst of temper.

“Damn the cards!”

“It isn’t the cards’ fault,” she remarked, laughing.

“You’re right,” he said darkly; “it isn’t the cards.”

“What is it, then?”

“You know what’s the matter!” he told her accusingly.

She was too honest to feign innocence.

“Oh, *that!*” she said coolly. “I’m sorry.”

“Why do you treat me so?” he demanded.

“How else could I treat you?” she murmured.

“Are you a mere flirt?”

She was stung. “I don’t know what you mean,” she said coldly. “I act as I feel. If that is flirting, I suppose I am a flirt.”

“You don’t act as you feel. You do care for me. Your eyes draw me on.”

“Of course I care for you,” she said simply as a child. “I never made any secret of it.”

“Then why do you hold me off?”

She shrugged.

“Are you trying to madden me?”

“It rests with you, doesn’t it?” she asked very low.

Still in his blind egoism he would not see.

“That first night,” he said. “You didn’t draw away from me then; you let me take you; you kissed me back. What has happened since then?”

He was leaning across the table, reaching for her, and she was leaning back. She rose, pushing back her chair.

“Do you love me?” she asked simply.

“I’m mad about you!” he cried. “I can think of nothing else, night or day. You have stirred me to my depths! No woman ever meant to me what you do.”

“I asked you if you loved me,” she repeated with soft persistence.

“Am I not telling you I’m crazy about you? What’s a word?”

She shrugged. “True; what’s a word!”

He took a step around the table. “Then come to me! We’re wasting time!”

“Keep back!” she ordered sharply.

“I *will* have you!” he cried.

He had her cornered. Her eyes darted around the room like a wild thing's. They fell upon a paper knife on the mantel, and quick as light she had snatched it up. Heberdon stopped in his tracks. It was the swift sure gesture rather than the foolish weapon which intimidated him.

Cora flung it disdainfully on the table.

"Oh, we're acting like people in a play!" she cried distressfully. "It's too silly!"

Encouraged by this evidence of weakness, he took another step forward. Instantly her face steeled again.

"Stay where you are!" she said.

He stayed.

"There must be an explanation," she went on with proud simplicity, "though it seems very strange to me that you should require any. I don't know what another woman would do; I don't care. You say you love me, or are crazy about me, but I must know what you mean. Do you wish to marry me?"

The word had the effect of an icy shower on Heberdon. He started back, staring at her clownishly.

"Marry!" he echoed, and laughed harshly.

Cora gazed at him sombrely. "If you are trying to insult me, you can't!" she said quietly. "Not that way. For I know my own worth. I could make you marry me if I chose—— Oh, I've seen it done; but I don't want you on such terms. If you don't want to marry me, all right; I shan't die of it. You may continue to come here; I'll be friends with you. But it must be understood, hands off! You, the same as any other man! You'd better go now and think over what I've said."

In the face of that proud simplicity there was no answer possible; there was nothing to do but to go, as she bade him. With a sneer and an air of bravado Heberdon left the room, horribly conscious nevertheless that he was being put out.

His vanity could not endure the thought. Rage suffocated him. How he got out the front door he never knew. That the thief and the daughter of a thief should seek to put him in his place; should presume to speak of marriage; should practically order him out of the house—— Oh, ridiculous, ridiculous!

It did him no good to take that lofty tone to himself. The fact remained—— she had put him out, and she was back there triumphing over him. Oh, how could he get square with her; how could he make her suffer; how make her

crawl in abasement? He couldn't, because she had put him in the wrong with her ridiculous pretence of virtue. He should have laughed—laughed! And now it was too late.

To put it plainly, she had punctured the egoist's illusions by speaking the truth. He simply could not exist without his illusions. He could not face the truth; he had to drive it out of his mind somehow.

In the turmoil of his feelings he walked halfway into town without realizing what he was doing. The walk did not calm him at all. He trolleyed the rest of the way. It was impossible to think of going home to bed. He had to achieve forgetfulness somehow; he had to find something that would set him up again in his own esteem. The thought of Alcorné popped into his head.

He dropped into Mellish's chophouse, and asked for him.

"Oh, Dick," said the cashier, with perfect familiarity. "He's over at Blaney's place. Just telephoned me from there."

Heberdon proceeded to the address given. Blaney's proved to be a dingy little bar in a side street that was doing an extraordinary business. It was hard to say what constituted the attraction of the place, but you felt it as soon as you entered; a complacent air, as if the motto over the bar had been: "Everything goes here, and nothing goes any farther." Perhaps it was in the insinuating leer of the bartenders.

In the rear of the barroom there was a "garden"—a small hall, really—where couples danced to the strains of an orchestration that was fed with nickels. Elegantly dressed couples jostled shoddy couples, but the same spirit hovered over all; was it the spirit of dissoluteness?

Heberdon paused just inside the street door, a little taken aback by the unexpected throng and the racket. Presently he made out Alcorné, deep in talk with a shady-looking customer who wore a cap pulled low over his eyes.

At Heberdon's approach this individual faded away. Alcorné seemed to be in a fairly rational state for him, though his eyeballs rolled, his head twitched, and his yellow fingers trembled as usual.

He greeted Heberdon almost effusively.

"Strathearn! Good man! What'll you have? I was hoping you'd look me up some time."

Heberdon took whisky neat, but that wasn't what he craved.

With his uncanny insight into evil, Alcorné entered into the state of the other man's mind without a word being spoken.

“I was just on my way over to Standish’s,” he said. “You’ll come?”

Heberdon nodded.

On the way in a taxi Alcorne produced one of the little white papers, and, unfolding it, took a pinch of the contents. Heberdon’s eyes glittered.

“Take half a shot just for the jingle,” said Alcorne invitingly.

Heberdon had no thought of resistance now. This was what he craved; forgetfulness, a stimulus. Taking the amount that Alcorne measured off, he snuffed it up as he had seen the other man do. Alcorne showed all his yellow teeth.

Heberdon had two thousand dollars in his pocket—all that remained of his haul.

## Chapter XII

### THE GAMBLING HOUSE

STANDISH'S was one of an otherwise respectable row of big brownstone houses in a side street among the Forties. The arrangements were very discreet. There was a bright light in the vestibule, and while you waited there for the door to be opened you were presumably subjected to a close scrutiny from within, but you were not aware of it. Alcorne being eminently *persona grata* at the house, he and his friend were not kept standing long.

The lower floor was given up to dressing rooms in charge of smiling and discreet footmen and maids, who made you feel that you could not be better taken care of anywhere. A magnificent, sweeping stairway, with elaborately carved balustrade, wound up through the centre of the house, fitting for the display of delicately shod feet and exquisite, slender ankles. The whole of the second story was a dancing floor with little tables all around, like Blaney's—with a difference. The same spirit hovered over the place, but there were no shoddy couples here. Heberdon, in all his experience, had never seen such women and such clothes.

As they climbed the stairs he began to feel a subtle fire mounting in his brain. The first sensations were exquisite; the horrible hurt to his self-love ceased to torment him; a fine, big pride filled his being. All these dashing people of whom ordinarily he would have been just a little in awe now seemed like such ordinary creatures that he was thrilled by the sense of his own superiority. It seemed to him that everybody instinctively recognized his worth; he stepped among them like a king.

"The girls aren't so bad," he remarked to Alcorne with a blasé air; "but the men! Lord, what common-looking mutts!"

Alcorne glanced at him sidewise and stroked his upper lip, to hide the yellow-toothed smile.

The green-baize covered tables were on the third floor. There was very little noise up here; only a certain clicking and shuffling, and a low, excited voice, uttering numbers. There were roulette, *rouge et noir*, fan-tan, and many other games ancient and modern, including even a form of solitaire which seemed to be popular with the older patrons of the house. There was a whole row of them, white-haired and benevolent, each playing by himself at a little table, a watchful representative of the bank sitting opposite.

The greatest press was around the wheels, and in this direction Alcorne and Heberdon bent their steps. Heberdon's sense of well-being had by now risen to such a pitch that it was difficult to tell if it was well-being or agony. The blood pounded in his temples; he couldn't see very well; his body seemed to have overcome the attraction of gravity and he had difficulty in keeping his feet on the ground. He grasped Alcorne's arm.

They found places in the circle about one of the wheels. Heberdon was vaguely conscious of the faces of the others around, floating faces without any bodies, in particular the mask of a young woman with staring eyes and a jewelled aigrette in her hair which quivered incessantly. Then the spinning, parti-coloured wheel hypnotized him. It seemed like a symbol of his brain; was it a wheel or was it his brain spinning there? Like everybody else he instinctively thrust a hand in his pocket, that was the last he knew.

He came to, to find himself lying on a couch in a small room. One of the irreproachable menservants was there.

He heard Alcorne say: "He's better now. You needn't wait."

Heberdon tried to rise, and was overcome by a wave of nausea. He fell back on the couch. His head was bursting.

"What's happened?" he asked weakly.

"You tried to go it, that's all," said Alcorne with his cackling laugh. "Never saw a man take it like you before. I only gave you half a man's size dose, too. But it blew the top of your head clean off. When you saw the wheel you went crazy; started in to break the bank. I couldn't hold you. And when your last dollar went you crumpled up, as if somebody had dropped you with a slung shot. We carried you up here."

"All my money!" wailed Heberdon.

"Every damn cent!" said Alcorne cheerfully.

Heberdon thought: "It's a lie! He's got it! But I can never prove it!"

"Hell, what's a couple of thousand to a guy like you?" Alcorne went on easily. "I can put you in the way of making plenty more myself."

The bottom seemed to have dropped out of Heberdon's world. "All my money!" he repeated. "All my money! I must get out of this!" He tried to sit up again. "I'm sick!" he wailed.

In his weakness and relaxation the tears began to roll down his face.

Alcorne regarded him with that unchangeable grin.

"There's only one thing for you," he said.

"What's that?"

“A hair of the dog that bit you.” The inevitable little folded paper appeared.

Heberdon, in his utter prostration, had only one thought—to recover that godlike sense of superiority. He put out a trembling hand. Alcorne measured out a minute dose.

Presently the blood began to mount to Heberdon’s brain again. His weakness left him. Rising from the couch, he caught sight of a ghastly drawn face in a mirror, but refused to recognize it as his own. He was in great haste to put the room and the hideous recollection of his awakening behind him.

“Let’s go! Let’s go!” he said nervously.

“We’ll take a table on the dancing floor,” announced Alcorne. “I’ve got a proposition to put up to you. And by the way, since you’re cleaned out I’ll lend you fifty.”

Alcorne took out his bill roll, but held it in such a way that Heberdon could not see how much it contained. “Has he got the gall to lend me back fifty of my own?” he thought bitterly. Alcorne’s crazy grin told him nothing. “I’ll never know,” Heberdon told himself. He hastily pocketed the money without thanks.

By the time they got a table on the second floor Heberdon’s self-esteem was pretty well restored. It was not the ecstasy of the first dose, but he had no desire to repeat that. He merely wanted to feel like somebody; and he did.

To be sure, it was all slightly unreal; he found himself blinking in order to decide whether the turning figures on the floor were really dancers or merely spots before his eyes. Alcorne’s twisted face had a disconcerting way of retreating into a fog and springing out at him again. Only part of the time did he realize that the second voice he heard speaking was his own. It seemed to be carrying on its half of the conversation intelligently, but he had no control over it.

But it was a comfortable enough state, on the whole. He blinked and basked in the light and warmth. He felt fine. He listened to Alcorne’s proposition without a qualm, for he was living in a world where all moral considerations had been sloughed off.

“Ever hear of Miss Biddy O’Bieme?” asked Alcorne.

Heberdon nodded. “The Irish millionairess.”

“The same. Her old man made a stack in the palmy days of railroading. Started as a navy, and ended as a first-class road wrecker.”

“What about Biddy?”

“She’s got a pearl necklace worth—well, I don’t know what it’s worth; but Gelder has put up a standing offer of fifty thousand for it.”

“Who’s Gelder?”

“Er—a broker.”

“Well, how are you going to get it?”

“I’m giving you the chance.”

“What’s the dope?”

“Listen. Biddy O’Biene is one of the characters of New York. An old maid, over sixty. Lives alone with her servants in a big brick house on the Avenue, near Washington Square. She’s a superstitious old bird, and she wears her necklace night and day, she thinks it brings her luck—see?

“She’s a great philanthropist. Wants to be known as the most charitable woman in New York. By playing up to that, you can do what you like with her. Now, you’ve got a good appearance. You can go anywhere. All you have to do is to go to her house and get that rope of oyster buttons. I’ve got it all fixed for to-morrow.”

Heberdon was not so bemused but that this startled him a little.

“Hey? To-morrow!” he said.

“You’ll have to act promptly, or some slick guy will cut you out. Gelder’s offer is known to all, of course.”

“To-morrow!” repeated Heberdon, a little dazed.

“Listen,” said Alcorne. “Biddy’s got a butler, Cummings by name. He’s more than a mere servant; a sort of bodyguard and general factotum. Watches over her like a hen with one chicken. Nothing doing when he’s in the house. I’ve been doing some work on this case. I happen to know that Cummings has a day off to-morrow. He’s going up to the country. There won’t be anybody in the house but the old dame and a pack of maids.”

Considerations of prudence occurred dimly to Heberdon.

“But I’ve got to know the lay of the land,” he objected. “I’ve got to find out the old party’s habits and so on. That will take time. I can’t go it blind.”

“I’ve done all that for you,” said Alcorne. “Listen. We’ll fix you up a disguise together. You’ll call there about four-thirty to-morrow afternoon. She’s religious as hell, and she’s not at home to visitors Sunday, so there’s no danger of your meeting anybody—see?”

“But if she’s not at home to visitors, why should she see me?”

“Listen. It’s all been thought out. You will be provided with a calling card reading ‘Mr. Christopher Kelly’; and down in the corner ‘Secretary Ozone Farm for Convalescent Children.’ Firstly, the Irish name will appeal

to her; she's strong for the race; secondly, she'll be up in the air at the thought of anybody starting a new charity without consulting her first. Oh, she'll see you all right."

"Have you got a plan of the house?"

"Don't need any. It's an English basement, and there's a reception room on the ground floor just a step or two from the front door. Ordinary callers are shown in there, and intimate friends are taken upstairs."

"Where did you get your information?"

"I took one of the maids out."

"Go ahead."

"Well, the maid will leave you in the reception room, and the old girl will come to you there. You don't want to die laughing when you see her. She's about four foot ten high and the same in circumference. On her head she wears a sort of hayrick of false hair, red, and about a foot high. Don't be worried if you don't see the necklace; it will be under her bodice; she never leaves it off."

"Well, what's the procedure?"

"You will just give her a little swipe with a silencer that I have for you—handy little tool. You must give her a side swipe on the temple, because, of course, you could not make any impression on that shock absorber on top.

"And you want to be ready to catch her when she keels over, so she won't make a thud on the floor that will bring somebody. That's all. You just take the marbles and walk out—see? Nothing to it."

Heberdon's jingle was at its height. Little hot eddies were whirling through his brain. The room swam in a golden mist. There was a certain deferential note in Alcorne's voice that Heberdon's voracious vanity simply gobbled up. Alcorne suggested that there was nobody so well fitted as Heberdon to pull off a job like this—of course there wasn't! Nobody so cool, so nervy, so resourceful as he! He'd show them all; they'd have to hand it to him! Fifty thousand—— But amidst this jingling welter one canny question made itself heard.

"How do we split?" asked Heberdon.

"Fifty-fifty, I suppose," said Alcorne carelessly.

"Not on your life! I take the risk. Seventy-five, twenty-five."

"Ah, don't be a Jew, Frank!"

"Seventy-five, twenty-five, or I quit right here!"

"Oh, all right," said Alcorne. "There's my hand on it."

They shook.

“You’d better spend the night with me,” suggested Alcorne carelessly. “You can have my bed, and I’ll take the couch. You’ll feel rotten in the morning, but I’ll soon fix you up. Then we can rehearse the act.”

Heberdon assented, scarcely hearing. His brain was on fire, and the figures thirty-seven thousand five hundred were dancing in the flames.

“What a picayune I was with my measly seven thou,” he thought. “This is something like! Won’t I make it fly, though! This is only a beginning. I’ll make the whole world sit up and take notice before I’m through.”

But his arms and legs were twitching; he was mad to go somewhere and do something, he knew not what.

“Come on, let’s go!” he said, jumping up.

“All right, let’s go back to Blaney’s,” rejoined Alcorne. “Some amusing guys there you ought to know. I got one or two other places I’d like to show you, too.”

Heberdon awoke at dawn. His surroundings were strange to him and for a moment he could not figure out where he was. He was afraid to find out, and he closed his eyes again. He had a vile taste in his mouth and a bursting head. Worse still, the woe of all the ages was lying on his breast; immeasurable, inexplicable woe that he was powerless to struggle against. He could not face such a world. Tears of self-pity forced themselves from under his lids.

But merely closing his eyes did not serve to shut out that crushing sense of woe; he felt he should fall to screaming if he did not do something. He rose up in bed and looked around him. Across the faded bedroom in the cold light he saw Alcorne lying on his back on a couch, his mouth open, hideously like a dead man. Recollection returned with a rush, and with it the explanation of his woe; Cora, cocaine, the gambling house, the plot to bludgeon an old woman.

Heberdon’s hair fairly stood on end—not with penitence, but with terror. Looking at Alcorne, he thought:

“He doped me; he robbed me, perhaps; he doped me again! He worked me the way he wanted. I promised to do a job for him. I agreed to everything he said. He brought me here so that he’d have me right in the morning. My God! in a little bit I’d be the man’s slave for life!”

Heberdon’s fears were greater than his weakness. Notwithstanding the trembling of his limbs, he dressed himself swiftly and silently, and contrived to let himself out of the room without awakening the sleeper. He ran most of

the way home through the empty streets, and gaining his own rooms, flung himself on his bed in a passion of relief.

“Never again! Never again!” he swore. “So help me, God, never again!”

### *Chapter XIII*

#### A PAST MASTER'S JOB

AFTER spending over an hour in a barber's chair having his face steamed and massaged in an endeavour to remove the traces of that awful night, Heberdon took train up to Marchmont as to a refuge. Wild horses could not have kept him from Marchmont that day.

How reassuring was the sight of the Pallisers' big, old Mackinaw car at the station, with its correct, but not too correct, chauffeur, and Ida, cool and supercilious, in her corner of the rear seat. He never so nearly loved her as at that moment. The spreading, homely country house further comforted him; how good to feel that he belonged there; that he was one of such an eminently secure and domesticated herd! Surely, while he kept a tight grip on them he could never descend into the maelstrom!

Luncheon brought the usual family house party around the table: Judge Palliser, rather less hearty and whole-souled in the family circle than in public; his amiable wife, who rarely took her eyes from the sun of her lord's countenance; Ida; Amy Steele, a smart young married sister; Dean Heberdon and his wife, inveterate country home visitors; Cyrus, Jr., the young hopeful; and Aunt Maria Heberdon, who sulked because Frank had brought her no present, and all but threatened to see her lawyer.

By this time the rejuvenating effects of the massage treatment had pretty well worn off, and Mrs. Palliser, who had a genius for putting her foot in it, remarked on Heberdon's used-up appearance.

"My dear, I'm afraid you're working too hard," said she.

All looked at Heberdon, who silently cursed the woman. The opportunity was too good to be lost on Judge Palliser, who remarked with the heavy sarcasm of the bench:

"Frank will certainly kill himself with overwork if he doesn't let up. I'm always telling him so."

Mrs. Palliser missed the sarcasm—she always did! "Tsch! Tsch! Tsch!" she said solicitously. "Couldn't you come up here for a few days and rest, Frank?"

"We couldn't possibly spare him, my dear," said Judge Palliser, winking at the others to make sure that the point got over.

“Silly old fool!” thought Frank. Out of the tail of his eye he observed uncomfortably that Ida’s pinched nose was registering a determination to inquire into this question of overwork when she got him alone.

Dean Heberdon was the sort of man who feels it his duty to wag his beard at whatever subject comes up; he said oratorically: “Overwork is the curse of the age. It is only within the walls of one of our older institutions of learning that any leisure and serenity is to be found nowadays. At Kingston \_\_\_\_\_”

He was prepared to deliver a whole lecture on the subject, but Amy Steele cut in: “That’s exactly what I tell Herbert. I hate to see Herbert overwork. Over and over I have offered to get along with three inside servants, and give up the second car, but he won’t hear of it. Of course, the Damrells have just set up their third car, but what is that to us? Or we might rent the house and come in to a good hotel to live. You can get the sweetest apartments for only six hundred a month, and it would be so much easier on dear Herbert.”

“Poor Herbert!” murmured Mrs. Palliser abstractedly.

Cyrus, Jr., sniggered.

“I don’t see why you say that, Mamma,” said her daughter aggrievedly.

“Of course not; of course not!” said the elder lady hurriedly. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“In my day,” put in Grand-Aunt Maria quaveringly, “a whole family could live on six hundred a year.”

As no one paid the least attention to her, she repeated the statement as loud as possible, whereupon they all turned hurriedly with a “Yes, yes, of course, Aunt Maria.”

Heberdon, seeing the conversation pass safely away from him, breathed more freely and applied himself to chicken timbales with a still air. But Judge Palliser brutally brought it back again.

“Were you working at the office yesterday, Frank?”

“No, sir; I was busy on that old case of mine.”

“H’m!” said his uncle drily. “It certainly takes a lot of your time. I hope it pans out well. By the way, what is the nature of the case?”

“Just at present I am not permitted to say,” answered Heberdon with a heavy air of professional discretion.

Cyrus, Jr., spoke up unexpectedly. Cyrus was a prep. school youth, finished beyond his years, and generally bored and contemptuous in the family circle. Said he:

“I saw Frank at Blaney’s last night.”

An inward tremor shook Heberdon, but he managed to keep his face. It was not likely that anyone else at the table knew anything about Blaney’s, and indeed they showed in their faces that they thought it better not to inquire. All except Mrs. Palliser; one could depend on her never to let sleeping dogs lie.

“What’s Blaney’s?” she asked innocently.

There was nothing that relieved the tedium of life for her youngest child like an opportunity to shock his family.

“A low dive on Fortieth Street,” he said coolly.

“Good Heavens, Cyrus, what were you doing in such a place?”

“Chap took me there after the theatre just to see it. It’s the latest place to go. You see all kinds there; evening dress and hand-me-downs. There’s a big organ in back. There are slots in the wall all around, and every time anybody drops a nickel she starts to play. If two drop at the same time, why, the house wins. But ask Frank; he knows.”

Mrs. Palliser turned a distressed face toward Heberdon; all the others looked down their noses except Aunt Maria, who did not understand what was going on. “Frank, is it true what he says, or is he just joking?”

Heberdon had to make a swift decision. He greatly desired to lie, but foresaw that it would deliver him helpless into the hands of young Cyrus, who had the look of a potential blackmailer. So he chose the truth—that is to say, part of the truth.

“It’s true I dropped into a saloon called Blaney’s last night,” he said indifferently. “But I know nothing of the place. I went there to find a witness.”

“Dick Alcorne,” put in the incorrigible Cyrus. “The fellow I was with says he’s the worst man in New York; high-class crook, gambler, and dope fiend. He’s one of the sights of Blaney’s. Seemed to be quite a pal of old Frank’s.”

Heberdon was panic-stricken inside; fortunate for him his face was naturally colourless and wooden.

“I know nothing about that,” he said, carefully schooling his voice. “I merely want to get him to testify for my client.”

“Well, that will be enough about Blaney’s,” announced the head of the family peremptorily.

Heberdon was safe for the present, but his heart misgave him at the thought of the cross examination he would presently have to undergo at the

hands of Ida. There was a look of sweet unconsciousness in her eyes that always portended trouble.

Heberdon's chastened state of mind lasted until Monday. Monday afternoon he began to get feverish again. This was his regular evening to spend with Cora, and as the time drew near he felt a pull from the direction of Greenhill Gardens as of a gigantic magnet. He simply could not face the thought of spending the evening in his own company. A yearning emptiness filled him that was worse than hunger. Of course he gave in to it, but true to his nature, deceived himself while he did so.

"If I stay away from there she'll think she has me going," he thought. "I can't let her think she can get under my skin. I've got to go out there just to show her I don't give a continental."

Meanwhile all day Monday he had been feeling keenly the pinch of his impecuniosity. It is astonishing how quickly one can become a slave to luxurious habits. The fifty dollars he had from Alcorne lasted him no time. He desired to send the usual bushel of American Beauties out ahead of him—not as a peace offering, you understand, but just to show how great-minded he could be in the face of injustice; but when he tried to get credit the florist demurred with deference and firmness. Perhaps the very extravagance of Heberdon's order had alarmed him. At any rate, the pseudo Mr. Strathearn marched out of the place in a rage, and the roses were not sent.

Heberdon had to dine at the club, a sad come-down from the Madagascar—and worse, when it came time to start for Greenhill Gardens, instead of lolling luxuriously in a taxi with the top down, he had to ride bolt upright in one of the plebeian trolley cars that he detested. Like an insistent bell in his brain rang the thought: "I must have money! I must have money!" From this it was but a short step to: "I don't care how I get it!"

As he approached 23 Deepdene Road it gave him a nasty turn to find Alcorne's rakish raceabout standing out in front. He walked on in a horrible state of indecision; what was he to do? Return to town and bite his fingers in solitude all evening? But how could he face the man?

It was not that he was in physical fear of Alcorne; he could have crumpled him up, and both knew it. But Heberdon's soul was horribly attracted and repelled by the other; he was afraid of him in another way. On the other hand, how could he leave him there to have his own way with the household, to poison their minds against him—Heberdon? He had to be there to keep his own end up. Anyhow, better to meet him for the first time in the presence of others; there could be no explanations then.

He forced himself to return to No. 23. John Blighton opened the door to him. His greeting was bluff and hearty, and Heberdon was partly reassured. Neither Cora nor Alcorne could have told him anything yet.

“Just the man I want to see!” said Blighton. “You and me’s got to have a little business talk before you go home.”

The sound of Alcorne’s jerky, cracked laugh came down the stairs, putting Heberdon’s teeth on edge.

“Dick’s upstairs,” went on Blighton. “He’s in better shape to-night. Grace is here, too. Go right up.”

The old man followed Heberdon.

Cora betrayed no self-consciousness at the sight of him, but welcomed him as unaffectedly as a child. She was glad to see him, and made no scruple of showing it. This did not please the queasy Heberdon, who would sooner have seen her mount her high horse a little.

“Confound the girl!” he thought crossly. “She takes my coming as a sign that I’ve knuckled down to her. I’ll have to show her. How unfeminine! There’s no reticence about her, no allure!”

Just the same, his eyes were devouring her—the exquisite grace of her slender white arms, the inimitable carriage of her dark head. He could not drag his gaze away.

Alcorne’s greeting was quite unabashed. “Hallo, here’s Strathearn! Good old Strathearn! Gave me the slip nicely, didn’t you, Sunday morning?”

Heberdon, inwardly cursing him, exhibited as good an imitation of good nature as he was able.

“Sunday morning?” repeated Cora, with raised brows.

“Sure; Frank and I made a night of it,” explained Alcorne maliciously. “Some night, eh, Frankie?” This with a leer that caused Heberdon to grind his teeth while he smiled. “Frank tried to break the bank at Standish’s, but it broke him first.”

Cora cast down her eyes and said no more. Old John took notice of the remark, but he said nothing either. Their silence was harder for Heberdon to bear than anything they could have said.

“What right have they to judge me?” he thought hotly. “It was my own money, I guess.”

To Heberdon’s relief it presently appeared that Alcorne was returning to town. He offered to carry Miss Starbird with him.

“Thanks,” said that lady drily, “but I’ve got to see Jack.”

“How about you, Frank?” asked Alcorne.

“Oh, I’ve just come.”

“I’ll wait for you.”

Blighton came to Heberdon’s assistance. “Roll along, Dick,” he said in his bluff way. “Frank and I have got to talk a little business.”

A sneer made Alcorne’s face even uglier than its wont. “Oh, I see!” he said. “Why don’t you say at once that I’m not wanted. Go ahead and talk your business. I’ve got business of my own. I’m off. I’ll let myself out.”

He slammed the front door ill-temperedly behind him, and in a moment they heard his engine start with wide-open exhaust.

Blighton shrugged.

“So you went out with him Saturday night,” he said to Heberdon with embarrassing directness. “Not that it’s any of my business, but I take an interest in you, Frank. I know him better than you do, maybe. Dick Alcorne’s a bad egg, not to say plumb rotten. And at that I ain’t got too sensitive a nose. Ten years ago I didn’t know a brighter or a nervier lad. I had great hopes of Dick. But the drug got him. It’s not only spoiled his nerve, but it’s poisoned his whole nature. Why, he had the gall to put up the job of blackjacking an old woman for her trumpery necklace to me!”

Heberdon had the sensation of blushing. Fortunately for him, his countenance did not easily betray changes of colour.

“I told him a thing or two,” Blighton went on. “In fact, I gave him the worst call I ever gave a man. Never reached him! The worst of that stuff is that the lower it drags its victims down, the higher it sets them up in their own opinion. I’d kick him out altogether if it wasn’t for old times. In a way he’s a sick man; we have to bear with him some.”

Heberdon did not take this friendly admonition in very good part. “You don’t think because I went out with him once that I’m going to fall for him altogether, do you?” he asked stiffly.

“No, no,” said the old man. “You’ve got a good strong head of your own, I take it. But a word to the wise, you know.”

Cora added softly: “He hates you, Frank, because you’ve kept your health and your nerve. He’d like to drag you down to his own level.”

Heberdon laughed in an annoyed way.

“I wasn’t born yesterday,” he said. “I’ve cut my eye teeth.”

The subject was dropped.

“Draw up your chair and light up, Frank,” invited Blighton. “Damn good cigars you smoke, boy. I respect them, though I find a cheaper article better

suiting to my plebeian taste. Take off your coat and make yourself comfortable.”

“Jack!” said Cora reprovingly.

“There’s nothing proud about me,” went on the old man, peeling off his coat. “He can do as he likes.”

Heberdon kept his own on.

They sat in a circle of easy-chairs around the little table with a shaded light. Old Jack had some difficulty in getting his cigar to draw to suit him, and Miss Starbird betrayed impatience.

“For Heaven’s sake, take another, and shoot!” she cried.

“Easy, my girl, I’m no Cræsus,” he drawled.

Heberdon, too, felt an excitement mounting slowly in his breast. For the moment he ceased looking at Cora, who sat farthest back from the light. “Whatever it is, I hope it’s big and quick,” he thought. “I’m ready for it. I need the money.”

The old man began at last.

“There’s been a plan stewing in my head this good while past, and I’m ready now to take off the lid and have a look at the decoction. First off, I intended to pull this myself, but I haven’t got the right appearance for a sunlight job. You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. Then, too, it needs brisk work, and in itself the sight of a brisk old man is suspicious. I thought of Crommelin—ah, there’s a cool hand for you! Crommelin’s nerve is like fine-tempered steel.

“But he don’t look quite right either. His hands would give him away. And men don’t wear gloves in the summertime nowadays, except a few dudes. But as soon as I laid eyes on Frank I says: ‘There’s my man! Frank has style, the real thing that cannot be imitated. Who would ever suspect Frank of any slick work, to look at him?’ ”

Miss Starbird broke in impatiently again: “You’re telling your story wrong end first, Jack! What’s the job? I’m dying with curiosity. And where do I come in?”

“Just like a woman!” said Jack ruefully. “Won’t let me lay out my scheme systematically! Well, who does the biggest cash business in the city of New York?”

“Oh, if you’re going to talk in riddles now!” she exclaimed.

“The Hippodrome,” ventured Cora.

“Not by a jugful!”

“One of the big department stores,” put in Heberdon.

“Wrong again. Their sales are largely on credit. How about the Union Central Terminal?”

Heberdon whistled noiselessly. “Never thought of that!”

“Well, I’ll tell you on ordinary days the ticket offices take in about fifty thousand in the twenty-four hours, practically all in cash. And on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings in summer, what with people going away on their vacations, the takings are as high as seventy thousand.”

Heberdon’s eyes brightened. “That’s worth going after,” he observed.

“Quite! Quite!” said the old man drily. “You know the brigade of ticket offices,” he went on. “Well, down at the end of the row, hidden from the public, is the head ticket seller’s place. Once a day the money is collected here, packed in a valise, and carried to the bank. The head ticket seller carries it himself with a single guard. They’re as regular as the depot clock; 9:45 and 2:45 on Mondays; 2:45 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays; and 12:45 on Saturdays.

“These two men come out of an inconspicuous little side door on the arcade where the shops are, and make their way up the ramp to the front of the depot at the Vandermeer Avenue corner, where a special taxi is waiting for them. The station is always crowded when they go, but on Saturday it is packed with the crowds for the half-holiday specials. Another reason for choosing Saturday, let alone the amount being bigger that day.

“Good!” said Heberdon. “Leave it to me to dope out a scheme to get that valiseful.”

“A scheme is already doped out, such as it is,” went on the old man in his dry way. “Let me open it to you, and if you can improve it, so much the better.”

In a few words he revealed a plan that caused the other three to laugh outright in admiration. Like all of Jack’s work, it showed humour. Even the conceited Heberdon was impressed. He had no amendments to offer. The thing was brilliant in its simplicity. They could not see how it might fail.

Only Cora looked aggrieved. “The woman’s part ought to be mine,” she said without any bitterness toward Grace Starbird. “It’s my kind of a part. I leave it to Grace if it isn’t.”

“You little cat!” rejoined the older woman good-naturedly. “Do you mean to insinuate that I am getting old and losing my nerve?”

“Not at all!” said Cora. “You’ve got plenty of nerve. You’ve got too much for this part. You love to act; you know you do. You can’t help throwing yourself on it. You’d overdo it. But I’d be scared half to death. I’d look scared. That is just what is wanted here. Give me a chance to show

what I can do, Grace. There are so many, many things you can do better than I.”

“It’s up to Jack,” said Grace. “I don’t want to deprive the young of any glory.”

Blighton scowled at the thought of his darling risking herself. “She’s too young,” he muttered.

Cora faced him with spirit. “You’ve been saying that long enough, Jack! When shall I be old enough, I’d like to know? I’ve told you often enough that I will not go on living here in luxury that is supplied at the risk of others. I’ve got to be allowed to do my part and take my chance, or I’ll go off on my own, I swear I will!”

Grace Starbird supported the girl, and in the end Blighton gave a reluctant consent.

Heberdon took Cora’s outburst to himself, and was much elated thereby. “She’s crazy about me!” he told himself. “She couldn’t contain her jealousy at the thought of the other woman doing a job with me. I’ll get her on my own terms yet.”

“How will we split?” Heberdon asked Blighton.

Blighton was not Alcorn. “You have the big end of it,” he said promptly, “you take half. Cora will take thirty per cent., and I, who am just a super, will take twenty.”

“But the whole plan is yours,” objected the girl. “You are the commander.”

After an amicable wrangle, father and daughter agreed to divide their half equally. Heberdon did not offer to give up any of his share.

## *Chapter XIV*

### THE UNION CENTRAL HOLD-UP

THE following Saturday was fixed upon for the attempt on the Union Central Terminal's cash, and during the intervening days Heberdon once more had an absorbing preoccupation. He contrived to be at the station each day when the cash was carried to the bank, and narrowly studied the appearance and the movements of the two men. Wednesday and Friday evenings he spent out at 23 Deepdene Road, planning and rehearsing every move with Blighton and Cora. During these evenings he had no opportunity to see Cora alone, but he was content to let that go for the present.

"This affair will make a bond between us," he told himself. "After we've pulled it off together she'll never be able to resist me."

By Saturday morning all was ready. Heberdon had not to go to the office this day, so his time was all his own. He had promised Ida to be out on the 12:40 train. To be sure, zero hour for their attack was not until 12:45, but Heberdon had discovered, upon studying the time-table, that there was an express at 12:51 which overtook the 12:40 at Rochedale. He could change cars there, and if the questions were raised it would appear as if he had left town five minutes before the robbery.

His disguise was simple; no more than a cap to pull low over his head, a pair of heavy-rimmed glasses, and a glossy little moustache. He was not relying on disguise this time, his aim being merely to render himself inconspicuous. He dressed with care to that end; a suit of indeterminate colour, neither well nor ill made; a plain shirt and tie, a collar such as four men out of five wear.

At noon he met Blighton and Cora by appointment at a restaurant not far from the terminal. He opened his eyes at the sight of Cora. With materials even simpler than his own she had completely metamorphosed her appearance. With a plain straight dress that made her look flat-chested, demure white collars and cuffs, her hair rolled over her ears, and a schoolgirl's hat, she seemed not a day over sixteen. Her look of wide-eyed innocence was a triumph of art. Blighton was made up and dressed as a prosperous business man. He carried a bag of golf sticks. Cora had seen to the details of his attire.

They scarcely touched the lunch that Blighton ordered. All were too excited to eat—even the grim and experienced old-timer, though it must be said that his perturbation was chiefly on Cora's account. It took the form principally of begging her to eat.

"I can't," she said, smiling to reassure him. "I've got the travel fever."

"If you don't feel just right——" said the old man heavily.

"Nonsense, Jack! I never felt better. If you don't stop fussing over me, I'll have to operate on my own hereafter."

The old man cheered up somewhat.

As for Heberdon, he was occupied in concealing from the others that he was in a blue funk himself.

There was little for him and Blighton to say to each other, every possible contingency having already been discussed. Sometimes they went over it just for the sake of talking.

"If everything goes as usual the two guys will be out on the street at 12:46," said Blighton. "That gives you just five minutes to turn the trick and get your train. It ought to be enough. But if anything holds you up and you miss that train, there's another at 1:02. Only, you shouldn't hang around the station. Take the Elevated uptown, and board it in Harlem."

Separating at the door of the restaurant, they made their way separately to the station. Blighton now carried Heberdon's suitcase packed for the week-end, while Heberdon had a special bag supplied by Blighton. It was empty.

At the station the Saturday afternoon rush was in full sweep. Converging from every direction, the currents of intending travellers joined at the entrances and flowed down the ramps like humanity in the liquid. There was a swing to the gait of most individuals and a shine in their eyes, for all had put office work behind them for a blessed forty-four hours, and a goodly proportion were liberated for a whole delectable fortnight. The roadways were jammed with taxis, and trolley cars could move only at a snail's pace. The shops in the station building facing on the street were overflowing with those making last purchases.

Heberdon's allotted station was in front of the drugstore between the middle entrance to the station and the mouth at the Vandermeer Avenue corner. About fifty feet from him he had presently the satisfaction of seeing Cora take up her place just inside the corner entrance as if waiting for someone.

Many a sympathetic glance was cast on this picture of innocent maidenhood from the crowd hurrying by. The cab that was waiting for the

two men with the money was in its place before her, and a second cab, which had been provided by John Blighton, and had a friend of his at the wheel, drew up at the curb a short distance behind the first.

This was to provide Cora's means of escape. Blighton's own stand was beside the information desk in the waiting room. Thus the stage was set for the big scene. Heberdon could not see the big station clock without stepping out into the street, but there was a clock in the drugstore on which he kept his eye.

The brief period that followed put a strain on the waiting actor's nerves. As always at such moments, Heberdon suffered an agony of stage fright, an inexplicable anguish that gripped him without warning, and almost brought his heart to a standstill.

"What am I doing?" an inner voice seemed to cry. "This is madness! Run! Run!"

But, of course he did not listen to it; men, unfortunately, make a merit of deafening themselves to the still small voices. Long preparation and rehearsal had built up an imaginary structure that overawed him. Besides, there was Cora within view. He stuck it out with the sweat running down his face.

And then suddenly he saw Cora cross the sidewalk swiftly. This was the signal that the men were coming. For the fraction of a second he stared at her stupidly, wondering what it had to do with him, then the reaction took place. His agony rolled away, giving place to a kind of insane exhilaration. After that Heberdon, no longer a thinking being, was pure action, swift as a released spring, swift as a jungle cat.

The two men he was waiting for appeared at the corner entrance. The principal of the two was a short, stout fellow with a self-important air. He wore a brown suit with the coat flying open over his solid stomach, and a straw hat placed just so on his head. He carried a black valise just like an ordinary traveller's, but the strain on his body betrayed its unusual weight.

"I'll jolt that complacent air out of you directly," thought Heberdon.

The second man was a strong, dull-looking young fellow in an ill-fitting new suit. "Bodyguard" was written all over him.

Their emergence upon the sidewalk was Cora's cue. A piercing shriek arose high above the noise of traffic. All those hundreds of hurrying people stopped in their tracks and turned startled faces. They saw a charming, girlish figure starting to cross the street, stagger and sink to the pavement. So many rushed to her aid that she was threatened with suffocation by her would-be helpers. In ten seconds there was a dense, swaying mob

immediately in front of the taxicab that was waiting for the men with the money.

These two, startled by the outcry and conscious of their responsibility, instinctively made for the shelter of their cab. It was a matter of some difficulty for them to push their way through the running crowd on the sidewalk.

The strong man shouldered the runners roughly out of the way. The two gained their cab and, clambering in, pulled the door to after them. Heberdon, who was close by, heard the fat little man agitatedly cry to his chauffeur to go on, but to do this, with all those hundreds under his front wheels, was manifestly impossible.

Heberdon marked that the fat man was sitting on the side of the cab farthest from the curb with the satchel on his knees. The windows of the cab were open, of course.

In such confusion, with everybody running and straining to see into the centre of the crowd, there was little danger of Heberdon's activities attracting attention. They were not conspicuous activities. Making believe to run and to look with the rest, he took care to stick close to the taxicab, and to allow no one to come between him and his quarry. As the moment for action drew near he was at the rear, off-sidewalk wheel of the taxi, where the occupants could not see him, of course.

Meanwhile, Cora was playing her part with spirit. Her first loud cries had given place to a pitiful weeping. The crowd about her was convulsed with sympathy. Heberdon heard voices asking: "What's the matter, miss? What's the matter?" Others replied for her: "She's sick. Call an ambulance." Cora herself spoke up: "No; a taxi, a taxi!"

Many turned to the driver behind them, but he shook his head and indicated his passengers within. Angry voices demanded that they vacate for the sick lady, but they sat tight, looking anxious.

By this time the driver of the second cab, Blighton's man, made his presence known. Steering out into the street, he passed the first cab. A score of voices held him up just beyond. The decisive moment was now at hand. Heberdon already had his big satchel unlocked and was holding it shut with a forefinger.

They bundled Cora into the taxicab, everybody running around like insects trying to get a look. A man followed her, which made Heberdon momentarily anxious, but things happened so quickly he had no time to think about it. The slam of the door upon them was Heberdon's next cue.

Without showing himself at the window of the other cab, he thrust an arm inside and, seizing the handle of the satchel, jerked it out and dropped it in his own larger satchel, all in one movement.

The man inside in a dazed and feeble voice cried out: "I'm robbed!" Then getting some breath into his lungs he roared it out lustily.

Instantly the crowd faced about, all agape for a fresh sensation. Meanwhile the cab with Cora inside moved off down the street at a good rate. The people came crowding around the door of the other cab; Heberdon crowded with them. There could have been no safer place for him. To have made a break to get away at that moment would have been fatal.

The fat man stuck his head out of the window, crying: "It's a frame-up! Stop that taxi!"

Some of the bystanders started to run down the street in a futile fashion, but the stoppage of traffic had created a free space and the escaping cab was already at Madison Avenue. The bodyguard, losing his head, cried to the chauffeur of the standing car:

"Go after her! Go after her!"

The chauffeur made as if to obey, but the fat man screamed:

"Stop! She hasn't got the money! My black bag! Look for that!"

The two of them tumbled out. The bodyguard blew a police whistle, and blindly shouldered this way and that in the crowd, looking for the black bag which was at that moment safely reposing inside Heberdon's larger pigskin one.

Several policemen ran up and were apprised of what had happened. Meanwhile, Heberdon was gaping like all the others. He allowed anyone who would to push in front of him, and he was therefore gradually crowded back to the outside of the circle without making any effort of his own. He could now see the big blue clock over the station. The hands pointed to 12:49. All this had therefore taken place in three minutes, and Heberdon had still two minutes in which to catch his train.

A newcomer next to him said: "What's the matter, fellow?"

Heberdon replied in the parlance of the streets: "Search me! Guy there says he's robbed. Gee! I can't wait! I got a train to catch."

"Same here," responded the other.

Together they made their way around the edge of the crowd, and, entering the station, sped down the ramp. Many others were running; they excited no attention. Heberdon's one thought was not to betray in his carriage how heavy the bag was. He lost his companion in the concourse.

Cutting diagonally across the vast hall, Heberdon made believe suddenly to discover a friend in a gray-haired man standing beside the information desk. He stopped short with a look of glad surprise, and, dropping his bag, grasped the hand of the other man, whose bag was likewise at his feet.

“Thompson! Of all men! Where are you bound for the week-end?”

“Hartsboro.”

“Sorry you’re not going my way. I’m for Rochedale. I got to run for it. See you Monday.”

“Sure!”

Heberdon ran on. All this had been carefully rehearsed. Of course nobody noticed that he picked up the gray-haired man’s suitcase and left the pigskin bag. Heberdon got through the gates for the 12:51 just as they were closing. Passing down the train platform he removed the heavy-rimmed glasses and put them in his pocket. In the vestibule of the car he passed a hand over his face and the glossy little moustache came away with it.

But the train did not immediately start, and Heberdon, glancing out of the window, experienced a shiver of apprehension upon beholding a brief colloquy between the conductor and a hard-faced man on the platform.

“One of those railroad bulls!” thought Heberdon.

The hard-faced one got on the train and it started. In the yard Heberdon unobtrusively dropped the false moustache and the heavy-rimmed glasses out of the window.

The first stop for this train was Rochedale, thirty-five minutes out. In the course of the run the hard-faced man entered the car accompanied by the conductor, and once more Heberdon felt an uncomfortable tickling sensation up and down his spine. But he soon perceived the object of the car-to-car search, and breathed freely again. It was the hand baggage the detective was looking at. No bag in the car escaped his ferretlike gaze. Some bags he tested by lifting, one or two, with apologies and a brief display of his badge, he opened. Heberdon had nothing to fear. They didn’t even lift his suitcase.

At Rochedale he shifted to the local train. Shortly before arriving at Marchmont he changed his cap for a straw hat from the suitcase. Ida was waiting for him as usual in the big Mackinaw.

“Goodness, Frank! What have you got on?” she said with strong disapproval. “What common-looking clothes. They don’t look like you.”

“My other business suits were at the tailors’,” he said glibly. “I’ll change as soon as we get home. I have plenty in my bag.”

“We’ll have to wait for the next train,” she said. “Cyrus telephoned he was taking the 1:02. Boys are so inconsiderate. Anyway, I don’t see why he can’t walk.”

When young Cyrus arrived he was full of the tale of what had happened in the station.

“Hell to pay!” he said blithely. “A guy stuck up the head ticket seller in broad daylight, and got away with the day’s takings.”

“What time was this?” asked Heberdon casually.

“Quarter to one.”

“Must have been just after I left. Sorry I missed the excitement.”

## Chapter XV

### AT MADAME CORIOLI'S

THE late editions of the evening papers, which presumably carried the first news of the robbery, were not taken in by the Pallisers; and Heberdon was therefore obliged to possess his soul in patience until the next morning. He passed a wretchedly excited and uneasy afternoon and night. It was hard to be parted from the money just after he had snatched it, and without even knowing the amount.

Thoughts of the loot and of Cora were all mixed up in his mind. He felt an intolerable desire for both. Not that the money was not safe with Blighton; even the suspicious Heberdon could not doubt old John's squareness. But he felt the need of it like food. If it had only been in the room with him he could have slept, he told himself.

As to Cora, the case was worse; that evening of all evenings he ought to have been with her. What a thrice-confounded fool he had been not to have arranged it. Exalted by the danger and the success of their common undertaking, she could not have resisted him.

And now what was she doing? Celebrating their success without him, no doubt. Heberdon ground his teeth at the thought. How did he know what other man might be hanging around?

Meanwhile, he was obliged to make love to Ida all evening, or at least to pay her the proper attentions. Ida fortunately did not exact much ardour. Ida was perfectly well meaning and harmless, but how his stretched and quivering nerves hated her! There were moments when his voice fairly trembled with rage as he made the obvious, fatuous answers that her conversation required. He would smile at her in a glassy fashion and think:

"Some day I'll get square with you, my lady! I'll find ways to put you on the grill, and make you smile while you scorch!"

Meanwhile Ida, all unconscious, prattled on about the sweet refectory table that she had found for the dining room. It was three hundred years old, and showed every year of it.

Heberdon had got up early Sunday morning and, with burning eyes, read the papers before the family came down. For once his gluttonous vanity was satiated—or almost. The fly in his amber was still the fact that nobody knew or could know that the hero of the day's news was he—Frank Heberdon.

“The most daring robbery that had ever taken place in the city of New York,” the newspapers said. They spoke of it in the hushed tones that they save for the very greatest happenings. “A modern highwayman that put the great historical figures of Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard to shame.”

What more could Heberdon ask?

Indeed, the affair had created so profound a stir, the papers expressed so strong a sense of outrage, that Heberdon became a little anxious as he read on. All the resources of the city, State, and even the Federal government were to be devoted to running down the criminals, it was said; the most famous private detective in the country had been engaged. Arrests were promised within twenty-four hours, as usual.

Rereading the story, Heberdon was reassured. They really had nothing to go on, and all the detectives in the world couldn't help them. The man who had been robbed could furnish no description of the thief. A hand had appeared from nowhere and had snatched his satchel into nowhere.

The amount obtained was sixty-six thousand dollars. Heberdon's mouth watered. They were combing the city for the girl in the case, but there was nothing in this part of the story to give Heberdon any uneasiness. They were looking for a girl of sixteen or seventeen. It had been discovered that the license plate on the car in which she escaped was a spurious one. The doctor who had accompanied her from the scene came in for a certain amount of suspicion at first, but that very much chagrined young man finally succeeded in establishing his innocence.

Naturally the overwhelming sensation in the morning's news furnished the main topic of conversation at the Palliser breakfast table. All sorts of far-fetched theories were put forward. It was very difficult for Heberdon to restrain himself from putting them right.

In the course of the talk Mrs. Palliser remarked with a sad shake of the head: “And they said the girl was no more than sixteen years old! How shocking!”

“Oh, they ripen early nowadays!” remarked Cyrus cheekily.

“So we see!” said Judge Palliser grimly.

The point was lost on Cyrus.

Dean Heberdon proposed to explain the case according to the Freudian hypothesis. “Crime is the natural and inevitable corollary of modern industrialism,” he began oratorically.

“What's a corollary?” interrupted Mrs. Palliser timidly. “Sounds like something in botany.”

Nobody paid any attention to her.

Dean Heberdon rolled on: "The tedium of mechanical operations suppresses the need of variety and excitement that is a vital part of human nature. Put a man at feeding a machine for ten hours a day, and you'll turn out a criminal."

"I thought, in my old-fashioned way, that crimes were committed by those who wouldn't work," put in Judge Palliser.

"There are millions of workingmen," objected Ida, "and only a few criminals, I hope."

"Every workingman is a potential criminal," said the professor crushingly.

Heberdon was very uneasy under all this. Finally he could stand it no longer. "This was no workingman's job," he burst out. "No workingman would be capable of it."

"Oh, Frank," said Mrs. Palliser reproachfully, "you don't mean to say that a gentleman could do such a thing?"

Cyrus, Jr., answered for him, "Why not?" he wanted to know. "It showed nerve and finish, didn't it? Aren't those gentlemanly qualities?"

"Be quiet, Cyrus," said Ida loftily. "You are not as funny as you think you are."

Cyrus forgot his man-of-the-world air and stuck out his tongue at her.

Grand-Aunt Maria Heberdon piped up: "The cook steals the sugar. Every Thursday when she goes home for her afternoon off, she carries a basket. I watch her."

Mrs. Palliser passed over the marmalade to sidetrack her.

Somebody else said: "The police always make out that such a crime was the result of a deep-laid plot. But I think the thief just happened by in the midst of the excitement, and saw his chance, and took it."

This annoyed Heberdon afresh. "How did he make away with the valise if he hadn't planned it all out beforehand?" he demanded. "Things don't come out just pat the way you want them to."

"You all talk as if it were the work of one man," put in a brother-in-law. "Whereas there were probably a dozen concerned in it. That crowd that pushed around the cab; the police should have roped in the lot of them."

"I don't agree with you," said Heberdon stiffly. "All the most successful affairs of this kind are carried out single-handed. The more there are in it the greater chance of a slip-up."

"You seem to know," remarked Judge Palliser drily.

It was just a lucky shot in the dark, of course, and quite in the judge's usual vein, but Heberdon shivered internally and dried up. The discussion raged on without him; after that, nothing could tempt him to open his lips.

By the time Sunday evening came around, Heberdon's nerves were in bad shape. The inconsequential family talk, which never varied, exasperated him almost beyond bearing. He compared it in his mind with the talk of the very different and vastly more amusing circle at No. 23 Deepdene Road, where he longed to be. On Sundays all sorts of young men were free of the house; there was always a picnic supper amid hilarity.

How did he know what young man might be making love to Cora under cover of all this? He writhed at the thought. He threshed his brains in vain for an expedient whereby he might return to town. But the excuse of his old case had been pretty well worked out, and he could hardly plead business on Sunday. He had to stick it out.

Monday morning he took the earliest possible train. On the way to his rooms to change, and leave his bag, he stopped in at the Madagascar on the bare chance that a note from Cora might be awaiting him there.

A letter was handed him, but it was not from Cora. The handwriting was strange to him—a shaky, almost illegible scrawl. Within he read:

DEAR STRATHEARN:

Didn't have a chance the other night to put you on to the ropes. Thought you might like a jingle now and then, so enclose the joy stuff. It's carefully measured for a man of your size, so you needn't be afraid of it.

Yours,

A.

P.S.—When these are gone you can get all you want by presenting the enclosed prescription at the address given.

A peculiar smile wreathed Heberdon's lips as he read this. "Clumsy work," he thought. "He must think I'm a gudgeon. This is funny."

His impulse was to tear the papers into bits and toss them into the gutter, but, in the very act of doing so, a recollection of the thrilling excitement in the gift of that pinch of white powder made him tingle all over. He held his hand and began to find excuses for himself.

"I suppose the stuff is valuable. Why destroy it? That would be weak. That would show that I distrusted myself. Anyhow, the professor said that a certain amount of excitement was good for humans. Why shouldn't I take

one once in a long while, when I'm by myself, just for the thrill? I'd never let it get a grip on me. I'm not a weak-minded fool like Alcorne."

The upshot was that he thrust the envelope with powders and prescriptions into his pocket, and when he got to his rooms hid it between the pages of a book.

From his own place he called up Cora. Once more the sound of her fresh, boyish voice gave his heart a shrewd wrench.

"Is everything all right?" he asked breathlessly.

"Right as right can be! Where are you?"

"At the Madagascar."

"How are you?"

"All right, but longing for you."

Cora laughed deliriously. "That's only proper. You're coming out to dinner, aren't you?"

"I hope so. But I can't wait all day. Won't you come in to town and lunch with me?"

"Surely. Where?"

Heberdon thought swiftly. "Let me see. Not any of the big places. I have it—a little Italian place on Macdougall Street. Not much to look at, but the food is A1."

"I love such places."

"Well, meet me at the Brevoort at one o'clock, and we'll taxi down. And, Cora! Bring me something on account, will you? I'm stony."

She laughed again. "All right. Thank Heaven, the new spinach is in. It's a bumper crop."

Heberdon hung up the receiver with a beating heart. But love, or what passed for love with him, only excited him, and did not soften his heart. His head was scheming busily.

On his way downtown he stopped at a restaurant—a little parlour floor dining room which advertised itself with a dazzling blue façade, and was not perhaps of impeccable cleanliness. But a few choice spirits had discovered that Mme. Corioli was an incomparable cook; there was a Tuscan wine, too, that paid no license fee. Madame, a handsome peasant of the campagna, received Heberdon with an insinuating smile.

"Lunch for two at one o'clock," he said. "The best you can set out. Er—how about a private room?"

Madame, a woman of perfect discretion, did not allow so much as an eyelid to flicker.

“Certainly,” she said calmly; “the little room at the head of the stairs.”

Heberdon gave an annoyed attention to the tiresome details that presented themselves to him at the office, and only began to live again on his way to the Brevoort. Cora, in an artfully plain blue suit and an abandoned little hat, was prompt to the hour. Heberdon could never decide whether she was more alluring in the severe garments she affected by day—always excepting the cap sheaf, which was anything but severe—or in her blossomy evening dresses.

It was only three minutes from the Brevoort to their destination. Cora’s eyebrows went up at the sight of the little room, but she said nothing until Madame had left them.

“Why the seclusion?” she asked.

“We must talk,” said Heberdon glibly. “And the dining room downstairs is so small that every word can be overheard unless you whisper like conspirators.”

“Oh, if you only want to *talk*,” rejoined Cora with meaning.

But she was ill at ease, and presently she returned to the subject.

“Please, Frank, don’t force me to be on my guard against you,” she said with an appealing naïveté. “If you knew how hard it was for people like me to put a restraint upon themselves! And to-day, especially, I am on wings; I want to soar!”

Heberdon leaned toward her across the table.

“Why don’t you soar with me?” he asked a little thickly.

She leaned back and shrugged in an offended way.

He saw that he was likely to spoil his own game with too much precipitancy. He must at least restrain himself until the waiters had ceased passing in and out.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I’ll try.”

She brightened.

As the meal progressed she gradually forgot the necessity for curbing her exuberance. She mounted like a lark.

“Oh, Frank, wasn’t it exciting?” she cried. “At first I nearly died with fright. While I was waiting inside the entrance, I mean. I almost failed you then. It’s a wonder I didn’t really and truly collapse before I got my cue. Weren’t you a little bit scared?”

“Oh, no,” answered Heberdon indifferently. “It’s such an old story.”

She made a face at him. “You’re not human,” she said. “Of course, when I saw the chesty little guy come marching up the ramp as if he owned the railroad, I was all right. The weight of the satchel he carried inspired me. I forgot myself. I forgot everything.

“What fun it is to act, anyway! When I screeched and fell down, and all those men crowded around me with their scared and sympathetic faces, what a sense of power I had! I believe I’ll go on the stage and move thousands to tears. I wanted to embroider my part. But I didn’t exactly feel like myself either. I felt loose from my body.

“When they bundled me into the cab I almost burst out laughing in their faces, they were so funny and clumsy. ‘Easy! Easy!’ they said, as if they were lowering a heavy bale of goods. One said: ‘I’m a doctor. I’ll go with you.’ This wasn’t in my calculations, but it seemed better to let him come than to waste precious seconds trying to prevent him. So I let him. I heard the yells behind when we started off, but he never got on to it. We had a sweet heart-to-heart talk in the taxi——”

Heberdon scowled.

“Purely professional! Purely professional!” she cried gaily. “I told him it was hysteria, and he patted my hand and gave me oceans of good advice. I got better quickly, and dropped him at Fifty-ninth Street in spite of his protestations. How exquisitely foolish men are when they talk to young girls; I mean that pretence of being fatherly, while their eyes gobble you up. I had forgotten.”

The lunch was very simple and very good. Whenever the waiter, a son of Madame’s, came to the door, he knocked, and every time he knocked, Cora chuckled. Upon pouring the coffee he put a little bell beside Heberdon’s hand.

“When the gentleman wants me he will please to ring,” he said suavely.

This was to serve notice that he wouldn’t be back. Heberdon lowered his eyes to hide the glitter that sprang up in them. There was a key inside the door. He longed to turn it and drop it in his pocket, but he did not dare. He was more afraid of Cora than he would have admitted.

She rattled on in seeming unconsciousness:

“I had myself carried away uptown to the Hotel Tours. I checked my valise there, and changed my appearance somewhat in the ladies’ room. Then I got an ordinary taxi and went to another hotel, and changed some more, and so on, until I looked like my usual self again.

“Then I went home by train. All this time I was nearly beside myself with anxiety, not knowing what had happened to you and Jack. Jack was

home before me. What a blessed relief it was to see his homely old phiz, and to see by his grin that everything was all right with you, too.”

“You thought of me?” murmured Heberdon, deepening his voice.

“Sure! No need to play the organ about it!”

There was no stopping Heberdon now.

“Cora, how beautiful you are!” he murmured.

Her face fell like a child’s. “You’re determined to spoil my fun! Why will you be so theatrical?”

“If it’s theatrical, I can’t help it,” he said. “You’re in my blood like a fever!”

She tried to hold him off with chaffing, “I don’t want to be anybody’s fever.”

“You lead me on,” he said, “then try to push me off.”

“Lead you on!” she cried indignantly. “Is the least bit of fun and naturalness to be thrown up to me as a reproach? Do you want me to pretend to be a half-witted ingénue, as other women do? What *do* you want?”

He had risen. “I want you!” he muttered. “All of you!”

She jumped up. “Keep away from me,” she said warningly. “Will nothing teach you?”

“Why do you still fight against me?” he pleaded. “After Saturday? Are we not in all ways partners now? We were meant for each other. Come to me, Cora?”

“Here?” she said, glancing around the ugly little room.

“What does the place matter? Don’t fight me any more. Give me a pledge. Your lips! You gave them once!”

She made no answer. She stood gazing at him with the sombre look that he could not fathom. Having gone so far, there was nothing for him to do but carry it through. He made a sudden move toward her; she darted around the table.

“Don’t make a noise!” he cautioned in sudden alarm.

She saw her advantage. “I’ll make as much noise as I can,” she said. “You tried to trap me here.”

Heberdon’s face turned ugly. “Make a noise then,” he said. “You won’t get much sympathy in this house.”

They continued to circle warily and slowly around the table. Cora pulled a chair after her, in the way of a barricade. Their looks were dark upon each

other. Neither was aware, of course, of the exquisite absurdity of the situation. When Cora had her back to the door Heberdon saw his chance.

“Look out—the waiter!” he whispered sharply.

She turned her head. Heberdon bounded forward and, avoiding the chair, seized her in his arms. They struggled in most unlovely fashion. Hate was in their faces. Cora, in the plumage of a butterfly, was nevertheless as strong as a deer. Leaning back from the waist and pressing against him with her two hands she finally broke free. But she left him between her and the door. She retreated to the other side of the little room.

“Let me be or I’ll cry for help!” she panted.

Heberdon was beyond caring for that now. He sprang toward her again. Swiftly as an animal she seized the back of the other chair, and with a twist sent it sliding across the floor. Heberdon crashed over it and for an instant lay spread-eagled on the floor.

Before he could recover himself Cora was out of the door.

Following to the head of the stairs, he had the unspeakable mortification of seeing the blue skirt flirt through the front door and of hearing it slam behind her. The sound had the effect of an explosion in his brain, blinding him with rage. Mme. Corioli came out into the lower hall with an air of discreet inquiry. Seeing Heberdon’s distorted face, she instantly comprehended what had happened, and as quickly made believe to perceive nothing.

“Did you ring?” she asked blandly.

Heberdon’s one conscious thought was to conceal his humiliation. He shook his head and went back into the little room. When Mme. Corioli disappeared into the rear quarters below, he left money on the table and stole out of the house.

He walked up the teeming street of the Italian quarter quite blind to his surroundings. Upon reaching Washington Square, an empty taxicab overtook him. Hailing it, he had himself carried to his rooms. Like an arrow to its mark he went to the book where he had hidden the drug, and opened one of the folded papers with fingers trembling in haste.

No power on earth could have stopped him. He simply could not live with his vanity shattered.

When the fire began to mount in his brain he began to feel once more like a man in his own estimation. He laughed somewhat unsteadily, it is true, but still laughter. He had to hear the sound of his own laughter.

“What is she to a man like me?” he asked himself. “Pooh—a plaything! Less than nothing! She must be taught a lesson, that’s all. I’m the one to do it! I’ll take her down a peg!”

He returned to the office.

## Chapter XVI

### HEBERDON PROPOSES

HEBERDON had not been long at the office when he received a summons to Judge Palliser's room. In his present state of inflation he was not easily to be intimidated. "Let him say anything he likes to me," he muttered to himself. "Just let him try it on! I'll tell him to go to blazes and turn around and march out of the place! He'd begin to appreciate me then."

However, Judge Palliser's attitude was propitiatory rather than admonishing.

"Sit down, Frank," he said. "Have a cigar."

"Huh," thought Frank; "he wants something out of me now."

"I have a proposition to put up to you, Frank," the judge went on, "that is not exactly to your disadvantage."

"Nor to yours, either," reflected Heberdon. "I thought so!" Heberdon, with his wooden face, was able to conceal the fire that was burning in his brain. The older man perceived nothing out of the way.

"I've not been blind to the fact that your job here wasn't exactly a bed of roses," he went on. "But of course it would have been fatal to the morale of the office if I had appeared to favour my own nephew. And, as I told you when you came, I meant to try you out while I waited for an opportunity to give you a boost."

Heberdon thought, "And of course you have got to get rid of a certain amount of hot air."

Judge Palliser went on impressively, "Well, the opportunity has arrived."

"You needn't think you're going to get me for nothing, old man," thought Heberdon. "I've got thirty-three thousand dollars waiting for me out at Greenhill Gardens, and I guess that's more than you could raise overnight."

Judge Palliser continued: "You are aware, of course, that the firm is general counsel for the International Finance Corporation. What you do not know is—and this is in confidence, of course—the I. F. C. has undertaken a merger of all the public utilities in the city of Managuay, South America; that is to say, street railways, electric power plant, gasworks and waterworks.

“In order to avoid exciting popular opinion, it is not to be known that American capital is behind the scheme; there will be dummy local directors, and a firm of local lawyers for general counsel. But we are going to send a representative to be taken into that firm, see? Just to see that there is no disposition to put anything over on us. And I have chosen you.”

“South America!” repeated Heberdon blankly. His first impulse was to turn the offer down flat, but an instinct of caution bade him hold his tongue for the moment.

“The land of golden opportunity!” commented Judge Palliser unctuously. “The eyes of our best young men are turning in that direction.” He named a handsome remuneration. “You will be expected to stay two years. At the end of that time we will see what we will see.”

“I’ll have to think it over,” said Heberdon cautiously.

“Oh, I’m not asking you to pack up and leave to-morrow,” rejoined the judge. “The details of the merger have still to be perfected, and you must familiarize yourself with the whole business before leaving New York. Spanish lessons will be in order, too. You would have to sail about the end of September, two months from now.

“I assume that you would take Ida with you. Ida, I understand, has always had a fancy to be married in the country, the smartest thing, they tell me. Well, you can be married in Marchmont before we come into town, and go to Managuay for your honeymoon.”

In Heberdon’s superheated brain the little devils began to get busy. “Two months! . . . A lot can happen in two months! . . . Why shouldn’t I? . . . Cora. . . Get square with her. . . Shake the whole bunch forever.”

Even to himself Heberdon would not name what he meant to do. But his mind was made up.

“I accept,” he said to his uncle.

“Of course you do!” cried Judge Palliser. “It’s a chance such as doesn’t often come to a man of your age. Run along now and write the glad tidings to Ida. I’ll carry it up to her when I go. You and I will go into detail some other time, and at the first opportunity I will introduce you to the officials of the I. F. C. Big men, Frank!”

One of the nasty little difficulties that had faced Heberdon was how he was going to present himself at No. 23 Deepdene Road to collect the money, after what had occurred. But all that was changed now. He was eager to go. He meant to go and claim the dinner that had been offered him. Over and

over in his mind he rehearsed the little scene that was going to make all smooth for him. He was so carried away by it that he got in quite a glow of self-approval. How shocked he would have been had anyone used the words “cold and heartless villainy” in respect to what he purposed doing!

So much for cocaine. By the time he got home to dress the effect had worn off, and the reaction set in, but not in the form of remorse—fear rather! “I’ll never be able to pull it off!” he thought with a shudder. “It’s too nervy a scheme. I’d be found out! Good Heaven! If the old man so much as suspected, he’d shoot me like a dog!”

Half sick, panic-stricken, and perfectly incapable of facing Cora in his present condition, there was nothing for Heberdon to do but to open another of the little folded papers. The pleasant tingling fires were relighted. Confidence arose.

“What am I afraid of? Cora has absolutely no line on me as Frank Heberdon. And a country wedding wouldn’t attract the attention of a big affair in town. I’ll fix it so that Ida and I will sail immediately after the ceremony. . . . And the city of Managuay is a long, long way off. I will simply have dropped out of the world for them. . . . Everything can happen in two years. . . . The difficulty will be with Cora. . . . Secrecy—the old man mustn’t be told.”

Upheld by the deceitful courage of cocaine, Heberdon presented himself at the door of No. 23 Deepdene Road with an unabashed countenance. It was opened to him by John Blighton, and from the old man’s unaltered demeanour it was clear he had been told nothing of the incident at Mme. Corioli’s.

“Cora’s upstairs bedizening herself,” he said. “Dinner’s all ready. We’ll eat first, and then we’ll ladle out the gravy. I haven’t opened the keister yet. Cora wouldn’t let me without you were here. But, oh, son! it took some strength of mind! There are some sunny boys in that keister from the heft of it!”

Jack went back in the kitchen to dish up, and Heberdon, puffing at a cigarette, walked up and down the living room, still rehearsing what he had to say to Cora. He must open the scene before they sat down to eat.

In a few moments she faced him, not with an unfriendly or an accusatory air, but merely wary, with an eye out for a way of retreat through the dining room into the kitchen. She was pale. At Heberdon’s first words the new tone caused her to start and look at him with wide eyes. He was very humble.

“Cora, I acted like a brute to-day! Can you ever forgive me?”

Her eyes went down. "I don't know that I have anything in particular to forgive," she murmured with her invincible honesty. "One knows what men are. I should not have gone. But I hoped—I—I am sorry——" She could not go on.

"You were perfectly right," he said. "I respect you for the way you acted. But you ran away to-day before I had a chance to speak. I wanted to ask you to marry me."

The downcast eyes leaped up to his, then fell again; a lovely warmth flooded the pale face. "Oh, Frank!" she murmured, swaying.

He took her in his arms. There was no resistance now. The little devils in his steaming brain rubbed their hands at the excellent progress of affairs.

"Cora, I can't wait for you!" he murmured ardently. The ardour was real enough, anyway. "There is no reason why we should wait, is there? Marry me at once, darling!"

"There is no reason, I suppose, why we should wait," she murmured with adorable dreaminess. "At least, I can't think of any at this moment. But we must talk. Oh, yes, there are reasons! Oh, it is cruel to have to think and to talk now! But I must think. Frank!"

"Yes, darling."

"There is something I want to ask you to do for me. Oh, something so near my heart I am afraid to speak of it!"

"What is it?" he asked with an uncomfortable misgiving.

Her white arms stole around his neck. Her deep glance sought to plumb his very soul, and the little devils wriggled uncomfortably.

"Frank, we have plenty of money now," she said beseechingly. "Promise me that we may run straight after we are married. It is my dream!"

This was like cold water again on Heberdon. He did not relish a moral attitude in Cora. But he kept his face smooth and considered what to say.

His silence frightened Cora. "Don't misunderstand me," she hurriedly pleaded. "It isn't exactly for moral reasons. Ah, don't think for a moment that I feel myself any better than you or Jack. It isn't that. I'm not thinking of myself. This is the only life I have ever known; how could it seem wrong to me when I was born to it? But I can't help dreaming of being like other people. And—and—things will be different now. We might," the eyes fell again, "we might have children. I want things to be different for them! Oh, I don't want them to be handicapped! I can't help remembering my mother and the agonies she suffered when Dad had work on hand! You are clever enough to succeed at anything. Promise me that we can run straight, Frank."

This was intensely disagreeable to Heberdon, but he managed to hide his feelings. It had occurred to him that it made no difference what he promised for the future, since there was to be no future. He put on a solemn air.

“I promise,” he said, “for your sake.”

And all the little devils rolled and squealed in glee.

Cora kissed him with a will. “Ah, now I shall be happy!” she cried from a full heart. “And please God! I’ll make you happy, too!”

This was surrender complete, and Heberdon made haste to avail himself of it. “There is something I want you to do for me,” he said. “But only a little thing.”

“Just ask it and see!” she said with shining eyes.

“Keep our marriage a secret for a little while.”

Her face turned grave, and she partly drew away from him. “But why?” she asked.

“For no important reason,” he said craftily. “But just because it would be so sweet to belong to each other in secret. I can’t bear to think of people knowing all about us and smiling—you know the way they smile. I suppose I am oversensitive, but it hurts, Cora. Of course they’ve got to know some time, but just a little while to have our happiness wholly to ourselves!”

She was trying hard to accommodate herself to his point of view. “I understand how you feel about people in general. I feel the same. But our own people—I mean Jack. Of course, Jack must be told.”

Heberdon shook his head. “He, least of all,” he said; “because we’ve got to be with him.”

Cora was keenly distressed. “Oh, Frank! How could I keep it from Jack?”

“Just for a little while,” he pleaded. “It isn’t as if he had any objections to me. I have tested myself to him. He approves of me, doesn’t he? He likes me?”

“Oh, yes,” she admitted. “But——”

“Then, where’s the harm? Just for a little while. We could be married over again later if it would save his feelings.”

“How long, Frank?”

“Say two months.”

Cora sighed. “Very well, I agree,” she said. “Though I don’t like it. But you are doing more than that for me!”

“Strike while the iron is hot!” whispered the little devils.

“To-morrow, Cora?” whispered Heberdon with burning eyes.

“Oh, not to-morrow!” she exclaimed. “Give me a day to accustom myself to the idea! Wednesday, perhaps!”

“Wednesday, for sure!” he urged.

She nodded, hiding her face.

“Meet me at the Madagascar at five,” he said breathlessly. “I’ll see to all the arrangements.”

None of the three did justice to Jack Blighton’s excellent cooking on this occasion. When Heberdon’s brain was jingling mere food meant nothing to him. He glanced at Cora through his lashes, and dreamed of the next day, while the little devils made merry within. Cora’s thoughts, too, were far from food. She was pale, but with a different pallor from before. Her breast lifted on tremulous sighs. As for Blighton, his mind was upstairs with the black keister. He could talk of nothing else, nor were the other two, preoccupied with love though they might be, indifferent to this subject.

Dispensing with dessert and coffee, they piled the dishes in the sink, and hastened upstairs to the den. The black satchel reposed in a closet there. Clearing the largest table in the room, they opened it and poured out the contents pell-mell.

It was a feast for lawless eyes, and the three pairs above the table glittered. This was no haul of dirty little bills such as Heberdon had made from the Elevated road. A good proportion of them were of large denominations—twenties, fifties, hundreds—and the big numbers, of course, are always fresh and clean. Who ever saw a greasy hundred-dollar bill? Since travellers are often furnished with gold, there were more than a few eagles and double eagles in the lot.

To count and divide so great a sum was no five-minutes’ job. They didn’t care. Before they had it completed they heard the well-known sound of Dick Alcorn’s car in the street; Dick, in defiance of the law, always drove with his exhaust open. They looked at one another in chagrin.

“Hell!” exclaimed Blighton.

“Don’t let him in,” said Cora.

“There’s a light in the hall; he knows we’re home.” The old man began to sweep the money back in the valise. “He mustn’t see all this,” he growled. “It would turn his head for sure.”

“He mustn’t be told what happened,” added Cora.

“But suppose he guesses it was us pulled the trick?”

“We must deny it. He is not fit to be trusted with such a secret!”

The old man, after considering a moment, shook his head. “No!” he said. “No need for us to publish the facts, of course. But if he’s guessed it was us, we mustn’t deny it. For if he thinks we have lied to him, that will, in his mind, release him from all obligations toward us.”

Jack’s word was law, of course, and Cora and Heberdon were obliged to acquiesce. Blighton put the satchel back in the closet and went downstairs to answer the bell.

At first glance Heberdon saw with a sort of fellow feeling that Alcorne was at the height of a jingle. His face was lividly pale, the pupils of his eyes distended; his breathing was quick and shallow, his movements jerky beyond all control. Heberdon stole an uneasy glance at his own face in the mirror. The result was reassuring. “I would never let myself go as far as that,” he told himself confidently.

Alcorne left them in no doubt as to what was in his mind. “Congratulations, folks!” he cried. “So this was the job you’ve all been whispering about! Well, I have to hand it to you. The biggest and the neatest job of the century! I’ll say it is!”

They smiled, neither denying nor affirming the flattering impeachment.

Alcorne went on: “It didn’t take me long to recognize your fine Italian hand, Jack. You were the brains of the scheme, eh, while Frank and Cora were the hands?”

Heberdon’s vanity could scarcely let this pass unchallenged. “The best scheme in the world wouldn’t be much good without the nerve to carry it out,” he remarked.

Alcorne laughed disagreeably. “Never fail to rise, do you, Frank?”

He sat down and jumped up again; lit a cigarette and immediately tossed it away. He tried to smile at them and succeeded only in glaring, for his facial muscles were under no better control than his vocal cords. It was clear that he wished to ingratiate himself though he could not always restrain that malicious tongue of his. Finally he blurted out the object of his visit.

“This comes in damn lucky for me. I’m broke. Absolutely cleaned out!”

Heberdon sneered. John Blighton grimly stroked his clean-shaven upper lip.

“I’ve got to have a couple of thou or go under,” announced Alcorne.

“Got to?” said John Blighton with ominous quietness. The prudent Heberdon perceived that he had much better leave this matter to the old

man.

“Debts of honour,” explained Alcorne flippantly.

“Aren’t you taking a good deal for granted?” murmured Blighton.

“It’s always been understood, hasn’t it, that when some of us were flush and one was broke, we shared?”

“I’d share my last penny with a pal for necessities,” said Blighton. “But gambling debts are something else again.”

“Gambling is a necessity to me,” remarked Alcorne with his flip and crazy laugh.

The old man made no reply, but the vein in his forehead swelled.

The hot steam in Alcorne’s brain rendered him blind and fatuous. “Well, what are you going to do?” he wanted to know. “I don’t care whether it’s a joint loan or separate.”

“And what if we refuse?” asked Blighton, still more quietly.

Alcorne’s cracked laugh rang out again. “Oh, you won’t do that! I know too much about you!”

There was a silence in the little room. A dark flush overspread the old man’s face. It became terrible to see. Cora and Heberdon paled with concern, though the cause of it still preserved his impudent air. Finally the old man began to speak.

“Drugged and diseased as you are,” he said, “I am astonished that you have so far forgot yourself as to threaten me! No man ever did that, by Heaven, and got away with it!” He slowly doubled his great fist.

“Dad, not here!” cried Cora sharply. “Frank, stop him!”

Heberdon was not anxious to interfere. Nevertheless, he moved between the two men. Alcorne, suddenly abject, retreated to the door.

“Aw, I didn’t mean anything,” he whined. “Can’t you take a joke, Jack?”

“Jack nothing!” cried the old man. “Out of my house, you cur!”

Alcorne turned and fled precipitately down the stairs. At the foot he turned and cried back in a voice as shrill as a hysterical woman:

“You’ll be sorry for this, Blighton! I’ll get square with you! You know I can, don’t you? Just you wait!”

The front door slammed.

“Will he go to the police?” asked Cora, aghast.

“Don’t you believe it,” answered the old man coolly. “He’s waiting out there now for somebody to ask him to come back.”

It was true they heard no sound of the motor starting.

“But hadn’t we better keep him here at least until he comes to his senses?” Cora suggested anxiously.

“Let him go!” said Blighton harshly. “He will not go to the police. He couldn’t put me behind the bars without landing there himself. And to a dope like him it would be worse than death to be deprived of his drug.”

“But he’ll make trouble for us somehow,” persisted Cora.

“I dare say,” said Blighton coolly. “He is ingenious in deviltry. But I dare say, too, that we can stand it.”

## Chapter XVII

### ALCORNE GETS SQUARE

NEXT morning Heberdon awoke to another sickening reaction—not so violent as on the former occasion, for the small doses of the drug that he was taking no longer had quite the same power over him, but terrifying enough in good sooth.

“What am I coming to?” he asked himself with a flash of panic-stricken insight. He could not face that question, and his hand was drawn longingly toward another of the little white papers. But with an expiring effort of the will he refrained from opening it. He could not bring himself to destroy the destroyer, though; he shut the book and put it back on its stand. Setting himself up as well as he could with several cups of black coffee—food was hateful to him—he went to the office.

His mind was in a state of frantic confusion. His villainous scheme had succeeded beyond his hopes, but he dared not go on with it now. His lips burned with the recollection of Cora’s kisses. He could neither resolve to give her up nor to go through the marriage ceremony as planned. At the recollection of the terrible sight of John Blighton in anger he turned cold all over.

“He wouldn’t shoot me,” he thought. “He’d strangle me with those hands! Strong as a vice! I’d be as helpless as a rag in them!”

Over and over Heberdon’s thoughts pursued the same round: “I’ll postpone the marriage. I’ll never see her again. I’ve got the money all right. I’ll just drop out of sight. I’ve got to drop all that or God knows where I’ll end! . . . I’ll stick to Ida and her lot. That’s safety . . . I’ll try to hurry up the South American trip . . . I’ll get Ida to marry me at once. . . . That will save me! . . . Oh, God! I can’t give Cora up! I can’t . . . I can’t!”

To be sure there was another way out; that was to keep faith with Cora; marry her, and run straight. But never for a moment would Heberdon consider that. He shivered at the thought of the amused contempt of his respectable and powerful relatives. In short, he condemned himself to suffer all the torments of the egoist who insists on having his cake and eating it, too; on playing without paying. It can’t be done.

Heberdon had another cause for fear, when he thought of it, in Alcorne. “He’s going to make trouble. . . . He has a special grudge against me. He

knows, too, that I got half, or more than half of the coin. He'll try to bleed me. . . . Another reason for staying away from Greenhill Gardens. Alcorne can't reach me except through them. . . . But I can't give her up! . . . I can't!"

During the course of the morning Judge Palliser sent for him. He wanted to talk over the details of the proposed South American trip. The harassed Heberdon was a good deal reassured by this talk. Street railways, power plants, underwriting securities, legal business; here was something safe and solid to tie up to. The judge was charmed by his nephew's unwonted complaisance and anxiety to please.

Heberdon came away from his office saying to himself: "That settles it! My mind is made up now. Safe and sane financing for mine. . . . I'll write Cora a note putting off the date to-morrow. . . . And I'll never see her again!"

But he didn't really mean it.

He applied himself to studying the Managuayan contracts, but was a little discomposed by the refusal of the lines of typewriting to run straight across the pages. Only by holding one eye closed could he make any sense of it.

Later an office boy entered his room to announce that a man wanted to see him.

"What name?" asked Heberdon.

"Wouldn't give his name. Just said a personal friend."

"What did he want to see me about?"

"A personal matter, he said."

"What sort of looking man?"

"Funny-looking guy. Sporty clothes. Squeaky voice. Can't make his eyes behave. One rolls up in his head while the other's looking straight at you."

No mistaking this description. Heberdon's heart stood still. He stared at the boy in incredulous horror. Alcorne here! How could it have happened? For the moment he was unable to find his voice. Then he asked huskily:

"Whom did he ask for?"

"Just said he wanted to see a fellow who worked here; young fellow, about thirty, he said: slender, pale-faced, wears glasses; has a scornful-like look, and dresses elegant and quiet. So I says, 'You mean our Mr. Heberdon.'"

"You told him my name?" cried Heberdon.

"How was I to know?" protested the scared boy.

The room seemed to whirl around Heberdon. He was unable to think coherently. Words came flowing out of his mouth involuntarily.

“Tell him I’m out.”

The boy left the room.

Heberdon pressed his bursting head between his hands. What was he to do? No answer was forthcoming. His head seemed to be full of broken gears that wouldn’t mesh. Alcorn had discovered his secret! The ruthless, poisonous maniac had him in his power! What was there for it but instant flight? But flight would mean letting go forever of solidity, of respectability, of safety. “I’d sink! I’d sink, alone!” Heberdon cried to himself in a panic. How he longed for the contents of one of the little white papers to bring at least a semblance of order out of the chaos in his brain.

He became aware that the boy had returned to the room, and was staring at him open-mouthed.

“What do you want now?” he asked sharply.

“When I told the fellow you were out he asked to see Judge Palliser. Thought I better tell you first.”

Heberdon shivered in his very soul. He gave up. “Show him in here,” he said in a muffled voice.

“What’ll I tell him?” asked the boy.

“Tell him, oh, tell him anything you like!” said Heberdon desperately. “Tell him you found me in one of the other offices.”

Heberdon got up and looked out of the windows. He heard Alcorn enter, but could not immediately bring himself to turn around. Without looking at the man he was hatefully aware of every detail of his appearance—the elegantly careless clothes, the fixed sneer, the fidgety movements, the rolling eye. He heard Alcorn plump himself into a chair.

“Well, Frank,” he said with his hateful cackling laugh, “you do yourself pretty well, it seems.”

Heberdon turned, and stole a little glance at him sitting there smirking in his gratified malice. His thought was, “If I could stop his breath what a good job it would be for all!”

Alcorn went on: “I thought something like this would be about your style. The hold-up game is just a little side line with you, eh?”

“For God’s sake! Anybody may come in!” said Heberdon hoarsely.

Alcorn laughed. “I suppose you’re wondering how I came to drop in on you. Well, since you wouldn’t take me into your confidence I had to do a little detective work myself. Put up my car and traileed you into town last

night. Followed you to your rooms. This morning I actually put myself to the inconvenience of getting up at eight o'clock so that I could watch your door. Followed you down here, and then went and had some breakfast. Simple, eh?"

Heberdon had returned to his chair. He played abstractedly with the objects on his desk. "He has me at his mercy," he was thinking. "He'll take every cent I've got—and everything I may win in future! He'll make me do whatever he wants—that vile beast! . . . My life will be a hell on earth! I've got to kill him. . . ."

"I called to remind you of that little loan you promised me," said Alcorne with a leer.

Heberdon was too far done to even make believe to chaff with the man. "How much?" he asked dully.

"Why, Frank, what a poor memory you've got! And you a lawyer. Five thousand was the figure named. Some men might double it after the treatment I received, but I've got a generous nature. Five thousand will satisfy me."

Even the unblushing effrontery could not rouse Heberdon. "I haven't it by me," he muttered.

"Your check book," suggested Alcorne.

"I've no such sum in the bank."

"Oh, well, you've got it snugly salted down somewhere. I'll give you a chance to get it, and I'll come back for it this afternoon."

Heberdon made no answer. He was thinking, "I must kill him quickly before my resolution fails me."

"I said I'd come back for it this afternoon," Alcorne repeated.

"No, don't come here," said Heberdon, bestirring himself. "It isn't safe. I'll bring it to you."

"Just as you say. Where?"

Heberdon thought, "His room! . . . That place is deserted upstairs during the day. . . . That poniard I bought for a curiosity. It has a point like a needle! . . . Nobody has seen it in my possession!"

"Come to! Come to!" broke in Alcorne. "Where will I wait for you?"

Heberdon moistened his lips. "Suppose we say your room? A little after five."

"Right-o!" said Alcorne. The man was almost good-natured, he was so sure of his power. "Well, I don't want to keep you from your work," he added mockingly. He rose. "So-long, Frank, old man. See you later."

Heberdon remained sunk in his chair, staring before him with eyes that saw nothing.

“So many people go in and out of the restaurant at Mellish’s I’d never be noticed. . . . I’ll enter by the side door as if I was going up to the ladies’ section. And then I’ll simply keep on up the stairs. The upper floors are sure to be deserted. . . . No bachelor is ever in his room at five. I’ll hand him the money in loose bills. He’ll stoop over to count it, and that will expose his back. I must look up an anatomical chart and locate the exact position of the heart from behind. . . . There mustn’t be any slip-up. My hand mustn’t tremble. . . . A little shot of coke will put me in shape for it. . . . Then never again! If it hadn’t been for that devil I would never have known the damn stuff! But does a man cry out when he’s struck to the heart? How can I be sure of that? . . . There must be no cry——

“When he’s found dead will his visit to this office come out? . . . Not likely. He wouldn’t tell any of his friends he was coming here. . . . I don’t believe he has any friends. Only barroom cronies. But a description of the dead man would be published, a photograph maybe. . . . What if they should get on to something here? . . . No chance! A dead man’s eyes don’t roll! . . .

“I suppose I looked queer to the boy who showed him in. He may talk to the others. Oh, what’s the gossip of office boys anyhow? With Alcorne dead there’s nothing to prove any connection between Frank Heberdon and that life. . . . Just the same, I’d better see the boy—and sort of remove that impression. . . . I’ll account for Alcorne’s visit somehow.

“I’ll slip home for a pick-me-up—I’ll be able to think more clearly then. . . .”

Heberdon returned to the office after lunch with a pleasant heat inside his head. He seemed to himself to be perfectly self-possessed, his brain working with remarkable clearness. A difficulty had but to present itself to be solved. He did not make the mistake of calling the boy to speak to him about Alcorne; that would have seemed to lend too much importance to the incident. But when the boy came in on another errand, he remarked carelessly:

“That was a queer customer you showed in this morning, Joe.”

The boy grinned.

“I expect I pretty well jumped down your throat when you told me you had given him my name.”

“You looked funny,” confessed the boy. “Like as if he was the avenger on your trail.”

Heberdon laughed heartily. "Avenger! Your brain has been turned by the movies, Joe! That poor fellow is only a barroom acquaintance. Picked me up one night when I'd had a bit too much. Naturally I didn't want him to know who I was. He wanted to make a touch, of course."

"Well, if he comes again I'll know what to do," observed the boy.

"Oh, it really doesn't matter," said Heberdon, turning to his desk with an indifferent air. "He will never come here again!" he thought.

Heberdon did not remain at the office long. It was impossible for him even to make a feint of working. He was still tormented by that question: "When a man is struck to the heart does he have time to cry out?"

He went to the main public library and looked up what he could find under the headings of "Heart," "Wounds," etcetera. The information was not conclusive. He gathered that a man was likely to grunt or gasp when he received a mortal blow. He could not be sure.

He proceeded to his rooms, and out of a piece of wire contrived a clip for the poniard similar to the clips attached to fountain pens. This was to suspend the weapon inside his coat on the left-hand side, convenient to the grasp of his right hand.

But, after all, he could not make up his mind to use the weapon.

"I have to get down three flights of stairs. . . . A cry would spoil everything. My bare hands would be better. . . . When he stoops over to count the money I could take his windpipe from behind. If I stopped his wind there would be no cry. . . . And no blood! My hands are strong—They would be strong as steel at that moment!"

Once Heberdon had tried to strangle a cat. He remembered the creature's frantic struggle. It had escaped. And a cat weighs perhaps a thirtieth part of a man. But a cat is a cat! A man far gone like Alcorn has no such steely sinews. . . . He couldn't make up his mind one way or the other. In the end he decided to take the poniard anyhow, and leave it to the inspiration of the moment how to act.

At ten minutes past five Heberdon was on the way to keep his appointment in a taxi he had picked up in the street. He had the five thousand with him. He did not have himself carried direct to Mellish's, but named a restaurant a few doors away. Making believe to enter the place, he turned around as soon as the man had gone, and proceeded to his real destination. He was shaking as if with an ague, his teeth chattering like castanets—but in his change pocket was the last little folded paper. He delayed taking the contents until the final moment, for it was in the first onrush of the intoxication that he felt invincible and king-like.

On the second-story landing of the old chophouse he stopped and snuffed up the contents of the little paper. He waited with a hand on the rail until the fire began to mount in his brain. Then he went on up with his heart waxing big in his breast.

“It would take a better man than Alcorne to stand up to me now! . . . My nerve is perfect. I’m just as calm as if I was going to bed. . . . I’ll use my bare hand instead of the poniard. . . . More satisfaction!”

Alcorne’s room was on the top floor in the front. Heberdon knocked on the door with a firm knuckle. “Little does he think what’s waiting for him!” he muttered to himself.

Alcorne flung the door open with a “Hallo, Frank!” and stood aside for Heberdon to enter. Heberdon walked in with a bit of a strut. As he passed Alcorne he perceived behind him another man, a gross creature with an evil-grinning face. Heberdon stopped short, and all his superb courage ran out of him like water out of a burst paper bag.

Alcorne, at the sight of the alteration in his face, laughed aloud. “This is my friend, Pete Dickey,” he said. “Pete, meet Mr. Strathearn. You had a funny look in your eye, Frank, when you said you were coming here, so I thought I better have a witness present. No offence, I hope.”

The waning effect of the cocaine was just sufficient to enable Heberdon to keep his face before the two. He handed over the money.

“You’ll find that all right,” he said.

He got out of the room as quickly as possible, notwithstanding Alcorne’s jocular, derisive cries to have something before he went. He did not get out too soon. Something in his breast was rising higher and higher. On the stairs it broke. The tears gushed from his eyes, and like a hysterical woman he stuffed his handkerchief in his mouth to stifle his sobs. One pays for the courage of cocaine.

Reaching the streets he hurried along with his head down. His feet took him instinctively in the direction of the Union Central Station for no reason but that it was his habit to take the five-forty to Marchmont on Tuesday evenings.

## Chapter XVIII

### THE WEDDING PARTY

HEBERDON spent a ghastly night tossing on his bed at the Pallisers'. The failure of his attempt upon Alcorne, the fear of what Alcorne would do next, and the thought of Cora combined almost drove him insane. And worse than the torment of his thoughts was the hunger for cocaine that would not let a nerve of his body rest. That unappeasable craving made the night a hundred years long.

By rising early and taking a train before breakfast the haggard, yellow, shaken creature contrived to avoid the members of the household. On reaching town his first act was to hurry to his rooms, and get the prescription out of the book where he had hidden it. He called a taxicab and ordered the driver to take him to the address given. Once he was headed toward the place his jumping nerves quieted a little.

"Of course, I'd never let myself get in the habit," he thought. "But I've got to have it until I can get Alcorne out of my way. . . . I'd go insane without it. . . . That may take a little time now, because he's suspicious. I've got to lay my plans carefully. I'll be cautious about the dope, too. I'll get it down on a system. . . . Neither too much nor too little. Once my mind is easy I can stop."

The address proved to be in a forgotten little street on the ragged eastern edge of the island. It was a grimy drugstore with a furtive air. The fly-specked stock-in-trade had the look of being set out merely as a stage effect, properties of a show that had been some seasons on the road. As a matter of fact the trade of the place was limited to two or three commodities which may not easily be procured elsewhere. The proprietor had the yellowed, spoiled look of an habitual partaker of his own wares.

He welcomed Heberdon as a prosperous new customer, with a grin that was intended to be ingratiating, but was merely horrible. Having secured a customer in this business he probably did not lose him often until death intervened.

Heberdon was not much impressed by the horror of the place, nor its proprietor. He handed over his prescription with a hand trembling in anxiety. Suppose the man refused! But there was no danger, really. The prescription supplied a sufficient credential. The "druggist" made haste to fill it.

Heberdon had the drug put up in slightly stronger doses; he was already becoming wise to its use. The price charged for the powders staggered him—but it had to be paid, of course.

As the druggist showed him out he said with oily obsequiousness: “Next time you come, if you don’t mind, leave your taxi at the corner. It is so conspicuous in this quiet little street!”

Safe in the taxi again Heberdon made haste to take one of the powders. He fell back in the seat with a groan of relief. His ghastly vigil was over. The immediate effect of the drug was to resolve him to meet Cora that afternoon as arranged, and go through with his plans.

“I’ve got to have her! . . . I’ve got to have her! Whatever happens! . . . Hell, what’s the use of worrying! I can lie out of anything!”

In the exciting but somewhat muzzy state of mind induced by cocaine, it was easy not to dwell on unpleasant things. Heberdon put away the thought of Alcorne for the time being and gave himself up to dreams of Cora. He tried to feel like a man on his wedding day—but it was not an entire success. In the midst of his transports he would often become conscious of a nagging feeling of unreality. In other words, there was plenty of fizz to his champagne, but not much kick in it. His state of mind was a good deal like fireworks, which burst out gorgeously, but suddenly end in charred sticks.

When the effect of the dose began to wear off he took another without a qualm.

“The thing is to know how to control this thing. Neither too much nor too little. . . . I’m getting it down fine! . . . Cocaine won’t do you any harm if you keep it in its place!”

There was a good deal to be done in respect to his preparations and he did not trouble the office much that day. But he had become a person of more consideration since the South American scheme had been bruited, and there was none to question his comings and goings. He engaged a charming little suite at the Madagascar for “Frank Strathearn and wife,” and had it filled with flowers. From the clerk at the desk he obtained the address of a clergyman rather well known in connection with Bohemian marriages, and calling upon him, made a date for five-thirty that afternoon. He bought a wedding ring. The legal implications of what he was about to do never troubled him. That was another of the things that he simply chose not to think about.

Shortly before five he finally departed from the office to meet Cora. She was already waiting for him in the rear corridor of the Madagascar, that fashionable place of rendezvous. She looked very lovely and like a bride

dressed for going away, in blue foulard. The hat to-day was not one of the vivid affairs she usually affected, but had a modest droop to the brim more befitting the occasion. Her face was pale and her eyes big with a distress she could not hide.

“What’s the matter?” asked Heberdon sharply.

“Nothing special,” she said, forcing a smile, “just the agitation natural to the occasion . . . . Oh, Frank! . . .”

The involuntary appeal did not touch his heart; it annoyed him. He saw that there *was* something special the matter.

“Something has happened,” he said, “I insist on knowing!”

“Dick Alcorne has been here,” she said simply.

A cold chill struck to Heberdon’s soul, and for a moment the cocaine stopped effervescing in his brain.

“Dick Alcorne!” he echoed a little stupidly. “How did he come here? Was it just a chance meeting?”

“I don’t know. I think perhaps he followed me here.”

Heberdon looked nervously up and down the corridor.

“Oh, he’s gone now.”

Heberdon studied Cora sharply. There was distress in her face, but nothing to indicate any change of feeling toward him. Nevertheless, he could scarcely bring himself to put the question.

“What—what did Alcorne say to you?”

“Oh, the usual thing. I am always so ashamed to be seen in public with him!”

“The usual thing?”

“Don’t you know? It’s what he calls making love.” She shivered delicately. “I can’t stop him. It’s impossible to penetrate his vanity.”

Heberdon moistened his lips. “Did he—did he say anything about me?”

She shook her head.

He breathed more freely. “Well, come on,” he said. “We’d better walk a way. We’ll stroll down the block to Eighth Avenue to make certain we’re not being followed.”

She nodded and rose.

During their walk down the long block they scarcely spoke. Their constraint was not unnatural under the circumstances. Cora occasionally touched Heberdon’s arm as if to reassure herself. With the slightest encouragement she would have taken it boldly, but this would have

affronted Heberdon's sense of propriety, and she guessed it from his slight frown. He walked with his head over his shoulder, more like a fleeing thief than a prospective bridegroom. But he was able to assure himself without doubt that they were not being followed. In that quiet block of respectable dwellings there were few pedestrians besides themselves. At Eighth Avenue they picked up a taxicab and had themselves carried downtown to the Municipal Buildings. They mounted to the marriage license bureau and took their places among all the little Hebrew, Italian, and nondescript couples bound on the same business that they were. Cora was alarmed by their frank endearments. But they thought, no doubt, since they were there, and since everybody knew what they were there for, they might as well spoon while they waited.

A settled depression rested on Cora. It piqued Heberdon's vanity, and his frown deepened. She did her best to rouse herself.

"Forgive me," she murmured. "But it seems so sordid; so different from what I had imagined. I'll be all right later."

The license was issued to Frank Strathearn and Cora Blighton. With the document in Frank's pocket they taxied back uptown. Cora ever grew paler and more quiet. The parsonage was a modest dwelling in the Thirties. As the cab came to a stop before the door Cora laid a hand on Heberdon's arm.

"Frank, I can't help it," she said imploringly. "I must speak! I feel that we should not enter here. Some danger awaits us. All day I have simply been crushed by a premonition of evil. Let us wait for another day, dearest. I shall not love you any less!"

Heberdon was highly incensed by this "woman's nonsense," as he termed it to himself, but he had the grace to try to conceal his feelings.

"It's too late to turn back now," he told her. "You'd feel just the same another day. I suppose it's natural. When we get it over with, you'll be all right."

She bowed her head in submission.

They crossed the sidewalk and mounted the steps. The bored and none-too-tidy maid who opened the door scarcely deigned to look at them. Like the clerks in the license bureau she had the air of one sated with the foolish spectacle of matrimony.

"What names?" she asked listlessly.

"Strathearn."

She closed the door. "Your friend is waiting in the reception room," she said listlessly. "I'll tell Mr. Ainslie you're here."

“My friend!” echoed Heberdon blankly. A horrid instinct told him who it was without looking. He involuntarily turned to escape. But the reception room was separated from the hall by an archway only, and the occupant of the room had already perceived them. It was Alcorne, sitting there, grinning.

Heberdon’s clutch on reality slipped. His head whirled insanely. He felt as if he were falling through a void. He forgot all about Cora.

She, seeing the evidences of confusion in her lover’s face, took command of the situation. “We’ll have to go through with it,” she whispered swiftly to Heberdon. “After all, it’s no affair of his.”

She walked with a cool and majestic air into the reception room, and Heberdon perforce had to follow.

Alcorne stood up. That unchanging grin may have meant anything or nothing, a snarl or a benediction. His eyes rolled wildly. He stuffed his hands in his pockets to conceal their trembling.

“Well, I guess you’re surprised to see me,” he said in his cracked and uncertain voice.

“Naturally,” said Cora coldly. “If we had wanted you to be present we would have invited you.”

Heberdon thought, “Damn the girl, she’s giving everything away!” He was quite incapable himself, though, of shouting the conversation in what he considered the proper direction.

Cora’s rebuke never reached Alcorne, who seemed to be filled with a malicious glee, though one could not be sure. “When I left you in the Madagascar a while ago,” he said to her, “I happened to glance at the register on my way out, and there I saw as plain as a pikestaff, ‘Frank Strathearn and wife.’ ‘Hello!’ says I, ‘what’s our young Frank up to?’ Pointing to the entry I says to the clerk, ‘There’s a friend of mine; is he in?’ ‘Hasn’t come yet,’ said the clerk. ‘He’s getting married.’ ‘How do you know?’ I asked. ‘Asked me for the name of a parson.’ ‘Indeed!’ says I. Well, to make a long story short, I got the name of the parson from him, and came around here and found out what hour you were expected. And here I am. If you want to keep these things to yourself you’ll have to cover your tracks a great deal better.”

Heberdon was aghast at his own folly. How, when he had felt so sure of himself, had he come to leave so wide open a trail?

“Well, now you’ve enjoyed your little triumph,” said Cora bitterly, “if you have any sense of decency remaining I hope you’ll go.”

This shot told. Alcorne snarled; there was no doubt of its being a snarl. “I don’t know that I’m so dead to a sense of decency at that! And I don’t

intend to go until you two go—which won't be long. After all, Jack Blighton is my oldest friend, and you're his daughter. I'm not going to let any slick guy put up an ugly job on you while I'm able to prevent it."

Cora's lip curled.

Alcorne addressed Heberdon peremptorily. "Show me your license!"

Cora's eye flashed. "How dare you!" she cried. She turned to Heberdon to forbid him. Heberdon, however, had no intention of obeying.

"He's marrying you under an assumed name," said Alcorne.

"You can't frighten me with that," retorted Cora. "We all take what names we choose. I'm marrying the man and not his name."

"That's all right," said Alcorne with one of his uncanny flashes of perspicacity, "but you don't even know what his right name is."

Cora winced under this and lowered her head.

"Four nights a week he moves in the highest society!" Alcorne continued triumphantly, "and the other three he lowers himself by associating with us!"

Cora's head went up and she managed to laugh.

Alcorne's face turned dark. "Wait a bit before you laugh! I haven't begun to tell all I know! I called on him to-day at his office. Swell offices; one of the biggest legal firms in town!"

Cora glanced sidewise at Heberdon, but there was no help to be had there. So she fought her own battle. "So much the better!" she said calmly.

"So much the better, eh?" snarled Alcorne. "He's engaged to a society girl. Is that so much the better?"

"It's a lie!" said Cora instantly.

"Oh, is it?" said Alcorne. "I thought you'd say that, so I went to the trouble of looking up the announcement in the papers. I have the clipping here."

Cora's pride would not permit her to ask for the clipping or to put out her hand for it. But her pride could not conceal the torments she was suffering.

"On second thoughts I'm not going to show it to you," said Alcorne, putting the slip of paper back in his pocket. "Because knowledge is power, and I mean to keep my power."

Cora looked up with a ray of hope in her eyes. Perhaps, after all, the man was bluffing.

"Oh, you don't need to read the clipping in order to be satisfied of the truth of what I say," sneered Alcorne. "Look at your young man."

She looked and she could not but see the terror and blank confusion in Heberdon's face. It was significant enough. Cora turned suddenly faint. She put her hand out to the back of a chair for support.

"Now, who's got a sense of decency?" cried Alcorne.

"It isn't true! It isn't true!" she murmured. "Frank, why don't you say something?"

Heberdon's brain was still whirling dizzily with these thoughts going round in it:

"Why don't I say something? . . . Why do I stand here and let him put it all over me? Why don't I brazen it out? . . . She'd rather believe him than me. . . . What's the matter with me? Oh, God! If I only had a shot of cocaine! . . ."

Half a dozen things to say occurred to him at once, and in his confusion he chose the worst one.

"A man's name is anything he wants to call himself," he stammered, echoing Cora. "You are marrying me, not my name."

"Oh, then, it *is* true!" cried Cora.

He saw his mistake. "Not about the engagement," he said. "I'm not engaged to any woman but you!"

Alcorne whistled a little tune, and significantly tapped the pocket that contained the clipping.

Heberdon made another mistake. He admitted the clipping. "They fixed that up among themselves," he said. "I broke it off." He wanted to add, "When I met you," but his confused brain could not remember whether the announcement had appeared before or after he became acquainted with Cora.

"When?" demanded Alcorne, sneering.

"As soon as I read it," said Heberdon. "It was published without my knowledge."

"Modest and gallant gentleman!" said Alcorne. "No denial appeared in the papers," he added. "I looked."

"They don't publish denials," rejoined Heberdon. He was becoming a little encouraged from the glib sound of his own lies. "That's to save the girl's face. They just allow it to be forgotten."

"Oh, what does all this matter?" said Cora proudly and simply. "Do you love me, Frank?"

Heberdon saw the spasm of pain that crossed Alcorne's face, and one thought filled him to the exclusion of every other. "Get square! Get square!"

Marry her and put him on the toaster!”

So that it was with a very fair imitation of ardour that he cried: “Can you doubt it, Cora? You are the only woman in the world for me! If you abandon me I’ll go to the dogs!”

She raised her head. “Very well,” she said. “I’ll marry you, anyhow!”

“You fool!” cried Alcorne, beside himself. “You are committing suicide! Your father shall know of this! I’ll call him up!”

“We’ll be married before you could get him on the wire,” she said coldly.

“I’ll tell the parson all the circumstances. He would not dare marry you!”

“Then we’ll go to another!”

They heard a door close above, and a step on the stairs. Heberdon began to be able to smile at Alcorne now. But his feeling of triumph was very short-lived. Alcorne suddenly pulled himself in.

“Frank has forgotten something,” he said quietly.

“What’s that?” said Heberdon in quite a firm voice.

“Forgot to ask my permission,” said Alcorne, with his eyes rolling extraordinarily.

Cora stared at him indignantly.

“No, I haven’t lost my mind,” said Alcorne, with restored insolence. “Frank is my little bondman, my manservant, my slave. Frank has to do everything I tell him to, and well he knows it! If I wanted him to, he would have to get down on his marrow bones on the carpet here and wipe the dust off my shoes. Isn’t it so, Frank?”

Heberdon gulped. At that moment the clergyman entered the room in his decent black habit. He smiled his unmeaning professional smile and bobbed his head to each.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting,” he said. “I had a hospital visit this afternoon, and had to change my clothes. Beautiful weather, isn’t it? Happy is the bride the sun shines on!”

The stock remark was hardly appropriate to the strained atmosphere of the room, but the speaker could hardly be blamed for that.

“Which is the lucky man?” he asked, glancing from Alcorne to Heberdon.

Cora indicated the latter.

The clergyman sat down at his desk. “May I see your license, sir?”

Alcorne whispered to Heberdon, "Remember, I forbid this marriage!"

A light suddenly broke in Heberdon's foggy brain. "Why, of course I can't marry her! . . . If Alcorne is a witness I'd have to stick to her!"

He began to whisper stutteringly to Cora: "Hadn't we better put it off? I can't dare to marry you under an assumed name now. I want to get a new license."

"It doesn't make the least difference," she whispered back.

"But Alcorne being here," Heberdon went on desperately. "It spoils everything. Let's call it off for to-day."

She looked at him in astonishment. A fine sweat had broken out on his forehead; his eyes were sick with fear. No woman could fail to read those signs. Cora's love and her pride together received a mortal blow. But she gave little sign of it. Without an instant's pause she turned to the minister, saying:

"We are sorry to have troubled you, sir, but certain circumstances have forced us to change our plans. Good afternoon."

Before the surprised clergyman could focus his glasses she was out of the room.

Alcorne said, with his matchless effrontery: "But we mustn't forget your honorarium, sir. Allow me."

He then laid a bill on the clergyman's desk.

The act was wasted on the other two. Cora was already out of the front door and the distracted Heberdon, feeling as if the heart was being dragged out of his breast, was following her, pleading:

"Cora! Wait! Wait! Let me explain. Let me go with you!"

She turned a stony face to him. "Stay where you are!" she said in a voice that rooted him to the steps.

Alcorne overtook them. "I'll see you home," he said to Cora, with a glib and confident air.

Her glance shrivelled him up, too.

"The cab is here," she said. "I will go alone."

The closing of the cab door broke the spell that held Heberdon. He ran after it insensately. A fog descended on his brain. For a while he knew nothing. He never sensed what became of Alcorne.

## *Chapter XIX*

### THE BARAGLIESI CUP

FROM this time forward Heberdon, during his waking hours, was continuously under the influence of cocaine. With the caution natural to him, he carefully regulated the doses, so as to maintain an even simmer in his brain. To be sure, there were the black and hopeless moments of awakening in the morning, but he took care to have one of the little folded papers handy to his bedside. As long as he kept himself going with it he looked all right. Though the little flames were shooting up in his brain, he still appeared the correct and punctilious young lawyer that he had always been. He still promised himself, of course, to give it up as soon as he had his present business out of hand.

Cocaine applied balm to the searing recollection of that ghastly scene at the parsonage. By dint of reassuring himself, he came to believe that there was no serious break between him and Cora.

“She loves me anyhow—she showed that clearly enough. . . . That’s all that matters. Of course, she’s sore—but I can bring her round all right when I’m ready; soon as I get Alcorne out of the way. Fortunately he didn’t give me away altogether. Of course, she may worm it out of him, but it’s not likely. She’s sorer at him than she is at me. . . . And he thinks he can do more damage by holding it over my head!”

Heberdon’s confidence, though, was not so great that he cared to present himself at No. 23 Deepdene Road. He kept away, though he hungered and thirsted for Cora more than ever. Cocaine might enable him to deceive himself during the day, but it did not prevent him from dreaming of her at night with intolerable yearning, and wakening with her name on his lips.

Everything depended on his getting Alcorne out of the way. He lived with that thought. In his sick brain the figure of Alcorne assumed monstrous proportions like a nightmare shape. Everything that frustrated him, everything that opposed him, everything that hurt him he blamed on Alcorne, of course.

Nearly every day some new scheme of murder presented itself. But each scheme developed some fatal flaw. And indeed the problem that confronted Heberdon might well have staggered a man with all his wits about him. Not

only was Alcorne on his guard, but now it would be necessary to conceal all traces of the murder for fear Cora might suspect who had done it.

“I must take things slowly,” he said to himself. “An opportunity is bound to offer if I always hold myself ready to strike. . . . I must make friends with Alcorne. . . . Not go out of my way to smooth him down, of course, or he’d surely smell a rat. But just gradually let on that I’m resigned to the situation. . . . If I could only get on a job with him, that would give me the chance.”

To Joe, the office boy, Heberdon said: “If that poor souse calls again to make a touch, better bring him in to me. The quickest way of getting rid of him is to give him half a dollar.”

Five days after the scene at the parsonage Alcorne turned up at the office with his unabashed grin. When he and Heberdon were alone he said:

“Broke again, Frank! It’s fierce, the high cost of vice!”

Heberdon shrugged with the air of one making the best of a bad job. “How much do you want?”

“The usual five thou,” replied Alcorne airily.

“I suppose I can’t help myself,” said Heberdon in a tone of bitter resignation.

“That’s the way to take it,” rejoined Alcorne, grinning.

“But at this rate I’ll soon be as broke as you are.”

“I can put you in the way of making more.”

Heberdon thought, “Mustn’t appear too eager.” Aloud he said, “I don’t fancy the last job you put up to me.”

“That’s queered now,” said Alcorne. “Old dame’s gone to the country. I’ll dope out something else. You and I will make a good team; I’ll supply the brains and you the nerve.”

Heberdon thought furiously: “Besotted fool! Cocaine has eaten what little brains you ever had!”

“I have several ideas stirring,” went on Alcorne.

“Don’t talk about them here,” interposed Heberdon quickly. “I’ll bring you the money to-night, and then we’ll have a chance.”

“Want to come to my room?” asked Alcorne, grinning.

“Doesn’t matter to me,” said Heberdon indifferently. “You can come to my place if you’d rather.”

He thought swiftly: “I might do it there. If I had some way of disposing of the body. . . . A trunk! I could start away on a journey and lose the trunk somewhere.”

But Alcorne cut in on these pleasant ruminations by saying: “Oh, make it Blaney’s at nine.”

At Blaney’s they got a little table in the garden.

Heberdon paid over the money, feeling a good deal as if he were draining his veins of their life-giving ichor. They sat talking over their schemes.

Heberdon thought: “The thing would be to get him out of town.” Aloud he said: “How about Miss Bidy O’Bieme’s necklace?”

“I told you she’d gone out of town,” said Alcorne.

“Where?”

“Narragansett Pier.”

“Why couldn’t we pull it off up there? It’s worth looking into, isn’t it?”

“In a crowded hotel? Don’t be a fool!”

Heberdon shrugged. “Well, what do you propose?”

“It ought to be something in the jewel line,” said Alcorne. “The jewel market is strong. A new fellow has come up that will buy anything we bring him. Pay a fair price, too. He’s in with some of the biggest jewellers in town.”

“What’s his name?”

Alcorne showed all his discoloured teeth. “Wouldn’t you like to know! You can leave that end of it to me, partner.”

Heberdon swallowed it because he had to.

“Now, you’re in with a lot of nabobs,” proceeded Alcorne. “You ought to know where the diamonds and pearls are to be picked up.”

“You said you’d supply the brains of the outfit,” said Heberdon. “I’m awaiting orders.”

“That’s all right,” rejoined Alcorne. “You tell me where the stuff is to be had, and I’ll tell you how to get it.”

“I’ll look around,” said Heberdon.

“All right. I’ll see the fellow that buys the stuff. Often they can put you on to good things.”

Leaving Alcorne, Heberdon thought: “He hasn’t got nerve enough to pull off the simplest stunt. I’m necessary to him. That’s where I’ll get a hold over him.”

Heberdon still made a habit of asking at the desk of the Madagascar for letters, and on the following day he was rewarded by receiving one bearing

the postmark of Greenhill Gardens. But the hand was not Cora's. He tore it open.

DEAR FRANK:

What the hell's the matter with you giving us the go-by like this? Come on out Wednesday night.

J. B.

This was almost as good as a letter from Cora. Heberdon's breast swelled with a feeling of triumph.

"She put him up to writing this. I did exactly the right thing to stay away, and not send any word. She couldn't stand it any longer. . . . I've got her going now. . . . Now, when I go back I mustn't fall all over myself to make it up—must let her feel that I know my own worth, and that she treated me damn badly."

But the poor wretch was happy in his way; that is to say, as happy as an egoist may be. There was a little song in his muzzy brain:

"Cora! Cora! Cora! I'll see her to-morrow!"

Blighton let him in, and his grim, hearty greeting was unchanged.

"This is no way to treat a pal!" he said.

Heberdon muttered something about having had to go out of town. A sense of emptiness in the house behind Blighton made his heart sink.

"Where's Cora?" he asked sharply.

"Say, I'm sorry. After I wrote you, she found she had to be out to-night," said Blighton. "Sitting up all night with a sick friend. You'll have to come out again Friday."

It was a sickening disappointment. Heberdon's vanity side-slipped and crashed. That soaring pride of his, so prone to seek altitude records, was at the same time horribly sensitive to changes of temperature.

He thought: "Blighton said, 'After I wrote you, she found she had to be out?' After she found I was coming she made up that excuse."

But the heady fumes of cocaine began to set him up. "Just a girl's bluff! . . . She put him up to writing that letter all right. She wanted to resume relations, but she didn't want me to know she made the first move. So she goes away to-night. Friday she'll be waiting here for me—Friday it will be up to me to stay away and teach her a lesson."

He didn't remain long talking to old Jack.

On Thursday Heberdon got a telephone call from Alcorne: "Meet me at Blaney's at nine to-night."

Heberdon's heart sank. Did he want more already?

Alcorne interpreted the silence aright, and his cackling laugh came over the wire. "It's not what you think," he said. "I've got it."

"Got what?"

"What we were looking for."

"I can't meet you to-night," said Heberdon. "Got to go out of town."

"Going up to see number one, eh?" sneered Alcorne.

Heberdon bit his lip in silence. "Some day you'll pay for that, with the rest," he thought.

"Make it five this afternoon, then," said Alcorne. "It'll only take a few minutes to lay it out to you."

Heberdon agreed.

Blaney's garden was deserted at this hour—and an ideal place to hatch a little conspiracy.

"I got a tip from my friend, the jewel broker," explained Alcorne. "Soon as he caught sight of me he said: 'Alcorne! Just the man I want to see. Got a job for you.' When he laid it out to me I laughed. It's a cinch—it's too easy! Like swiping chewing gum from a blind pedlar."

"Let's hear it," said Heberdon.

"Well, it appears there's a dago millionaire visiting this country just now—a celebrated collector and so on. From what my friend tells me, an eccentric sort of character; in other words, if he wasn't so rich he'd be called real crazy and put in a nuttery."

"What's his name?"

"My friend didn't tell me. If he told me, that would let him out, wouldn't it?"

"But how can we get after the dago if we don't know who he is?"

"Oh, he's not our mark; he's our principal. Listen. It appears his heart is set on getting hold of a certain gold and enamel cup that was made by a celebrated Italian artist in the seventeenth century. I forget his name—Ben something. It is called the Baragliesi Cup.

"The dago claims it was carried off from Italy by Napoleon as loot. After passing through many hands, it is now in the collection of an American millionaire. The dago offers twenty thousand for the cup, and no questions asked."

"But what good will it do him?" said Heberdon. "He couldn't show it afterward."

“We should worry about that!” laughed Alcorne. “Didn’t I tell you he was crazy? It seems he’s actuated by patriotic motives. This is one of Italy’s greatest works of art, he claims, and it’s his duty as a patriotic dago to restore it to Italy, and incidentally to his own collection. He will show it to connoisseurs in secret, he says. No Italian would give him away.”

“Where is the cup?” asked Heberdon.

“In the Severance collection, Baltimore.”

Heberdon thought: “If I can get you down to Baltimore you’ll never come back.” Aloud he said carelessly: “I’ve heard of the collection.”

“Severance himself is dead,” Alcorne went on. “He left his collection to the city, housed in a magnificent museum. It’s open to the public, but there’s half a dollar admission, which is lucky for us, for the number of folks willing to put up half a dollar for art’s sake is limited.

“The place is never crowded, and at certain hours is quite deserted. My friend tells me, too, that the attendants have become careless, because Baltimore is a law-abiding town and there has never been an attempt to rob the collection. Such stuff is too hard to dispose of, anyhow.

“The Baragliesi Cup, with other objects, is in a glass case in the centre of a small room to the right of the main hall on the ground floor. You can’t miss it. It’s ticketed. It’s in the shape of a big scallop shell in gold resting on the back of an enamelled tortoise. Besides, you’ll be supplied with a copy to slip in the place of the genuine. Only a clumsy copy, my friend says, but it will keep the eye of an attendant from being attracted to the empty space.”

“That’s all right,” said Heberdon. “But how am I going to get into the case? It doesn’t look like such a cinch to me. Am I expected to smash the glass?”

“I thought you were an expert on locks,” sneered Alcorne. “I’ll tell you this; such museum cases are all made by a certain firm. They use a lock made for them especially by the Orlick Manufacturing Company in Meriden—a small, neat, strong affair. Isn’t that enough for you?”

“I don’t know,” said Heberdon cautiously. “I’ll look into it. I thought you were going to supply the brains of the outfit.”

“Oh, if you don’t want to take it on, I can easily get somebody else,” retorted Alcorne.

Heberdon did want to take it on, but not just for the reasons that Alcorne supposed. “I’ll let you know to-morrow morning,” he said. “When do you want to pull it off?”

“The sooner the better. The dago’s in a rush to get home.”

“I only have Saturdays and Sundays off from the office. If I can fix it about the key we might go down to-morrow night. That will give us two full days. If it takes longer we’ll have to go back next week.”

“Oh, I’m not going,” said Alcorne coolly. “This is up to you.”

Heberdon’s heart sank. “I may need help,” he objected.

“Can’t help that. I never go so far from Broadway. It’s a rule I’ve made.”

“Aren’t you afraid I might lift the cup and make off with it?” asked Heberdon, grinning.

“You couldn’t dispose of it,” retorted Alcorne, grinning back.

Heberdon was afraid to say any more, for fear of betraying his secret thought. He shrugged and appeared to submit. Another scheme to get Alcorne was working in his brain.

“All right,” he said. “If I can make out with the key I’ll go down on the sleeper to-morrow night.”

“Meet me here at nine,” said Alcorne, “and I’ll pass you the fake cup.”

“How do we split?” asked Heberdon.

“You can leave that to me,” said Alcorne insolently.

Heberdon thought: “If I put up a strong kick it will lull any lingering suspicions he may have.” He said, “No, sir! I’ve got to know where I stand!”

Alcorne shrugged. “Five thousand to my friend,” he said coolly; “ten thousand to me, and five thousand to you.”

Heberdon protested with an appearance of the greatest indignation.

“What’s the difference?” said Alcorne. “I’d only take it from you later.”

They argued the matter hotly back and forth. Heberdon, for his own ends, even humbled his pride to beg Alcorne not to be so hard on him. Then he abused him. It was good acting, he told himself.

“Oh, shut your head!” said Alcorne at last. “You know you’ve got to do what I tell you, anyhow.”

This is exactly what Heberdon desired. The sullen reluctance with which he gave way deceived the other man completely.

“You might as well learn your place, Frank,” he said, with a loud laugh of gratified malice.

Heberdon let his eyes fall in seeming humility—in reality he desired to hide the glitter there. He thought: “That’s all right, my man! I’ve got *you* going!”

## Chapter XX

### HEBERDON GOES TO BALTIMORE

WHILE the estimable members of the Palliser household slept the sleep of easy consciences, Heberdon walked his room into the small hours, thinking, thinking. Under the combined stimuli of cocaine and hate, his brain was active enough, but somehow it did not seem to be able to round out conclusions. Before he worked out one plan a new one would crowd it out of his head. And everything he thought of required an accomplice.

He had no doubt but that there were other men who hated Alcorne no less than he did, but the question was how to lay his hands on one such at short notice. Morning came, and he had still not filled in the details of his plan.

In the old days, when Heberdon had been interested in crime in theory only, he had occasionally been tempted to write to the newspapers under an assumed name, giving his idea of certain cases. Through this means he had become acquainted with one Nicholson, a locksmith of tastes similar to his own.

He had finally, under an assumed name, called on the man at his little shop downtown. Each had secretly perceived a fellow spirit in the other, and the acquaintance had ripened. Without any actual confidences having been exchanged, Heberdon knew that Nicholson was a man who would stop at nothing. Nicholson's knowledge of locks was nothing less than amazing.

On returning to town next morning Heberdon's first act was to call on Nicholson in relation to a key to the exhibition cases in the Severance gallery. Not that Heberdon had the slightest intention of lifting the Baragliesi cup, but he wished to be prepared with the right thing to say to Alcorne. The relation between Heberdon and Nicholson was now such that Heberdon could put the matter up to the other man without the slightest hesitancy. Things were not tagged by their right names, of course.

"I know the style of lock well," said Nicholson. "I could get you a master key that would open any of the cases made by that company, but it would take a little time."

"How much time?" asked Heberdon.

"A week."

Heberdon considered. "I'll let you know Monday whether I'm going to need it," he said at last. "In the meantime lend me a key of the same general style. Just to show."

Nicholson, with a nod, found a little key for him. He was not a man to ask too many questions.

From Nicholson's shop Heberdon had himself carried in a taxi to Gibbon Street. He needed a further supply of cocaine before leaving town. This time, as requested, he left his cab at the corner, and made his way over the remaining distance on foot. He had an uneasy feeling that the dirty little children looked at him knowingly, and indeed they did.

The little store was known quite frankly in the neighbourhood as the "coke-shop," and Heberdon was not the only well-dressed man who patronized it.

As he approached the door it opened violently, and a figure was propelled out, landing in a heap at Heberdon's feet. The prostrate one scrambled out of the way, as if expecting a kick, and, getting to his feet, leaned against the show window and hiding his face in his arms wept noisily like a child. It was a meagre, bony little figure, and Heberdon had a glimpse of a face incredibly drawn and haggard—a middle-aged man, one would have said, had it not been for a pathetic suggestion of youth about the eyes.

Heberdon was disgusted with the exhibition. He drew himself aside and circled around the figure in order to enter the shop.

"What's the matter?" he asked the proprietor indifferently.

"Damn coke fiend had the nerve to come to me for his dope," was the indignant reply. "Threatened to report me when I wouldn't give him his filthy drug."

This display of moral indignation in one who was at that moment putting up cocaine for Heberdon might have been considered laughable—but not by Heberdon. He and the storekeeper maintained the pleasing fiction that it was a harmless drug Heberdon came for, and each was careful of the other's feelings.

When Heberdon, having pocketed his purchase, came out, the poor young wretch was still there. But his tears had ceased to flow. He was waiting for Heberdon with an agony of eagerness in his eyes.

"Mister! Mister!" he stuttered. "For God's sake, give me a little shot! Just a pick-me-up! My nerve is all gone! I'll be screaming directly. Don't refuse! Don't refuse! Just a pinch, mister, for God's sake! I've spent hundreds in there, and now the damn Shylock kicks me out when I'm broke!"

Heberdon's first impulse was to mount indignation—like the storekeeper. But he quickly reflected: "I could buy this man body and soul for a few shots of coke! I need a man." He said, "All right, I'll give it to you. Come up to the corner. I've got a cab there. Walk behind me."

The poor creature shambled after him. Around the corner they were out of sight of those who had curiously witnessed the encounter. Heberdon, with a furtive glance around, opened the cab door, and the other clambered in. They started. Heberdon handed over one of the folded papers. The young man's hands, though they trembled as if palsied, did not spill a single grain of it. He snuffed it up, and fell back in a corner of the cab with a groan of relief.

Heberdon, whose own head was humming a little, watched him through narrowed lids. He was not thinking, "I may come to this," but, "I can say anything I like to this fellow; a man as far gone as this can't afford to have any moral scruples."

By and by the young fellow opened his eyes and sat up. There was a startling change in his expression. He looked almost rational now. He had dropped years. A slightly filmy quality to his gaze was all that revealed his abnormal state.

"I'm all right now," he murmured. "You can put me out."

"Wait a minute," said Heberdon. "What you going to do?"

"Maybe I can get a job dish washing somewhere. If you'd give me another shot to keep me going till night."

He hazarded this clearly without any hope of getting it. But Heberdon handed him over another little paper. The youth took it with a strange look, and pocketed it as one might stow a gold piece. He did not thank Heberdon.

"A pretty poor life, eh?" said Heberdon.

The other shrugged apathetically. "I've quit worrying."

"Any home?"

A shake of the head. "The Nonpareil House when I've got two bits for a bed."

"How old are you?" asked Heberdon curiously.

"Twenty."

"Any folks?"

Another shake of the head.

"How would you like to work for me?" asked Heberdon carelessly.

The youth looked at him quickly. "What at?"

“Anything I told you,” said Heberdon, with a hard glance that was significant of the nature of the work.

But the youth had no idea of questioning it. He began to tremble.

“Would you—— Would you——” he stammered.

“As much as you wanted,” said Heberdon coolly. “So it didn’t paralyze you.”

A terrible eagerness appeared in the young man’s eyes. “I’d do anything—anything!” he stuttered in an abasement dreadful to see. “Only try me!”

“Oh, it isn’t much,” said Heberdon. “I’ve got a little job to pull off down in Baltimore. Your part would be simple.”

“Only try me!” implored the young man, unconsciously clasping his hands. “I’d serve you well!”

Heberdon studied him. It was clear that the game of life was too much for him, and all he asked was to be taken care of. Heberdon thought: “If I keep the stuff in my own hands and dole it out he’ll be as meek as a lamb.” He said: “All right. No pay. But I’ll keep you.”

This was like paradise to the outcast. Nothing to think about and all the coke he wanted.

“You mean it? On the level?” he murmured.

“What I’ve given you will keep you going till evening,” said Heberdon. “Meet me at five-thirty in the Southern Terminal, in front of the ticket offices. I’ll give you more then, and tell you about leaving to-night.”

The young man nodded eagerly. One could see that he scarcely dared credit his good fortune. Little doubt but that he would be at the meeting place. Heberdon stopped the cab and signed to him to get out.

“By the way,” said Heberdon, “what’s your name?”

The other looked uneasy. “They call me anything they’ve a mind to,” he said.

“I’ll call you Johnson,” said Heberdon. “You call me Mr. Smith.”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Smith.”

“I suppose you’ve got to eat,” said Heberdon.

He gave him half a dollar—enough for food, but not enough for dope—and drove on in high satisfaction. His plan was rounding into shape now.

That afternoon he approached the station in no little anxiety—his plan was complete, and if Johnson failed him—— But he was there. Indeed, he had the look of having been there for hours. The station was no doubt as good as any place for him to sit and dream. The craving was coming on him

again. His look of eagerness at the sight of Heberdon was very gratifying to that gentleman.

Heberdon passed him another dose, and Johnson, with the skill resulting from long practice, took it in the crowded station there without betraying what he was doing. Heberdon glanced him over critically. His linen was dirty, and his suit, though whole, looked as if it had been slept in many a night.

“I suppose you’ll have to have new clothes,” Heberdon said. “Come on, before the stores close. Walk behind me.”

Johnson followed him like a dog. New clothes meant nothing in particular to him. There was only one thing could excite him.

When the outfit was bought, Heberdon gave him money for his supper and sent him back to the station. “The train leaves at half-past twelve to-night. You had better be waiting from ten o’clock on, as I don’t know when I’ll get there. Don’t recognize me unless I speak to you first. If anybody is with me I’ll make out to get on the train and come back after you.”

After his own luxurious dinner at the Madagascar, Heberdon wrote an affectionate letter to Ida, bewailing the fact that business would prevent him coming up to Marchmont for the week-end. It was his old case, he said, which was at last approaching a settlement. He’d be up Monday instead.

Later, Heberdon had himself carried to Blaney’s to meet Alcorne, as agreed. At sight of Alcorne propped against the mahogany, Heberdon put on a harassed air.

“Well, how goes it, Frank?” cried Alcorne, with the leering joviality that made no pretence of concealing his insolence.

“Bad,” said Heberdon.

“What’s the matter?” demanded the other, scowling.

“I’m sick!”

“Sick! Huh! Cold feet, I guess.”

“No—sciatica,” and Heberdon put a hand to the small of his back.

Alcorne scowled at him, full of suspicion.

“It’s not bad yet,” explained Heberdon. “But generally when I have these attacks they lay me out cold for a couple of days. It’s foolish to start anything to-night.”

“Hell!” said Alcorne. “I told my friend everything was all right, and the dago’s engaged passage home Saturday.”

“But there’s no assurance of my being able to pull it off the first trip anyhow.”

“Why not? How about the key?”

“I have it.” Heberdon showed the key Nicholson had given him. “That’s a master key to all the cases turned out by that company.”

“Why, then it’s as easy as turning over in bed!” said Alcorne. “Take a good stiff horn. Take a flash with you. Hell! You’ll be all right.”

Heberdon by degrees allowed himself to be persuaded. “I’ll do the best I can,” he said. “But I warned you.”

Shortly after eleven Alcorne accompanied him over to the station; not out of friendliness, naturally, but to make sure that he really got on the train. As they passed through the concourse Heberdon, out of the tail of his eye, saw little Johnson hanging about. He parted from Alcorne at the train gates in apparent amity.

“What hotel you going to stop at?” Alcorne asked idly.

“I thought it would be better to get a furnished room. In case I had to go back again,” said Heberdon.

“Don’t see that it matters,” commented Alcorne, “but suit yourself.”

Heberdon gave Alcorne ten minutes to get out of the station, and then reascended to the concourse. Johnson was now near the train gates, but as there was a possibility of Alcorne’s still hanging about Heberdon did not recognize him. On these night trains the conductor sits at a little desk at the gate and collects the tickets before the passengers go to bed. Heberdon went to his conductor and said, loud enough for Johnson to overhear:

“I forgot to leave you my friend’s tickets. He’ll ask you for them when he comes. Name of Johnson.”

Johnson, hearing this, stole away unobtrusively. Heberdon waited on the train platform below. Presently he saw Johnson return and identify himself to the conductor. As he came down the steps Heberdon boarded the train. Soon Johnson joined him in the smoking compartment.

“So far, so good,” said Heberdon. “Here’s your nightcap. Run along to bed. You’ll have to look sharp in the morning because we’ve got a busy day ahead of us.”

Heberdon himself remained up until the train started to make sure his little servant did not give him the slip.

## Chapter XXI

### HEBERDON LEASES A HOUSE

NEXT morning in the dressing room of the sleeping car, Heberdon got into conversation with a citizen of Baltimore. After sounding him out a little Heberdon said:

“My firm is sending me to Baltimore to establish a branch.”

“Ah,” said the good Baltimorean, immediately interested. “What line?”

“Shipping,” replied Heberdon. “A new line to South America.”

“If I can be of any service——” said the other. “Permit me, my card.”

Heberdon, who always carried a small collection of cards against an emergency, gave him one in return that was inscribed: “Mr. Hector Sotheron.”

“The first thing I’ve got to do,” went on Heberdon, “is to look about for a house for my family. Can you give me any information?”

The Baltimorean could. In ten minutes Heberdon had acquired all that he needed to know, about localities, etcetera. He was not so much interested in rents. He took down the names of several agents who specialized in dwellings.

Immediately after breakfast in the station he and Johnson started in a taxicab to make their rounds. It was rather a nuisance to have to drag Johnson with him, but Heberdon did not care to let him out of his sight. And it must be said that the docile little fellow gave no trouble. His indifference was extraordinary. He never spoke except when he was spoken to. He took everything as it came. It did not seem to occur to him to wonder what Heberdon’s business might be. He was content simply to sit and dream, knowing that when his dreams began to wear thin the means to renew them would be forthcoming. Heberdon allowed others to assume that he was a sort of servant.

They visited many houses. Heberdon’s requirements—all of which he did not feel called upon to state to the agents—were: a respectable, middle-class dwelling in a decent, respectable neighbourhood not too far out; in short, such a one as might be taken for a rooming house of the better class. The interior must be in fair condition, not too fresh nor too dingy. There must be an earthen cellar or some other convenient place to dispose of what Heberdon meant to leave there.

By noon he was in possession of such a house on Jefferson Avenue, the lease signed, a month's rent paid down, and the key in his pocket. The agent congratulated himself on obtaining a tenant who made no disagreeable stipulations as to repairs and new decorations. The particular reason which led Heberdon to fix on this house was that along with it went a shed in the corner of the back yard with a plank floor.

They bought broom, mop, and other cleaning paraphernalia and carried it home in the taxicab. Leaving Johnson with instructions to clean the hall and the front parlour only, and all the windows in the front of the house, Heberdon sallied out again to purchase furnishings. Since the youth was now in a strange town without a cent of money, Heberdon felt safe in leaving him.

Whatever Heberdon's defects of character, it must be conceded that he was thorough in his operations, and that there was a queer artistic streak in his make-up which led him to take no end of pains with the details of his stage effects. He had prudently provided himself with a list as follows:

Second-hand carpet for hall and stairs. See that the worn spots come in the right places. If this is not possible, get strips of linoleum to cover the supposed worn spots.

Old-fashioned, secondhand hat rack.

Four secondhand steel engravings of Landseer animals; stained and fly-specked if possible.

Second-hand rug for parlour. Ought to be large, showy design, roses etcetera. Linoleum strips, if necessary.

Second-hand parlour suite, much worn, tidies for the backs and arms.

Carved walnut table, with marble top; plush-covered albums and gift books for same; art lamp.

Miscellaneous pictures for parlour. Coloured art photographs, with showy frames. A big oil painting on easel, with plush drape for the top, if possible to find it.

Iron clock; big pink seashells, china ornaments, etcetera, for parlour mantel.

Portières, with pins and rings to hang them.

Roll of cheesecloth for window curtains.

Hardware; tacks, tack-hammer, heavy hammer, nails, shovel, pick, crowbar, and lantern.

During the course of the afternoon Heberdon bought all these articles, and either arranged for their immediate delivery or carried them away

himself in the cab. They got curtains tacked up inside all the front windows before they knocked off for the day. With the clean panes and the strips of white hanging primly within, the house instantly took on a respectable, habited look like its neighbours.

The only thing that Heberdon regretted was that he could not paste a little strip beside the door with the legend "Furnished Rooms" upon it. But it did not seem to be the custom in Baltimore.

During all these preparations Johnson only volunteered two remarks.

"Where are the beds?" he asked.

"That's funny!" said Heberdon. "They haven't sent them yet?"

"Will we be here long?"

Heberdon looked at him with a queer smile.

"A fairish long while," he answered.

They dined at an hotel. Afterward Heberdon, as a result of long cogitation, composed the following telegram to Alcorne. He sent it as a night letter, because he did not want to bring him too soon. He was not yet ready for him. Every word had been considered and reconsidered with a view to obtaining a carelessly natural effect.

"I got the contract signed all right to-day, and it is safe in my possession. But I'm down with sciatica for fair. Shan't be able to move off my back for three or four days. Makes me uneasy to have the contract by me. Other parties might repent of the bargain and try to get it back. Could you come down and get it Sunday? I have a room on Jefferson Avenue. My landlady's son is sending this for me. If you can't come I could send him to New York with the contract. Answer to the below address."

Heberdon and Johnson slept at the hotel. Immediately after breakfast they returned to Jefferson Avenue. In the sunny Sabbath quiet Heberdon highly approved the aspect of the house he had chosen. It was of the older school of Baltimore domestic architecture, one of a long row of decent plain brick fronts set off with white marble steps. Nothing could have been more reassuring than the sedate and respectable air of the neighbourhood, with its old trees and its well-dressed pedestrians.

Within, the next thing to attend to was the shed in the back yard. Heberdon had carried the "Hardware" out there the day before. Leaving Johnson in the house to finish the cleaning, he went out to lay out the ground.

It was a storehouse about ten feet square. He had to leave the door open for light, and the sunshine filled the place with dancing motes and painted a vivid rectangle on the floor. Like most of such places, it was filled with discarded odds and ends of a household—old brooms, leaky pails, broken crockery, and smashed furniture. Heberdon piled and swept the litter to one side, leaving a clear space twice as big as he required.

Then, with the crowbar, he pried up the planks of the floor, careful not to split them. The hole was of darkly significant shape, about six feet by two. Under the cross sleepers the dry, brown earth was revealed. Heberdon called Johnson. When the youth came to him he said curtly:

“Dig me a hole the size of that opening.”

Johnson shrank back. “A grave?” he gasped.

Heberdon, sure now of his man, took no pains to dissemble.

“What do you care?” he said callously. “I’ll undertake the job of filling it.”

Johnson lowered his head and set doggedly to work.

“Make as little noise as you can,” cautioned Heberdon. “It’s Sunday, and we don’t want to attract the attention of the neighbours.”

He went into the house to arrange the furniture, returning at intervals to inspect the progress of the work. It went slowly because of the interference of the cross sleepers. Seen through the open door, the meagre little frame of Johnson standing in the hole, laboriously plying the shovel or piling the clods around the edge, made a picture like some grim old etching. When it was about two feet deep he asked, “Will that do?”

Heberdon, looking down into it, considered darkly. The youth’s head was turned away. Heberdon glanced at him with a sinister little smile.

“Another foot,” he said.

Johnson set to work again.

Shortly before midday a telegram was brought to the door. Heberdon opened it with trembling fingers. It read:

Arrive Baltimore 2:20 to-day. Will come direct to your place.  
Don’t let the contract out of your hands.

D.A.

A pink spot appeared in either of Heberdon’s waxy cheeks; his eyes glittered. “Good!” he cried involuntarily. “I can’t fail now.”

Johnson looked at him, vaguely apprehensive.

Heberdon surveyed his completed arrangements with a feeling of pride. So much as was intended to be seen of the house—that is to say, the entrance hall and the parlour—was the middle-class lodging house to the life.

In addition to the articles on his list, Heberdon had picked up various gimcracks in the secondhand shops, which flourish in Baltimore. Moreover, everything looked as if it had been in place for at least thirty years. There was supposed to be a bedroom behind the parlour, but one could not see into it on account of the portières.

Over and over Heberdon rehearsed Johnson in the simple part he was to play. A man would ring at the street door. Johnson was to open the door wide. He was to look neither scared nor overbold, but just indifferent. The man would ask for Mr. Strathearn. Johnson was to reply: “Yes, sir, Ma put him in the parlour suite, account of his back.”

After closing the street door he was to knock on the parlour door, and without waiting for any answer was then to open the door for the man to pass in.

At this point an ugly thought occurred to Heberdon: “What if Alcorne brought a friend?” He considered it, biting his fingers. Then his face hardened. “If he has anybody with him show them both in,” he said harshly. “And lock the front door.”

The weapon Heberdon had chosen was a round, five-pound weight of lead such as plumbers use. This was knotted in the toe of a sock. He also had a revolver, but this was to be used only in a case of dire necessity.

At 2:20 Heberdon and Johnson were waiting, both well primed with cocaine. A few minutes later a taxicab drew up before the house. Back from the windows in the parlour Heberdon was watching. Johnson was in the hall; he was to count to twenty-five before he opened the door. Alcorne got out of the cab.

Heberdon’s flesh crawled with hate at the sight of his enemy, and his grip tightened on the blackjack. Alcorne was alone. He spoke to the chauffeur, apparently bidding him wait. He took a seemingly careless survey of the house. Apparently the result was satisfactory, for he came to the steps and rang the bell.

Heberdon got behind the door from the hall and listened. Johnson played his part well. His listless tone was just right.

“Is there a Mr. Strathearn stopping here?”

“Yes, sir. Ma put him in the parlour suite, account of his back.”

Then the closing of the front door, steps crossing the hall, a knock and the door opened. Heberdon raised his right arm. All the forces of his being were gathered up in that blow; his face resembled nothing human.

Alcorne entered, presenting his back to the man behind the door. Heberdon's eyes fastened on the round bald spot on his crown; he brought the lead weight crashing down. The man dropped to the floor like a felled ox.

But the hideous passions that were released in Heberdon were not to be sated with one blow. With a low, bestial cry of rage he, the elegant and punctilious, flung himself on the prostrate body, swinging the weight again and again. Through the open door the youth in the hall watched with clenched hands pressed to his mouth and eyes frozen in horror.

Suddenly Heberdon came to himself. Rage departed from him and left him weak and trembling. He rose and passed his hand over his face. He looked down at his ghastly handiwork as if he saw it for the first time. Shuddering, he turned and, wrenching down one of the portières, roughly wrapped it round the ruined head. Then he caught sight of the boy, and stared as if to ask how he came there. Recollection returned; he laughed weakly.

"Well, that's done," he said in a dazed way.

"The—the cab is waiting," stuttered the boy, between ashy lips.

"Eh? Oh, the cab!" said Heberdon. "Well, go out and tell him that the gentleman has decided to stay."

The boy broke into a dry, nervous sobbing. "I can't! I can't! I can't!" he stuttered. "I can't show myself."

Heberdon started for the door. The boy intercepted him with a gasping cry:

"You're all over blood!"

"Oh, am I?" said Heberdon, looking down at himself. "I didn't see it come there. Spreads like ink, doesn't it? It's damn bad blood!"

"The cab!" wailed the boy.

"Let him wait," said Heberdon.

The prudent Heberdon had provided a complete change of clothing against possible contingencies. By the time he had washed and dressed in the kitchen he knew just what he was doing, though he felt shaky. A shot of cocaine gave him renewed courage. He returned to the front door outwardly self-possessed, though he averted his head from the object lying inside the other doorway.

To the cabman Heberdon said: "My friend is obliged to remain for a while. He doesn't want you to wait. How much?"

The chauffeur perceived nothing out of the way in the look of the pale, well-dressed young gentleman who spoke with the habit of command. He named his price, received it, and drove away.

Returning to the house, Heberdon sneered at the spectacle of the shattered Johnson, who was crouched in a corner of the hall like an idiot. In order to restore him to some semblance of usefulness, he gave him a stiff dose of the drug they set such store by. Under its influence Johnson became his usual self, a little more apathetic perhaps, a little more hopeless.

Together they dragged the body to the rear of the hall, where anybody who might possibly chance to look through the parlour windows could not see it, and flung the remaining portière over it.

"Tack down a piece of linoleum over the stain in the rug," ordered Heberdon.

Johnson obeyed.

"There's nothing we can do now until dark," his master said. "We'll have to wait."

"Not here!" muttered the youth. "Let's go out—and come back."

Heberdon shrugged indifferently.

They spent the intervening hours riding aimlessly out of town and back again in various trolley cars. It was nothing to them where they went or what they saw, for both were existing in the Nirvana of the coca leaf.

When it was as dark as it was likely to become on a fair summer night they returned to the house. Neither had eaten. Up and down Jefferson Avenue all was peace; pleasant little family parties were gathered on the steps of the various houses; light laughter and the murmur of quiet voices were in the air. There was nothing in the outer aspect of the number that was their destination to suggest that it was any less peaceable than its neighbours. The girls next door looked with curiosity at the two young men who entered.

But once inside a subtle odour met their nostrils. It caused them to shiver and their hair to rise a little, notwithstanding the fresh doses of cocaine. Heberdon, counting the remaining papers, found that he had but four. "But it will be enough," he said to himself with a sinister smile into the darkness.

Before touching the body Heberdon prudently changed back to the soiled clothes he had taken off earlier. He dropped the weighted sock in his side pocket. Johnson had but the one suit.

“I’ll have to be careful,” he said, thinking of his garments.

Heberdon smiled again without replying.

Between them they carried the body across the yard and into the shed in the dark. It was cold and already beginning to stiffen. Closing the door of the shed, they lit the lantern. Lowering the body into the hole promised to be somewhat of a difficult matter on account of the sleepers running across.

Heberdon’s eyes, darting everywhere, took in the lay of the land, and he laid out his plans accordingly. He put the lamp down just inside the door of the shed and dragged the body up to the other end of the grave.

“I’ll lower him in at the top,” he said. “You get down in there. Crouch down under the crosspieces, and pull him toward you by the feet. No, turn around, or you’ll get in your own way.”

Johnson obeyed in his usual docile fashion. This brought him with his back to the lantern. Heberdon lowered the body into the grave, and the youth, crouching, drew it toward him and between his feet. Heberdon moved around to the foot of the grave as if to see better. He knelt behind Johnson, all the time issuing instructions:

“Take it slow. Just ease him along. Stay where you are and grab him higher up. That’s it. Now he’s set!”

Heberdon’s hand stole to his side pocket. As the youth, having completed his task, straightened up, the blackjack swung again and crashed down. The youth fell forward over one of the sleepers without a sound, and hung there with swinging arms, like a sawdust doll. One blow was enough for him. There was a depression in the back of his skull almost as big as a teacup.

Heberdon straightened up. “There’s a happy release from your miseries,” he muttered.

## Chapter XXII

### AFTERMATH

ON the way back to New York in the train Heberdon reflected with perfect clearness and calmness on what had happened. The pleasant humming in his brain helped him, he decided, to look at matters in the right light.

“Safe under two feet of earth. . . . The boards neatly nailed down, and fresh dust sifted into the cracks; the rubbish piled on top just as it was. . . . No danger of anything rising out of that hole to trouble me in the future. . . . Everything is all right—all right.”

From the number of times he felt called upon to assure himself that everything was all right, it may be guessed that there was a little fear at the bottom of his consciousness that would not be stilled.

“Nobody will disturb the house for a month—more than a month; for the agent will call for his rent a couple of times before he goes so far as to break in. . . . It will cause talk, of course, to find the house like that, just one room furnished—but just local talk. . . . They wouldn’t go nosing around for a body just on spec. . . . Somebody has to be missed before they think of looking for a body.

“The news of Alcorne’s disappearance will never reach Baltimore. A little talk around Mellish’s chophouse. Nobody cares enough about him to start an investigation. . . . As for Jack Blighton and Cora, they’ll simply be relieved when he stops coming around. . . . Everything is all right.

“Suppose, a long while from now, the shed should be pulled down or the floor taken up? Why, I’ll be in South America. . . . What is there to connect the general counsel of the Managuay Public Utilities with a case in Baltimore? Why, nothing, of course. . . . Everything is all right.

“According to the fiction writers, I ought to be a prey to remorse now. . . . Am I a prey to remorse? Not so that you could notice it! It was a good deed to put that beast out of the way. I’ll never lose any sleep over him. A good job well done. . . . I feel fine!”

He held his hand out in front of him and studied it attentively. “It only shakes a little bit. That’s the dope. . . . Well, I’m ready to start tapering off now—to-morrow. Everything is all right.”

To his second victim he never gave a thought.

He had not had much sleep during the past few nights, and in the course of the journey he dozed in the chair car—dozed and dreamed that he was still awake, as one so often does; still sitting in his chair with the New Jersey landscape flying by. But the chair in front of him, which had been empty before, was now occupied. He could not see the face of the person in it, only the top of his head over the back. Suddenly, he perceived that the head was oddly crushed in. An icy hand was laid on his heart.

“Turn around! Turn around!” he thought he whispered. “Let me see your face—if you have a face.”

The chair in front swung slowly, and Heberdon found himself looking into a pair of inexpressibly mournful eyes that plumbed his very soul. Terror broke over him like a tidal wave blotting out the universe. He was frantic with it, but he could not move nor make a sound.

“Only twenty years old!” the youth murmured. “I never knew life. I never knew joy. I never knew love!”

Heberdon thought: “If he keeps this up I shall go mad! . . . Am I not mad already?”

The youth murmured: “Do you remember what it was like to be twenty years old? Do you remember what a clean and jolly place the world was for you then?”

With the magic of dreams the figure dissolved, and in its place Heberdon saw himself as he had been at twenty—an uncommonly good-looking boy, with his regular features and delicate fair skin, a sparkle in his eyes and a song on his fresh lips. He heard an echo of the old song:

“Sweetheart, when you walk my way,  
Be it night or be it day,  
Dreary winter, faery May,  
I shall know and greet you.”

The once-loved air brought back the very smell and taste of that time. An intolerable agony wrenched Heberdon’s breast. For an instant he saw with flame clearness the difference between that figure and the one that was his to-day.

“God help me!” he seemed to cry. “What has happened to change me so? What will become of me now?”

He suddenly became aware of the vibrating car again, with the double line of people sunk in their magazines or staring out of the windows listlessly. The conductor was beside him.

Heberdon fumbled in the wrong pockets with a distraught air. He was trembling, sweating.

“Are you sick, sir?” asked the conductor.

Heberdon shook his head. “A little dizzy spell,” he murmured. “It’s past.”

When the man had gone on Heberdon went to the end of the car for a restorer. It was his last shot—but he was nearing New York.

It was mid-afternoon on Monday before he got to the office—he had to make a side trip to Gibbon Street first—but Judge Palliser was out of town, and no explanation was called for. During the remaining office hours he made a great pretence of business, a hollow pretence, for his nerves were jumping like crickets.

“I’m taking too much,” he thought. “To-morrow I’ll begin to taper off.”

In his distempered state he turned to the thought of Cora like a thirsty man to a woodland spring. In the horrible sense of unreality that unnerved him—his dreams were more vivid than his waking sensations—she was a fixed point; she was something to cling to. She was very real; her honesty, her sweetness, her wonderful vitality, could cool the fever that was burning him up.

Of course, he would not admit all this. He merely said to himself: “I’ve punished her enough now. I can go back there.”

But he dared not go Monday night, for he had promised Ida to come to Marchmont, and after disappointing her over the week-end, to break it would be a serious matter.

He spent a wretched evening sitting on the broad veranda of the Pallisers’, listening to the family talk. The judge was away from home, and Cyrus was calling on his girl. The others held forth in their usual styles, paying scant attention to each other; Mrs. Palliser on the subjects of marketing and servants, Amy Steele on dear Herbert, Dean Heberdon lecturing from a very tall platform, and Ida—the family censor—putting them all in their places. From her corner Aunt Maria Heberdon was telling an endless story about journeying from Syracuse to Rochester in a canal boat seventy years ago, the point of the tale being that at mealtimes there was a plate with five cookies between her and her sister Elizabeth Ann. And Elizabeth Ann always got the odd one. Such were the old lady’s reminiscences.

All this was torment to Heberdon in his jumpy state. He sighed with relief when the party broke up for the night. Ida expected him to linger for a tête-à-tête, but he could not face it. Pleading fatigue, he went to his room. Not that he wanted to go to bed; he had an extraordinary dread of closing his eyes. But at least in his room he had the means of forgetfulness—so long as he kept awake.

He did not undress, but took a book down and essayed to read. No go. The printed characters danced like imps before his eyes. At the same time an immense weariness threatened to overpower him. He dared not give in to it. He had all the lights turned on. Sitting in a chintz-covered easy chair in the pleasant room, he tried to discipline his mind.

“Look here, this can’t go on—I’ve got to have sleep. . . . I don’t believe in anything I can’t touch. These are only imaginary terrors. . . . I can control my imagination the same as any other part of me. I will not be afraid. . . . I *will* sleep! . . . Suppose I dream again? . . . Well, suppose I dream? A dream’s only a dream—there’s nothing in it. When you wake up it’s over.”

Heberdon’s thoughts tailed off. But it seemed to him that he was still in the act of admonishing himself when the meagre little figure in the ill-fitting new suit came into the room; or rather he suddenly was there, for Heberdon did not see him enter. A groan was forced from the bottom of Heberdon’s breast. He clasped his hands over his eyes, but he saw him as plainly as ever; he pressed his thumbs into his ears, but he still heard the soft, mournful voice:

“Twenty years old! Twenty years old!”

“I am going out of my mind!” thought Heberdon.

“Seventy years is the span of a man’s life,” the voice went on. “In killing me you killed fifty years of mine.”

“It’s a lie!” cried Heberdon. “You wouldn’t have lasted the year out.”

“I might have been saved. It is easy to save the young.”

“Your life was a hell. I released you.”

“You are not God,” was the quiet reply.

“Have pity on me,” moaned Heberdon. “You are at rest, and I have to go on suffering.”

“You are only at the beginning of your torments.”

“Leave me! Leave me!”

“I will never leave you. Whenever you close your eyes I will be there. You may drug yourself as you choose. I will be there to hold up the truth to you.”

“I will never touch another grain!” cried Heberdon.

“So you say every night,” the inexorable soft voice went on, “and every day you take more.”

“I will stop.”

“You cannot stop. If you were deprived of it you would fall to grovelling and screaming like me.”

“Have mercy!” moaned Heberdon.

“Lost! Lost! Lost!” said the dreadful voice. “There is no hope for you!”

Suddenly the scene changed, and Heberdon found himself in the sordid little shop on Gibbon Street among the fly-specked boxes of soap and patent-medicine cartons. He was dreadfully conscious of empty pockets and of a gnawing pain in his vitals. With clasped hands he made his prayer to the furtive and evil face behind the counter for a dose, a single little dose to save his manhood. The man laughed and jerked his head toward the door. Then it seemed to Heberdon that his racked frame could stand no more; he flew to pieces; he was no longer a man, but a bundle of naked red filaments, each separate one of which conveyed the pain of hell to his breast. He heard someone yelling.

He found himself sitting in his chair in the lighted, chintz-hung bedroom. Young Cyrus, in pyjamas, was beside him, shaking him violently by the shoulder.

“For Heaven’s sake, what’s the matter with you?” the boy was saying.

Heberdon stared at him stupidly. For an instant he thought it was that other boy.

“I—I must have been dreaming,” he stammered.

Cyrus gave a loud laugh. “Well, cut it out! You’ve got the whole house going now!”

Heberdon pressed his splitting head between his hands. Relief—and a new terror filled him.

“Wh-what was I saying?” he stammered, scarcely able to shape the words.

“Nothing, only yells,” said Cyrus, with another laugh. “’Fraid of giving something away, eh? Why don’t you undress? What you got the room lighted like a gin palace for?”

“I fell asleep over my book,” stammered Heberdon.

“Well, turn in and get a fresh start,” said the boy, starting back to his own room.

Heberdon sat staring before him. "Oh, my God, what an escape! . . . I must not sleep again to-night. . . . I must never sleep again in this house. How can I get out of it? . . . How can I sleep anywhere if I am going to betray myself in dreams? There must be a drug to keep one from dreaming."

Turning out the lights, he paced the room until daylight.

He dared not go to town before breakfast; that would have been to invite suspicion.

At whatever cost he had to run the gauntlet of the breakfast table. In reality the ordeal was not a very severe one, but to the horribly sensitive Heberdon it was bad enough.

Innumerable feeble jokes were made at his expense, particularly by young Cyrus, but fortunately people are blind. Heberdon looked like a corpse, but they merely ascribed it to overwork at the office.

From the station he took a cab to Gibbon Street. His flesh crawled as he entered the little shop. There he had stood in his dream. There was the proprietor behind his counter. But the expression on that worthy's face was now very different. He was grinning oleaginously and rubbing his hands to see Heberdon so soon again.

"Look here," began Heberdon brusquely, "I'm sleeping badly."

"I understand," said the other instantly. "Bad dreams."

Heberdon scowled, not pleased to have his complaint so unerringly diagnosed.

"It's very common," the other went on. "I am often consulted about it!"

"Can you do anything for me?" demanded Heberdon.

"I certainly can. I have the very thing. A discovery of my own."

"What is it?"

"I call it—er—sopora," was the reply, with an inimitable leer. "From the Latin *sopor*, meaning a deep sleep."

"Is it—er—dangerous?"

"Dangerous!" cried the other with an astonished air. "Harmless as table salt."

"But in connection with the—er—thing I am taking?"

"Its natural complement. Your drug keeps you on your toes during the day and sopora lets you down at night. Many of my customers take them together without the slightest ill effects."

"Well, give me some," said Heberdon impatiently.

"Undoubtedly it's a very rare drug," began the other deprecatingly.

“How much?”

“I’m obliged to charge a dollar a dose.”

Heberdon shrugged. “Give me enough for a couple of weeks.”

While his package was being wrapped, some impulse prompted Heberdon to say:

“That was a wretched specimen I saw in here last week.”

The druggist shrugged in an annoyed way.

“A down-and-outer,” he remarked, “not worth bothering about.”

“Do you know anything about him?”

“What should I know about him?”

“His name?”

“I’ve heard him called Dopey Joey, that’s all.”

“Has he got any folks?”

“Oh, they threw him out long ago. He took to eating drugs in school, they say. His father was a civil service man, too.”

“What name?”

“How should I know?”

The storekeeper’s curiosity was aroused in turn.

“He followed you up the street, didn’t he?” he asked.

Heberdon had an internal shiver of apprehension. “Oh, only to the corner,” he said quickly. “I had a cab waiting there.”

As that day wore on the murk in Heberdon’s head began to be lightened by a ray of hope.

“I’ll see Cora to-night! . . . When I make it up with Cora everything will be all right; my mind will be at ease; I’ll be able to get a fresh start. . . . No dreams will trouble me when I have Cora. . . . She’s real!”

But it was thirteen days since he had seen her, and no word had come from her directly in all that time. Not all the cocaine he was taking was sufficient to prevent harrowing anxieties from rising. In the effort to reassure himself his brain evolved queer processes of reasoning.

“It was that blackguard Alcorne that made trouble between us. . . . Now that he’s out of the way, everything will be all right. I did it for her sake. He was always a plague to her. . . . He put me in a bad light that day. I’ll soon remove that impression. . . . After all she loves me. Nothing can change that. . . . Everything will be all right.”

On his way out to Greenhill Gardens in a taxicab he was as near softened as Heberdon had ever been.

“Cora! Cora! My God—how sweet she is! Her eyes like twin evening stars! . . . I’ll humble myself if it will please her. She’s worth it. . . . I’ve got to have her on any terms—any terms! . . . When she comes to me I’ll be all right again.”

John Blighton opened the door to him as usual.

“Good boy, Frank!” he cried. “I was just wishing for a friendly face to cheer my lonesomeness.”

Heberdon’s heart went down like a stone. “Lonesomeness?” he echoed stupidly.

“Cora’s gone away on a trip. Didn’t she let you know? We expected you out Friday.”

“A trip?” faltered Heberdon. Despair knocked at his breast. He had counted on her terribly. “Where?”

“Went with a tourist party up to Newfoundland by sea. She looked so peaked and done up I made her go. The hot weather, I guess. She’ll be back Monday week.”

## Chapter XXIII

### THE OTHER MAN

ON the evening of "Monday week" Heberdon was on his way to Greenhill Gardens again. Of the intervening time it is unnecessary to say much. He had got through it by virtue of doubled and re-doubled doses of cocaine by day and "sopora"—which one may guess is very much better known under another name—by night. Thanks to the sopora he had not been visited by any more such shattering dreams, but the combined attacks of the two drugs in reckless doses had had a visible effect. In thirteen days he looked older by as many years. At the office they were beginning to glance askance at him.

That afternoon just before leaving, Judge Palliser had sent for him. The judge was in a very bad temper.

"The Managuyan business is off," he said bluntly.

"Why?" Heberdon had stammered.

"The I. F. C. won't have you, that's all."

"Why?"

"Why? Why? Why? They asked you for an opinion on the contracts, didn't they? It took you two weeks to furnish it, and then it showed an utter lack of grasp of the subject; utter! Nice position that puts me into. After boosting you for the job! I don't blame them in the least. I can see it myself. What's got into you I can't imagine. I'll give you a month longer here to get some kind of grip on yourself. If you can't you'll have to go. I can't risk another such fiasco! Run along, now. I've no patience to talk to you."

Heberdon had left his office in a daze. Later, after boosting himself up with the usual means, he was filled with a febrile rage not unmingled with terror. Now, on his way out to Greenhill Gardens he was still fulminating inwardly.

"I'll show him! I'll show him! I won't work out the month in that sink. I'll fling my job in his face to-morrow! Thank God I've the wits to take what I want when I want it! I'm glad the thing's done with! I won't have to go up to Marchmont any more. Stupid hole! I'll get ahead of Ida by writing her to-night and telling her it's all off. We'll see how he feels when he has her back on his hands! Then I can spend every night with Cora! By Heaven, I'll marry her on the level and set her up as Mrs. Frank Heberdon. That will be a slap in their faces!

“Ought to have done it in the beginning—married Cora—I treated her badly just to save my relations’ feelings, and this is the thanks I get for it! I’ll make it up to her now. Oh, I’ll be sure of her then. I need her! I need her! Cora’s worth a hundred of Ida. I’ll be safe with Cora. She won’t let me go down. She couldn’t!”

Thus, in spite of any amount of cocaine, the frantic terror was bound to poke its head up in the end.

Another blow awaited him. He dismissed his cab at the curb and rang the bell of No. 23. The old man opened the door but his usual grim heartiness was missing. He looked disconcerted at the sight of Heberdon. He did not invite him to enter.

Heberdon, horribly sensitive to the shades of people’s bearing toward him, asked sharply:

“Where’s Cora?”

Dissimulation sat very ill on old Jack. He looked off into space as embarrassed as a schoolboy. “Had to go out,” he said. “I’m just stepping out to the club myself. Come along with me and have a touch.”

Heberdon cast down his eyes to hide the utter confusion there. He could not very well refuse to accompany Jack, and the two walked away from the house sedately enough. Fireworks were whizzing in Heberdon’s brain.

“There’s another man in the house, and she sent her father to get rid of me. Another man! Another man!”

Blighton found a safe subject for conversation in his garden. He had caught the infection from his neighbours. He was aware of nothing absurd in the spectacle of the old freebooter cultivating the soil in his declining years.

“Had two cauliflowers for dinner to-night. First I’ve raised. They wasn’t very big, but, man, the flavour was ambrosial! Guess it’s been too hot. I’ll try ’em again for fall. You should see my string beans. Thick as fleas on a squirrel and still coming! The stalk worms got my squash, though!”

Heberdon contrived to make sympathetic sounds even while the rockets went off in his head.

“Damned lying jade! Just like all the rest of them! By Heaven, I’ll make her regret the day she lied to me! I’ll show her I’m not the man to be trifled with! But I must be cagey—bide my time. Let her think she’s pulled the wool over my eyes. Then strike suddenly and terribly!”

Blighton’s “club” proved to be a cozy little saloon in a less fashionable suburb across the railway line. They sat down and called for refreshments. But naturally it did not work. Blighton was horribly constrained. He could

not bring himself to speak naturally of Cora, and he couldn't think of anything else to talk about. He was concerned, too, for the wild look which Heberdon could not altogether hide, yet his natural delicacy forbade him to inquire into the cause of it.

After two drinks Blighton rose abruptly, saying; "Well, I must get back home and turn in for a needed rest. Early morning's the only time to work a garden. I'll see you on the trolley."

Heberdon allowed him to do so; rode two blocks toward town, and then returned on another car. He hastened back to Deepdene Road. As before, No. 23 showed no light in front, but upon stealing around the house he saw a bright crack edging the lowered blinds of the den upstairs.

"He's still there," he told himself.

Across the road there was a little open space with trees and shrubbery. Here Heberdon took up his place in the impenetrable shadows.

At length he heard the door of No. 23 open—the door was in the side of the house and out of his range of vision—and caught good-nights and laughter; laughter that turned like a knife in his breast.

"She can laugh while I am suffering the torments of hell," he thought.

A tall, masculine figure strode down the little walk to the street, and turned in the direction of the trolley line. There was a debonair swing to the shoulders; young shoulders indubitably. He walked fast, with a lift in his step. Across the road Heberdon hurried after him on his toes.

The man in front never thought of turning his head. By and by he began to whistle cantily.

"Damn him! Damn him!" thought Heberdon. "When I'm through with him he won't be whistling!"

At the trolley line the man in front waited, whistling, and swinging on his heels, for a car bound citywards. Heberdon hung back in the shadows watching and scowling.

In the brightly lighted car that they both boarded, Heberdon got his first good look at the other. He saw a boy in his twenties with a high colour and a sparkling blue eye. He was tall and strong and exceedingly well-favoured; and that he was not altogether unaware of his good looks somehow added to his attractiveness. He betrayed it in the slightly picturesque quality of his dress, and in the hint of a swagger. But there was good sense and good feeling in his face too, in the eyes prone to light up with friendliness, in the lips turned up ready to smile.

Heberdon became a little dizzy with hatred at the sight; the freshness, the clean blood, the unimpaired vigour. He did not need to be told that this youth enjoyed his meals, slept well o' nights, and loved life. The implied contrast was unendurable; in the murky depths of his consciousness was born the determination to besmirch the brightness and to befoul the clear stream.

Hatred gave him a certain clairvoyance in regard to the character of the other.

“Innocent as a baby! All on the surface. He's to be had for the asking. Anybody could win him with a pretence of friendliness—and a little flattery. I'll make him my own—and then——”

At the Manhattan end of the bridge the young man changed cars, and Heberdon changed with him, but remained this time out on the platform where he could watch him unseen. They changed again to a Lexington Avenue car and rode down to Twenty-fifth Street. Here the light-hearted youth jumped off and hurried west without a suspicion that anybody in the world had any reason to track him. Heberdon was on the other side of the street. The young man ran up the steps of a house near the corner, one of a long row, and let himself in. Heberdon crossed the street to examine the house. Beside the door frame there was a little white ticket with “Furnished Rooms” upon it.

Heberdon smiled to himself. “This is too easy!” he reflected.

He went back across the street and marked the light that sprang up in the window of the third floor hall room. The young man appeared there and pulled down the blind.

“So-long, until to-morrow!” said Heberdon with an ugly smile, and turned home.

Once the hateful spectacle of vigorous and comely youth was removed from his eyes, true to his nature he started busily to reassure himself.

“There's nothing to fear in him! No half-baked cub like that ever obtains a strong hold over a woman. Not a young woman, anyhow. When I've removed him she won't know he's gone. But she mustn't know what's going on. I'll scrape acquaintance with him without her knowing.”

Before going downtown next morning, Heberdon returned to the house on Twenty-fifth Street in the guise of one looking for a room. Of the several vacancies in the house he chose the third floor rear, and paid his rent. He did not see the youth; the door of the hall room was open and he had already gone for the day. Heberdon explained that he was a traveller who would not

often be at home, but he had to have a stopping place. The landlady was well pleased to have such a one.

It need hardly be said that Heberdon did not throw up his job at the office. He had to hang on to somebody, and his repulse at 23 Deepdene Road had the inevitable effect of making him slavishly anxious to please the family lot. He wrote an affectionate letter to Ida to the effect that he was terribly sorry he couldn't come up that night, but the judge had hauled him over the coals for neglecting his business, and he was going to work nights at the office to see if he couldn't catch up, etcetera.

Immediately after dinner he carried a bag to his new quarters. Upon being shown upstairs he observed with satisfaction that there was a crack of light showing under the door of the front hall room on his floor. On being left alone he studied out a little plan of action. He left his bag open on the table and slipped an envelope in it; hid the match safe, and taking a cigarette, went and knocked on the door of the room in front. It was pulled open with a bang. The young fellow was in his shirt sleeves, a book lay open on his desk.

None could be more friendly and ingratiating than Heberdon when he had an object in view. "Sorry to disturb you," he said. "I'm the new lodger in the back. They don't seem to have left me any matches. Can I borrow one?"

"Sure thing!" cried the youth, diving for his match safe.

Heberdon lit up—and lingered. "Studying?" he asked, with a nod toward the book.

"No, only reading a yarn to pass the time," was the reply.

"Is it a good one?"

"So-so. I'm not much for reading, I guess. I like to be doing something."

"Same here," said Heberdon.

"Sit down and chin a while, if you're not busy," said the young man with shy warmth.

When Heberdon showed a disposition to accept, he sprang to bring forward the only chair the little room contained. For him there remained the bed to sit on.

"I suppose if we're going to be neighbours we ought to be friendly," remarked Heberdon, taking the chair.

The youth showed two rows of creamy teeth. "Bully!" he cried. "I don't know a soul in the house. When you meet them in the hall they look at you as if you were a pickpocket! I'm Paul Alvey!"

“I’m Frank Drury,” said Heberdon. He reflected: “If I should meet him later at the Blightons’ I can lie out of it. I’ll tell Cora I was on a job here.”

“Haven’t I seen you before somewhere?” asked Alvey.

“Not that I’m aware of,” said Heberdon with an innocent air.

“I have it! Didn’t you ride in on the car from Greenhill Gardens last night?”

“Why, yes,” said Heberdon, affecting surprise. “I don’t remember seeing you.”

“I was right under your nose,” laughed Alvey.

“I got on at King’s Terrace,” said Heberdon negligently. “I’ve got a girl out there.”

The youth blushed and smiled ingenuously. “I was seeing a girl out there, too. But she’s not mine, unfortunately!”

“Nor ever will be,” thought Heberdon, lowering his eyes.

They were soon talking like old friends. Heberdon had read his man aright in guessing that he was warm and impulsive. It never occurred to Alvey to examine the quality of the offered friendship; he met it more than halfway.

It seemed quite natural for Heberdon to ask, by and by: “What’s your job?”

“Hudson Electric Company,” was the answer.

“That’s the big concern on the river front, isn’t it? What do you do there?”

“Assistant cashier.”

Heberdon pricked up his ears. “Perhaps that’s my first move,” he thought; “to queer him with his bosses.” He said carelessly: “Pretty good job, isn’t it?”

“So-so. What’s a beggarly twenty-five a week nowadays? I’ve got to pull down a bigger cluster of raisins than that! But I stay with them because they’ve promised me the first branch office that falls vacant. Only the branch managers are so damn healthy!”

“You’re young,” said Heberdon.

“Twenty-four,” said the other as if he were getting anxious about it. “Besides, a fellow might want to marry,” he added self-consciously.

A horrid little pain stabbed Heberdon. His thought was—though he would have died rather than confess it: “What a beautiful young pair they would make!” He said hastily: “What does an assistant cashier have to do?”

“Oh, keep the petty cash and look after the pay-roll.”

“Pay-roll?” said Heberdon.

“Yes. Keep the register of the employees, you know. Post up from the time cards, and make up the envelopes.”

“Pay-roll?” repeated Heberdon very offhand. “That must run up to a good bit of money weekly.”

“Over seven thousand.”

Heberdon thought: “If I could lift that somehow, and fasten it on him!” Then aloud, feeling his way: “I should think making up the pay envelopes would be a job in itself.”

“Oh, no, the cashier helps me with it. We used to do it Saturday mornings, but now that the force is increased, we draw the money on Friday and work Friday night until it’s finished.”

“I wouldn’t like to have the responsibility for such a sum of money in that part of town at night,” observed Heberdon.

“That’s nothing!” was the heedless reply. “This Friday I’ll have it to do all alone. The cashier’s having his wooden wedding, or something.”

Heberdon quickly lowered his eyes.

“I expect I’ll be at it most of the night,” added Alvey with a laugh.

“All alone in that building?” asked Heberdon softly.

“Oh, the locks are strong, and there’s a perfectly good watchman.”

“Oh, if there’s a watchman in call——”

“He’s not exactly in call. He sits downstairs just inside the street door. I only see him once an hour when he makes his rounds.”

“Isn’t the office on the ground floor?” asked Heberdon.

“No, the top; worse luck. After hours it’s a case of walk up, four flights.”

“I hope your wind is good,” remarked Heberdon facetiously. “How do you get in after hours if the watchman isn’t at the door?”

“Oh, I have my own key,” said the rash youth.

Heberdon thought: “This is beginning to shape up. I’ll get an impression of that key. No more questions now. I can return to it later.”

“Come into my room,” Heberdon suggested. “It’s cooler. The breeze is on that side to-night.”

Alvey followed him willingly.

They talked for a couple of hours. Heberdon laid himself out to be friendly and sympathetic. Under his subtle questioning he gradually laid the young man’s soul bare. It was not very difficult. Sympathy unlocks young

hearts, and Alvey was not experienced enough to perceive that Heberdon's was a skeleton key.

In the end they came around to talking of girls, of course. Paul was very earnest on this subject.

"I never understood girls until lately," he said. "Don't laugh! I don't mean that I understand them now, but I know now what they may mean to a man. I used to think of girls as sort of playthings—oh, out o' sight, you know, but just something to have fun with. Just lately I met one that changed all that. She looked at me once, and I lost myself. I don't mean a baby stare; no, sir, this one was grave and simple. She didn't know what she was doing to me. Since then everything is changed for me. This is for keeps, you understand. There could never be another for me like her."

Heberdon turned his head away. "How did you meet her?" he asked softly.

The ingenuous Alvey was delighted to answer the question. "This year I took a trip to Newfoundland for my vacation," he explained. "By sea, you know. She was on the ship. Never will I forget the moment I saw her first. I got on board early and I was leaning against the rail by the top of the gang plank, looking 'em over as they came aboard, you know. Making up my mind what the prospects for sport would be on the trip. She had her head down as she came up the plank, and I coughed to make her look up. Lord, what a fool a fellow can be till he's been through the fire! It makes me hot all over now when I think of that cough.

"Well, she looked up, and she saw a foolish enough sight, I don't doubt. Me looking bright-eyed, you know the way a fellow does. But not at a woman like her. Not twice! She had her revenge on the spot. Those eyes struck me to the heart. I faded.

"She was alone. Oh, what luck! What luck! I bribed the purser to give me a seat beside her at the table. So I was able to be with her from early morn till dewy eve. Eating, walking the deck, sitting wrapped up in the chairs. She let me read to her. That was a cinch, for I could tell her things with my voice, while just reading the words of the book, you know. Oh, those two weeks were better than half a lifetime of paying calls on shore! But one day or a hundred it would have been the same with me. For me the bell struck with that first look."

"Does she—er—reciprocate?" asked Heberdon, inwardly writhing.

"I don't know," young Paul replied simply. "Sometimes I think yes; sometimes I think no. She makes out to treat me like a child, though I'm two years older, really. She is very kind to me. Sometimes I wish she wasn't so

kind. She jollies the life out of me, but her eyes are soft. I swear I don't know whether it's the real thing, or just the kindness her tender heart might throw to a dog."

Heberdon breathed a little easier. "Nothing serious has happened," he told himself. As a means of covering his agitation he made a feint of unpacking his bag.

"Have you got a picture of your girl?" asked Paul shyly. His fingers hovered over his inner breast pocket.

A frightful, pain transfixed Heberdon. "She has given him her picture!" he thought. "By God, if he shows it to me, I can't hold myself! I know I can't!" Aloud he said hastily: "No, it's in my trunk."

Paul's hand dropped from his pocket. He rose. "Well, I suppose I must go," he said. "To-morrow's a working day."

The time had come for Heberdon to put into effect the little play he had been thinking about all evening. From his valise he drew the plain white envelope he had slipped there. He had to rest his hands on the frame of the valise to conceal their trembling.

"Look," he said with a light laugh, "what a fellow I know, a drug clerk, gave me to-day."

"What's in it?" asked Paul.

"Cocaine. The joy-stuff, he called it."

Paul drew close, his eyes bright with an unholy curiosity. "Let me see." From the envelope he drew one of the little folded papers and opened it. His hands were steady. "Looks just like talcum powder," he said. "Has no smell at all."

"What did you expect?" asked Heberdon, laughing a little unsteadily. "Brimstone?"

"They say this wrecks men, body and soul!" remarked the youth.

"Oh, of course, if it gets a grip on you," said Heberdon carelessly. "My friend says there's an elegant jingle in it."

"Put it away! Put it away!" cried Paul in mock terror. "This is no sugar for a good young man's tea!"

"This is only half the smallest dose," said Heberdon dreamily. "I'll try one with you, just for the thrill."

"No, thanks!" rejoined Paul. "I find life exciting enough without any artificial thrills!"

"They say a man ought to try everything once."

An expression of genuine concern appeared in Paul's honest face. "Take my advice, Drury, and throw the damned stuff out of the window. You looked at it like the cat at the canary. If you feel like that about it, it would get you sure. Throw it out of the window!"

Heberdon saw that he had lost. Concealing his feelings, he did, indeed, throw the envelope out of the window.

"Well, good-night," said Paul.

Heberdon did not turn from the window. "Oh, by the way," he said, "I've got to go up to Gansevoort Street at noon to-morrow. That's near your shop. I'll call for you and blow you to a lunch, if you like."

"Fine!" said Paul.

"All right. Expect me at twelve-thirty."

When the door closed, Heberdon turned around livid and trembling. His face was distorted like a maniac's. He could not have endured the strain another five seconds. He glided to the door like a cat, and stood there, flinging up his clenched hands in a mute gesture of hate.

## *Chapter XXIV*

### THE PLOT

HEBERDON did not remain at the Twenty-fifth Street house for the night, but returned to Gramercy Park. In order to get any sleep it was necessary for him to increase the dose of "sopora" again, and consequently in the morning to take more cocaine to rouse himself. When he finally started out his brain was like a horse running a race on a treadmill; it galloped but it got nowhere. Every day now it was becoming more and more difficult to think things out to a conclusion.

All morning he was busy with the idea of robbing the Hudson Electric Company. The preliminaries offered no special difficulties. Easy enough to borrow the key while Alvey slept—Heberdon had already satisfied himself that the careless youth left his door unlocked at night—and easy enough probably, once he was armed with the key, to avoid the watchman on his rounds. He could tell better about that after he had had a look at the building.

But after reaching the office floor, how to deal with Alvey was the problem that stumped Heberdon for the time being. Of course he could always bludgeon him, but that would defeat his own purpose. The seven thousand was only incidental; what he desired was to ruin Alvey, and of course if the youth were found lying helpless on the floor no blame would attach to him for the robbery. Heberdon racked his brains for an expedient whereby he might fasten the crime on him.

"Of course I might give him his quietus for keeps," thought Heberdon. "But that would let him out too easy. I want to drag him down first. I want him to suffer. I want him to suffer as I do!"

By noon no expedient had occurred to him. He went to take the youth out to lunch as agreed. His purpose in so doing, of course, was to get the lay of the land.

The Hudson Electric Company occupied its own building on the river front, a busy, teeming neighbourhood by day. On the ground floor there were storerooms and shipping platforms, with the office entrance and elevator at one side. The next three floors were devoted to manufacturing, while the showrooms and offices occupied the fifth floor. The concern manufactured electric appliances of all kinds.

On entering from the street, Heberdon's first glance was for the lock on the door. His experienced eye recognized it as one well known to him. It had been invented by a policeman, and was non-jimmyable. Just inside the door the elevator was waiting, and he had no opportunity at the moment to pursue his investigations as to the interior of the building.

On the top floor he was let out into the stair hall, which by means of a door of wired glass opened into the showroom. This occupied more than half the floor. There were no partitions. The office was at the rear, the cashier's cage in a corner. The cage was not visible from the elevator until you passed through the door of wired glass.

Heberdon thought: "Damned awkward, if the lights are turned on. I've got to get the door open and get down half the length of the floor without being spotted. And at that he's protected by a cage."

As he came closer he saw that by some inadvertence the cage had been left open at the top. One could, therefore, scramble up the side and drop in without any trouble. But what would the inmate of the cage be doing meanwhile?

Alvey welcomed Heberdon blithely—and seizing his hat, joined him outside the cage.

Heberdon forced himself to resume the air of friendly interest. "So this is your joint," he said, looking about. "It's quite imposing. Just the same, I wouldn't care about being here alone at night. Suppose a hold-up man came creeping down among the showcases in the dark?" he added laughingly.

"Still running on that?" responded Alvey, joining in the laugh. "You can't scare me. The lights will be turned on full, and I've got a trusty gun in the drawer of my desk."

Heberdon thought: "The hell you say!" He appeared to drop the subject. "Well, it's a great place," he said admiringly. "Do they mind visitors?"

"Not a bit of it!" answered Alvey. "Let's walk downstairs and look in on each floor as we pass."

This was exactly what Heberdon desired.

Out in the hall, Heberdon observed that the stairs ran on up. "I thought this was the top floor," he said carelessly. "What's up there?"

"There's a sort of little bungalow built on the roof," was the answer. "The engineer lives there with his family, and the watchman boards with him."

In this hall in the rear there was another door which Alvey opened. "This is the demonstration room of the new Keith light. I'll give you a

demonstration.”

Heberdon attended with a polite interest, thinking meanwhile: “There’s no lock on the door. This room would make a possible hiding place.”

As they descended through the various floors, Alvey continued to play the demonstrator. Heberdon observed that none of the doors giving on the stair hall from the workrooms was fitted with locks. Possibly this was on account of fire regulations. They were double-section doors, swinging both ways.

Heberdon thought: “Easy enough to sidestep a watchman if he wasn’t looking for you—wear rubber-soled shoes.”

As they passed out of the building, Heberdon observed a push button high up on the door frame.

“What’s that for?” he asked.

“Rings a big bell in the hall. It’s to call the watchman if you want to get in after office hours. They put it up high out of reach of the street kids.”

The lunch was a very amicable affair. Heberdon, exerting all his self-control, forced himself to listen to more of Alvey’s artless confidences. Alvey thought he had never met so friendly and sympathetic a fellow. Alvey did not refer again to Cora. Upon separating, Alvey volunteered to introduce Heberdon to a good cheap restaurant in the neighbourhood of their rooming house, and they arranged to meet there at half-past six.

In the meantime something happened to Alvey, for he turned up at the meeting place like a youth transformed; there was an added shine to his blue eyes, his movements were jerky and spasmodic, he progressed abruptly from fits of dreamy abstraction to bursts of hilarity. Heberdon, affecting to notice nothing, waited with a sick feeling of apprehension to hear the explanation.

There was a mirror beside their table, and though he would not look in it, Heberdon was horribly conscious of the contrast between Alvey’s red comeliness and his sallow, lantern jaws. Heberdon played with the scarred tinned knife at his place.

“If it were sharp! If I dared slash with it——”

As Alvey made no offer to confide the cause of his new joy, Heberdon was finally obliged to ask casually:

“What’s happened? You act as if you’d come into a fortune.”

“Better than that!” cried the youth. “I got a letter—such a letter! Beyond all expectations! I’m really beginning to think that maybe—— Oh, I can’t talk about it!”

Further than that he would not be drawn out. Heberdon kept his eyes down. His food was like ashes under his palate.

Alvey was in haste to finish his meal. “Got to bathe and dress,” he explained. “I’ll give you a pointer, Drury. When you want a hot bath in our house don’t wait till bedtime.”

“Going out to Greenhill Gardens?” asked Heberdon—with what he intended to be a jocular grin—but it was more like the grimace of a soul in torment.

Alvey was not very perspicacious. “No such luck!” he said. “Got an aunt up in Harlem. Got to do the dutiful up there once a week.”

They proceeded to the rooming house, and went to their respective quarters. Heberdon left his door open. In a few minutes Alvey sailed by, his tall form encased in a bathrobe.

“Me for the suds!” he cried gaily, and went down the stairs.

Heberdon heard the bathroom door slam, and the key turn in the lock. The opportunity was too good to be missed. Slipping along the hall he entered Alvey’s little room. The youth’s clothes lay on the bed where he had flung them. It was the work of a few seconds to pull out his key ring and find the key marked with the name of the lock he knew, and press it into the little form of wax that he had ready.

There was something else Heberdon wanted. His trembling fingers sought the inside pocket of Alvey’s coat. He drew out a thick, square envelope of a style he recognized, superscribed in Cora’s big, half-formed hand. The faint, alluring fragrance that emanated from it brought her so vividly close that Heberdon turned a little faint and leaned against the bed head for support. He read:

DEAR BOY:

I’ve exercised the privilege of changing my mind. I will come and help you “make up the pay” on Friday night. It will be fun doing it together. But I refuse to be admitted to the building and shown upstairs by a strange man. You say the watchman is away at his dinner from seven till seven-thirty. Very well, I will present myself at the door at seven-fifteen, and will ring three times. You tell the watchman beforehand that you’re expecting one of the girls back to help you, and that you will let her in. I don’t suppose he knows all the office girls by sight. And then if he sees me in the cage later, it will be all right.

Until Friday,

Yours,

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Heberdon shoved the letter back in its envelope and the envelope in the pocket. Somehow, he got back into his own room, and flinging himself down, pressed his head between his hands and tried to think. But no order would come out of the crazy confusion of his head. All he was aware of was a voice screaming:

“She’s going to him there! Alone together in that building! Alone together! Alone together!”

He took a dose of cocaine. Immediately after each dose he still enjoyed a lucid interval—an interval that ever became shorter. He needed it now.

As the false clearness settled on his brain, he went over and over the words of the letter—no danger of forgetting any of it! “Make up the pay,” in quotation marks. To Heberdon the quotation marks could have but one significance. Cora had tempted the enamoured youth. They planned to lift the seven thousand together. Of course! Of course! That was why she was so particular to have the watchman out of the way!

A crazy exultation took the place of Heberdon’s despair. “What a fool I was to torment myself! She doesn’t love him! She’s using him! Just as they used me in the Union Central affair. He’s their latest protégé. God help him!”

Suddenly a baleful ray of light struck athwart Heberdon’s brain. He clapped his hands down on his thighs. “By Heaven! Quarter past seven! The watchman at supper! The three rings! They’re playing right into my hands! This was all I needed to know! I’ll get the money, and get square, too!

“I’ll be there ten minutes ahead of her and let myself in with my key. I’ll hide myself in the little demonstration room on the top floor. At seven-ten I’ll have somebody give the three rings. Alvey will go chasing down the stairs. I’ll slip back to the cage and get the seven thou——

“Not finding anybody at the door, Alvey will hang around a bit. I’ll sneak on down the stairs. If I hear him coming back I can slide into any of the workrooms. When she does come he’ll bring her upstairs and I’ll walk out with the money. Then let him explain to her—and to his bosses—where the money went!”

Before Alvey came upstairs from his bath Heberdon was out of the house. His objective was a quiet little hotel in Fourth Avenue where Crommelin lived. Heberdon had met Crommelin several times at 23 Deepdene Road, and was on good terms with him; sufficiently good at any rate for his present purposes.

He found Crommelin in the reading room of the place, looking a little seedy and dispirited. So much the better. Crommelin himself was astonished at the change in Heberdon's appearance, but he was much too astute to make any comment upon it.

"How are things?" asked Heberdon.

"Rotten! No luck lately."

"I've got a trifling job on," said Heberdon carelessly. "Too small to attract you, perhaps."

"I need coin," rejoined Crommelin simply.

"I'm going to make a little touch at the Hudson Electric Building tomorrow," Heberdon went on. "I've arranged how to get in and all that, but I need a friend for a moment outside. At exactly ten minutes past seven——"

"Daylight?" interjected Crommelin.

"Sure! Just the hour when nobody is looking for trouble. At ten minutes past seven I want you to press the button three times at the elevator entrance to the building. That's all. Press the button three times, and walk on. There's five hundred in it for you. I suppose you know I'm good for it."

"Oh, any friend of Jack Blighton's——" said Crommelin.

"Are you on, then?"

"I'm on," said Crommelin succinctly.

## Chapter XXV

### THE PLOT IS PUT INTO EFFECT

UPON leaving Crommelin, Heberdon returned to the Gramercy Park house, consequently he did not see Alvey again. That night he doubled his dose, and again in the morning. Upon this day all restrictions were thrown to the winds. Whenever he felt a shiver of apprehension; whenever that bottomless gulf seemed about to yawn at his feet, he took more cocaine, and he soon lost all account of the amount. No human frame could stand this.

“It doesn’t matter about to-day. The lid is off to-day! I can go as far as I like! It’s only one day. To-morrow everything will be all right. My mind will be easy. To-morrow I’ll begin to brace up in earnest.”

He had no breakfast; the thought of food was loathsome to him. Some time during the morning in a lucid interval he started downtown to get the key he needed from Nicholson. Something happened to him on the way, for the next thing he knew he was entering the locksmith’s shop. He must have walked the entire distance.

He got the key—for a fancy price and no questions asked, and leaving the place automatically turned in the direction of the office. But he never arrived there. A sort of gray fog seemed to roll over his consciousness, and when it lifted he found himself in a street strange to him—a wide street with tall tenement houses rising on either hand, but with grass growing between the cobblestones. “This is a dream,” thought Heberdon. On a lamp post he read the name of the street: Pleasant Avenue. He laughed, and the sound rang strangely in his own ears. The fog descended again.

He next found himself in upper Third Avenue; he knew it by the Elevated road and the big, cheap stores. He was still walking—and desperately weary. He got on a car bound he knew not where. He was sure he knew where the Third Avenue cars went, but he could not quite remember. The next thing he knew he was being roughly ejected at the end of the line. He had wit enough to wait and take the next car back to town.

He had no recollection of getting off the car, but he presently found himself on the Bowery, rolling from side to side of the pavement like a drunken man. Some boys were following him, jeering. He felt no shame, but an immense self-pity. “The poor fellow hasn’t eaten all day!” he thought. Entering a lunch room he forced himself to eat a sandwich and drink a cup

of coffee, though the stuff was nauseating. He continued to sit there in a daze until he was invited to leave in no uncertain tones.

He made his way along the thronged sidewalk of Houston Street, bound east. He had a vague notion of calling on his friend the druggist, though he was not in need of his wares at that moment, having several shots of cocaine in his pocket and more at home. Though he had but lately taken a dose, he still felt distressful and was trembling.

“The damn stuff doesn’t make me happy any more,” he reflected, and the hot tears rolled down his cheeks.

Suddenly he perceived that he had a companion in his walk—the little youth with the big eyes was beside him. He had no hat on, and the crushed-in place on the back of his head was very conspicuous. But Heberdon was not terrified this time; he was too far gone inside; he was conscious only of a fretful irritation.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded. “It’s not night, and I’m not asleep. I’m walking the street.”

“I’m walking with you,” replied the youth.

“Where’s your hat? It’s not decent coming out like that.”

“Nobody can see me but you.”

“You’re trying to make out I’m crazy!” cried Heberdon in a febrile rage. “You lie! I know exactly what I’m doing!”

The other made no reply, but simply gazed at Heberdon. There was no particular expression in his eyes. It was just a stare.

“What are you looking at?” snapped Heberdon.

“A lost soul!” was the quiet reply.

“You lie!” said Heberdon again. “I’ve got half a dozen shots in my pocket and plenty of money to buy more when that’s gone—plenty! You’ll never see me screeching and hollering for it!”

“It will not be long!” remarked the other.

A white-hot flame of rage leaped up inside Heberdon. Turning, he seized his tormentor with both hands around the throat, and shook him like a rat. It was real flesh and blood that he had between his fingers, too; there was an exquisite satisfaction in that.

Suddenly Heberdon received a violent shock. He came to to find himself in the street surrounded by a pushing, swaying crowd, some of whom looked indignant, but the most merely brutishly curious. One of the angry men had a grip on his arm. On the other side of the circle a boy was sniffing, rubbing his eyes and pointing out Heberdon.

“It was him done it,” he whimpered. “I wasn’t doing nothing. He come along, talking to himself and waving his arms. He grabbed me and tried to choke me. He’s looney!”

“Call a policeman!” said the man who had hold of Heberdon.

For an instant Heberdon saw his situation clearly, and turned sick with terror and dismay. He instinctively thrust a hand in his pocket, and pulling out a roll of bills, handed one to the man and one to the boy. The temper of the crowd changed. A rich lunatic was another matter. The man let go his arm, and the circle opened to let him pass. “Bug-house, all right,” they said as he fled. He ran across the street, and presently had the luck to see a taxi approaching empty. Hailing it, he flung himself in with a sob of relief.

He had no recollection of dismissing the cab. He found himself over on the west side of town on Canal Street. Happening to look up at a street clock he saw that the hands were pointing to ten minutes to seven.

“It’s time to get to work,” he said to himself, without any sense of the absurdity of “getting to work” in his present condition.

The river was just ahead of him, and the Hudson Electric Building but a few blocks to the north. As it loomed up, a tower clock somewhere was striking seven. He still had five minutes to spare. He sat down on a shipping platform. He was not worrying about his lapses of consciousness; that was the most significant thing of all about his condition. He seemed to himself to be perfectly free from agitation and self-possessed.

Meanwhile the peace of evening was settling on the river front. The trucks had ceased to rattle and the gongs to ring. Such few people as live along there were gathered outside the doorways for the sake of the cool air. On other shipping platforms sat pairs of longshoremen playing draughts on chalked squares with bits of brick for red men and coal for black. Across the street in the wide-open space before the pier fronts the horse trucks were now stored for the night, row upon row in a disappearing perspective up the street.

At five minutes past the hour Heberdon strolled up to the door of the electric building and coolly let himself in with his key. The unreal quality of everything prevented him from feeling any excitement or nervousness. He went through with it like a man in a dream. Once inside, though, it did occur to him that he needed every ounce of his wits for the job ahead, and he paused at the foot of the stairs and took a shot of cocaine. The sense of unreality passed for the moment.

He looked down at his empty hands in surprise. “Why, I’ve forgotten to bring the satchel to carry the stuff away in,” he thought in surprise. “How

came I to do that? I'll have to stuff it in my pockets. Or wrap it in paper. And I was going home for my gun."

He softly climbed the stair, his head bent to catch the slightest untoward noise. There was not a sound to be heard throughout the building.

On reaching the top floor he found that the door giving on the showroom had been caught back on a wedge to permit the passage of air. Though it was still bright out of doors, the stairway was some distance from the windows, and where Heberdon stood the light was dim. He ventured to drop to the floor and stick his head a few inches inside the doorway. So far so good. Down at the end of the floor he clearly made out the solitary figure in the cashier's cage counting money. Heberdon gloated a little at the sight. He could not see the man's face because of a shaded electric light which hung before it.

While he looked the man leaned forward to reach for something, and Heberdon got a strange shock. The man looked older than Paul Alvey, different, somehow. Heberdon's faculties slipped. Confusion filled him. He drew back into the hall. What had happened? What error could he have made in his calculations? It *must* be Paul Alvey. Had he not made a date with Cora to come there that night? Heberdon told himself his eyes had deceived him.

Before he could look again the great bell sounded three times in the hall below. At any rate Crommelin had not failed him. Heberdon hastily let himself into the demonstration room, and softly pulled the door to.

Crouching inside he waited, listening for the footsteps of the man in the cage. He was strangely long in coming. And when he did come it was with deliberate steps—not the haste of a lover. He paused in the hall immediately outside the door where Heberdon was.

"Oh, Patterson!" he called.

*It was not the voice of Alvey!* Heberdon's head swam again.

A door opened above, and a voice came down: "Yes, sir?"

"Did you hear the bell?"

"Yes, sir. I'll be right down."

"You finish your supper. I'll go. It may be a message for me."

"All right, sir. Thank you, sir."

The door closed above, and the man in the hall went downstairs with leisurely steps. Heberdon tried in vain to think clearly. He could carry out a preconceived plan automatically, but he was quite incapable of meeting a

new situation. In spite of the evidence of his senses he clung to the preconceived idea.

“It must be Alvey! It must be! I’ve only heard him talking a couple of times. Maybe he’s excited and his voice sounds different. Anyhow, the money’s there. Get it!”

As soon as the descending figure turned the stairs, Heberdon slipped out of his hiding place and hastened back to the cashier’s cage. It was the work of a moment to scramble up the outside of the wire grating and drop inside. There was no money in sight. Heberdon pulled out one drawer after another in the breast-high desk. No money! In his search he scattered the papers wildly. In the drawer nearest the door he saw the revolver.

No money! His brain reeled again. Suddenly he perceived the safe behind him. Dropping to the floor he laid trembling fingers on the handle. It was locked! That flame of blinding rage shot up in his brain again. They had cheated him! Then the fog rolled in!

He was recalled to reality by hearing an amazed and angry voice cry: “What the hell are you doing in there?”

Outside the cage he saw a tall man with a resolute and outraged face. “Patterson! Patterson! A thief!” the man called loudly.

Heberdon thought instinctively of the revolver he had seen. Jerking out the drawer he snatched it up. The man outside dropped behind one of the office desks for cover. He re-doubled his shouts for help. Heberdon flung open the door of the cage and ran out. The man was caught in a corner between the desk and a railing, and Heberdon, running around the desk, pointed the gun at his head.

“Stand up!” he commanded hoarsely. “Put up your hands!”

The man obeyed with alacrity.

“Stand where you are,” said Heberdon, “or I’ll blow the top of your head off!”

Heberdon began to back toward the stair hall. In his preoccupation with the man in front, he overlooked the possibility of danger from the other direction. Suddenly a pair of strong arms were flung around him, one of which knocked up his pistol arm. The gun exploded harmlessly. The newcomer secured the weapon.

The shock was too much for Heberdon’s tottering nerves. As in that ghastly dream it seemed to him that he flew to pieces. He slipped into the bottomless pit at last. He had the sensation of falling endlessly through space. The face of the youth with the big eyes seemed to be pressed close to his own.

“It has come!” the face whispered.

Again Heberdon heard the wild screams he was not conscious of uttering.

“Be quiet!” commanded the man who held him.

“Take him away! Take him away!” yelled Heberdon.

“What’s the matter with him?” asked the man helplessly.

“Dope,” said the cashier laconically. “Look at his eyes!”

Heberdon, with a last instinct of self-preservation, struggled to reach the change pocket of his coat. “Let me get it!” he gasped.

“No, you don’t!” said his captor, taking a fresh grip on him.

“For God’s sake let me get it!” moaned Heberdon. “It’s not a gun!”

“See what’s in that pocket,” said the man who held him.

The other searched and drew out the little folded papers. “Just as I thought!” he cried contemptuously, and crumpling them up he tossed them away.

A despairing scream broke from Heberdon.

“Some poor bug who has just wandered in,” suggested the watchman.

The other man shook his head. “He was in the cage. He was after the pay-roll. Lucky I locked the money in the safe before I went downstairs. How did he get in the building?”

“Search his other pockets.”

The cashier found Heberdon’s key, and hastily compared it with a key of his own.

“A key to the street door!” he said grimly. “There’s no accident about this. That ring at the door was just to draw me away from the cage. He had a confederate outside.”

“Well, he ought to have cut out the dope before tackling a job like this,” declared the watchman grimly. “I’ll turn him over to the police. Give him a shot for Mike’s sake! I can’t take him out yelling.”

The cashier picked up the stuff where he had thrown it. The watchman partly released Heberdon, and he was allowed to take his dose. A measure of quiet returned to him. He stood shaking all over, his head sunk on his breast.

“There’s an object lesson for you!” said the watchman grimly. “Come along with you!”

“Want me?” asked the cashier.

“You’ve got your work to do. I guess I can handle this athlete without assistance. I’ll whistle for a cop at the door. When you’re through your work

you'll have to go round to the station house.”

Twisting his hand in Heberdon's collar, the watchman thrust him toward the stair hall. The cashier went back to his cage.

Heberdon's brain was working fairly clearly now. A desperate terror nerved him.

“If they put me behind the bars they'll take my coke from me—my sleeping powder. He'll come back. It will kill me! I must do something—something! Better be killed at once——”

The watchman was pushing Heberdon downstairs a step in advance of him. It was his right hand that he had twisted in the captive's collar. He had put the gun in his pocket. Heberdon was on the side of the stairs nearest the handrail. On the next to the last flight an idea occurred to him.

“If I flung my left arm up and back I could hook him round the neck and sling him forward—grab the rail with my other hand to keep him from pulling me after——”

The action followed hard on the thought. It was successful. The watchman, taken unawares, pitched headlong down the stone stairs. Heberdon remained clinging to the rail. The watchman landed in a heap at the foot. But he was not completely disabled. He managed to get to his hands and knees and to shout for help in a voice hoarse with pain.

Heberdon did not try to pass him, but vaulting over the stair rail, dropped to the landing below. Only one flight remained. He ran out into the blessed free air of the street. The wide, empty thoroughfare offered no cover except among the empty wagons across the car tracks. Heberdon darted across, and bending double, lost himself among the wheels.

Safely hidden, he squatted on his heels and looked back under the wagon bodies to see what would happen. The cashier was the first to appear at the door. He looked up and down the empty street at a loss. The watchman appeared behind him, bent with pain, and supporting himself against the door frame. He put a police whistle to his lips and blew shrilly. Heberdon waited for no more.

Doubling and twisting around and under the empty trucks, he finally emerged in the narrow lane between the last line of them and the pier buildings. Here, hidden from the street outside, he could run at top speed without interference. The ranks of trucks ended at the Christopher Street ferry. A cross-town car was just starting. Heberdon swung himself aboard and was carried away to safety.

## Chapter XXVI

### BEGINNING OF THE END

As soon as the urgent danger passed, Heberdon's brain began to slip again, but with a difference. It was not the fog of apathy that obscured his faculties now, but the poisonous gas of rage. That white-hot flame burned through his brain like an acetylene torch.

"He trapped me! I was a fool to think him so simple! All the time he was drawing me out, and planning how to trap me. Cora helped him! Oh, God, they planned it together—laughing! She wrote that letter just to decoy me, and he left it in his pocket where I would find it! But I'll show them! Tonight! First him and then her—— Unless I find them together."

He went to his rooms and got his revolver. He walked the five short blocks that separated Gramercy Park from Twenty-fifth Street. It still lacked a few minutes of eight o'clock, and the streets were bright. He let himself into the rooming house with his key. He bowed to his landlady in the lower hall. Outwardly he was collected enough, and that worthy woman had no idea that it was a madman who passed her, grasping a loaded revolver in his side pocket.

He went direct to Alvey's room and knocked. There was no answer. He tried the door; it yielded. The room was empty—empty and *stripped*! All of Alvey's little belongings were missing, and his trunk had been removed. Heberdon looked around him stupidly, and then returning downstairs, called the landlady out into the hall. He was still fingering the revolver, and was quite capable of shooting her as a party to the conspiracy against him.

"Where's Alvey?" he demanded.

"Left to-day," she said, with the pleasant zest of one who has a real bit of news to impart. "Most unexpected. Had a sudden business call out of town, he said. Permanent. I guess he must have got a step up, for he seemed real pleased. Such a nice young fellow! Paid me an extra week's rent so I wouldn't lose nothing on the room, though he wasn't bound to do it. I always did like Mr. Alvey; so much the gentleman! I always said it. I says to him to-day: Mr. Alvey, whenever you come back to town——"

In the middle of this communication Heberdon turned abruptly and left the house. Then, for the first time, she did suspect his sanity a little. She went out on the stoop and stared after him until he turned the corner of

Lexington Avenue. She never knew how close she had been to death. She never saw him again.

Hailing the first taxicab that approached, Heberdon ordered the driver to take him out to Greenhill Gardens. During the long drive up to Fifty-ninth Street, across the far-flung bridge and out through the suburbs, he changed one crazy mood for another. The top of the cab was down and the breeze cooled his burning head. He let go of the revolver.

“Poor, poor Cora! A thief, and the daughter of a thief! She never had a chance! Before I kill her I’ll give her one. I’ll offer to marry her and lift her out of the mire. Marry her under my own name, too! We’ll see what they say to that!”

He dismissed his cab. Old John opened the door to him, but there was no welcome in his grim face, nor any embarrassment either.

“Where’s Cora?” asked Heberdon.

“Gone away,” was the uncompromising reply.

Things spun around Heberdon’s head. “Wh-where?” he stammered.

The old man’s face hardened. The veins stood out on his forehead. “I don’t know as I’ve any call to tell you,” he said. “You’re either drunk or doped. I’ll tell you this, though. Before she went she wrote a letter to you, and sent it to the Madagascar. You’ll find it there.”

He closed the door. Heberdon fumbled with the gun. But even his anger was swallowed up in the chaos that filled him. Turning, he went stumblingly down the walk.

An hour later he turned up at the Madagascar. Next morning the clerks at the desk recollected his visit, and the extraordinary, inhuman look of the man was explained. He got his letter, but dimly conscious of the curious stares upon him, he would not read it there. He strutted out of the hotel, and taxied to Gramercy Park.

Standing alongside his gate-leg table he slit the envelope with the jewelled poniard that he had once designed for another purpose. A whiff of the well-remembered fragrance dizzied him. He could not read the words of the letter until he had snuffed up another of the white powders.

DEAR FRANK:

Perhaps silence would be best, but I feel that I must write you. I wish you to know that I have forgiven you, and that in my heart I will always be your friend, though I never see you again. I loved you in the beginning; you knew that because I could not hide it. Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had. You never cared

for me except my looks, which is the least part of me. You wanted me too cheap. I have my pride, too. Though it wasn't pride that stopped me, but just common sense. You seemed to think that a girl shouldn't have any sense. It annoyed you. I saw that we would be miserably unhappy together. Once you possessed me you would have tired of me. I had no influence over you. In your heart you despised me. I cannot understand a love like that. Nobody will ever know what you caused me to suffer; but, truly, that is all over now, and there is no bitterness remaining. I have learned that there are different kinds of love. Perhaps one cannot build a lifetime of happiness on the blind and passionate kind.

I am going to marry another man—I shall be married to him by the time this reaches you. He is a good and generous boy who loves me with all his heart. There is no doubt about that. He is older than I really, but he seems years younger. He needs me. And I long to take care of him. Perhaps I shall be happiest so. And I shall have my dearest wish, too, to run straight, to be like other people. I need not live in dread like my poor mother.

You must not think I have been keeping this from you. I didn't make up my mind until to-day. To-day he got the offer of a responsible position in the West. He had to leave within a few hours and didn't know when he could get back. He came and begged me to go with him. I took my courage in my hands and told him all about myself, about my feeling for you, too. He stood up under it. He said, even so, he'd be lucky if he got me. So we are going away to a place where nobody knows us to get a fresh start.

I think of that other woman. She must love you, and perhaps with your better self you love her. With me it was only a kind of excitement. I beg you to go to her and tell her everything. You are going down where the way is steep, Frank. If she loves you, she will forgive. And you two can get a fresh start also. It is my dearest hope.

Your friend,

CORA.

Heberdon glanced around the room. Everything within it rocked before his eyes. His face turned hideous with rage and pain. His brain seemed to burst into flames. He clapped his head between his hands and screamed in agony.

“Gone!” he cried aloud. “Gone—with him! In his arms by now, making a mock of me!” A torrent of foul vituperation burst from his lips.

But the pain in his head was insupportable. It beat him to the floor, where he writhed, clawing at the rug. The paroxysm finally passed, leaving him gasping. Another would kill him, he knew. He dragged himself on hands and knees to the stand where he kept the book that hid his store of cocaine. He took another dose on top of the last.

As a flame shoots up before it dies the burnt-out brain responded for the last time to the stimulus. His body seemed to lose all weight. He got to his feet. He walked on air. Like a frog, he puffed up with his old delusions of self-importance. He laughed horribly.

“What do I care? I’ll show them! I’ll show the whole world how much I care! There is nobody like me! I’ll show them what kind of man I am!”

He sat down at the table, and pulling paper toward him, started to write in characters big and small in lines that run up and down hill:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *Daily Sphere*:

Sir—I am the cleverest crook in America. I collect tribute where I choose. The police are helpless against me. I play with them like tenpins. Look behind any of the big, successful robberies lately and there you will find me. To mention only a few, it was I who held up the Princesboro bank single-handed. That was the result of a bet with some of my friends at the Chronos Club. To be sure, I didn’t get away with the coin on that occasion, because my taxi blew out a tire. But that wasn’t my fault.

There was no accident when I held up the money car on the Flatwick Elevated road. Your paper said it was the work of a gang of three or four, but you lied as usual. I did it single-handed. I prefer to work alone. I can depend on myself. I only got a beggarly seven thousand out of the job, but it was rather amusing; the five men I held up were such a white-livered lot. Five or fifty, it’s all the same to me.

By this time you have guessed that it was I who carried out the great Union Central robbery. Right. Equal to the best exploits of Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin, you said. They were picayunes beside me. Did they ever gather in sixty-six thousand at a single haul? Besides, they were hung and I’m very much alive. And I’ll do bigger things than this before I’m through. On this occasion I had a girl working under my orders, but the whole scheme was mine from start to finish. I simply lifted the bag of coin out of the

taxi, dropped it in a bigger bag, walked into the station and took a train. Really, it was too easy.

There was a man got in my way, a well-known bad character called Dick Alcorne. Around Times Square they're asking what's become of him. Well, I'll tell you. I decoyed him down to Baltimore, and cracked him over the head in a house I rented on Jefferson Avenue. He was a low fellow, a dope fiend, and guilty of every crime. In putting him out of the way I was a public benefactor. His body is buried under a shed in the yard at the address given. Oh, a second body will be found there, too. That's only a little dope fiend I picked up on the street who helped me. I had to croak him, too. I don't know his name.

As you will perceive by this letter, I am a man of education and breeding. My family has been prominent in New York for four generations. Judge Palliser is my uncle, Mrs. Pembroke Conard is my aunt. Besides the Chronos, I belong to several well-known clubs. I'm a man of means. I only engage in these affairs for the fun of it. Men are such fools, particularly policemen and newspaper reporters, that they are beneath my contempt. It amuses me a little to play with them, but as I say, it's too easy. Publish this and let them catch me if they can.

FRANK HEBERDON.

He stopped writing only because his brain was beginning to blaze again. He enclosed his letter, addressed it, and slipped it in his pocket. Leaping to his feet he caught the edge of the table cover and jerked it from the table. With a savage kick he then capsized the table itself. Looking around he picked up the chair, and swinging it about his head he made short work of everything in the room that was breakable.

"I'll show them! I'll show them!" he cried.

Jamming on his hat he went reeling down the stairs and out into the dark street followed by the astonished gaze of the hall boy.

Outside, the little youth with the big eyes was waiting for him.

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 end of *A Self-Made Thief* by Hulbert Footner]