

**THE
RING OF EYES**

HULBERT FOOTNER

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This is the Story

OLD J. M. Lawrence, commonly known as the lion of Wall Street, one of the biggest financiers—and one of the worst-hated men—in America, had received letters threatening assassination. Much against his will the old man applied for police protection. From the police point of view there wasn't a worse risk in town. Old "J.M." was dogmatic and wilful as a spoiled child, and likely to resent protection. The police selected young Dan Woburn as personal guard, and Dan, with the prospects of a police lieutenantcy and the hand of Julia Dormer if he succeeded, grimly settled down to his task. *The Ring of Eyes* is an enjoyable mystery story, with swift action, crisp dialogue, and an ingenious plot which is excitingly solved.



By the Same Author

THE MURDER OF A BAD MAN

THE NEW-MADE GRAVE	MADAME STOREY
MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY	THE VELVET HAND
THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE	THE DOCTOR WHO HELD HANDS
THE OWL TAXI	THE VIPER
THE DEAVES AFFAIR	THE FOLDED PAPER MYSTERY
RAMSHACKLE HOUSE	EASY TO KILL
OFFICER	CASUAL MURDERER
UNDER DOGS	DEAD MAN'S HAT
A SELF-MADE THIEF	DANGEROUS CARGO
QUEEN OF CLUBS	THE ALMOST PERFECT MURDER

THE RING OF EYES

by
HULBERT FOOTNER



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CHAPTER I

“ANGELO’S” is a little restaurant almost in the shadow of Police Headquarters, New York, that has long been frequented by members of the force when off duty. It is a democratic sort of place where patrolmen, detectives, inspectors and even an occasional deputy commissioner rub elbows. There is a lunch counter down one side if you want a hasty snack, and a row of alcoves on the other if you have time for a square meal.

In the last alcove an uncommonly pretty girl was sitting opposite a young policeman who was obviously off duty, because he was looking at her with a most unpoliceman-like expression.

“Damn it, Julia,” he muttered, “you treat me as if I was a boy!”

“So you are!” she retorted, laughing. Yet her eyes softened while she laughed. She was more than just a pretty girl. There was good sense, good feeling in her.

“I’m just the same age as you.”

“Sure! But I was already a woman when your voice was changing.”

“Why do you keep me hanging on a limb?” he said sorely.

“I don’t know what you mean by that. Haven’t I always been honest with you?”

“Yes, damn it!”

“Do you want me not to be honest with you?”

“No, damn it!”

“Then what do you want?”

“I want you to marry me,” he said with a world of feeling in his straight blue eyes.

Julia’s brown eyes went down. She made marks on the tablecloth with a fork. “Most women would be thrilled by that,” she murmured in a voice that suggested she was thrilled herself, though she would not admit it. “But it’s an old story with me, Dan. Working with men the way I do, I suppose I average an offer a week. Detectives; lieutenants; a deputy inspector. And crooks of course. You’d be surprised at the number of crooks who want to marry me.”

“Aah, don’t josh!” he muttered sorely.

“I’ve got to, pal,” she said, still drawing pictures with the fork. “You wouldn’t want me to break down and sprinkle the tablecloth.”

“Don’t you like me, Ju?”

“You know I do, Dan.”

“How much is that worth? Do you . . . Do you . . .” He gulped at the sentimental word. “Do you love me?”

Julia’s head went a little lower. “I could,” she whispered.

“That’s what makes me so sore!” he blurted out savagely. “You can and you won’t!”

“Not marriage, Dan.”

“Why not?”

“Must we go over all that again? . . . I’ve been a police detective for five years, but at that I’m only a left-handed member of the force. A woman isn’t protected by the regulations. I could be fired to-morrow, and I would be if I married.”

“Are you so stuck on your job?”

“No! I hate it! But where could I find another as good? . . . It’s an unnatural job for a woman. I have to keep a watch on myself every moment. I have to make myself completely hard-boiled. If you only knew how I long to let myself go and be a regular woman!”

“Why don’t you?”

“Suppose we got married and I lost my job,” she said low-voiced. “What would be the answer? A little cheap flat in the Bronx, and a lifelong study to make one dollar do the work of two! You forget that my father was a patrolman, I was born in a Bronx flat. I didn’t escape from it until I got this job.”

“I’ll make good,” growled Dan.

“Sure, you will. If you get the breaks you’ll be a captain about the age of forty. Fifteen years. The fifteen best years of our lives. And suppose you don’t get the breaks. My father never did. He’s still a patrolman. You should see my mother after thirty years as a patrolman’s wife. It’s not good enough, Dan.”

“This just means that you don’t feel the same as I do,” he said sorely. “A flat in the Bronx would be like Paradise to me if you shared it.”

“Sounds like the words of a popular song,” she said, with a shaky smile.

“Aah, don’t josh!” he said, hurt to the quick.

“I must,” she said. “One of us has got to show some sense.”

“You don’t feel anything.”

“That’s what men always say,” she answered quietly. “They don’t know. The truth is, that a woman has just got to learn to hide her feelings, or go under.”

“I’d do anything for you,” said Dan strongly. “I’d give up anything. I’d put up with anything!”

“All right,” she said, “that’s the way out.”

“What do you mean?”

Julia was not joshing then. “Show me that you’re man enough to break through the trap that all poor people are caught in!” she said steadily. “Show me that you can make a decent life for us and I’ll marry you like a shot!”

Dan’s eyes fired up. “Is that a promise?” he demanded.

“No engagement!” she warned. “That would be like chains hanging on both of us.”

Dan scowled. “It will take years to make good.”

“Oh, you don’t have to earn a million dollars first. Only show me, and I’ll take a chance.”

“How about all these other guys who are after you—including the deputy inspector?”

“You’re too modest,” she said, with a sidelong smile.

“Modest?”

“Look at me!” She planted her elbows on the table, and rested her chin in her palms. Their faces drew close together. Nothing was hidden between them then. “You look better to me than any man I’ve ever seen,” she murmured. “I’m crazy about you, honey. Why worry about a deputy inspector?”

The promise in her eyes made Dan’s head swim.

“Oh, Ju!” he whispered, reaching for her hands.

She saw it coming, and was already on her feet, slipping sideways out of the alcove. He could not embrace her in the alleyway with the waiters running back and forth, and he dropped back in his seat. However, there was a new confidence in his eyes.

“Up to your old tricks!” he said. “I’ll get you yet!”

She flashed a smile sideways in his direction. “I’ve got a date with a suspected counterfeiter at one,” she said very off-hand. “Are you coming?”

Dan shook his head. “I’ve got ten minutes more. I’ll stay here and try to dope things out.”

“I’ll be seeing you.”

She hurried away down the alleyway, nodding to this man and that on the stools and in the alcoves. Nearly everybody around headquarters knew Julia Dormer. It was a part of her job to make herself as feminine and attractive as possible, and she was a kind of phenomenon at 300 Mulberry. There was nothing like her around the old dump, the men said. She was respected for her work, too. One of the best detectives on Inspector Scofield's force was the verdict.

Dan lit a cigarette and scowled at the opposite wall of the alcove. He was up against the problem that faces every young man in the world; how to force the breaks; how to beat the game.

Two plain-clothes men older than Dan were lunching in the next box. One of them had a grievance. Dan scowled when the complaining voice first grated on his ears, because it interrupted his thoughts. Then he distinguished a word or two, and suddenly became interested.

"Aah, what the hell did he want, anyhow?" growled the voice. "One of these lily-fingered lads to pick at the typewriter?"

For some minutes the complaining voice went on in the same strain. Dan listened to the end with bent head, and a slight smile playing about his lips. A resolve took shape in his eyes.

"I'll make a stab at it!" he muttered.

CHAPTER II

A FEW minutes later Dan stood facing Inspector Scofield in the latter's private office. More than a little diplomacy and good humour had been called for before the humble patrolman succeeded in getting the great man's ear, but there he was.

From long practice Scofield could make his face like a mask when on duty. "What's your name?" he asked curtly.

"Daniel Woburn, sir."

"Your assignment?"

"Clerical work under Deputy-Inspector Madison."

"H'm! Clerical work?" said the inspector, with a glance at Dan's wide shoulders and long clean limbs. "What have you got to say to me?"

"I want a job under you, sir."

Scofield picked up some papers from his desk. "Apply through the regular channels," he said, jerking his head towards the door.

Dan stood his ground. "I couldn't do that, sir, in this case. There isn't time."

"When do you suppose I'd get my work done," said Scofield irritably, "if I had to sit here and listen to every rookie who wanted to be a detective."

"I don't want to be a detective, sir. I just want one particular assignment."

"Oho! choosy, aren't you? What assignment is that?"

"As personal guard to J. M. Lawrence."

A sharp change came over Scofield's face. He was downright angry then. "Who told you such a man was wanted?" he barked.

"I overheard some talk, sir."

"Who was talking?"

"I don't know," said Dan honestly. "I don't want to get anybody into trouble. Officers talk to each other about police business, but they wouldn't say a word to any outsider."

"Just the same, that is how police business leaks out!"

"I haven't said anything about it, sir."

The inspector looked Dan over more attentively, but his mask-like face gave nothing away. "Just what did you hear?" he asked.

“Only that you had sent an officer on this detail, and he was not satisfactory to Mr. Lawrence.”

“And what makes you think that you are qualified for the job?”

“I understood that somebody was wanted who could dress and look and act like a Wall Street clerk.”

A sarcastic smile cracked the inspector’s mask. “And you think you could fill the bill?”

“I know I could,” said Dan boldly. When you want a thing, you can’t stand back for modesty.

“Any other qualifications?”

“Yes, sir. I have taken the stenography and typing course. I’m qualified to act as secretary. That’s what I’m doing for Deputy-Inspector Madison.”

“Do you like the job?”

Dan took a keen look in the inspector’s face before replying. “No, sir,” he said bluntly.

“Then why did you take it?”

“Well,” said Dan, “a young man never gets anywhere just by pounding the pavements. I took this detail hoping I could persuade somebody at headquarters that I had a head on me as well as a pair of dogs.”

Scofield was pleased with this answer, and rubbed his upper lip to hide it. “There’s another qualification needed,” he said crisply. “And that’s the most important. I must have a man who can act like lightning in an emergency.”

“You once praised me for my quickness,” said Dan; “but I reckon it has passed out of your mind.”

“What was the occasion?”

“It was the strike at the Diana Shirt Waist Factory.”

“Oh, yes, I remember. You disarmed the leaders on both sides and prevented any shooting. A neat piece of police work.”

Dan said nothing.

“It’s true that J. M. Lawrence has asked for police protection,” said Scofield studying him hard. “I ask you not to let that go any further. A threat has been made against his life. Do you realise what the job means?”

“Sure,” said Dan. “Everybody knows that J. M. Lawrence is one of the biggest financiers in the country. They call him the lion of Wall Street. Some people say he is the real ruler of our country, but I don’t take any stock in that.”

“A big man all right,” said Scofield; “but that was not what I had in mind. Do you know that protecting a man from assassination is the most difficult kind of police work? If there is a man who is out to get J. M. he is almost certain to get him in the end. No officer has got eyes all around his head. The advantage is always with the killer because the killer has the first move.”

“Sure,” said Dan.

“What’s more, in these days of machine guns, killers are not particular about an extra dead man or two. If J. M. gets his, you would be almost certain to get yours at the same time.”

“I know it.”

“Well, is there no other form of suicide available?” asked Scofield, with a keen glance.

“It’s a big break, sir, a big break!” said Dan eagerly. “Naturally, there’s a big risk goes with it.”

“Well, go on to your work,” said the inspector coolly. “If I can use you, you’ll hear about it.”

Dan put in the worst hour and a half he had ever spent in his life up to that time. He kept one eye on his work, and one cocked towards the front of the building where Inspector Scofield had his offices. All sorts of men came and went, but he had no means of knowing if any of them were connected with his case. He grew a little pale around the lips with suspense. Suspense is the hardest thing in the world for a quick-blooded man to bear.

“Oh, God! I want this job!” Dan murmured to his typewriter.

In the end the summons came from a totally unexpected quarter. Dan’s boss, Deputy-Inspector Madison, approached him scowling. “You’re to report to Inspector Scofield in his office,” he grumbled.

A great calm peace settled on Dan’s strained face. When he raised it it was as smooth as wax. “What for?” he asked with an innocent air.

“He didn’t tell me,” said Madison sorely. “Hell! it’s always the same! Just as soon as I get a man broken in to my work some guy higher up comes along and lifts him.” He retired still complaining.

When Dan entered his private office for the second time, Scofield was leaning back in his swivel chair, scowling and turning over an unlighted cigar between his teeth. He gave Dan a good hard scrutiny before he spoke.

“Sit down!” he said.

This was unusual. Dan relaxed somewhat.

“I’ve been looking up your record,” the inspector went on. “It’s good enough as far as it goes. I’ve decided to give you a trial on this detail. You’re transferred to my force now.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Dan.

“You look the part all right, but I don’t know what stuff you’ve got in you. You’re the best I can lay my hands on at short notice. I hope to God you won’t let me down.”

“I’ll do my best, sir.”

“Oh, sure,” said Scofield impatiently; “but is your best good enough? I could spend an hour advising you how to handle yourself in this situation, but it would be a waste of breath. You’ll be on your own as soon as you leave here. Either you’re the man for this job or you’re not, and nobody can help you.”

Dan said nothing.

“But I can tell you a little about the man you’ve got to watch over,” Scofield went on. “From the police point of view, there isn’t a worse risk in town. In his top hat and cut-away he’s as conspicuous wherever he goes as the Central Park obelisk. Nights, they say, he likes to put on old clothes and walk around the streets seeing life. Week-ends he’s generally fluffing around the Sound in one of his yachts or motor boats. Old as he is, he’s a great hand for the ladies. Believes in changing them often. His present girl is Christie Lauderdale, the star of *It’s Never Too Late to Bend*. They say he hires a stage box at the Holland Theatre by the week.”

An anticipatory grin spread across Dan’s face.

“Ha!” said the inspector dryly, “you think you’re going to see a bit of life, eh? You don’t know what you’re up against. The old man is as dogmatic and wilful as a spoiled child. At the least hint of opposition all hell breaks loose. You’ll have to handle him with gloves.”

“Maybe that’s what’s the matter with him?” suggested Dan. “Gets sore because everybody pussyfoots around him. If he was handled without gloves he might like it.”

“If you take that line you’ll be back here inside an hour.”

Dan smiled. “When do I start in?” he asked.

“Right away. . . . Where do you live?”

“East Thirty-eighth Street.”

“Well, you’ll have time to go home and change, and get back to his office before he leaves. If he isn’t satisfied with your appearance it’s up to

him to provide you with an outfit. You must have your badge and your gun with you at all hours. Stay away from headquarters. You can report to me by telephone.”

As Dan was leaving, the inspector dropped his mask, and clapped him on the back in almost human fashion. “Woburn,” he said, “if an attack is made on J. M. and you succeed in saving him, you can have pretty much what you want from the department. Say, a lieutenantcy.”

“Of detectives, sir?”

“Of detectives.”

“Okay, inspector.”

Quarter of an hour later Dan entered the boarding house room that he shared with long Reed Garvan, his pal ever since training squad days. Reed, who was doing the night tour for the time being, was asleep on the bed. Dan woke him violently. He had to have some outlet for his feelings.

“I’ve got it!” cried Dan. “It’s come at last! A big break!”

“What the hell——!” grumbled Reed sleepily.

“Assigned as personal guard to J. M. Lawrence! What you know about that!”

“My God!” said Reed solemnly. “My God.”

Dan was already tearing off his clothes. “Hey, lend me your new grey tie, will you, pal? And a pair of socks to match it. I’ve got to turn out as a Wall Street man.”

“Go to it!” said Reed.

“If the old boy puts me down in his will I’ll remember you!” said Dan.

CHAPTER III

THE J. M. LAWRENCE offices were on the second floor of the National Columbian Bank Building, one of the Lawrence properties. It was one of the oldest buildings remaining in Wall Street, and the plain, almost shabby suite had often been written up in the press. J. M. expressed a great contempt for the luxury with which modern finance surrounds itself, and he would never allow anything to be changed.

But when a skyscraper was threatened across the street, he bought up the corner and built a two story building upon it that he maintained at a loss of a couple of hundred thousand a year, solely that the light of Heaven might continue to fall unobstructed on his plain old desk. It was with imperial gestures such as this that the old man manifested his power.

J. M.'s suite was a part of the general offices of the Indiana South-Western Railway, another Lawrence property. Though his surroundings were plain, he knew how to protect himself from time wasters, and Dan had to run the usual gauntlet. The girl at the telephone switchboard handed him over to a boy who conducted him to an assistant secretary. This was a beautifully dressed young man with a sour smile, who looked Dan over, saying:

“Ah, from headquarters. You are expected.”

After asking Dan a few meaningless questions, he led him to the equally well-groomed private secretary. His name was Carrington. He asked Dan some more questions, with a disapproving air, and handed the young man over to a little old messenger.

“You’re from headquarters, ain’t you?” squeaked the old man, with a sly smile.

Dan did not answer.

He was shown into the waiting-room that was reserved for the more important callers. “You won’t have to wait long,” said the old man. “Only one ahead of you.”

The “one” was a young woman whose back was turned to Dan when he entered. She was accompanied by a sort of chaperon or paid companion, a dried leaf of a woman continually in a flutter.

When the young one turned around Dan received a shock that caused him to change colour. She was extraordinarily beautiful; red hair, sea-blue eyes; a complexion like cream; the stamp of the highest fashion was upon her, but that was not it. There are plenty of beautiful and smart women

about. In this one there was an indescribable something that a man who had only seen her once was bound to remember as long as he lived. No man could resist it; she had only to choose.

Dan, as always when he was strongly moved, made his face as expressionless as wood. It was an instinct of self-preservation. Such a woman was as dangerous as poison in a man's blood.

The sea-blue eyes flickered indifferently over Dan's face, and drifted away. But presently they returned and there was a hint of pique in them. Dan refused to look at her, and she bit her lip. Presently she addressed him in the abrupt and lordly way of a beauty.

"Have you got a cigarette? I'm gasping for a puff."

The chaperon commenced to fumble with her bag, but the girl paralysed her with a look.

"Surely!" said Dan, producing a packet.

While he was lighting it, she sent him a glance through her lashes that was intended to put her mark on him for life, but he kept his eyes fixed on the match. She turned away with her nostrils quivering slightly. Dan looked out of the window. Presently she addressed the chaperon in a voice of strained sweetness.

"Darling, if I have to wait in this hole any longer I'll faint. Run out like a deer, and buy me a bottle of smelling salts in the nearest drug store."

"Certainly, darling, certainly!" The chaperon fluttered out of the room, leaving them alone together.

The girl came drifting slowly towards Dan with her eyes slant-wise. Dan looked stolidly out of the window. "Don't you hate to be kept waiting?" she said.

"A man has to get used to it," said Dan.

"I'm not accustomed to it."

"Just getting a little of your own back, I reckon," he said slyly.

"Indeed!" she said, running up her eyebrows. "Is that supposed to be funny?"

"You asked for it."

She studied him as if he was some strange new specimen that had never come her way before. After a moment she started on a new tack. "Are you a military man?" she asked caressingly.

"No. Why?"

"Well, you have a sort of army look. About the shoulders."

The flattery made Dan warier than ever. He said nothing.

“You seem very young to be having business with the lord high muckamuck, J. M.,” she went on.

“I reckon he has to see all kinds,” said Dan.

“Are you in the financial line?”

Dan grinned. “Do I look it?”

“No. But you never can tell.” A look of sharp curiosity came into her eyes, and she turned her head to hide it. “What do you want to see J. M. about?” she asked with a casual air.

Dan was not going to let her get away with that. “You have a cheek asking,” he said coolly.

The colour flamed under her make-up. “I’ve never been spoken to like that in my life!” she said angrily.

Dan’s cool look said: Maybe that’s what you need, then; but he didn’t utter it out loud. He said reasonably: “You can’t have it both ways. If you’re going to be up and down with people you must take it.”

She presented an offended back to him. Dan waited for her to cool off.

In the end she turned around smiling again, but her eyes were still glassy. “You mustn’t mind what I say,” she said sweetly. “I’ve been spoiled by flattery. It’s really refreshing to meet a man who is not afraid to speak his mind.”

Dan’s expression was dry. He was willing to meet her half-way. “There’s no secret about my business with J. M.,” he said; “only I didn’t want to be told where to get off at. I’m looking for a job here.”

“Does J. M. receive applicants for jobs personally?” she asked incredulously.

“Oh, I’ve been passed up from below,” said Dan.

“What sort of job?”

“One of the secretary mob.”

Her lip curled slightly. “Secretary? Are you satisfied with that?”

“No,” said Dan. “What of it?”

“Well, I hope you get it,” she said sweetly. “So we can see some more of each other.”

“Thanks,” said Dan. “I’ll try my damndest just on that account.”

“You really can be quite nice when you want,” she said, sending him an intoxicating glance through her lashes.

Dan slipped. "I could be a lot nicer," he said, "if I wasn't so darned afraid of you."

"Afraid of me!" she exclaimed, making the blue eyes as big and innocent as a small child's.

"You're a dangerous woman!"

Her face broke up in delight. "Oh, is *that* it! Oh, if you were just hateful on purpose I don't mind at all. I thought you really didn't like me!"

"You *are* a dangerous woman!" said Dan grimly.

At this moment the little old man messenger came back, gentle and soft-spoken, with an odd peering glance. "Will you please to step this way, Miss Lauderdale," he simpered.

She sailed out smiling gayly at Dan over her shoulder. "So long!"

Dan was left alone in the room with his face like one round O of astonishment. Miss Lauderdale! Christie Lauderdale! "Holy smoke! The big chief's girl!" he murmured.

To-day something interrupted the smooth course of J. M.'s affair, for in about ten minutes Christie came marching out of the inner room with her eyes sending out blue lightnings and her pretty mouth pressed into a thin red line. The little old messenger was running around her agitatedly rubbing his hands together. She swept by Dan without a glance. The dried-leaf chaperon had returned and was sitting patiently holding the smelling salts. To her Christie said stormily:

"An impossible man! Impossible!"

The little messenger bleated in distress. The chaperon fell in behind Christie, silent and scared, and the two of them passed out of sight through the outer door. Dan's eyes followed them with an expression that suggested that he would have given something pretty to know what had happened inside.

He turned around to discover that the little messenger was studying him with an evil sharpness that gave the lie to his appearance of gentleness. He instantly began to fawn and simper, and rub his hands together, but Dan had seen that look first and it made him thoughtful.

"Mr. Woburn, sir. Will you be good enough to step this way, please. Mr. Lawrence is ready to see you now."

CHAPTER IV

DAN was shown into an immense old-fashioned room with a row of four windows looking out on Wall Street. The floor was covered with a Turkey carpet which must have been woven expressly to fit it; there was a wide flat-topped desk with its back to the windows, a mantelpiece of black marble facing it, and a row of portraits in dingy gold frames hanging above. In addition to the owner's big swivel chair there were several plain chairs convenient to the desk, and in the back corners of the room a few easy-chairs and a huge sofa upholstered in blackened leather. That was all. The whole centre of the room was left clear of obstructions, and a faintly defined path across the heavy piled carpet showed where the owner was accustomed to pace it.

He was pacing it now followed by a trail of cigar smoke, head slightly bowed, hands clasped behind his back, a big figure who needed the big room as a setting. He wore his somewhat old-fashioned clothes with distinction; black cut-away, striped trousers, wing collar and black bow tie. He let his plentiful dark hair grow longer than was customary, and it curled slightly over his collar. He was old and he was fat, but the big figure was instinct with energy. His air of careless assurance, and his commanding glance would have stamped him as a leader anywhere on earth. He looked like nobody but himself.

He appeared to be entirely unperturbed by what had just taken place in his room, but he bent a look of frank dislike on Dan that did not promise well for the coming interview. "So you're the fellow from headquarters," he said.

Dan glanced over his shoulder to make sure that the little messenger was out of the room. The door was just closing. "Excuse me, sir," he said; "but too many people around here know that."

"Oh, hell," said J. M. impatiently. "I don't hold with all this secrecy. The people who surround me have been working for me for years."

Dan said no more.

"You're too young," said J. M. peevishly.

"I understood that a young man was called for, sir."

"Well, I didn't expect to get a rookie. How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"You don't look it."

J. M. took a testy turn back and forth. "I may as well tell you in the beginning," he said, "that I don't want you around me. My hand has been forced. I never employed a bodyguard yet, and I don't like it. If you want to get along with me you'll have to make yourself small, see? Efface yourself! Act as if you weren't here!"

Dan stood up to it with a wooden face.

"Another thing," J. M. went on, "I'm an imprudent man. I always say what is in my mind regardless of the consequences. If you work around me you'll hear things every day that the newspapers would pay you well for. Well, you'll only sell me out once. I advise you never to speak of anything you may hear around here; not to your mother, your girl, or your best friend. . . . Well, what about it?" he demanded, as Dan kept silent.

"Wouldn't help any for me to swear I'd keep my mouth shut," said Dan. "That's what a crook would do. You'll have to satisfy yourself that I can do it."

J. M. was amused. A subterranean chuckle shook his big body, and the scowl smoothed itself out. "Sit down!" he commanded, pointing to a chair beside the desk.

He dropped into the big swivel chair and searched among some papers on his desk. Drawing out a little sheet he laid it before Dan. "That's the cause of all the trouble," he said.

It was a piece of common discoloured paper with blue lines ruled across it such as might have been torn out of a penny exercise book. Two lines were printed on it in lead pencil.

"Your father's life is endangered.
Let him watch out."

"I've had mash notes like this before," said J. M. scornfully. "Always chucked them in the waste basket and forgot about them. Life wouldn't be worth living if you kept the fear of assassination before you all the time. But this time the devil addressed it to my daughter. Well, you know women; tears, prayers, hysterics until I gave in."

He made as if to crumple up the paper and throw it away, but Dan stopped him. "Let me have this," he said.

"What the hell!" said J. M. "There's nothing in it! Nobody has ever made an attempt on my life yet."

"You've had a lot of unfavourable publicity lately," Dan pointed out.

“Oh, sure! I’m the worst-hated man in the country to-day. Ever since stocks went down they blame me! But what of it. If I was bumped off the stock market would break wide open.”

“Leaving the small investor aside, haven’t you got powerful enemies that you know of?” asked Dan.

“Sure! I could name half a dozen big men who would sleep easier nights if I was under the sod.”

“Do you want to tell me who they are?”

“Why not? If you’re going to be my bodyguard. First there’s old Ashley Barnes; a rich idler; collects Persian faience; so do I. I have the finest collection in the world, and his is the second best. It might seem like an inadequate motive for murder, but I wouldn’t be surprised to find that he was the deadliest enemy I’ve got. Because the faience is his sole interest in life; it’s a monomania with him. The finest pieces are always brought to me first. I have seen murder in his eye when I beat him out.

“Then there’s D. D. Beddington, President of the Nebraska Pacific. For years he’s been trying to get hold of the Ohio and Mississippi in order to complete his coast to coast system. That’s *his* life’s dream. I have always blocked it, and I mean to go on blocking it, because he’s not a good railway man; he’s only a manipulator. Then there’s Nicholas Malata, the super-wop. Ever hear of him?”

Dan shook his head.

“He started life as a cobbler in some Bessarabian village. Came to this country after the war and got work in a shoe factory. Learned all there was to learn about shoe machinery, and got somebody to stake him to a couple of machines which he shipped to Bessarabia. There he had them duplicated, and with wages what they were and the present state of exchange he made shoes for thirty cents a pair. Shipped them all over the world. Even with a hundred per cent. duty he had our manufacturers lashed to the mast. I got the A. F. of L. interested and between us we had an executive order issued in Washington forbidding the importation of Malata shoes at any price. That’s how I stand in the wop’s light. All wops have a murderous streak in them.

“I know they hate me,” J. M. went on, “because they all assume to be my intimate friends. Makes me laugh to see the way they suck up to me. If you want to investigate them I tell you what I’ll do; I’ll ask them all to dinner and you can give them the once over.”

“Why take that risk?” said Dan.

“Wouldn’t be any risk. These are all rich men, you understand. Why should they attack me when they can hire thugs or gunmen for a thousand or

two. No, it would be an amusing stunt to bring them all together. I'm going to do it." He made a note on his desk pad.

A telephone bell rang. There were two instruments on J. M.'s desk, one connected with the office switchboard, the other, a dial instrument connected with the public exchange. It was the latter 'phone that J. M. answered.

Dan perceiving from the expression of his face that he was talking to a woman, got up meaning to step out of the room. J. M. with a peremptory gesture commanded him to sit again. The old man listened to a somewhat lengthy communication with scornful amusement, then abruptly broke in on it.

"Wait a minute, Christie! You told me all this when you were in my office. There's no use, my dear. I told you you could have anything you wanted for yourself; jewels, automobiles, furs, dresses, but I will not put up the money for your new show. It would be your ruination if you were in a position to swell around the theatre telling everybody where to get off at! You need the discipline. . . . Sure, I know I'm horrid, but that's that! . . . Why of course the party is on for to-night. I'm looking forward to it. But if you mention the word 'show' I'll walk out on it. . . . See you later!"

When J. M. snapped up the receiver there was a glint of amused masculinity in his strong eyes. They happened to meet Dan's eyes at that moment, and he read appreciation there. An understanding was established. Both laughed.

"Ah, they are lovely!" said J. M. with grim pleasure. "Life would be like a desert without them. But mark my words, young fellow"—he shook his big forefinger in Dan's direction—"if you ever let one of them get the upper hand you're done for!"

"I get you, sir," said Dan.

"Well, to get back to our dainty missive," said J. M., resuming his hard-boiled air, "if it's true that there's a plot hatching in these wealthy circles, it don't seem likely that we would get news of it in this style."

"Somebody may have chosen that cheap paper just to put us off," said Dan. "If I could trace that letter back to its source, you wouldn't have to have me tagging around after you."

"Ha!" said J. M. "Figuring on working yourself out of a job, are you? You're an altruist. How could you trace a thing like that back?"

"It has often been done," said Dan. "I can already see a lead or two. The paper is old; that is to say, it wasn't bought for this occasion, but has been lying around for some time. There's probably more of it where that came

from. It was written by a person of at least fair education, judging from the neatness of the letters, and probably an old person.”

“Why old?”

“From the phraseology. A young person would express himself differently.”

“Huh! Sounds to me like it was written by somebody who had been reading too many dime novels.”

“If that is so they were old-fashioned ones. The modern stories are more simply written. . . . Have you got the envelope?”

J. M. produced it. “Addressed just the same as the writing inside. Post-marked Grand Central, 3 p.m., yesterday.”

“With your permission I’d like to have some help on this case,” said Dan. “If I could telephone to Inspector Scofield——”

“You’re hunting for a mare’s nest if you ask me,” grumbled J. M. “This is just some practical joker trying to throw a scare into me. But go ahead. You can use my private ’phone.”

He pushed over the dial instrument. Dan dialled headquarters and put the receiver to his ear. Almost instantly a sharp change came over his face. He hung up.

“Quick!” he said. “Give me the number of your home!”

J. M.’s eyebrows ran up in two indignant points. “What the hell——?” he began.

“The wire is tapped,” said Dan urgently. “When I put the receiver to my ear I heard the circuit open. I want to put in a call that will fool them.”

J. M. gave him the number of his house. Dan dialed it, and shoved over the instrument. J. M. issued an order to his butler that sounded *bona fide* and meant nothing. He hung up and the two men looked at each other. J. M. blazed with rage.

“By God!” he cried, pounding his desk. “Tapping *my* private wire! I’ll raise hell over this!”

Dan was already making for the door. “It must be somewhere in the building,” he said. “I’ll be back in ten minutes with a telephone expert. Maybe we can catch him at it!”

The door closed after him.

In half an hour Dan was back in J. M.’s office. He made his report with a grim face. “I brought back a man from the telephone company. As soon as he started following your wire through the conduits in the building, he found where it was tapped with a wire running to room 517 on the fifth floor. But

the bird had already been tipped off, and when we got there he was gone. Went in such a hurry he left all his apparatus behind him, the bell which rang when anybody called you on your private wire, and the indicator which dropped when you took down your receiver to call.”

“Who hired room 517?” demanded J. M.

“It was rented ten days ago,” said Dan. “The superintendent of the building is investigating the circumstances, but nothing will come of that. You may be certain that the fellow has covered his tracks effectively.”

“Damn!” said J. M. furiously.

“Where is the party that you are going to to-night?” asked Dan.

“At Pierre’s.”

“Could you change it to your own house?”

“No!” roared J. M., pounding his desk. “I’ll be God-damned if I’ll change my way of life at the bidding of a pack of crooks!”

“That’s up to you,” said Dan. “It took money and nerve and skill to tap your private wire in your own building. This is something big we are up against. You are probably surrounded by spies.”

J. M. modified his tone. “All right,” he growled. “I’ll have the party in my own house.”

“You ought to be safe there,” said Dan. “If you approve, I’d like to take the night off so that I can make some preparations for to-morrow.”

“Go ahead, and be damned to you!” muttered J. M.

Dan grinned understandingly.

CHAPTER V

THAT evening Dan established himself in a bedroom on the top floor of J. M.'s house. This was a somewhat old-fashioned palace occupying half a block frontage on upper Fifth Avenue facing the park. J. M.'s daughter occupied a similar house next door. Dan was introduced to the butler and the housekeeper, the two principal dignitaries of the establishment, as "my personal secretary, Mr. Woburn."

Dan satisfied himself that J. M. was pretty safe as long as he remained in his own house. Filled with art treasures from the old world, the place was more like a museum than a dwelling, and however careless he might be of his personal safety, J. M. had overlooked nothing that might tend to protect his collections. The house was fitted with a complete modern burglar alarm system, and in addition, a force of gentlemen watchmen had been installed to guard the art objects night and day. Dan persuaded J. M. to install watchmen to patrol the outside of the house at night.

After dinner Dan proceeded to Inspector Scofield's home in the Bronx, making certain on the way that he was not being tailed. He handed over the pencilled warning received by J. M.'s daughter, and reported what had happened during the afternoon. The inspector's face turned grim as he listened.

"Huh!" he said, "a thankless job for the police. If we save the old man it's all in the day's work, and if they get him, God help us!"

He made it clear that he was going to take his own measures to protect J. M., but that Dan was to act independently of him. "This is the biggest job that ever fell to a man of your age," he said morosely. "I hope to God you can measure up to it."

Dan said nothing.

"Don't come to me again," he said. "If the gang should get to know that you were my man your usefulness would be ended."

"It's already known in J. M.'s outer office," said Dan.

"That was foolish of him," said Scofield.

"Foolish!" said Dan, "as far as police work goes, he's a child!"

"Use a dial 'phone in a public pay station to communicate with me," said Scofield. "Send any evidence you may get by special delivery."

Dan obtained the inspector's consent to draft his pal, Reed Garvan, for a helper on the case. Garvan, Dan explained, had taken the course in stenography and typewriting at the same time as himself, and was, moreover, the sort of fellow who could dress and act the part of a Wall Street secretary.

Garvan at the moment was patrolling a beat in a respectable part of Brooklyn where excitement was at a minimum, and with no hope of anything better. When he left the inspector's house Dan set off for Brooklyn to convey him the glad tidings of his release.

It was about midnight when he got back to the Lawrence mansion. From the direction of the dining-room he could hear the sounds of the "party." He went to bed.

Shortly before ten next morning, he accompanied J. M. to his office in an immense black limousine that, like everything else pertaining to the great man, had a quality of unique distinction. Some car! It was a fancy of J. M.'s to sport a top hat at all times. He seemed disinclined for conversation on the way down, and Dan prudently held his tongue.

They drew up before a private door in the bank building, and Dan glanced keenly right and left along the sidewalk. He had a hand on his gun. That was his job. However, nobody in the street paid any particular attention to them. The door was opened by a brawny guard in uniform. Inside there was a small lobby with an automatic elevator that could only be operated by a key carried by J. M.

"Does anybody else ever use this entrance?" asked Dan on the way up.

"Nobody but myself," said J. M. "That's a hard and fast rule."

"You've been coming this way for many years?"

"Sure! Ever since the building was put up in 1900."

"Then your custom must be well known. It would really be safer for you to use the main entrance."

"Safety be damned!" said J. M. "I come and I leave by my private door in order to avoid the people waiting in my outer offices."

The elevator landed them in an empty room adjoining J. M.'s private office on the side opposite to the general offices. In addition to the door into J. M.'s room this ante-room had another door, locked and bolted on the inside.

"Where does that door lead to?" asked Dan.

"To the public corridor."

"Could we get out that way if necessary?"

“Sure! The key is in my desk!”

“Is this room ever used for anything?”

“Only for me to walk through.”

J. M. hung the top hat on a tree in the ante-room, and Dan followed suit with his Fedora. When they entered the big room the chief turned on him grimly.

“What the hell do you propose to do with yourself all day?” he asked. “Sit in the corner and twiddle your thumbs?”

“I’m a pretty fair stenographer,” said Dan. “Why not try me out?”

“All right,” said J. M. sardonically. “Sit down and get out your book.”

He started dictating rapidly and without pause as if he was wound up, pacing up and down the path in his rug meanwhile like a caged lion. Dan, sweating, managed to stay with him somehow, and what was more, he was able to read his notes when commanded to do so. The old lion relaxed somewhat, and Dan took the opportunity to say:

“I’ve got a proposition to put up to you, sir, if you can spare a moment. I told Inspector Scofield about it last night, and he approved of it.”

“Well, what is it?” growled J. M.

“It will give you more freedom of action,” said Dan cunningly. “Allow you to go and come as you please, and all that.”

“I mean to do that anyhow.”

“It’s based on the fact that you have never allowed your photograph to be published.”

“Ha! that’s true!” said J. M., with fire in his eye. “And you may take your orders right now. If you ever see anybody pointing a camera at me smash it! I’ll stand the damage.”

Dan grinned. “All right, sir. . . . I suppose you’re a more or less familiar figure in this neighbourhood, but to the general public you are entirely unknown.”

“Well, what of it?”

“I propose to hire somebody to impersonate you. Let him ride around in the big car as a kind of pilot, while you and I follow in an inconspicuous taxi.”

The idea tickled the old man’s fancy, but he wasn’t going to admit it right away. “Ha! Preposterous!” he said scornfully.

Dan said nothing.

“Where could you find a man who looked like me?” he demanded with superb egotism.

“Well, that’s up to me,” said Dan. “I thought of looking for an actor who could study all your ways and imitate them. The point is, if I could find such a man, we could let it leak out that you had finally consented to be photographed. If they photographed him it would establish him as you. He would be taken everywhere for you, and you could go around unnoticed.”

“Ha!” said J. M. “There might be something in it. But first you’ve got to find your man.”

“I’m expecting my partner here at ten-thirty,” said Dan. “His name is Garvan. I’ll leave him with you, and start right out.”

“Oh, God, another sleuth!” said J. M. disgustedly. However, he telephoned to the outer office and gave instructions that Mr. Garvan was to be brought in when he came.

Reed Garvan was a tall, loose-limbed lad, a pole vaulter of some note, with a long, smooth face and a wise eye. He carried himself in his elegant new clothes as if he had been born to them. The little messenger brought him in, glancing sharply from under his brows from Reed to Dan and back again. This man’s name, by the way, was Mr. Colfax. Dan had already asked Inspector Scofield to have his activities outside the office investigated.

J. M. opened up on Reed in characteristic fashion. “What the hell am I going to do with this stork? He looks like a candidate for the ministry!”

Reed, who had been warned what to expect, took it without batting an eye.

“He knows what he has to do,” said Dan. “He can take your dictation as well as I can, and I can guarantee that he’s quick on the draw.”

“H’m!” said J. M.

“I’ll go now,” said Dan. “If you will permit it I’d like to leave by the side room and the door into the corridor. If I find a candidate for the job, I want to bring him in that way. Nobody in your office must know about this stunt.”

J. M. tossed him the key without comment, and Dan went out leaving Reed to work out his own salvation.

It was nearly five that afternoon before Dan returned, bringing with him a large, dejected-looking man in a wrinkled brownish suit and greasy hat. His hair was a nondescript shade between blonde and grey, and his big features were heavy with discouragement. They entered by the back door on the corridor. Dan, hearing no voices in J. M.’s room, knocked and was

bidden to enter. J. M. was seated at his desk studying a legal paper, while Reed typed in the corner as if he had been working there for years.

“I have my man,” said Dan with his hand on the door. “Shall I bring him in?”

J. M. grunted an assent, and Dan beckoned to his companion. “This is Henry Waters,” said Dan.

When J. M.’s eyes fell on the man who entered his face was a study. “Damn it!” he cried. “Have you the assurance to pretend that that looks like me?”

“Not at present,” said Dan; “but when he is properly made up and dressed, he will. His figure is about right——”

“By God, I’m not as fat as that!”

Dan let it go. The big man stood in front of J. M.’s desk nervously fingering his hat, while Dan exhibited him like a showman. “When his hair is dyed black and curled at the ends; when we put him in a cut-away coat and a top hat——”

“Where did you pick him up?”

“In an actor’s agency.”

“He looks like a sheep!”

“Well, he’s not acting now. With a little study he can take you off to the life. He’s a very good actor, but he’s been down on his luck for a couple of years. He’s grown so stout there are not many parts he can play——”

“I am *not* so fat as that!” muttered J. M. Raising his voice, he asked: “How much does he want?”

“A hundred a week.”

“Have you explained the nature of the job to him?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And do you mean to tell me that for a beggarly hundred a week he is willing to let us put him up to be shot at?”

“Mr. Waters has a wife, sir,” explained Dan, “and he is naturally anxious as to what would become of her if anything happened to him. I suggested that if he was disabled or killed while working for you, you would agree to pay fifty thousand dollars.”

“Well, I’ll be damned!” said J. M., staring.

“Is it too much, sir?”

“Not at all. But a man expects to be consulted about these things——”

“The arrangement was subject to your approval, of course.”

All this time the candidate had stood turning his hat, and not saying a word. “What’s the matter with him?” cried J. M. exasperated. “Is he a deaf mute? Has he lost the use of speech?”

“Mr. Waters is a silent man,” said Dan, never cracking a smile. “I considered it a recommendation. As long as he keeps his mouth shut he can’t give himself away.”

“All right! All right!” said J. M., waving his hands. “Take him away and fix him up.”

“I thought your house would be the best place to do that, sir.”

“All right.”

“Will you be at home to-night, sir?”

“Yes, I’m dining at home. What about it?”

“Well, he must have an opportunity to study you and to form himself on you. And he must try on your clothes and so on.”

“All right,” said J. M., with grim humour. “Ask him to dinner with me. And come yourself, of course; and bring what’s-his-name yonder, the long-legged lad. We’ll have ourselves a time!”

CHAPTER VI

ON the outskirts of the financial district, Beaver Street, east of Broad, the top floor of a small ancient building was rented by a concern known as the Exchange Office Supply Company. For a good many years it had been functioning in a small way at that address with a few salesmen, stock clerks and delivery boys. Scarcely anybody in the neighbourhood noticed that there had lately been a change in ownership. The office force remained the same. Only the boss and the salesmen were new.

Thus Joe Penman and his two principal assistants, Bull Fellows and Whitey Morgan, built up a front behind which they concealed their real operations. Whitey, a sandy-haired young fellow who owed his moniker to his colourless eyebrows and lashes, was much changed in appearance by the application of a little hair dye. Bull, lately released from the penitentiary, had been to the seashore to get rid of his Sing Sing bleach. Joe, who had escaped the notice of the police in late years, attempted no disguise. All three were dressed as sober business men.

When the clerks and the delivery boys went home for the day these three came out into the general office to lounge about. Joe locked the door on the stairs to guard against interruption, and the talk of office supplies was dropped.

Old Joe was a fine wreck of a man; tall, broad-shouldered, lean in the flank. Only his seamed face betrayed the nature of the life he had led. Aware that it was no asset to their present business, he kept himself as much as possible in the background. "The Sucker's getting ugly," he said. "Threatens to hold up the jack. We got to stage our show this week to satisfy him."

Bull stretched as if to throw off the respectability that cramped him during business hours. "Cheese! A little excitement will go good!" he growled. "Selling pencils and carbon paper ain't no job for a hard guy. I want to paste them chair warmers in the smush when I got to ask for their orders."

"Me, I'm pretty good at it," said Whitey, leaning back and cocking his feet on a desk. "I make a hit with the pretty stenogs."

"Oh, yeah?" said Bull. "Crazy about your dyed eyebrows, ain't you?"

Joe leaned against a roll-top desk, scowling thoughtfully into the street. "Shut up!" he said coolly. "Hear what I got to say. J. M. is booked to address

the National Executives at the Madagascar Hotel on Thursday night. He's got no date afterwards. That will be our chance."

"How you know he's got no date?" asked Whitey.

"Colfax told me. Colfax keeps tab of the engagement pad on J. M.'s desk. . . . That little guy earns double what I pay him," Joe added with satisfaction. "Because why? He hates the big chief."

"Why should he?"

"Reason enough. They started as boys together, and now look at them!"

"How you get hold of Colfax first-off?"

"I smelled him out," said Joe, grinning. "With my office supplies. I always recognise a man that I can use. Colfax is almost as good as the tapped wire."

"It was the young cop blew that graft," growled Bull, moving restlessly around the office.

"And a near thing for me too," put in Whitey. "I met him in the hall coming as I was going."

Bull stopped short, scowling. "How come J. M. should get a cop to guard him just at this time? Looks funny to me. Looks like somebody had tipped him off."

Joe fixed one then the other with eyes like two points of ice. "Well, there's us three," he said, ominously quiet; "and there's the Sucker and the guy who brings us the jack. Which one tipped J. M. off?"

Neither answered him.

"If I found a traitor," said Joe softly, "he would curse the day that he was born!"

"Near every rich man employs guards," said Whitey hopefully. "Maybe J. M.'s just got round to it."

"That's the talk of a fool too," said Joe coolly. "We got to act as if J. M. was wise to us. We can't afford to kid ourselves. We got to think of everything. We got to be prepared for anything. This is no Sunday school picnic we're working on. . . . Colfax told me he thought he was being tailed."

"Cheese!" said Whitey, startled. "The cops will tap his 'phone!"

"Yeah, Sherlock," said Joe dryly. "Somebody already thought of that. He calls me up from a pay station now."

"Suppose they was to arrest Colfax?"

"I'm prepared for that too."

The slow-witted Bull was still pursuing the same thought. "That cop galls me!" he snarled. "He's too smart. He gets in our light. You better let me smoke him, boss."

"Yeah?" said Joe sarcastically. "Kill the cop and rouse up the whole damn force before we're ready to act. That's a brilliant suggestion, that is."

"Take it from me," said Bull hotly, "if you don't get that cop out of the way, he'll block our game."

"Are you telling me?" said Joe, with a cold stare.

Bull couldn't face it out. "Aah!" he growled.

"There's other ways of getting rid of a man besides smoking him," said Joe, with an ugly grin.

"What way?"

"Pull him down; disgrace him; get him in wrong with J. M. and his inspector; get him fired off the force."

"How you going to do that?"

"When there's a guy in your light," said Joe, grinning, "first-off you got to learn everything you can about him. That gives you ammunition to use, see? I got a man working on Woburn now. It's Charley. Charley has taken a room in the house where Woburn and his lanky side-kick boards, and he's made friends with them. Nice fellows off duty, Charley says, easy to get along with. Woburn's got a girl."

"What of it?" said Bull.

"A guy is always vulnerable when he's stuck on a girl," said Joe, with relish. "You can get at him through her. She's a female 'tec working for Scofield. She's promised to take him when he makes good. All this come out through Ma Winters who runs the boarding house."

"What else do you know?"

"If J. M. is attacked and Woburn saves his life, Scofield has promised to make him a lieutenant."

"What good is that to us?"

"Aah," drawled Joe with cool contempt; "you're a good lad, Bull, game as they come, but you can't see no further ahead than your eyelashes. You leave the planning to me, fellow, that's my long suit, brains. That's how come I'm bossing this outfit. When I'm through with that damned cop, a dog in the gutter would be well off alongside him!"

"Well, I hope I get a chance to put my heel in his face," growled Bull.

"What about Thursday night?" asked Whitey.

“J. M. is booked to make his spiel at nine o’clock,” said Joe. “He don’t like listening to other men getting up on their hind legs and talking, and he’ll slide home as soon as he’s through. Say he gets home at ten. That’s not too early. Where J. M. lives it’s as quiet at ten as it is at two. I been studying over the ground. Bull will take care of the watchman, and Whitey will use the gun.”

“Yeah,” said Bull sullenly. “Whitey gets the star part!”

“Well, he’s quicker in the getaway,” said Joe, grinning; “but you’re a neater hand with limber-jack, eh? That’s your speciality.” Joe made a gesture of striking sharply. “To-morrow we’ll go up there and look over the ground together.”

CHAPTER VII

WITHIN a week of the time when Henry Waters was hired, the whole routine was operating like clockwork. One of Dan's greatest difficulties was to persuade J. M. to give up the top hat. At first he refused point blank.

"I wouldn't be myself in any other hat," he said.

"Suppose," said Dan, "that somebody in the street was to see Henry driving along in a top hat and you following in another top hat. It would certainly make him rub his eyes."

"People don't use their eyes," said J. M.

"Nobody else wears a silk hat down-town," Dan persisted. "It's associated with your name. Thousands who never saw you have heard that you wear a silk hat. If you continue to wear it the whole stunt goes for nothing."

J. M. finally found a Homburg hat that satisfied his sense of the picturesque, and he wore that. Dan, realising that it was impossible to make J. M. look ordinary whatever he put on, had to be satisfied.

For J. M. and Dan's use a small black car resembling a taxi-cab was added to J. M.'s garage, with a man to drive it specially chosen for his skill and nerve. On duty he was always armed.

Meanwhile, Henry Waters and Reed always went ahead in the big limousine. To land a good job after his long search seemed to make a new man of Henry. The dejected stoop went out of his shoulders. When he stepped out of the limousine, though he well knew that he might stop a bullet at any moment, he kept his head up and eyes front as if he had been trained to danger since childhood.

"It's the fifty thousand dollars insurance bears me up," he said to Reed, with his slow smile. "It's a satisfaction to know that if they get you you'll bring a good price!"

On his public appearances Henry carried himself with a bluff dignity that was the very spit of J. M.'s. The real J. M., watching the impersonation from under cover, chuckled in his belly.

"Damned if he don't do me credit!" he said.

He doubled Henry's salary.

One day a national news agency called up J. M. and (for perhaps the hundredth time) asked very humbly and urgently for permission to take a

photograph to use in connection with the forthcoming convention of National Executives.

“All right,” said J. M., winking at Dan. “You can send a man over to my office. I won’t be interviewed, but he can take pictures if he doesn’t bother me.”

The man at the other end of the wire almost fainted with surprise.

After that the other news agencies had to be accommodated, and pictures of Henry Waters posing as the great J. M. Lawrence began to appear in newspapers throughout the entire country. Some of J. M.’s close friends may have looked hard when they saw them, still the likeness was sufficient so that nobody could say positively: That is not J. M.

The force of circumstances threw J. M. and his three defenders much closer together than could ordinarily be the case with an employer and his employees. A sense of the danger that they shared made them feel friendly. It was never spoken of between them, but the same thought was often in the mind of each man: “We are four to-day; how many will we be to-morrow?”

J. M. and Henry were both native New Yorkers, and they were fond of reminiscing together about the town of fifty years ago when the Bloomingdale gang used to deploy down Amsterdam Avenue, driving all the other kids before them. Henry had a passion for the game of pinochle. He taught it to Reed Garvan, and they played it during the long hours when they were obliged to sit hidden in the side ante-room of J. M.’s office.

At the end of the day when Henry’s services were no longer required, he would change to his shabby old clothes, leave the Lawrence mansion by the servants’ entrance, and go sit with his old wife for an hour or two.

At the office Dan was unable to persuade J. M. to get rid of the aged messenger, Colfax.

“Why, I went to school with him half a century ago,” said J. M. “Why should Tommy Colfax rat on me now?”

“What do you pay him?” asked Dan dryly.

“I don’t know. Ask the office manager. He has instructions to be liberal.”

“Say twenty-five a week,” said Dan. “Or even fifty. He may be eaten by envy.”

“Nonsense! He’s a simple-minded old guy. . . . You told me the police were investigating him. What did they find out?”

Dan was obliged to confess that the police had turned up nothing. Colfax appeared to live a perfectly regular and open life. The only thing they had

against him was that he had lately installed a telephone in his little flat. It seemed unusual for a man in his circumstances.

“Everybody’s got to have a telephone,” said J. M. “Why don’t the police tap it, if they’re suspicious.”

“They have done so,” said Dan.

“Well?”

“He has never used it.”

“What did I tell you?” said J. M. in great satisfaction.

“Well, anyhow, give him another job,” urged Dan. “A better job if you like, but one that doesn’t keep him so close to you.”

“Nothing doing!” said J. M. “The old fellow likes to be around me. I’m not going to hurt his feelings.”

Dan had to let it go at that.

On the night when J. M. was scheduled to address the National Executives it came out that he had no intention of eating their banquet.

“Why should I poison myself with lousy hotel food when I’ve got a \$25,000 chef at home? You men eat with me and he’ll show you something. We can go on to the hotel afterwards.”

On this night the usual routine was altered a little. J. M. and Dan set off for the Madagascar in the plain car a little in advance. They entered the hotel by a side door, and proceeded direct to a room that had been engaged in advance.

A few minutes later Henry made a grand entree through the main lobby, attended by Reed. Henry faced the soft booming of the flash powders without a tremor. Henry’s photograph had been so widely published within the past few days that he was pretty generally recognised. He bowed with dignity to all who greeted him, but never spoke. It was Reed’s job to keep his admirers from coming too close.

They went to the room where the other two were waiting. Henry handed over the silk hat, and J. M. proceeded to the banquet hall with Dan at his side. Henry and Reed sat down to play pinochle while awaiting their return.

At the same moment one of the watchmen instituted by Dan was making his rounds back and forth around J. M.’s house and his daughter’s house next door. The big twin houses filled an entire block frontage on Fifth Avenue facing the park. It is a neighbourhood of automobile owners

exclusively, and after nightfall there are but few figures to be seen on the sidewalks.

The two houses were entered through a closed loggia that joined them in the middle. This loggia was recessed thirty or forty feet from the sidewalk, and the intervening space was filled with grass plots and bushes planted along under the walls of each house. A walk led between the grass plots to a few steps mounting to an open terrace surrounded by a stone parapet. The two front doors opened on the terrace side by side. J. M.'s was the right-hand door.

The watchman's beat began at a little door opening on the side street at the rear of J. M.'s house. It was his job to unlock this door every time he came to it, and cast his light around the small paved yard inside. Then he retraced his steps. In front of the house he was required to enter the recess on every round and cast his light around the bushes and around the terrace to make sure that no figure was hidden there. Then on around to the rear of Miss Lawrence's house where there was a similar little door.

At intervals of five minutes or so he passed back and forth. He wore a uniform similar to a policeman's, but made of grey cloth in order to distinguish him from the city force. In addition to his flashlight, he carried a night-stick and a gun.

So intent was he on looking for possible intruders that he failed to notice that he himself was under observation in the cross street that ran along the side of Miss Lawrence's house. A man dressed precisely the same as the watchman was hidden in the area-way of an old-fashioned house just beyond, peeping at the watchman through the balustrade of the stone steps.

When the watchman went back around the avenue side of the twin houses, this man slipped behind the corner of the wall that ended Miss Lawrence's property, and waited. The first time the watchman came back there happened to be a car passing in the street, and the hidden man remained still. The watchman unlocked the little door, cast his light inside and went back again. The next time he came the street was empty.

The hidden man was less than two yards from the door in the wall. He waited until he heard the door unlatch. Then slipping out, he struck a terrible blow on the watchman's head as he leaned forward to cast his light inside the yard. The victim pitched forward without a sound. The other man with lightning quickness caught him before he crashed to the pavement. The door in the wall was open. With one step the assailant was inside, carrying his victim, and had the door closed behind him.

A swift glance assured him that all the back windows of Miss Lawrence's house were dark. He laid his man down on the cement pavement, and expeditiously lashed his arms behind him with a thin hard cord. He tied his ankles together. He sealed his lips with strips of surgeon's tape.

After not more than three minutes delay the second grey-clad figure took the place of the first, back and forth around the two houses. On the avenue front he entered the recess and flashed his light around the bushes and at the sides of the terrace in exactly the same manner. While he was doing this he flashed his light on and off three times.

As soon as he had gone on around the corner, another figure issued out of the shadow of the park wall opposite, crossed the street, entered the walk between the grass plots and concealed himself behind the bushes that lined the terrace wall on J. M.'s side.

When J. M. and Dan returned to the hotel bedroom after the speech, Reed swept up the cards.

"Hell of a waste of time!" grumbled J. M. with his grim humour. "Feeding pap to these old babies. They couldn't stomach the truth."

"Don't you believe it," said Dan to the others. "It was a darn good speech. Made 'em sit up."

J. M. passed the silk hat to Henry. "Come on, let's go," he said.

"J. M., if it's all right with you I'll go first with Henry," said Dan.

"Sure," said J. M. carelessly. "But what's the idea?"

"Well, I got this scheme up," said Dan, "and I can't always be putting somebody else in the fore-front. I'd sooner ride in the first car when we go home at night, at least until you cut those bushes down. They make too good a hiding place."

"Damn it all, have I got to ruin my place on account of a parcel of crooks?"

Dan said nothing.

"All right," growled J. M. "Remind me to-morrow, and I'll give the order to have the bushes grubbed up."

It was only a short distance from the hotel to J. M.'s house. When the limousine drew up before it with Dan and Henry inside, all was quiet. There were a number of cars rolling up and down the avenue, but the pavement

was deserted except for a pair of lovers sauntering by. Before opening the car door, Dan took a keen survey of the premises.

“I don’t like those bushes,” he muttered. “We’ll wait for the watchman.”

Presently the grey-clad figure came around the corner, entered the recess, flashing his light carefully all around, and disappeared around the next corner.

“Okay,” said Dan. “Come on!”

Entering the walk, Dan let Henry go a yard in front of him so that he could see all around him. The limousine drove off to the garage. Mounting the steps to the terrace Dan handed Henry the door key.

“You open the door.”

While Henry was fumbling with the key, Dan keeping watch behind him, saw a head rise above the parapet as silently as a shadow. “Down! J. M.! Down!” he yelled.

Henry dropped to the terrace as if he had been boneless. At the same moment came the flash and report of a gun. The bullet smashed harmlessly against the stone door frame. Almost in the same instant Dan had his hand on top of the parapet, vaulting over.

He crashed into the man below before he could point his gun, and bore him flat on his back. The gun exploded again, the bullet going wild. The two figures rolled and smashed amongst the bushes. Dan concentrated all his faculties on the gun. The man struck at him savagely with his left hand, but Dan cared nothing for that as long as he could keep his right hand crushed to the ground. The second car drew up at the curb, and Reed came running.

“I can hold him,” said Dan. “Take his gun.”

Reed planted his foot on the man’s wrist. He yelped with pain and opened his fingers. Reed snatched up the gun and pocketed it.

They held the man down until the chauffeur had escorted J. M. into the house. Then Dan and Reed dragged their prisoner after. The whole affair attracted surprisingly little attention. People in the passing cars must have heard the shots, but none stopped. The few on the sidewalk thought of nothing but to scuttle for cover.

Inside the house J. M. was determined to be in on the excitement, and he had sent Henry off out of sight. The butler was there and the chauffeur, nobody else. They turned on all the lights in the great central hall so they could get a good look at their prisoner.

He was a young man, sandy-haired, rather well favoured, but shifty and snarling now. He was panting and sweating with fear. His collar was torn

apart and one side of his face was streaked with mud where Dan had ground it into the earth.

J. M. was enjoying the situation. “We got him! We got him!” he kept saying in great satisfaction. “What have you got to say for yourself?” he demanded of the prisoner.

The young man raised his matted head. “I wasn’t going to hurt anybody,” he said hoarsely. “I’m no killer. It was all a stall, anyhow. I fired wild.”

J. M. laughed grimly. “A likely story!”

The prisoner’s voice ran up hysterically. “I tell you it was the cop put up the whole thing!” he cried. “And he double-crossed me. He come to me and my pal and offered us a hundred each and another hundred if it went off all right. My pal was to handle the watchman and me fire the gun. The cop gave me the gun. He promised to let me get away. I had a car waiting in the side street. And he double-crossed me!”

“The cop got this up?” repeated J. M., scowling and puzzled. “What cop?”

The prisoner turned on Dan. “Him!” he yelled. “Dan Woburn there.”

“For God’s sake what’s this?” cried Dan, all amazed.

“Yeah, this is all news to you, ain’t it?” snarled the prisoner. “You don’t know what it’s all about, do you? Aah, you dirty liar, you can’t get away with that! I’ll show you up for what you are!”

“Dan, do you know this fellow?” cried J. M.

“I never saw him before in my life, sir.”

The prisoner went off into a peal of hysterical laughter. “That’s good! That’s good!” he yelled. “Never seen me before! That’s rich!”

“Tell me,” said J. M. ominously quiet, “why should Woburn put up a job like this.”

“To get promoted!” yelled the prisoner. “Scofield promised to make him a lieutenant if he saved your life. So he goes to work and stages this show. He wants to get married, but his girl won’t take him on a patrolman’s pay. I know him and he knows me!”

Dan was so stunned he was unable to defend himself for the moment. He and Reed looked at each other with hanging mouths. “Where did he get hold of all that?” muttered Dan.

“Look at him! Look at him!” yelled the prisoner. “I guess that touched him!”

“You say he gave you the gun you used,” said J. M. “Where is it now?”

“I have it, sir,” said Reed, handing it over.

“You see that’s the regular police department gun,” said the prisoner.

J. M. examined it carefully. “Did Dan have any private mark on his gun?” he asked Reed.

“Yes, sir. On the butt. Three little squares arranged in a triangle. I watched him scratch them.”

J. M. handed the gun back to Reed without speaking. The old man’s face was as grim as stone. Reed took one look at the butt of the gun and turned as pale as chalk.

“Oh, my God!” he gasped. “That’s Dan’s gun!”

“Wheatley,” said J. M. to the butler, “you had better get Inspector Scofield on the ’phone.”

CHAPTER VIII

ON the following morning in the main office of the Exchange Office Supply Co. the orders were being made up and sent out by the delivery boys as usual. Business had fallen off somewhat of late, and the two stock clerks were sore.

“It’s the new salesmen,” said one to the other. “Sometimes they come in without an order. Hell! I could sell more than them two guys together with one hand tied behind me!”

In the private office Joe Penman and Bull Fellows had their heads close together over the morning papers. This was what the *Herald-Tribune* had printed about the events of the night before:

“A report was current up-town last night that J. M. Lawrence, on his return from the banquet of the National Executives Association, was shot by a man who was lying in wait for him at his own doorstep, and dangerously wounded. A reporter from the *Herald-Tribune* who visited the scene was told by several persons in the neighbourhood that they had heard two shots. Edward Dickey, second man employed by Mitchell Ennis, the banker, who lives in the next block to Mr. Lawrence, told a story to the effect that as he was accompanying a lady friend home, he heard the shot and saw one of Mr. Lawrence’s secretaries struggling with the assailant on the ground. He said he did not wait to see more.

“Upon inquiry at Mr. Lawrence’s house this story was categorically denied by his butler. The butler, John Wheatley, laughed heartily at the ‘yarn,’ as he termed it, and led the reporter to the door of Mr. Lawrence’s library where the multi-millionaire was to be seen playing cards with a secretary. The reporter can state that Mr. Lawrence was entirely uninjured.”

“Huh! they didn’t give us much,” growled Bull.

“It’s enough to show the Sucker that we were on the job,” said Joe. “We wouldn’t have got that much if it hadn’t been for me. J. M. and the police both wanted to keep the whole thing quiet, but I telephoned around to the papers and gave them the tip.”

“Suppose the Sucker ain’t satisfied,” said Bull, scowling. “Suppose he fires us off the job, and hires somebody else to do his business!”

Joe spat to one side. His hard, seamed face showed no concern. "I have it in mind," he said shortly. He hoisted his long frame out of the office chair and paced up and down the little room with the tread of an old leopard, thinking hard.

Finally he said: "We got to get a guy to tail the guy who brings us the jack. He must be A1 at it. Ought to be an ornery looking little guy like Colfax that nobody wouldn't notice. Know anybody?"

Bull suggested a couple of names that were rejected by Joe. Finally he said: "I got the man! Sliver Buckley."

"Who's he?"

"He's a little mutt that you wouldn't notice no more than a bum on a park bench. But smart. Used to be a dick in a private agency, and a good one, but the coke got him and he's down and out."

"I don't want no down and outer," said Joe, scowling.

"He'd be all right if you just fed him coke enough to keep the band playing. It's only when he can't get the snow that he begins to shake and make faces."

"Do you know where to find him?"

"Sure, I can always find him through the snow peddlers."

"Okay. You can look him up this afternoon. This morning you got to help me. Whitey will be arraigned in the Yorkville Court at ten-thirty."

"Will the whole story come out then?" said Bull, scowling.

"Not a chance!" said Joe, with a hard grin. "Nobody wants this story spread in the paper. Whitey will be charged with carrying a gun, that's all, and held for trial. J. M.'s name won't be brought into it."

"Whitey certainly gummed things up by getting nabbed last night!" growled Bull.

"Yeah," muttered Joe, only half-listening. "The cop was just a little too quick for him. Whitey had to show his hand too soon."

"Whitey's a wash out!" snarled Bull. "There's nothing to him but face!"

"Quit your grousing!" said Joe curtly. "In this business you have to take everything as it comes." He took a turn back and forth, studying grimly. "This will all work out to our advantage," he muttered. "I will make it work out."

"Just the same I told you you ought to let me step on that cop," persisted Bull.

Joe stopped and looked at the other man with an evil pleasure in his face. "Maybe you can now," he said softly. "Wait a bit! Wait and see how this

works out. If Woburn is fired from the force on account of this it will be nothing to them if he drops out of sight.”

“Cheese!” muttered Bull. “Only let me at him!”

Joe’s face hardened. “But hear what I say,” he commanded. “No shooting! This guy mustn’t be found anywhere. He just disappears.”

“I get you,” said Bull.

Joe looked at his watch. “Come on,” he said. “We got a lot to do before ten-thirty. For to-day you can forget the pencils and the carbon paper.”

CHAPTER IX

IN the trial room at police headquarters Dan sat to one side facing the crowd of complainants, witnesses and officers that filled the room. In the case of a charge as serious as that which had been brought against Dan, the accused was entitled to a lawyer, but he had refused that advantage. He sat alone.

The minor delinquents were brought up one after another, for sleeping on duty, for being absent from post, for taking a drink and so on, and fined, reprimanded or cleared. All this was nothing to Dan. He sat with his hard, intent face lowered, obviously preparing his own case, making all clear in his mind, so that he could defend himself like a man when he was called up.

The people in the court looked at him sympathetically, sneeringly or indifferently according to their natures. Dan was the star attraction to-day. Of them all only Reed Garvan could guess what Dan was going through. Reed was able to measure the strength of the painful feelings that made Dan's face as pale and hard as stone.

Julia Dormer was in the back of the room. She had learned to conceal her feelings too. It had been whispered about that her name had been brought into the case, and people glanced curiously from her to Dan and back again. Julia's face gave nothing away. After a single swift glance towards her when she entered, Dan avoided looking at her.

The commissioner himself was conducting the trials this morning, an imposing figure on the bench flanked on one side by a deputy and on the other by Inspector Scofield, whose assistance he required in trying Dan. Dan's case had been put at the bottom of the docket owing to the non-arrival of the complaining witness.

As the cases were cleared off one by one the crowd in the room didn't lessen any, for all were curious to hear what kind of an answer Dan was going to make to the extraordinary charge that had been brought against him. Finally, the last case was disposed of.

"Where's your witness, inspector?" asked the commissioner.

Inspector Scofield was worried. "I don't know, sir," he said, glancing at his watch. "He left the Yorkville Court forty minutes ago in charge of Detective-Officer Rafferty."

"Time enough to get here twice over in a taxi," grumbled the commissioner.

At that moment Detective Rafferty entered the room. An excited buzz of comment went around when it was perceived that he was alone. Rafferty was a big man with a high colour ordinarily. His cheeks were pale now and etched with a network of tiny purple veins.

“Where’s your man?” demanded Scofield sharply.

It was a bad moment for Rafferty before all that staring crowd. “I’m sorry, inspector,” he stammered. “He—he escaped.”

A sensation was caused in the room. The commissioner scowled and rapped for order. Scofield swore under his breath. Some of the stony look went out of Dan’s face. His eyes and Julia’s sought each other out like flying birds, and exchanged a smiling look in which their lips took no part.

The commissioner was angry. “Clear the room!” he ordered. All the spectators were very unwillingly ushered out and the doors closed. Rafferty meanwhile had dropped in a chair. The man was clearly in a bad way.

“Tell your story,” snapped Scofield.

“This man,” began the unlucky Rafferty, “he gave his name in court as Ralph Danvers, but he’s known to the police as Whitey Morgan. He has a record. He was arraigned for carrying a weapon and held for trial. His bail was set and put up by a bondsman. After that he was free technically, but my instructions were to bring him to headquarters anyhow. He made no objection to coming.

“We left the court and were standing at the curb waiting for a taxi when somebody struck me from behind. Blackjack. I never saw who it was. The blow blinded me and forced me to my knees. There were plenty of people around, but nobody offered to help me. I was only out for a second, but when I got my sight Whitey was gone. I saw him jump on the running board of a moving car. They took him inside. I shot at the tyres of the car, but I couldn’t see good. I grabbed the next car that come and gave them a chase. But they got away. I’ve turned in the number of the car and an alarm has been sent out, but I reckon they abandoned it as soon as they shook me off.”

“Well, that’s that!” said the commissioner grimly. “This man needs medical attention.”

“Go to the surgeon, Rafferty,” said Scofield, “and afterwards report to me in my office.”

“Yes, sir,” said Rafferty unhappily. He left the room.

“Woburn!” said the commissioner.

Dan faced him confidently.

“Without a complaining witness there can be no trial,” he went on. He paused, fixing Dan with a searching glance. “If you’re a crook,” he said meaningly, “this is a lucky break for you. If you’re an honest officer it’s a damned bad one!”

Dan was completely taken aback by this turn. “But, commissioner,” he protested, “the man was afraid to come here! He couldn’t face me. His story wouldn’t have stood up for a minute before you. Doesn’t that prove my innocence?”

“No,” said the commissioner coldly. “How do I know that you or some friend of yours hasn’t squared the fellow since last night? How do I know that it wasn’t some friends of yours that snatched him away this morning?”

“Oh, my God!” gasped Dan, forgetting where he was. “Then how can I prove my innocence?”

“You can’t. Unless we can put our hands on this man again.”

“But what do you think yourself, commissioner? Do you think I’m guilty?”

“Frankly, I don’t know.”

“Oh, this is terrible!” muttered Dan.

“Nothing is proved,” the commissioner went on, “and I am bound to give you the benefit of the doubt.”

“To hell with that!” said Dan under his breath.

“You will return to patrol duty in the Thirty-first precinct. If we can find this man you will be called up for trial again.”

Dan stood dazed, trying desperately to see light through the thicket that surrounded him. “Commissioner,” he said at last, “could I ask for a favour?”

“What’s that?”

“Could I get a short leave of absence, a week, a month maybe, without pay?”

“What for?”

“My God, commissioner, I can’t rest under a charge like this! I must find this man.”

“The whole machinery of the department will be put in motion to find him. What could you do? Have you any information that you have not given to Inspector Scofield?”

“No, sir.”

“What could you do single-handed?”

“I don’t know, sir. I must be doing something. I couldn’t pound the beat thinking of this all the time. I’d go crazy.”

“All right. A month’s leave without pay.”

Dan and Julia could not talk together at headquarters where everybody was glancing at them slyly. Dan knew that Julia had an assignment at the Municipal Building that morning, and when he left headquarters he proceeded there, and waited in the ground floor corridor until she came along. There they could steal just a moment or two in full publicity amongst the people hurrying to and from the elevators.

Dan told her what had happened in the trial room after she left. “Do you believe that I did this thing?” he asked her straight.

“No,” she said quickly. “I know you. I don’t have to go by the evidence.”

Dan drew a breath of relief. “Thanks for that,” he said simply. “It helps me to take it on the chin.”

She put her hand on his sleeve in a fleeting caress. “Oh, Dan!”

“But it puts me back an awful long way with you,” he said gloomily.

“Nothing of the sort! You stand just the same with me as you did before.”

“I mean it postpones the happy day almost indefinitely,” he said, with a twisted smile.

She looked at him with soft eyes. “If you knew!”

“Knew what, honey?”

“When you’re out of luck it’s so much harder for me to hold back!”

“Why do you?”

“I must! . . . But if you were completely down and out I reckon I’d have to marry you out of hand!”

They laughed, and involuntarily pressed closer together.

“I wouldn’t let you then,” said Dan. “I have a little pride of my own.”

“Perhaps they’ll run the man down,” she suggested hopefully.

Dan shook his head. “I doubt it. Whitey Morgan has abandoned all his old haunts, all his old friends. They don’t know where to look. It’s clear that he’s under the guidance of somebody a whole lot cleverer than he is.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I believe that the best chance of getting hold of him is through J. M. Whitey and his gang are not likely to give up just because the first shot missed. I’m going to put it up to J. M.”

“Dan! You’re going to see J. M.!”

“Sure!”

“Well, you have your nerve!”

“Aah!” growled Dan. “He can only have me thrown out.”

“And if he does what will you do?”

“I don’t know,” said Dan, scowling. “But I’ll do something.”

She gave him her hand. “Good luck, old fellow!”

Dan held it for a moment. “I suppose,” he said, with a hang-dog air, “that you wouldn’t kiss me in this crowd.”

“Sure I will! They’ll think we’re brother and sister!”

Their lips met briefly.

Half an hour later Dan was standing in front of J. M.’s big desk. The old man leaned back in his swivel chair, studying him grimly from under his beetle brows.

“Thanks for letting me see you,” said Dan.

“Hell, you owe me no thanks,” said J. M. coolly. “I was curious to find out what brought you back here. Is it the gameness of an honest man, or is it just the brazen nerve of a scoundrel?”

Dan said nothing.

After studying him for a while J. M. said: “And I swear I can’t tell yet! Your face is as expressionless as a plank.”

Dan’s face became even more wooden as J. M. studied it. “I can’t talk up for myself, sir. If it was somebody else I could.”

“Then what did you come here for?”

“You’re a man of experience,” said Dan earnestly. “You must know men or you wouldn’t be where you are. Put me to the test; any way you want!”

“H’m!” said J. M. “What happened at headquarters this morning?”

Dan gave him a brief and exact account.

“H’m!” said J. M. again. It was his only comment.

“Won’t you question me, sir?” asked Dan. “You can certainly satisfy yourself that way whether I’m on the square.”

“Hell, I’m no lawyer,” said J. M. “One question will be enough. . . . How in thunder did this thug find out so much about you? About your girl? About the promise of promotion that was made you? And how did he get hold of your gun?”

“There’s a new boarder lately come to the house where I live,” said Dan, “and Reed and I have figured out that he must be an agent of the same gang that employs Whitey, and that he came to our house for the purpose of getting something on me. He was a friendly appearing young fellow. Reed and I never discussed our private affairs with him. We figure he must have wormed it out of the landlady. We all tell her things.”

“And the gun?”

“He must have come into my room while I was sleeping and changed it. It was lying on the bureau. I never thought to lock the door.”

Dan paused, anxiously searching J. M.’s face to see how he was taking it. But that grim map told him nothing.

“Look,” said Dan eagerly, “if it was true that I gave Whitey that gun I must have had two guns, mustn’t I? Because I had a gun on me last night when we took that one from him. And if I had two guns naturally I wouldn’t give him the one that would incriminate me, would I?”

“Ha!” said J. M. dryly. “You don’t talk up so badly for yourself!”

He got up and started pacing his accustomed path in the carpet, while Dan, standing with one hand resting on the desk, tried not to show what a hellish state of suspense he was in.

After a moment or two J. M. said: “You say you’re on leave of absence?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, that suits me all right.”

Dan whirled around. “You mean—you mean——?” he stuttered.

“I never did favour the idea of your having two bosses,” said J. M., with a twinkle under the shaggy brows. “When a man is working for me I want him to be working for me!”

“J. M., you don’t know what this means to me!” said Dan in a breaking voice.

“Forget about it,” said J. M. “I’m satisfied. . . . Why,” he went on with dry humour, “to-morrow night I’m giving that dinner to my most intimate enemies. Naturally, I expect you to be there. It was your idea.”

Dan instantly got his grip again. “No, sir,” he said firmly. “I thought it was a foolhardy idea.”

“Well, anyhow, it was you put the idea into my head,” said J. M., with a subterranean chuckle. “Get your note-book and take a letter.”

CHAPTER X

THE meeting-place was in the middle of the waste of Union Square, that half-finished park with its magnificent memorial flag-pole in the centre, and nothing but a little crab grass to mask the graded clay excavated from the subway. It was likely that the spot had been chosen because of its openness; there was not a bush or tree in the whole expanse to afford cover to a spy.

Joe Penman sat down on a bench near the flag-pole, and made believe to study a newspaper, but his hard watchful eyes kept glancing to the right and left from behind it.

A moment or two later a skinny little man wearing an old suit faded almost to the colour of mustard, came shambling along the path from the south side. He kept plucking at his mouth and his vacant eyes turned this way and that. He looked like a boy who had started to decay before he finished growing.

He dropped slackly in a bench not far from Joe. He had no newspaper, but he was a born actor, yawning, scratching himself, pouncing on a cigar butt, only to drop it later when nobody was looking. Joe glanced at him and a faint grin moved his thin lips. As much as to say: This guy is good!

Some minutes passed, and another figure approached the flag-pole; this one an elderly man, well dressed, brisk, determined to look young. But neither the neat derby nor the elegant suit could hide the fact that his grey face was mean and old. There was a lounge beside Joe at the moment, and with a significant glance the newcomer indicated a vacant bench farther along.

He sat down there, and after a few seconds Joe joined him with a casual air. First one then the other passed in front of the man in the mustard-coloured suit who goggled at them vacantly.

There was a silence between the watchful pair, each wishing to let the other speak first. All around them the park benchers shifted uneasily in the hot sun, and scanned their newspapers. Finally, Joe spoke. He adopted a fawning air towards his companion, but his sardonic eye measured him up and down.

“Nice day,” said Joe.

“I didn’t come here to talk about the weather,” snapped the other.

Joe shrugged. “Well, I reckon you read the newspapers yesterday?”

“I did. And so did my client.”

“I’m sorry we fell down on the trick,” said Joe.

“I’m not interested in your feelings,” retorted the other man. “You failed to deliver the goods, that’s all. You were described to me as a cool and steady hand, one of the best in the business. I see that I was mistaken in you.”

An angry spark showed in Joe’s eyes, but he kept the whine in his voice. “Every man falls down occasionally, boss.” His eyes ran over the other man, trying to see if he had the money on him.

“You have been preparing for this four weeks; you have had twelve thousand dollars for expenses. For first-class pay we have a right to expect a first-class performance.”

“You’re dead right, mister,” agreed Joe in his humble voice. “I ain’t got a thing to say except that my man washed out on me. Generally a dead shot too. The cop was too quick for him.”

“It was the dummy that he shot at!” snarled the well-dressed man in bitter anger. “If he had hit him we’d have been no further forward. J. M. was in the second car. My God! what a farce.”

Joe’s face was a study in simulated astonishment. “What!”

“Do you mean to tell me that after all the money you have spent, you haven’t even learned that J. M. has hired a dummy to impersonate him, and sends him on ahead wherever he goes in a pilot car?”

“How you know that?” demanded Joe.

“My client told me.”

“How does he know?”

“Well, he’s close to J. M. He has ways of finding out.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I have no way of reaching you except when we meet.”

“How was I to know, friend?” said Joe in an aggrieved voice. “I got a spy working right in J. M.’s office, and he didn’t know it.”

“Well, it don’t matter now,” said the well-dressed man sorely. “The thing has fizzled out. My client is fed up. He wants to call the whole thing off.”

Joe shrugged like a man who gives up. “I couldn’t hardly blame him,” he said smoothly. He glanced sharply at the other. “Still, it seems too bad like, he should spend all that money and get nothing for it.” Joe waited for a moment, and went on softly: “I got a better scheme now. I could promise him positive results inside a week.”

“J. M. is warned now,” snarled the other. “You’ll never get near him again.”

“Oh, I ain’t thinking of trying to smoke him again. Didn’t I say it was a better scheme? I’m boring from within, as they say. I could get him through a woman. It won’t be the dummy neither. J. M. would just get sick and die, and his daughter would hush it all up to save scandal.”

The other man became sharply interested. “What are the particulars of your plan?” he demanded.

“I won’t tell you that,” said Joe coolly. “Since I’m fired.”

It was the other’s turn to become smooth and persuasive then. “If I approve of your plan, I am authorised to go on paying you.”

Lines of satisfaction appeared at the corners of Joe’s mouth. The guy had the money on him! He said nothing.

The other man’s eyes narrowed. “Through a girl?” he said eagerly. “How will you reach him through her? Is she——?”

Joe, with a side glance, saw that he was hooked. “I won’t tell you that,” he said coolly.

“Why not?”

Joe looked at him hard and full. “I wouldn’t give any man living the evidence that would send me—or others, to the chair.”

The other man’s eyes shifted away.

“Ain’t I right?” said Joe, making his voice smooth again. “That’s no more than natural, is it?”

“Perfectly natural,” said the other, anxious to butter him now. “Oh, perfectly natural.”

A glint of contempt appeared in Joe’s eyes. “But of course if your boss has lost confidence in me——!” He ended with a shrug.

“He left it to me,” said the other man. “I’m willing to try it out for another week.” So saying, he produced a thin, rectangular package from his breast pocket.

Joe, lowering his eyes to hide his satisfaction, transferred it to his own pocket. They rose; shook hands.

“Same place; same time next week,” said the well-dressed man.

“You can come to-morrow and bring the big stake with you,” said Joe, with an evil grin.

“It will be ready for you whenever you earn it.”

Joe turned southward, sneering contemptuously when his face was hidden; the other headed briskly towards Broadway. The man in the mustard-coloured suit rose and shambled after the latter. The well-dressed

man engaged the first taxi standing in the rank, and his trailer entered the second. He threw off the dumb air of the park bench lounge.

“Follow your mate yonder,” he ordered his driver. “A dollar bonus if you stay with him until he drops his fare.”

CHAPTER XI

J. M.'s dinner-party was a stag affair. Henry Waters was given the night off, but Reed Garvan was included in the dinner to make an even number at the table.

Ordinarily J. M.'s tastes were simple, but on this occasion he seemed bent on stunning his guests with magnificence. Wheatley, the polished butler, presided at the sideboard, and three young footmen served. The middle of the table was banked with orchids from J. M.'s conservatories and the famous gold dinner service was dusted off.

Reed batted a humorous eye in Dan's direction. "Gosh!" he murmured out of the corner of his mouth. "I never expected to be mopping up a gold plate with my bread!"

J. M. presided with D. D. Beddington on his right, and Ashley Barnes at his left. Dan sat at the foot of the table with Malata, the Bessarabian, at his right, and Reed at his left. The table was so big that a considerable space separated each man from his neighbour.

Beddington was a little terrier of a man who wore brightly polished glasses to make his eyes look harmless. He talked all the time in a yapping terrier's voice to conceal his real thoughts. Barnes, across from him, had an air of worn-out elegance. He had a long, thin head with a lank lock of hair down the middle of his crown; long nose; twisted mouth. His ugliness was so extreme that it gave him a look of distinction. Malata was a heavy-set man turned out by expensive tailors, but his red face and slightly bloodshot eyes still betrayed the peasant.

All three of these men addressed themselves to J. M. with smiles and honeyed words.

"By God! This is a superb party, J. M.!"

"Oh, J. M. knows how to throw one all right. He's got background. We need more of his kind in America."

"J. M.'s not like an American. He ought to have lived in Italy in the fourteenth century. They would have called him J. M. the Magnificent."

"But damn it all, J. M. is an American, Barnes. One hundred per cent! That's the best thing about him. Here's to you, J. M.!"

They all joined in. "To J. M.! To J. M.!"

“You don’t have to go back to the fourteenth century,” said Malata in his careful English. “Come to my country, J. M., and we’ll make you a king tomorrow!”

“We can’t spare him,” said Ashley Barnes. “The king job is too dangerous.”

J. M. took all this with one of his eyebrows cocked grimly. “Well, I don’t know as the air of America is so healthy,” he drawled.

They knew to what he referred. A sudden silence fell on them; then they all began to talk at once.

The two young men at the foot of the table passed almost unnoticed. They had practised the trick of talking to each other without moving a muscle of their faces. Said Reed to Dan:

“It has all the marks of a swell party, but it don’t click somehow. There’s a jumpy feeling in the air.”

“Hate,” said Dan. “They’re charged with it like electricity.”

It was late before they rose from the table. J. M. and Dan happened to be the last to leave the dining-room. The old man looked at the young one quizzically.

“Well, you’ve had a chance to look them over,” he said, “which one is it who is plotting to murder me?”

“I don’t know,” said Dan. “I wouldn’t put it past any of them.”

“Beddington is the cleverest,” said J. M. “Barnes is the most deceitful, and Malata is the most brutal. You can take your choice.”

The entire south side of the house was given up to a suite of reception rooms brilliantly lighted by old-fashioned crystal electroliers. Here J. M.’s principal art treasures were on exhibition, and he took a particular pleasure in leading Barnes, the rival collector, from case to case while he pointed out his best pieces. Barnes admired everything with a poisonous smile. The other two followed, Beddington yapping in his inconsequential fashion, and Malata keeping a sullen silence. Dan and Reed remained standing near the door into the hall.

The tour of the room was interrupted by Wheatley who came to the door announcing: “Miss Lauderdale.”

Christie swam in wearing the bouffant costume of the last act of her play, and the make-up of the theatre. The thickened black eyelashes and the heavy colour on her cheeks gave her an exotic and exciting look. She surveyed the four millionaires at the far end of the room like a huntress sure

of her prey. She avoided looking at the two secretaries by the door, but she murmured to Dan as she passed:

“Hello, Handsome! I see you got the job!”

Dan said nothing. Reed glanced at him in astonishment, and Dan made his face like wood.

“You never said a word about knowing her,” said Reed.

“Why should I?” answered Dan.

Meanwhile, the three guests were hastening forward, and a chorus of compliments was offered to Christie. She was accustomed to this sort of thing. J. M. waited quizzically at the end of the room for them to come to him. They moved towards him and Christie raised her cheek to be kissed.

“Hallo, Guardy!”

“Too much paint,” said J. M. fondly. “Doesn’t taste good.”

The examination of the art treasures was resumed, but Ashley Barnes succeeded in detaching himself from J. M.’s grasp. He brought up the rear of the procession with Christie, who was frankly uninterested in art. These two dropped farther and farther behind, and when J. M. passed into the front room, they sat down on a little gilt sofa and remained there. Dan and Reed followed J. M.

Ashley Barnes grinned at Christie like a gargoyle, and toyed with her hand. Ugly as he was, women liked him for his cool assurance. “This is an unexpected pleasure,” he murmured.

Christie looked at him through her languorous eyelashes.

“For months I have loved you from the front of the house,” Barnes went on; “but I never expected to have you to myself like this even for a moment.”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” said Christie.

He continued in the same strain. Finally he said: “You have made me feel like a boy again. Romantic, I mean. How I wish there was something I could do for you! Anything!”

“Do you mean that?” said Christie. “Or is it just the usual hot air?”

“I mean every word of it! Try me!”

“You are very rich, aren’t you?” said Christie casually.

He laughed. “I believe I have that reputation. But of course no man is rich in his own estimation.”

“If you are rich there is something you can do for me.”

“What is that?”

“Put up the money for my next show.”

Barnes was slightly taken aback by her directness. He laughed, and rubbed his upper lip. “Well! How much would it require?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Christie indifferently. “I thought you were rich or I shouldn’t have mentioned it!”

“Lady, you are glorious!” murmured Barnes, raising her hand to his lips. “You ought not to be working for your living.”

Christie smiled at him.

“Who would manage the show?” he asked presently.

“I would,” said Christie with a flash of the blue eyes. “That’s just the point. I’m sick of being at the beck and call of everybody around the theatre.”

Barnes leaned back in the sofa a little so that he could study her face without bringing his own into the foreground. The glint that showed between his narrowed lids did not suggest passion but calculation. Christie who had a well-developed set of instincts was perfectly well aware of his feelings.

“I’m half-inclined to do it,” murmured Barnes. “Though it beggars me!”

“I could almost kiss you for that,” said Christie, with an intoxicating glance.

“Go ahead!”

However, she did not. “Oh, what a slap in J. M.’s eye!” she murmured, looking down at her hands.

“What a slap in J. M.’s eye!” echoed Barnes, with an ugly smile. “Can I come see you so that we talk the matter over further?” he asked.

“Surely,” said Christie. “At any time. I live at the Champlain.”

“I’ll telephone ahead so that I won’t run into our mutual friend,” said Barnes slyly.

“J. M. doesn’t own me,” said Christie sharply. “I see whom I please.”

“Surely,” said Barnes; “but just the same, I would prefer not to run into him at your place.” He stood up. “Let’s join the others now. We’ll have a better chance to talk elsewhere.”

They entered the front room looking a little too innocent, too unconscious. Dan’s eyes searched their faces sharply, while Reed looked at Dan’s face. The expression there scared him.

“Dan, for God’s sake!” he murmured out of the side of his face, “you’re not falling for the girl!”

Dan was recalled to himself with a start. “Aah, you’re crazy,” he muttered. “What a sap I would be, falling for the boss’s girl!”

“She’s crooked,” said Reed.

“Maybe,” said Dan. “Oh, God! she’s beautiful!” he groaned suddenly.

Reed’s jaw dropped in surprise. “Cheese, Dan, is it as bad as that?”

Dan immediately recovered himself. “Snap out of it!” he said, with his customary hardy grin. “We got our job to do here.”

Reed quickly responded. “Sure,” he said, “the hell with it!”

CHAPTER XII

ALL of J. M.'s guests were bored with his art exhibition, but the old man took a wicked pleasure in leading them on from case to case. Presently Christie dropped on another sofa, and smothered a yawn behind her white hand. Little D. D. Beddington slipped into the place at her side.

"Art kind of takes the pith out of your legs, don't it?" he remarked.

Christie laughed.

Beddington with his unkempt grey hair, blank eyes and ill-fitting clothes was almost a comic figure, but when he took his glasses off and looked at Christie there was a surprising power in his eyes. A crafty, jealous devil brooded behind them. "You're the finest woman I have seen in my time," he said.

"Thanks," she drawled.

"Wish I was twenty years younger," he said.

"You're not very old," said Christie seductively.

"Too old for a beauty like you. And I got sense enough to know it. But I can look at you."

His powerful gaze began to make Christie uneasy. "Why do you look at me like that?" she asked.

"I was just thinking," said Beddington, with a grimace. "You can't tell anything about a woman."

"Maybe there's nothing there," said Christie.

He wasn't listening to her. "Look," he said significantly, "there's something I wanted to say to you. If you ever get in a jam apply to me, see?"

"In a jam?" said Christie, staring in surprise.

"A woman as beautiful as you with so many men chasing after her, she lives dangerously," said Beddington. "I hope you won't get in a jam, but who knows? If you do you can count on me. I don't care what it is. To the limit."

From across the room Dan watched the colloquy on the sofa, and watched J. M. to see what he was making of it. Having come to the last show-case, J. M. raised his voice so that all could hear.

"We'll go upstairs now. Some of my best pieces are up there."

He led the way towards the hall, and whatever their private sentiments towards art may have been, his guests had to follow.

Eight persons squeezed into a little elevator opening off the hall, including Wheatley, who operated it. Christie was clinging to J. M.'s arm now. He whispered something in her ear, and she nodded with a smile. Dan was watching them from behind. Ashley Barnes asked in his affected, drawling voice:

“Will this take us to Heaven, J. M.?”

There was a general laugh.

When the elevator disgorged them on the floor above, J. M. lingered to give an order to Wheatley. Dan saw him scribble a few words on a page of his note-book and tear it out.

They entered the apartment at the back that J. M. called the renaissance room, and Malata put himself at Christie's side. His bulging black eyes ran over her figure greedily. He was a handsome man in his coarse way, and obviously a strong one. This room had a row of French windows opening on a balcony which looked down on a formal garden between the two houses at the back. Some of the windows stood open.

“Let's step outside,” suggested Malata. He had been carefully tutored in English since he had become rich.

Christie nodded. They disappeared from the view of the others.

Outside, Malata fixed her with his stare, and said at once as if he were picking up a conversation that had previously been dropped:

“I am a man of few words. I go straight to my mark.”

“What is your mark?” asked Christie idly.

“You!”

“Well!” she said, laughing.

Malata had no humour. “I am a verree rich man,” he said, scowling slightly.

“Richer than J. M.?”

“No, but I shall be.”

“You'll have to show me,” said Christie.

“I will do somesing for you that J. M. never will do. I will marry you!”

Christie looked down into the garden. Malata studied her face keenly, but the heavy make-up wiped out all expression. He could not tell how she was taking it.

“You shall name your own figure,” he went on, “and it shall be settled on you the day we are married—in United States securities.”

“Well, you do go straight to a thing,” murmured Christie.

“And what is more, I am rich enough to buy the title of prince in my own country. You shall be princess.”

“I’d have to live in Bessarabia,” said Christie.

“And how would you live?” he cried, with dark energy. “In America there is no living; there is only a dirty scramble for money. In Bessarabia you should live in a castle on a mountain top!”

“Too high,” murmured Christie under her breath.

“With an army to serve you,” Malata went on. “Not servants, you understand, but serfs, slaves; yours to do what you liked with! Doesn’t that appeal to your love of power?”

“Yes,” said Christie frankly; “but I’d have to take you along with them.”

“Well,” said Malata, with a shrug, “you have to take some man.”

From inside the room J. M.’s voice was heard: “Oh, Malata! I have something here to show you.”

Malata seized Christie’s wrist. “Quick! before we go in,” he said; “your answer!”

“Let go!” complained Christie. “You’re hurting.” He released her. “I must have time to think it over,” she murmured, with a smile that seemed to promise everything.

“This way,” said J. M. when they entered. “I want you to see my Cellini cup. There’s only one other in America, and that is not nearly so fine as mine. Observe the originality of the design; the scallop shell balanced on the back of a turtle. Notice the marvellous enamel work on the turtle. Cellini took the secret of that to the grave with him. . . .”

J. M., with an ironic glint in his eye, delivered a little oration. The men were all gathered around him with their backs to the door of the room. When they turned it was seen that Christie was no longer present. In vain their furtive eyes searched among the show-cases. J. M. led them relentlessly to the next exhibit.

Dan and Reed were standing a little apart from the rest. In a moment Wheatley approached them carrying an envelope on his salver.

“For you, sir,” he said to Dan.

Upon tearing it open, Dan saw the leaf from J. M.’s note-book inside. On it was scribbled:

“Take Christie home.

J. M. L.”

Dan's pale face flushed red, and became pale again. With a perfectly wooden face he said to Reed: "I've got to go. Keep a sharp eye on the chief."

He followed Wheatley out.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTIE, wrapped in a shimmering cloak of silver cloth, was waiting for Dan in the big hall below. She eyed him as he approached, as enigmatic as a sphinx in her make-up. Dan's own face gave nothing away.

"Come on," she said coolly, and turned towards the door.

The small, plain car that J. M. and Dan customarily used, waited for them in front of the house. As soon as they started away from the curb, the surprising Christie dropped her head on Dan's shoulder.

"When I'm tired I've got to have a shoulder to put my head on," she said calmly.

"Sure!" said Dan grimly. "Go as far as you like."

"You've got a nice square one."

They drove for a while in silence, then from Christie came somewhat peevishly: "Can't you hold me? I'm wobbling all around."

"Sure!" said Dan, putting an arm around her.

"You're one of these strong silent men that they talk about, aren't you?" she said scornfully.

"Yeah," said Dan. "That's me."

"Just the same, your heart is beating. I can feel it in your shoulder."

"It's got to beat to keep me going."

"It's beating faster than it has to just to keep you going."

Dan said nothing. They drove for a few more blocks in silence. In spite of himself Dan's head was gradually drawn over until his cheek was brushing against her hair. It gave off a delicious fragrance that was unknown to him.

"Hold me closer," murmured Christie.

Dan, startled to discover where he was drifting, straightened up. "You're not wobbling any more," he said.

Christie jerked up her head, and angrily threw his arm from around her. "Oh, I hate you!" she said, drawing into her own corner.

Dan said nothing.

In a few moments they drew up before the magnificent apartment house where Christie lived. Dan handed her out of the car, and accompanied her

across the sidewalk and into the lobby. There as he paused and raised his hat she surprised him again by saying off-handedly:

“Aren’t you coming up?”

Dan stood transfixed, hat in hand. “It’s not—it’s not part of my orders,” he stammered.

“Well, it’s my orders,” said Christie. “Come on. I’ll give you a drink.” She started to walk down the lobby.

Dan hesitated—and fell. He followed her with a hang-dog expression into the elevator.

She conducted him into the beautiful apartment that she shared with her chaperon, her maid, her housekeeper, her dog and her love birds. The long living-room was a dream of comfort under its shaded lights. The little dried-leaf chaperon came fluttering to meet them. Christie made the introductions carelessly.

“Mr. Woburn—Mrs. Blackie. . . . Stella, darling, entertain this man while I get into something comfortable.” She disappeared.

Mrs. Blackie looked at Dan doubtfully. He seemed very big to her. “Er—I thought Christie was going to Mr. Lawrence’s to-night,” she began, just to be saying something.

“We have just come from there,” said Dan. “I am one of J. M.’s secretaries.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Blackie. “Isn’t J. M. perfectly wonderful? Such power and distinction! I am always frightened to death of him, but he fascinates me!”

Dan let her run on. His face was turned from her, and the dark look in his eyes suggested that he dreaded what was before him.

Christie returned wearing a loose lounging suit all black except for a sash of many colours around her waist. She knew that dull black was best calculated to set off her beauty. She had removed her make-up—or most of it, and her own pale skin was infinitely more human and seductive. Dan looked at her woodenly.

“Run along to bed, darling,” she said carelessly to Mrs. Blackie. “I’m just going to give this creature a drink and send him home.”

The chaperon, with fluttering good-nights, disappeared.

At the same time an elderly maid entered carrying a tray with a decanter, soda water, glasses with ice.

“Put it on the table, Maud,” said Christie. “I shan’t want you any more to-night.”

It was Dan's habit to fix in his mind any new face that he came in contact with, and he studied the maid without appearing to. Outwardly, she was the neat, humble servant without any personality of her own, but there was a deceitful look in her pale eyes.

When she had gone Christie waved her hand towards the bottles and glasses. "I just want a flavour in mine," she said. "Mix yourself a good one."

While Dan was so engaged she went to one of the French windows and opened it. When she raised her arms and the loose black sleeves fell away, the beauty of the pose fascinated him. "Bring it outside," she said.

She led the way out on a terrace high above the city. Lights shone in the towers here and there. Christie sank in a wicker chaise longue and held out a hand for her glass. "Draw up a chair," she murmured.

Dan sat down and looked at her with the kind of resentment that a man feels when the odds against him are too heavy.

"Why do you hate me?" said Christie plaintively.

"That's silly," said Dan, with a short laugh.

"Yes, you do! No man ever looked at me the way you do."

"How is that?"

"Well, as if you were saying: Oh, mamma, look what the cat brought in!"

Dan laughed in spite of himself.

"You are so nice when you laugh," murmured Christie. "Why can't we be friends?"

"I wish we could," said Dan. "If you would be honest with me."

"I am naturally honest," said Christie; "but I suppose, leading the life I do, that I have got out of the way of it. Nobody is honest with me. And men don't like women to be honest. They expect these long looks and lingering smiles."

"Try being honest with me."

"No," she said, glancing at him through her lashes. "I don't think I could be. Not with you."

"Why not?"

"You attract me too strongly."

Dan scowled. "That's what I mean! That makes a man feel like a fool!"

"Then you think I don't mean it?"

"I know you don't. You say it to every man."

"I do mean it."

Dan rose abruptly. "I shouldn't have come up," he said roughly.

Christie rose too, as swiftly as a cat, and went close to him. "I do mean it," she repeated softly.

"You already have four millionaires on a string," said Dan. "Leave me out of it. I'm not in your class at all!"

"Have you ever looked at those millionaires—and at yourself?"

"Why do you bother with them, anyhow?" demanded Dan angrily. "You're a famous woman, a popular favourite. I suppose you make a couple of thousand a week. Why aren't you satisfied with that?"

"You don't understand," said Christie. "This 'fame' you're talking about is the most uncertain thing in the world. A whole lot of money is needed to keep it going. Without money back of me all the time I would be sunk."

Dan cooled down. "Sure, I can understand that," he said gloomily. "But leave me out of it."

"Just because I have to make myself agreeable to millionaires," said Christie wistfully, "does that mean I can never please myself?"

"Not with me," said Dan.

"Why?"

"Never mind," he said. "I shouldn't have come here."

"I will win you yet," she murmured. "You cannot resist me."

"Better leave me alone," growled Dan. "I get ugly when I'm aroused."

Christie closed her eyes. "How thrilling!" she whispered. "Never tell that to a woman if you want her to leave you alone!"

Dan said nothing.

She led the way back into the living-room. "I suppose you'd better go," she said, with a shrug.

Dan looked at her sorely. When she told him to go he didn't want to. "I hate to have you think I'm just a rough-neck and a crab," he muttered.

"I don't," she said, without looking at him.

He glanced around him. "This is a swell room! I wish I had the right to come here."

"You have. Any time."

"No! Never again!"

"This is just my company room," said Christie. "Would you like to see my own sitting-room that I fixed up myself?"

She opened a door and passed through. Dan followed her into a smaller room. He looked around smiling a little at the softness and the pinkness of it.

After all there was a good deal of the kitten in Christie's make-up. All around the wall hung framed photographs of stage celebrities and others, handsome young men in the majority.

Christie suddenly turned and moved towards him with soft eyes and tremulous lips. "Dan," she whispered, "if it's for the last time! Just once!" She raised her face.

A groan was forced from him. It was more than flesh and blood could resist. "Oh, Christie!"

"You are so dear when your face softens," she whispered.

He took her in his arms. He was about to press his lips to hers when his eye was caught by a photograph on the wall behind her. It represented a young man who would have been handsome except for the colourless eyebrows that gave his face a sinister look. Dan dropped Christie as if he had been stung.

"Who is that man?" he demanded harshly.

She whirled around all startled and confused. "Who? . . . What? . . . What's the matter with you?"

"That man," said Dan, pointing.

"That's my brother. What of it?"

Dan's face was stony now. "Your brother, eh? I reckon!" He indicated the whole gallery of photographs with a violent gesture. "All your brothers, I suppose. You come of a large family, don't you?"

Christie's face flamed with anger. "I don't understand you. Only that one is my brother. Have you gone crazy?"

Dan had got his grip again. The girl no longer had any power over him. "Do you see much of him?" he asked, with a hard smile. "Does he come here? I'd like to get in touch with him."

"Why do you ask me these questions?" retorted Christie suspiciously. "He's no particular credit to me, but after all he *is* my brother. I shan't answer you."

"Well, I hardly expected you to," said Dan.

"I meant what I said to you," she said stormily. "I could have been something to you that I have never been to any man!"

"Foolish of you to leave that picture hanging on the wall," said Dan harshly. "It was a lucky break for me that I happened to see it!"

"Go!" she said in a smothered voice. "If I turn bad now it will be your fault!"

"I'm going!"

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT morning Dan had the job of telling J. M. what had happened. It was not an easy one. After they got down to the office the minutes passed, and still he said nothing. Finally, J. M. himself provided him with an opening.

"I suppose you know why I asked you to take Christie home last night," he said in his blunt way. "I didn't like the way my guests were pawing her."

"I understood that," said Dan.

J. M. exploded in disgust. "Pah! What a crew! I got rid of them as soon as you had left. They no longer amused me."

"I've got something to tell you about last night, sir," said Dan.

"Well, spill it."

Dan, after making a couple of false starts, realised that there was no use in trying to beat around the bush. He took a long breath to steady himself, and blurted out: "Christie has a photograph of Whitey Morgan hanging on the wall of her private sitting-room."

There was a terrific silence in the big room. J. M.'s thick eyebrows drew together. He put his hands on the desk and leaned forward ominously. Finally, he said with the deadly sarcasm of which he was master, "Her private sitting-room? Well! What were you doing there?"

"Well—I went up," said Dan doggedly.

"Oh, you went up! . . . Did you consider that a part of your orders?"

"No."

"But you went up, anyhow."

Dan said nothing.

J. M. stood up abruptly. The big head was thrust down and forward. "By God, I trusted you!" he said thickly. "You called me chief. What the hell does that mean to you? I thought you had the old-fashioned feelings of decency and loyalty towards your chief. But that's the bunk nowadays, eh? As soon as my back was turned you tried to worm yourself into my place, just like any other smart young fellow!"

Dan took it standing.

"Did you expect to go on working for your chief after this?" demanded J. M.

"No," said Dan. "I knew you'd fire me when I told you."

J. M.'s anger suddenly broke its bonds. "You were damned well right about that!" he shouted. "You're fired, do you hear? Get out!"

Dan marched stiffly to the door. By the time he got his hand on the knob J. M.'s humour changed.

"Come back here!" he barked.

Dan, keeping his hand on the door, turned to hear what he had to say. He would not come like a dog to heel.

J. M. resumed his bitter sarcasm. "I merely wanted to tell you," he said, "that though you made me mad I appreciate your honesty. It is unusual."

He paused for Dan to speak, but the young man's lips remained pressed close together.

"Do you want to go on working for me?"

"You'd better let me go," said Dan. "This would only come up again."

"I'd take my chance of that—if you will be honest with me."

"I can always be honest with you," said Dan.

"Good!" With a sweeping sarcastic gesture, J. M. urged him to sit.

Dan obeyed, and J. M. resumed his place at the desk, lowering at him from under his jutting brows. "So you set up to be my rival?" he said grimly. "You must know that I'm not going to stand for that from any man of mine."

"It won't happen again," said Dan. "I'm cured."

"Oh, you're cured, are you? How is that?"

"I believe she's a crook."

J. M. laughed scornfully. "What the hell difference does that make? If she were to come in that door this minute she could twist you around her finger like a bit of string."

"Well, maybe she could," muttered Dan, hanging his head for the moment. "Anyhow, I'll keep out of her way."

"That's the beginning of wisdom," said J. M., with a hard smile. "Let me tell you something, young fellow. All women are crooked according to our notions. An experienced man is prepared for it. Why shouldn't they be? Men made the rules of the game without consulting them."

J. M. reached for a cigar, and Dan guessed that the centre of the storm had passed.

"Did you tax her with the photograph?" J. M. asked coolly.

"She said he was her brother."

"Maybe he is."

"Not likely!" said Dan bitterly.

“What you going to do about it?”

“I have ’phoned the information to Inspector Scofield. It may help him to run down Whitey Morgan.”

“And do you believe from this that Christie is in cahoots with the gang that is trying to murder me?”

Dan shrugged. “What would you say yourself, sir?”

J. M. parried the question with another. “What could Christie hope to gain from my death?”

“You don’t know what your enemies may have offered her.”

“What could they offer her that she couldn’t have from me?”

Dan looked at him squarely. “Well, for one thing, marriage. . . . Of course that’s only a guess on my part.”

“H’m!” murmured J. M., stroking his chin. Evidently this was a possibility that had not occurred to him. “And what, according to your notion, should I do under the circumstances?” he asked sarcastically.

“That’s up to you, sir.”

“Drop the girl?”

“No. It would be better to let her think that I had told you nothing. But you ought to be careful.”

“I never was a careful man,” said J. M., “and I’m too old to change.”

“See her in your own house where you are safe,” suggested Dan.

“I am going to her apartment to-night after the theatre,” said J. M. with the utmost coolness.

“No!” cried Dan, startled out of his immobility. “That would be suicidal!”

“Just the same I’m going,” said J. M. grimly. “I don’t believe that Christie is in with the murder gang. After all, I know her pretty well. Even if she should be in with them I won’t be shot in her flat. She’s got too much to lose.”

Dan threw up his hands. “All I can do is to warn you,” he said.

“I expected to take you with me,” said J. M., with a hard smile; “but if it would be too painful for you—well, it’s all right with me.”

“No,” said Dan woodenly. “As long as I’m responsible for your safety, I’ll go along.”

“Very well,” said J. M.

Dan, turning his head to listen, slowly became taut with attention. Leaning across the desk towards J. M., he whispered: “Start dictating to me,

sir. Loud enough to carry to the door.”

J. M., with a quick glance of understanding, picked up a letter at random from his desk. “Well, let’s get to work,” he said, raising his voice. “Are you ready?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Take this letter.”

J. M. started dictating in his usual rapid fashion. He was never at a loss for a word. Slipping out of his chair, Dan made a detour over the heavy piled carpet in such a way that he could approach the door into the waiting-room without casting his shadow on the frosted glass. J. M. watched him tensely, but never stopped speaking.

Dan put out his hand swiftly, turned the handle of the door and jerked it open. There stood old Colfax. He turned to run, Dan caught him by the collar and dragged him into the big room, kicking the door shut. The little old man struggled and kicked like an animal. Dan, holding him helpless at arm’s length, dragged him up in front of J. M.’s desk.

“Listening at the door,” he said.

J. M. had risen. His heavy face was dark. There was wonder as well as anger in it. “By God, Tommy Colfax!” he cried. “They told me you were a spy, but I didn’t believe it.”

The old man’s face had become greenish and sweaty with terror. He fell to his knees on the carpet. “I’m not! I’m not!” he squealed inhumanly. “I will swear it with my dying breath! Why should I spy on you, J. M.? You’re the best friend I got. I think the world of you, J. M. I was only listening to see if you were busy. I don’t like to come in when you’re busy.”

“Ah, stop lying!” said J. M. with strong disgust. “You know very well you’re not supposed to come in without telephoning.”

Colfax would have crawled to J. M.’s feet had he not been restrained by Dan’s grasp of his collar. “Oh, believe me! Believe me!” he sobbed. “I would not go against you, J. M. You’ve been too good a friend to me and mine!”

“Throw him out!” cried J. M., with a violent gesture. “The dirty little worm! He’s not worth bothering about!”

Dan said: “If I let him go, sir, he’ll run off to his employer with the story of what he has just overheard here.”

“What else can I do with him? He ought to be stepped on like the worm he is, but I can’t do it.”

“Let Reed take him to headquarters in a taxi, sir. Inspector Scofield will know how to handle him. We may learn something important.”

Colfax redoubled his wailing. “No! No! No! Not the police! They’ll give the third degree! They’ll kill me! Have mercy, J. M.! I’m an old man! Have mercy!”

J. M. nodded to Dan, and the latter dragged the limp figure into the ante-room, and handed him over to Reed Garvan. Colfax was taken out through the private door, and down the corridor, still feebly struggling and protesting.

Out in the general offices of the railway there was a young clerk with a furtive downcast eye, who dressed in a somewhat flashy style. His work never brought him into contact with J. M.; in fact, he scarcely ever laid eyes on the big boss. But his desk was in sight of Colfax’s desk, and for some time past he had been making it his business to keep the tail of his furtive eye on the little old messenger.

To-day when he went out to lunch, the clerk dropped into a cigar store, and shutting himself up in a telephone booth, dialled a number that he read from a slip of paper. When he got an answer over the wire he said cautiously:

“This is a certain fellow who works in Wall Street. Do you get me?”

A hard-boiled voice answered him: “Sure! This is the guy who sold you some typewriter ribbons that day. And we made a little business arrangement together.”

“Okay. You told me to call you up if anything ever happened to Mr. Colfax.”

“Right.”

“Well, about an hour ago he went into J. M.’s office, and never came out again. Word was circulated that J. M. had sent him on an important errand, but that’s a stall because his hat is still here, and some of the fellows heard him crying in the hall. The inside dope is that he’s been arrested.”

“Much obliged, fellow,” said the hard-boiled voice. “You’ll get the customary by mail.”

CHAPTER XV

IN the box at the Holland Theatre that was popularly supposed to be reserved for the great J. M. Lawrence, sat Henry Waters with Reed Garvan beside him. In the corresponding box at the other side of the house, hidden from the sight of the audience by a looped curtain, sat the real J. M. and Dan. The show was *It's Never Too Late to Bend*, a sophisticated comedy with music that had been running since the previous autumn.

J. M. of his own choice had taken the seat inside Dan and a little to the rear, where by turning his head slightly, his grim eyes could watch Dan's profile without losing sight of the stage. Dan wasn't giving much away, but there was a sullen resentment in the bottom of his eyes. Christie, acting almost within his reach, was enjoying an unfair advantage.

With all the aid of lavish costume, rainbow lighting, romance and music, she was no longer like a mere earthly woman, but a creature from the world of dreams. Without coming out of her part or ever looking directly at the box, she nevertheless with the subtle art of an actress managed to convey that she was acting for them alone. The two occupants of the box were free to imagine which one of them it was addressed to.

"She's good to-night," rumbled J. M.

"Wonderful!" agreed Dan with dry bitterness.

When the curtain descended for the intermission, Dan stepped into the little corridor back of the boxes to smoke a cigarette. J. M. remained in his place. When he was no longer under observation, Dan's drawn face betrayed the strain. He stared at his cigarette darkly. The odds were heavy against him.

When the performance was resumed, he stuck his head inside the box, saying: "I'll stay here, sir. I've seen all I want."

J. M. cocked an eyebrow ironically and settled himself to enjoy the last act.

In the corridor Dan could no longer see Christie, but her voice came to him with an increased poignancy. Under his breath he cursed his own weakness. There was no escaping her.

After the final curtain J. M. and Dan, according to their custom, stepped directly on the stage through the little door in the corridor. The suite allotted to Christie as the star of the company was only a few steps away. In addition to her dressing-room it included a little reception room where her friends

could sit and talk to her while she dressed behind a screen in the room beyond.

At the outer door Dan said: "I'll wait here, sir."

J. M. went in.

Dan paced up and down, six steps and back. One by one the lesser members of the company came running down the stairs and crossed the stage on the way home. Many of the girls glanced sideways at Dan as they passed, but the young man's eyes were blank. The stage hands struck the scene and cleared the stage. The curtain was raised, and the dark auditorium yawned like a pit in front.

Soon Dan was left alone. All the lights were out except a single bulb mounted on a standard in the middle of the footlights. At the sides and at the back of the stage the piled scenery rose in fantastic shapes casting sinister shadows. The place was full of shadows. A cat walked out on the stage stretching one leg then another to limber up for the night's hunting.

Dan was pacing under the shadow of the gallery that served the dressing-rooms overhead. As he turned at the end of his beat and started back, suddenly without a whisper of warning, a quilt was thrown over his head from behind, and an arm hooked around his head over the quilt to shut off his cries.

He struggled with all his force to make a noise, to raise a warning, but his assailants were prepared for that, and they were skilful. There were four of them. Dan was instantly lifted from his feet and carried across the stage, struggling silently. At the other side they laid him down and knelt on him. His gun was taken from him. They passed a rope many times around his body, and knotted it hard. A couple of turns around his head forced the quilt into his mouth, gagging him. He could just breathe and no more. They laughed at his strangled attempts to cry out.

"Shut up!" growled a voice. "Or we'll put you out!"

Dan continued to groan hollowly, and somebody struck him a blow on the head. He did not lose consciousness.

Dan's captors, four vigorous young men under the leadership of Bull Fellows, picked him up again, and carried him through the little door giving on the corridor behind the boxes on this side. They hastened up the thickly carpeted aisle of the theatre. One of the fire doors was softly opened and they stepped out into the alley that ran through from street to street alongside the theatre. They closed the door, and laid Dan on the pavement.

"Go signal the car," said Bull, and one of his men slipped away.

Dan began to struggle again, and to groan under his gag. Bull kicked him viciously.

Dan became still. He found that he had freed his right hand sufficiently to give it two or three inches play. He worked it into his trousers pocket where he carried a little silver pocket knife. He opened the knife inside his pocket and drew it out. As he was lying on his back he could not cut his way through the quilt without betraying himself to his captors. He lay still holding his knife ready under the quilt for the first opportunity to use it.

A car entered the alley, and came to a stop beside the group. Dan could hear the engine idling and the soft suck of the tyres on the pavement. With a sudden spasmodic effort he rolled over against the wheel. He was on his face now. With a little slash he cut through the quilt. He felt rubber under his hand. He jabbed the knife into it, and left it sticking there.

The next moment he was jerked up and flung roughly inside the body of the car. His captors climbed after, careless of how they trod on him. The car started.

“To the river!” said Bull.

They turned out of the alley into the street behind the theatre, heading west. Dan, lying on the floor, could hear the soft hiss of escaping air beneath him. Before they had gone a block the car was pounding noisily on the rim.

Bull cursed the chauffeur. “Couldn’t you look at your tyres before you started out?”

“I did,” came the sullen answer. “And they was all right. I’ll stop and change it.”

“Not here!” commanded Bull. “Too many people. Get across Eighth Avenue. The next block is quiet.”

As they banged across the car tracks on Eighth, a policeman ordered them to stop. “Keep going!” whispered Bull. A shrill whistle then rang out. Bull cursed savagely. “Keep going!” he ordered. “He can’t catch us on foot.”

They pounded recklessly through the long block at increased speed, the noise reverberating startlingly between the high buildings on either side. As they approached the Ninth Avenue corner, a new sound made itself heard behind them, and Bull sharply turned his head to look through the rear window.

He started cursing in a voice that broke with rage and disappointment. “Oh, cheese! A motor-cycle cop! Stop at the corner and scatter, all of you!”

The car stopped and they piled out, Bull giving Dan a brutal kick as he left him.

A moment later the motor-cycle rolled up. The doors of the car stood open and the uniformed rider took in the situation at a glance. In a second he had his knife out and was cutting Dan's bonds.

"I knew that no honest men would drive a car like that on the rims!" he said.

"I'm all right," muttered Dan when he could speak. "Catch those devils! Catch them!"

The motor-cycle policeman blew his whistle for assistance, and roared away after the fugitives. By the time Dan had succeeded in freeing himself from the ropes and the quilt, a bluecoat on foot ran up. "What's the matter here?" he demanded.

Out of the tail of his eye Dan saw a taxi-cab coming up Ninth Avenue. He could not wait for explanations. "The motor-cycle cop said he wanted help," he said swiftly. "There are four of them. He went that way."

The policeman set off running across the avenue, and Dan hopped on the running board of the taxi.

"What's the matter here?" asked the driver in his turn.

"I don't know," said Dan, with a smooth face. "The cops are after them." He gave the address of Christie's apartment.

It was no business of the taxi driver's. He shrugged and obeyed his orders.

Crossing Broadway the big Paramount clock pointed to quarter of twelve. All this had happened in less than half an hour. The strain in Dan's face did not relax, for half an hour is plenty of time to kill a man.

When J. M., Christie, Mrs. Blackie and Christie's maid came out of the dressing-room the stage was empty.

"Hello!" said J. M., looking around. "He's not here." He called him. "Dan!" There was no answer.

Christie was carrying her Pekinese, Woo Woo. "Maybe he's outside," she said, chirping at the dog, and pulling at his silky ears. Her smile concealed her feelings.

The alley outside the stage door was empty.

"Have you seen a tall young fellow in evening dress?" J. M. asked the doorkeeper.

"No, sir!"

"Aah! the hell with it!" said J. M. testily.

They got in the small black car waiting at the curb and drove to Christie's apartment.

Upstairs, J. M. had to be shown everything; the outdoor terrace with its stunning view of Manhattan's towers; the inviting living-room; the pink sitting-room. J. M. duly admired everything; Christie was full of animation and laughter, but there was a feeling of strain in the air. Under his bluff and quizzical air J. M. was uneasy.

"Funny about Dan!" he muttered.

"Oh, he'll turn up," said Christie.

J. M. had little use for Woo Woo. "Do you carry that pup around everywhere?" he asked half-testily. "Can't he walk?"

"You're jealous, Guardy," said Christie, rubbing her cheek in the dog's silky hair, and looking sideways provokingly at J. M. "I love him so much I can't bear to let him out of my arms!"

"Humph!" said J. M.

In the pink room J. M. was quick to spot the vacant space among the ranked photographs on the walls. "Ha!" he said. "Somebody is out of favour!"

"Oh, that one?" said Christie carelessly. "I broke the glass and had to send it to the framers."

They entered the dining-room where Maud, Christie's housekeeper, was setting out a cold supper. Maud, with her faded hair, chalky skin and pale eyes was as inconspicuous as wallpaper. Nobody looked at her. Nobody saw how busy her eyes were under her lowered lids, and how the whole woman was as tense as a drawn wire. She was like a ghost in the room, so noiseless was her coming and going. When she set the dishes on the table, her hands drew away from them like slow snakes.

Christie, J. M., and Mrs. Blackie sat down at the table. There was a fourth place for Dan. Maud went into the kitchen. Christie still had Woo Woo in her lap. His foolish little head with its lolling red tongue the size of a thumb nail just showed above the table.

"Woo Woo has very sophisticated tastes," said Christie. "He adores caviare."

"Humph!" said J.M.

"I have a surprise for you, J. M.," said Christie brightly.

"What's that?"

"I heard you say once that you liked Irish whisky better than anything, and that Gahagan's was the best brand. So I got a bottle from my bootlegger.

Nobody is to have any of it but you.”

Maud re-entered the room with a high-ball on her tray. Under the maid's dress her flat breast was heaving agitatedly, but the hand that bore the tray was as steady as iron.

Without looking at the maid, J. M. waved away the drink. “I appreciate your thoughtfulness,” he said to Christie, laughing; “but I always carry my own. Mine comes direct from the distillery, and yours has nothing of Gahagan about it except the label.” He drew a big thin flask from his breast pocket.

Christie pouted and shrugged. “Well, you might at least have taken a sip of it,” she said.

Maud stood, still offering the tray to J. M. like a woman of stone.

“Give it to Stella,” said Christie. “She likes whisky. . . . Give it to Stella!” she repeated a little sharply as the maid did not move.

Maud passed softly behind Christie. Her face was livid. She gave Mrs. Blackie a daft look, and then deliberately shook the tray so that the high-ball glass toppled over and emptied itself. Some of the liquid splashed on the floor, and some remained swimming in the tray.

“What is the matter with you?” said Christie. “How can you be so careless? . . . Well, you don't get your drink, Stella.”

“She shall have some of mine,” said J. M.

Maud pulled herself together and started for the kitchen door.

“Wait a minute,” said Christie. “Let Woo Woo have some. He adores whisky.”

Maud returned very reluctantly. “It's not good for him,” she muttered.

Christie stared at her. “I'm the best judge of that,” she said haughtily. “Put the tray on the floor.”

Maud obeyed, and disappeared. Christie put the dog down. He waddled to the tray and started lapping the whisky and soda with his absurd little tongue.

“Look at him, J. M.!” said Christie delightedly. “He takes his toddy just like a little man.”

It was at this moment that Dan appeared in the doorway. He had repaired his battered appearance as well as he could in the taxi. At sight of J. M. sitting at the table laughing, his strained face eased in relief and the colour came back. J. M. saw him first.

“Well!” he said. “Where the hell have you been?”

“I met some fellows,” said Dan dryly. “They detained me.”

Christie gave him a cool nod. "Sit down," she said.

"What are you all looking at?" asked Dan.

"At the little pooch making a fool of himself," said J. M., chuckling.

"He's had enough now," said Christie. "Maud!" she called. There was no answer. Christie picked up the tray and put it on the table while Woo Woo looked longingly upward, and ran the thumb-nail tongue over his lips.

"Well, let's eat," said Christie. She rang the bell for Maud to serve. Meanwhile, she looked at Dan distantly, and remarked: "There's a bruise on your forehead."

"I bumped it getting into the taxi," said Dan.

"Your shirt is all dirty."

"Well, there was a little rough housing."

"Is that the kind of friends you have?" said J. M. good humouredly.

"Drunk, I suppose," said Christie. She rang the bell violently. "Where is that woman?"

"*What is the matter with the dog?*" said Dan suddenly.

The other three heads whirled around. Over by the window they saw little Woo Woo stagger and fall. He tried to rise and could not. The little body twisted in dreadful paroxysms of pain. He fixed his absurd popeyes in agony on his mistress's face as if imploring her to help him. He made no sound.

For a moment no one spoke. Then Dan said curtly: "The drink!"

J. M. arose abruptly. "It was mixed for me!" he said hoarsely.

Instantly the room was filled with confusion. Christie ran crying to the dog. Dan's first thought was of the maid who had not answered the bell. He ran through the pantry into the kitchen. A swift search of the rooms proved to him that the bird had flown. The other maid was there shaking and chattering with fear.

"Maud, she snatched her hat and beat it!" she gasped.

When Dan returned to the dining-room Christie was on the point of hysterics. "Stella," she screamed. "Telephone! Telephone! A doctor! A dog doctor! Don't let the little fellow die!"

J. M. was standing by the table looking grim and haggard. The old lion was shaken at last. He cast a cold and disillusioned eye on Christie, and said to Dan:

"Come on, let's get out of this!"

"Shall I send for the police, sir?"

“No! No!” said J. M. violently. “I want no publicity for this. Come on.”

Dan’s first duty was to J. M.’s person. Pausing only to pour what remained of the liquid in the tray into a glass, he followed J. M., carrying the glass under his coat.

“What’s that for?” growled J. M.

“Analysis, sir.”

Dan hesitated with his hand on the front door of the apartment. “By God, I wish I had my gun!” he muttered.

“Take mine,” said J. M., handing it over. “I reckon you can handle it better.”

CHAPTER XVI

J. M.'s small car, with the armed chauffeur, was waiting in front of Christie's apartment, and Dan exclaimed in relief when he got the chief safe inside it, and they started home. During the drive J. M. moodily chewed his cigar without saying a word, and Dan respected his silence.

They drew up before the small door at the rear of J. M.'s house and waited until the watchmen came around to open it. Since the first attempt on the millionaire's life the watchmen patrolled his house in pairs. They no longer wore the conspicuous grey uniforms.

As soon as he had seen J. M. safe in the house, Dan carried the sample of poisoned whisky to his physician, Dr. Pulford, who lived near by. The doctor promised to analyse it and to send the result to the house next morning.

It had not come when J. M. was ready to leave for his office, so Dan took him down-town and returned to the house.

When Dan entered the private office for the second time, J. M. had had time to go over his mail. He passed a letter to Dan without comment. At sight of the heavy cream-coloured notepaper covered with scrawling angular characters, Dan guessed who it was from. The intoxicating perfume of it reached his nostrils at a yard's distance. Dan read:

“DEAR, DEAR GUARDY,—When darling little Woo Woo was taken sick last night, it drove everything else out of my mind. I was nearly crazy. I can't remember what I said or did. It was not until my darling began to get better that I recollected you had left without a word. Oh, Guardy, surely, surely you cannot believe that I would put anything bad into your drink! It was Maud did it. She ran out of the house leaving all her things here, and I have not seen her since. Oh, Guardy, why should I do such a thing after you have been so good to me? I look on you as the best friend I have in the world, and something much more than a friend. Please, *please* call me up the moment you get this and tell me everything is all right.

“Yours devotedly,
CHRISTIE.”

“What do you think of it?” growled J. M.

“I think it's true,” said Dan.

“Ha! you’ve changed your tune!”

“Her actions last night proved that she didn’t know the drink was poisoned.”

“Just the same, it don’t ring true!” said J. M., rapping the note.

Dan started to speak, and then prudently held his tongue.

“What’s on your mind?” demanded J. M.

“The reason it doesn’t ring true,” said Dan doggedly, “is because she doesn’t feel for you what she is making out to feel.”

Dan expected this to produce an explosion, but J. M. swallowed the bitter pill in silence. After a moment he said: “How are you so sure that she didn’t know about the poison?”

“She wouldn’t have given it to the dog.”

“Ha! What’s a dog? Her extravagant love for the pup may be all a fake like the rest of it.”

“Certainly. But she wouldn’t have given herself away by making him sick before all of us.”

“You are right about that, of course. But what is the explanation?”

“Whitey Morgan may be her brother,” said Dan, “or he may be one of her boy friends. At any rate, he has the entree there. I figure that he fixed the maid unknown to Christie.”

“What do you think I ought to do about her?” growled J. M.

Dan looked at him in surprise. It was not like J. M. to ask anybody’s advice. “That’s up to you, sir,” he answered cautiously.

“By God! she’s a beautiful woman!” muttered J. M. regretfully. “There is nobody like her!”

“If you drop her,” suggested Dan, “it might have the effect of driving her into the arms of the gang.”

“Hell knoweth no fury like a woman scorned, eh?” said J. M. grimly.

“I’m not saying that you ought not to drop her. I just mention that as something we’ve got to keep in mind.”

J. M. scowled at the note. “She may not be a poisoner,” he muttered; “but she’s not on the square!” He tore the thick notepaper into small pieces and tossed them in his waste basket. “That for her!”

He lit a cigar and began to pace the carpet. “Did you get the analysis?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“What was the poison?”

“Arsenic.”

“Ha!” cried J. M. “Somebody wanted to make me writhe in agony like that pup!”

“There’s a very strange thing about it,” said Dan. “Dr. Pulford says it wouldn’t have killed you.”

“What!”

“There wasn’t enough arsenic.”

“Ho! Then somebody blundered.”

“I can’t believe that,” said Dan. “How could they make such a childish blunder? . . . As soon as I heard that, I got a tape measure and took some measurements around the door of your house. You remember Whitey Morgan said that he aimed to miss. Well, that much of his story was true. When I measured the height of the spot where the bullet struck, and calculated the angles, I found that even if Henry had not dropped to the ground, the bullet would have passed over his head.”

“But, good God!” said J. M., startled, “why should they make two attempts on my life if they didn’t mean anything by it?”

“I don’t know,” said Dan. “That’s what I’ve got to find out.”

“It’s like a senseless nightmare!”

“Whoever is behind it,” said Dan, “he must soon show his hand. Then we’ll know what to do.”

The bell of the private ’phone rang. J. M. took down the receiver. “Hello?” he said.

When he heard the answering voice over the wire his face turned hard, and he shoved the instrument over to Dan. “I won’t talk to her.”

Dan drew a breath to steady himself. “Hello,” he said.

“Oh, is this you,” answered Christie’s voice coldly. “I want to speak to J. M.”

“You’ll have to tell me what it is,” said Dan.

“I *have* to tell you!” she retorted angrily. “I *have* to tell you! I like that! Tell J. M. instantly that I wish to speak to him!”

“He heard your voice, and passed the ’phone to me.”

Dan heard sounds of anger that from a man would have resulted in a volley of curses. “Has he read my letter?”

“Yes.”

“Does he actually think that I——?”

“He does not believe that you had anything to do with what happened last night.”

“Then what’s the matter with him?”

“He is through,” said Dan curtly.

“Why? Why? Why?”

“You’ll have to ask yourself that.”

Christie’s voice rose to a screech. It was impossible to associate such sounds with her beauty and delicacy. “Oh, he’s through, is he? He’s through! And he tells me that through one of his servants!” She went off into a peal of ugly laughter. “Well, I’m through too! Tell him that, do you hear? I’m through and damned glad of it! Ask him if he thinks I loved him for himself alone! Ugly and fat, and old as he is! Tell him to look in the glass. A monstrous toad, that’s what he is. A toad! A toad!”

Dan hung up.

“Well, what was she saying?” growled J. M.

“Hell’s fury,” said Dan dryly. “Don’t ask me to repeat it.”

“Order the telephone company to give me a new number for my private ’phone.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE office telephone rang, and Dan answered it. "D. D. Beddington is outside, sir."

"Ha!" said J. M. grimly. He and Dan exchanged a meaning look. Each man read his own question in the other's eyes. "Have him brought in," said J. M.

Little Beddington, in his baggy tweeds, bustled into the room like a terrier. "Morning, J. M. Morning! How are you, old fellow? But I see I don't need to ask. Beautiful weather, isn't it? Makes me feel like a kid again. . . . How are you, Woburn? Sure, I remember Woburn. He was present at that wonderful dinner you gave us, J. M. Marvellous dinner!"

"Sit down," said J. M. dryly. "What can I do for you to-day?"

Beddington sat down facing the windows. He had a trick of flashing his brilliantly polished glasses in the eyes of whoever he was talking to, so that it was difficult to see what was behind them. His bustling talk concealed his real thoughts. "Well, I heard you were sick, J. M., and I just dropped in to inquire. However, since I'm here there's a matter I'd like to talk over with you—privately." He glanced at Dan.

"Sorry, but Woburn never leaves the room," said J. M. "He has a pistol in his pocket," he added wickedly.

"My goodness, J. M.! My goodness!" exclaimed Beddington, bounding agitatedly on his chair.

"There have been two attempts made on my life within the last few days," said J. M. watching him.

"How terrible, J. M.! What are the police for, I should like to know!" Suddenly Beddington began to laugh. "But surely, J. M., you don't think that I——?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you," said J. M. coolly. "But I've made it a rule now to keep Woburn in the room and I can't change it. So spill your business!"

The brightly polished glasses flashed disarmingly. "The annual meeting of the Ohio and Mississippi will take place in ten days," Beddington remarked casually.

J. M. merely grunted.

"How much will you take for the controlling interest, J. M.?"

“Not for sale.”

“Now come, J. M.,” said Beddington persuasively; “what good is that little road to you? It’s been losing money ever since it was built!”

“What good is it to you?”

“You know what it means to me. It would link up with my Middle Atlantic lines in the east, and my Nebraska Pacific in the west, and round out my system. I could run through trains from New York to San Francisco. Something that has never been done!”

“Why should it be done?” asked J. M. bluntly.

“For the convenience of the travelling public! For the good of business generally!”

“And for the glory of the Beddington name,” put in J. M. slyly.

“No! No, J. M.!” protested Beddington, wagging his hands. “I never think of myself. Nobody can accuse me of self-seeking. All my work is devoted solely to improving facilities for the public.”

“H’m!” said J. M.

“Surely it can’t be that big you is jealous of little me,” said Beddington, making his glasses twinkle. “I can’t believe it, J. M.”

“That’s it!” said J. M. ironically. “I’m jealous!”

Beddington made believe to laugh heartily. “That’s good! That’s good! . . . But seriously, J. M., money is no object in this case. You can name your own price.”

“Money is no object with me either.”

Beddington’s smile began to look like a snarl. “J. M., I would hate to think that you were just acting the part of dog in the manger. The road is doing nothing now, and you won’t let it go to those who can use it.”

“Build a link,” said J. M. “It would be a damn sight cheaper.”

“The Interstate Commerce Commission won’t let me.”

“Too bad!”

Beddington was reduced to a whine. “Why won’t you treat with me, J. M.? What you got against me?”

“As a railway man and a financier you’re unsound!” said J. M., with a powerful gesture. He stood up to show that the interview was over.

Beddington lost his self-control. “You can’t treat me like this, J. M.!” he snarled. “I won’t stand for it! I may be a small man physically, but I’ve got power in the business world! I’ve got as much power as you have!”

“Sure! Sure!” said J. M. as one might soothe a child. “But you must excuse me now. I have an engagement.”

“I am not accustomed to be shown the door!” cried Beddington. “Some day your arrogance is going to cost you dear, J. M. You can’t treat a man as if he was dirt under your feet! You say that your life has been attempted twice in the last few days. That shows what people think of you! All your money and your power won’t save you from a bullet or a dose of poison!”

“Woburn, will you open the door for Mr. Beddington?” said J. M. calmly.

“Hear my last words!” shouted Beddington. “And think over it! I offer you ten millions for the controlling interest in O. and M., and that’s twice what it’s worth.” He paused to give his words greater effect. “Until noon today,” he said meaningly. “At noon my offer is withdrawn. And I’ll get the road a damned sight cheaper then!” He stormed out.

“Well!” said J. M. jocosely. “The little son of a gun!”

Dan was not smiling. “J. M.,” he said, “suppose you were to die before the meeting of the O. and M. What would become of the road?”

“I reckon he’d get it,” said J. M. carelessly. “He’d make an offer to my associates that they would have to accept.”

“In that case,” said Dan, “you ought to be adequately protected until the meeting takes place. Instead of one man to guard you you ought to have half a dozen. You ought to have motor-cycle cops following your car.”

“Nothing doing!” said J. M., with the characteristic gesture. “I’m not going to make a circus of myself! I’m not going to advertise to the world that I’m afraid of the little cur! If you’re not man enough to handle the job by yourself you can go.”

“That’s for you to say, sir.”

“Oh, hell! Get out your book and take these letters.”

CHAPTER XVIII

At eleven o'clock the same morning alongside the monumental flag-pole in Union Square, Joe Penman met the well-dressed man whose name he did not know, and they sat down on a bench together. On another bench near by the shabby little guy in the mustard-coloured suit, otherwise Sliver Buckley, was giving his customary impersonation of the park bencher. He never seemed to look at Joe. An observer could never have guessed that there was any connection between them.

The well-dressed man stroked his grey cheeks, and studied Joe from between narrowed lids. He had the slick and furtive look of a disbarred lawyer. "Well, what happened last night?" he asked.

Joe looked hard at him then, studying how much he knew already. The grey-faced man's eyes trailed away. Joe made up his mind what line to take and gave a pretty truthful account of what had happened in Christie's flat up to the moment when Maud had run out.

"So you fell down again!" said the other with an ugly sneer.

Joe made out to be sore. "Have a heart, Mister," he protested. "You got to admit it was a good plan. One of my men fixed it up with Christie's cook. How could I foresee that J. M. would refuse the drink, or that Christie would give some of it to the dog?"

"Yeah! All this fooling and fussing, and pussy-footing around! There's been too damn much planning. My client is fed up with it. It's a simple matter to kill a man if you've got the guts to do it. Why don't you go to it?"

Joe still stalled him off. His sly eyes had fixed themselves on a slight bulge in the breast of the other man's neatly fitting jacket. "That's all right for you and your boss," he grumbled. "You don't run no risk!"

"The dog got better," said the other man meaningly.

Joe's eyes narrowed sharply. "How do you know that?" he demanded.

"My client is a friend of Christie's."

"Yeah," said Joe, "she's got plenty men friends."

"The dog got better," the other said again, with an ugly look.

"Well, what about it?" said Joe, looking innocent. "I reckon he didn't get enough."

"If it had been mixed right, a taste of it would have been enough."

Joe assumed to become hot then. "What you getting at, Mister?"

“Well, if you want to know, my client don’t believe that you ever had any intention of doing your job!”

“For God’s sake why not?”

“How do we know why not? Maybe you’re too chicken-hearted to kill a man. Maybe you’re taking money from J. M. to protect him!”

A glitter of rage appeared in Joe’s eyes. “By God, no man can say that to me!” he said softly. “I always been on the square, I have. I never double-crossed a pal yet!”

The other man, scared by his expression, edged away on the bench. “Well, it don’t matter now,” he said quickly. “My client is calling the deal off. You’ve been well paid for your time.”

“He’s calling it off, is he?” snarled Joe.

“I’ll be bidding you good-day,” said the other, making to get up.

“Wait a minute, Mister,” commanded Joe in a new voice.

At the same moment the other man felt a hard object pressing into the soft flesh under his ribs. He looked down and saw the gun that Joe was holding between them. His face turned ashy and fine drops of sweat broke out on his face.

“You can’t——” he stammered. “You wouldn’t dare amongst all these people.”

“Do you think any of these bums would try to catch me?” said Joe, with a hard smile. “I couldn’t have a better place to do it. Ain’t a cop in sight!”

“What do you want?” whined the other man. “I never did you no harm.”

“I want that packet in your inside pocket.”

“This is robbery!” murmured the other from between his colourless lips.

“Sure!” said Joe. “What did you think it was, ping-pong?” He prodded the gun. “Come across!”

With a purely reflex action the other man’s hand slipped inside his coat, pulled out the packet and dropped it on Joe’s thigh. “Now can I go?” he stammered. “Now can I go?”

“Sure!” said Joe. “And to hell with you!”

The well-dressed man sprang up and hastened away, looking over his shoulder at Joe in terrified fashion, stumbling in his walk. He was so intent on Joe, that he failed to notice Sliver Buckley shambling after him.

Joe, pocketing the little package, strolled away in the other direction with a grin of hard satisfaction. Leaving the park on the Fourteenth Street

side, he walked around a block to make certain he was not being trailed, and hailed a taxi.

Bull and Whitey were waiting for Joe in the latter's apartment. Since the arrest of Colfax they had lost their base in the Exchange Office Supply Co., for Colfax, under pressure from the police, had revealed the number of the 'phone over which he was accustomed to making his reports, and the place was now watched. The business had to run itself for the time being without the assistance of the boss and his two salesmen.

Joe's apartment, in line with his present character of humdrum respectability, was in an old-fashioned walk-up house on Lexington Avenue which had been allowed to remain because it afforded a light easement to a tall new building next door. The big front room was furnished with an overstuffed parlour suite bought on the instalment plan, a radio of the largest size and many lamps with gaudily painted shades.

Bull and Whitey were sunk in easy-chairs, each with his feet on a window sill smoking a cigar and letting the breeze blow in his face.

"Pretty soft!" said Whitey.

"Yeah," growled Bull; "but I want to see some action."

"Well, this is better than hoofing it for orders."

"It's dangerous to wait."

Joe entered, still wearing the hard, satisfied grin.

"Did he come?" asked Bull.

"He came."

"Well, what about it?"

"We're fired," said Joe, grinning.

"Aah!" growled Bull, "I don't see why you fooled with them so long."

"You don't see why, eh?" said Joe. "Well, I'll tell you why. I got more than twenty-five grand all told out of the Sucker, and we ain't spent a quarter of it. The rest goes to provide the capital for our own private business, see?"

"Suppose the Sucker hires somebody else to smoke J. M. now?"

"I reckon he will," said Joe coolly. "I'm keeping tab on the guy who does his business."

"Here's a piece of news for you, Joe," said Whitey. "J. M. has given my sister the air. She's so sore she'd come in with us now if you can use her."

"Sure I could use her," said Joe, immediately interested.

“Wouldn’t cost you nothing, neither. She’d do anything to get back at J. M.”

“I’ll make a date over the ’phone to meet her,” said Joe.

An appetising odour was spreading through the apartment. Joe, sniffing it, said:

“How about a little dinner, boys, while we wait for Sliver Buckley to report? I don’t know if you know it, but I copped my missus in France. She learned the art of cookery in her own country.”

He led the way into the dining-room which was furnished with another fine suite of furniture in two shades of walnut veneer. There was wine on the table.

“Cheese, Joe, you got everything fixed nice,” said Whitey.

“Well, I like my little comforts,” said Joe, with a sardonic grin.

Mrs. Penman brought in a chicken smothered with a white sauce, and followed it with all the fixings proper to a big feed. She was a dark, subdued looking woman with her hair pulled straight back from her face, and wearing a black cotton dress cut after no particular style. Her husband paid no more attention to her than if she had been a servant. She did not sit at table with them. Whenever she was in the room her eyes dwelt on her husband’s face with a scared look.

When she came to carry out the plates Whitey said, wishing to be polite: “That chicken certainly was cooked swell, ma’am.”

Mrs. Penman seemed to be confused by the compliment, and looked at her husband for orders. He jerked his head towards the kitchen door and she went out.

“Never praise a woman, Whitey,” said Joe coolly. “It goes to her head, like. The right way to treat a woman is always keep her down; keep her humble. A woman likes to be treated rough. She gets a hell of a kick out of being afraid of her man.”

Mrs. Penman with her ear at the kitchen door overheard this, and a peculiar smile overspread her face. Her lips moved soundlessly.

“Cheese, Joe, what a fellow you are!” said Whitey admiringly.

CHAPTER XIX

At two o'clock Sliver Buckley came to Joe Penman's flat. The shabby little man's hands were shaking, and his face twitched spasmodically. He dropped in a chair, struggling to get his grip.

"Joe, for God's sake!" he muttered imploringly.

Joe with a contemptuous sneer drew a little folded paper from his vest pocket and handed it over. Sliver, with a sob of relief, turned his back on the others and made a pass to his nostrils. In a moment or two he was his usual self. He sat down again with a shamefaced grin and wiped his face.

"Well, what's your story?" asked Joe.

"Say, that guy in Union Square was scared all right," Sliver began. "He falls in a cab, grabbing his heart like he thought his last moment had come."

"Never mind his symptoms," said Joe. "Where did he go?"

"He drives to a Broadway hotel first, but that was just a stall. He changes taxis there and drives down-town to a law office on Centre Street. Brady and Kummel was lettered on the windows. I keeps my taxi waiting up the street a bit and hangs around. There was a fruit stand next door, and I buys a pear off it and chins with the dago. He tells me that guy is Hugh Brady."

"Hugh Brady!" exclaimed Joe.

"Know who he is?"

"Sure I know! The crookedest shyster in town! Go on!"

"I sits in the back of my car and watches the law office," Sliver resumed. "I reckon Brady is telephoning his boss now, but I can't report on that. Pretty soon a messenger comes to the law office, and right afterwards Brady comes out again, and hops a taxi bound down-town.

"He goes to the Park Bank. The bank is crowded so I can follow him inside without calling attention to myself. I see him shove in a cheque at the paying teller's window, and draw a pile of notes that high. Cheese! and they was yellow backs too. He puts these in an envelope and seals it, and slips it in his pocket."

"Some more of the Sucker's money!" said Joe, with a hard grin.

"Brady hails another taxi and drives to a house on Division Street," Sliver went on. "One of those old-timey houses over there with a slanting roof like, and a couple of big chimneys. Soon as I see it all closed up like, and see Brady slip in through the basement door, I says speak-easy!

“Well, there’s a flashy young guy loafing at the corner, and I ups to him and asks for a light. And then I says: ‘Cheese, I’m dry!’ I says, ‘Where can I get a drink around here, fellow?’ He jerks his thumb towards the slanting roofed house, and says, ‘There’s Alec’s speak-easy,’ he says. I says, ‘Are you known there?’ He says, ‘I’ll say I am!’ So I say, ‘I’ll blow you to a drink if you introduce me.’

“So him and me goes into the speak-easy. Quite a swell place; you wouldn’t of thought it from the outside. And when I said so, Jake—the fellow’s name is Jake, see? Jake says, ‘Well, I’ll tell you something, fellow, it ain’t advertised, but the real owner of this house is Owney Randall. He does his business here.’ ”

All three of Sliver’s hearers exclaimed at the sound of this name.

“Yeah, Owney Randall,” said Sliver. “The biggest shot south of Grand Street. Anybody who wants to do business in that neighbourhood has got to see Owney. He gets them coming and going.

“The bar was on the first floor rear, and there was a coupla friends of Jake’s drinking at a table, and being a little tight and they all give Jake a hurrah, and make him and me sit down with them. That gives me A1 cover, see? Being as they was known men in the place. And I buy a round.

“Hugh Brady he is sitting at a table by himself waiting to see Owney Randall. He has a dirty look; like an old grey rat backed in a corner. Has a high-ball before him, but I don’t see him drink it.

“There is a door at the back leading to an extension, and that’s where Owney’s private room is. I never clap eyes on him, but, cheese, he dominates that joint all right. They all kept looking at that door like the Pope of Rome himself was behind it. There is others waiting to see Owney; a poor woman, a slick Jew, and a young pug with a cauliflower ear. All these is let in before Hugh Brady is.

“Over on the other side of the room is two swell-dressed, dark-complected young guys sitting at a table drinking sarsaparilla. Struck me funny in that joint. Real hard-looking guys, but smooth, you understand. One had a scar in front of his ear. He was the leader of the two. You could see he was somebody.

“So I says to Jake, ‘Who’s that guy?’ I says. And Jake says, ‘That’s Smoke Atchey.’ Well, Smoke, he’s a famous man too, on the east side. They say he’s Owney Randall’s head torpedo. They say it was Smoke dropped Red Carroll, and Lew Lazaroff, and Tony Casino, and a lot of other guys who got in Owney Randall’s light. They give Smoke credit for seventeen killings, but he ain’t never been arrested.

“I says to Jake, ‘Do you know him?’ And he says, ‘Sure!’ And I says, ‘Cheese! I’d like to get next to that guy. I hear so much about him. And Jake says, ‘Come on over, I’ll give you an introduction.’

“So Jake takes me over, and I sit down with the two dark-complected guys. They ain’t none too friendly first-off, but I buy them a couple of good cigars—they wouldn’t drink nothing, and I butter them up, you know, telling what a lot I hear about them and so on. Even hard guys like that can lap up the applause all right. Smoke he had heard of me, so we talk about this guy and that guy we know, and we get pretty friendly.

“While I am talking to Smoke, Hugh Brady is let in to see Owney Randall, and after twenty minutes or half an hour he comes out again. I can’t see nothing through the closed door, but I could bet my last dollar the envelope full of yellow-backed bills changed hands in there. Hugh Brady goes right out, and I let him go, because I figure that my job is to find out what he come there for.”

“Right,” said Joe.

“I says to Smoke Atchey,” Sliver went on, “I says, ‘Cheese, Smoke, I’d like to be on a job with you! You’re a rising man,’ I says, ‘and I wish I could hitch on to you.’ And he says, ‘Cheese, I wisht somebody would give me a job! Cheese, everything’s as quiet as an up-state Sunday!’

“I give him all my qualifications; who I worked with in the past, what I could do and all. I told him I was good at tailing a man, that I knew all about cars, and that one of my specialities is lifting cars with a locked switch. I put up a good spiel for myself.

“Well, one of the bar-keeps come and told Smoke he was wanted by the boss. So he goes into the back room. I stick with the other guy. His name is Fingie Rubin. He’s a dumb guy; just a torpedo, you understand. I stay with him until Smoke comes back again.

“Smoke, he gives Fingie some instructions I can’t hear, and Fingie goes away. So I figure there’s something doing all right. Smoke sits down with me, and we talk a bit, and he looks me over keen. He didn’t suspicion nothing, you understand, because I had asked him for a job before he knew there was a job on the way.”

“I get you,” said Joe.

Sliver resumed: “Smoke says to me, ‘If you’re so good lifting cars, I’ll give you a chance to show what stuff you’ve got in you. I need a good car to-night. Go out and get me one—not in this neighbourhood, and bring it to Lipsky’s garage in Forsyth Street.’

“I figure Smoke would get suspicious if I don’t dicker, so we make a dicker, twenty-five dollars for a new high-power car. I leave the speak-easy and go up to the bridge plaza where there’s a public parking space. I hang around till I see a guy lock his car and leave it. Then I cut the wires to the main switch and join them together and drive away.

“This stunt makes me solid with the gang, you bet. Smoke, he takes me to their hang-out back of the garage. Fingie is there and two other guys they call Spike and Raymo. All killers by the look of them. And, cheese, they got a regular arsenal there! I see four Thompson submachine guns, with any God’s amount of ammunition, besides sawed-off shotguns, automatics and revolvers enough to stock a store.

“Well, Smoke and me we talks some more, and I savvy that he’s looking for a man to drive the car. So I puts myself forward for the job. He asks me if I know the road to Sands Point on Long Island, and I say, ‘Sure! I got a sister lives in Port Washington by there.’ He asks me if I know the J. M. Lawrence place, and I say I often been by the gates, but I don’t know the lay-out inside.

“So he says that’s all right, they got a map of the grounds. And I see the map with everything marked on it; roads, buildings, dock and so on. He shows me a way how you can get down to the water without going anywhere near the buildings. And so I get the job to drive them to-night.”

“What are they going to do?” asked Joe coolly.

Bull and Whitey strained forward to hear the answer.

“J. M. is due to arrive home in his yacht at eleven or later,” said Sliver. “He comes ashore in a small boat to his own private dock where a car meets him and carries him up to the house. Smoke’s car will be parked under cover of some bushes alongside the road, and when J. M. comes along Smoke and his gang will let him have it. Smoke says there will be five men in the car; the chauffeur, J. M., J. M.’s dummy, and the two young cops. Don’t try to pick out J. M., he said, but let them have it simultaneous, and blow the car and all five men to hell!”

“My God!” muttered Whitey.

“To-night!” cried Bull.

Joe appeared to be unconcerned. “Neat bit of work, Sliver. I won’t forget it.”

The little man’s face began to work painfully. “Yeah, but what am I going to do now?” he whimpered. “Where could I go where Owney Randall and Smoke Atchey couldn’t find me? When they find out I’ve double-crossed them my life won’t be worth a snowflake in hell!”

“Why double-cross them?” said Joe. “Why not go and drive the car the way they want. It’s all right with me.”

Sliver hung his head. “I couldn’t go through with it,” he muttered.

Joe slipped thumb and forefinger in his vest pocket and drew out three of the small folded papers. “Take one every three hours and you’ll be all right,” he said, with contemptuous good humour.

“Thanks, boss,” muttered Sliver gratefully.

“Mind, if you run them together you will fall down,” said Joe. “And they will blow you to hell!”

“I won’t do that,” said Sliver.

“You better go back to your partners.”

Sliver left them.

“To-night!” groaned Bull. “Oh, God, that gums our game!”

“Why should it?” said Joe coolly. He glanced at his watch. “We have three hours and more. All we got to do is make the last payment on the boat. She’s all fuelled up and manned, and ready to go.”

“How about the little boat that takes J. M. out to his yacht?”

“I’ll make that my business,” said Joe. “Maybe I can use Christie on that end of it,” he added, with an evil grin.

CHAPTER XX

At three o'clock Dan Woburn entered the Vandermeer Hotel, and making his way through the lobby to the cross corridor in the rear known as Paradise Alley, cast his glance up and down the rows of big chairs. At this hour only a few of them were occupied. He saw Christie Lauderdale down at the end cuddled in a big chair, smiling welcome at him from under the brim of her hat.

In spite of all that had happened, Dan changed colour at the sight of her. She was simply and beautifully dressed and made up pale. When Christie made her lovely eyes soft and wistful no man had ever stood out against her yet. Dan's face was wooden as he approached.

She indicated the chair next to her and he sat down. She laid her hand on his arm and let it rest there. "Oh, Dan, I was so afraid you wouldn't come!" she murmured.

"You said in your note that you had an important piece of information to give me," he said woodenly.

"I know. . . . Oh, Dan, this meeting means so much to me!"

"What is it?" he asked bluntly.

"I'll tell you directly. . . . I'm so sorry for the way I spoke over the telephone this morning. I was so furious I didn't know what I was saying. It was just wounded pride that made me act that way."

"That's all right," said Dan uncomfortably. "I don't hold it against you."

"I never cared for J. M. really. How could I, old as he is? But his attentions and his gifts flattered me and turned my head. Why, the girl that J. M. picks out becomes famous overnight, you know. Do you blame me for falling for it?"

"No," said Dan. "What was the information you had for me?"

"I'm coming to that. . . . I'm glad now it's all over between me and J. M. I feel differently towards everything since I met you, Dan."

Dan moved uncomfortably in his chair. The expression of his face suggested that he was cursing inwardly.

"I'm just crazy about you, Dan," she whispered. "There it is. I can't help myself. I haven't any pride at all where you are concerned. I never felt like this towards anybody before. I'm crazy about you, you are so strong and so square!"

Dan said nothing.

“Don’t you know what it is to have bad feelings inside you that drive you blind?”

“Sure, I know that,” he muttered, with blunt sympathy.

“I want to be good,” she said wistfully. “I want to forget everything that’s past. It’s up to you, Dan.”

“I’m not the keeper of your conscience,” he said helplessly.

“If you turn me down I shall certainly go to the bad, and you will be responsible for what happens.”

“Oh, this is fierce!” Dan burst out softly. “What can a man say?”

“Look at me,” she whispered. “Am I not good to look at?”

He averted his head from her. “Best looking woman I ever saw,” he muttered.

“Is it nothing to you that Christie Lauderdale has fallen for you? There’s many a man would give ten years of his life to hear me say it.”

“I know it. You ought to take one of them.”

“Why can’t I have you, Dan?”

“It’s like I told you before,” he said; his distress made him speak roughly. “I’m not free.”

Her face became sharp. “Oh, you’re not free! It’s that detective woman, I suppose.” She laughed in an ugly way. “A woman detective! That’s the way your taste runs! Is she better looking than me?”

“No,” said Dan. “That’s got nothing to do with it. I belonged to her before I ever saw you.”

“Oh, you belong to her!” said Christie in a strained whisper. “You belong to her! This to my face! Oh!”

“Easy!” muttered Dan. “Or we’ll be chucked out of here! You asked me, and I told you!”

“Oh, I hate you!” she said through her clenched teeth.

“Sure!” said Dan. “You told me so before. Seems to come easy!”

“I won’t stay here to be insulted!”

As she sprang up, Dan seized her wrist and forced her into the chair again. “What was it you had to tell me?” he demanded.

“Do you think I’d tell you now?”

Dan faced her out squarely. “Yes, if you’re decent.”

Christie's eyes shifted away. "There wasn't anything to tell," she muttered. "It was just a trick to get you here."

"I doubt that," said Dan. "You know that there is a gang of crooks out to get J. M. and that it's my job to protect him. Whitey Morgan is a member of the gang. I don't know if he's your brother or what he is to you, but you know him. And if you can help me to save J. M. you had better tell me what you know."

Christie seemed to get a perverse pleasure from his rough grip on her wrist. "Don't look at me like that," she murmured. "Make your face soften like you did once, and you can do anything with me."

Dan scowled. "It would be blackguardly to get it out of you that way," he muttered. "And, anyhow, I can't make myself soft to order."

"Only with her," she sneered.

"Leave her out of it."

"Let go my wrist," said Christie, "or I'll call a bell-boy."

Dan released her.

Christie stood up and smoothed her ruffled plumage. There was now a delicate sneer fixed in her pretty face. "There was nothing to tell you, really," she drawled in a fine-lady voice. "The man you call Whitey Morgan is my brother, and he may be a crook too. I know nothing about his activities. I just played a trick to get you here. You amuse me so. I didn't think it possible that one who looked like a man could be so lacking in masculinity. I recommend a fur overcoat. Good-bye. So nice to have seen you!"

She drifted languidly away through the corridor, Dan scowling after her helplessly. It was useless for him to try to follow her; she knew him too well.

On his way out of the hotel, sore and frustrated, his eye was caught by an illuminated sign: "Public Telephones." A look of longing came into his face, and he slipped into one of the booths. He called up police headquarters and had the luck to find that Julia Dormer was in the building.

"Oh, Julia!" he said—his voice was soft enough then. "Could I see you for a moment or two?"

"Oh, it's you," she said—her voice had an odd ring to it. "What are you doing off duty in the middle of the afternoon?"

"Well, I had to come up-town on a little business for the boss. It won't matter if I stay out a few minutes longer. He has a conference in his office, and Reed is on the job."

"Where could we meet?"

“In Angelo’s, the last booth, fifteen minutes from now.”

“All right. I’ll be there. I want to see you too.”

Dan came out of the telephone booth with a worried look induced by the odd ring in Julia’s voice. He stopped a taxi at the door of the hotel and was driven down-town.

As soon as he saw her he was dead certain that something was wrong. Her face wore that glassy look that women have when they’re saving something. “What’s the matter?” he asked, with a long face.

“Why, nothing,” said Julia, making her eyes big with surprise. It was obviously put on, for her pretty mouth was twisted with some bitter feeling.

They took seats opposite each other in the booth. “Gosh!” muttered Dan sorely. “I seem to be born to trouble!”

“Is your conscience bad?” asked Julia quickly.

“It is not,” he said. “Whatever I have brought on myself I can face out. It’s the troubles you don’t deserve that break you up.”

“What are you doing talking about troubles?” said Julia. “You’re lucky, it seems to me. In fact, I congratulate you.”

“What for?”

“They say she’s the most beautiful girl in New York,” answered Julia, not looking at him.

“Good God! Is *that* your line?” exclaimed Dan.

“You appear to have beaten out all the millionaires.”

“If I had, would I be here now?”

“Oh, of course it can’t last,” said Julia. “Even you couldn’t suppose that it would last. And naturally you want something to fall back on.”

“My God!” said Dan. “Women can be brutal in their way!”

There was a silence between them. Dan was studying the tablecloth with a scowl.

“What are you thinking about?” asked Julia.

“I can’t dope out what could have started you on this line,” he muttered.

“It’s the talk of the town.”

“That’s not true,” said Dan. “I haven’t talked to the girl but three times, and there wasn’t anybody present to report it.”

“Private meetings!” said Julia, with bitterly twisted lips.

“Unless she wrote to you herself, just to make trouble between us,” he said, trying to read her face. “It would be like her to do that. She’s a devil!”

“Lends a spice to the affair, doesn’t it?” said Julia. “A beautiful devil.”

“She’s as jealous as hell of you.”

“Mercy! How the ladies are fighting over you!”

“*Did* she write to you?” demanded Dan.

“I’m not going to answer that,” said Julia indignantly.

“Then she did.” Dan drew a long breath in the effort to keep cool. “Now look, Ju,” he said reasonably. “You know something about human nature. If this girl and I had fallen for each other and were happy together as you are trying to make out—God! do I look happy?—would she write to you? No! It was because she was sore and jealous that she wrote.”

“I didn’t say she had written,” said Julia quickly.

“I know she did. Nobody else could have started such a yarn.”

“Well, there’s no occasion to get excited about it,” said Julia, with her twisted smile. “It’s perfectly all right with me. You are free, white, and twenty-one.”

“Look,” said Dan, “all I can do is to tell you the truth. If you don’t believe me, the hell with it!”

“Yes, *do* tell me,” said Julia.

“It’s true this girl appears to have fallen for me. I reckon it don’t mean much. She thinks she has fallen simply because I am the first man who didn’t fall for her at sight.”

“What!” said Julia sarcastically. “Are you telling me that you turned down Christie Lauderdale?”

“Aah!” muttered Dan sorely. “What’s the use if you’ve made up your mind not to believe me?”

“Didn’t you fall for her just the least little bit?”

“Well, yes,” said Dan honestly. “In the beginning, I admit it made my head swim when she seemed to like me. I’m only human.”

“I thought there was some fire under all this smoke!” said Julia. She no longer made any attempt to hide her feelings; her face was full of anger and bitterness. “Don’t let me stand in your way. I resign my claim. I know better than to try to rival a woman like Christie Lauderdale. And you needn’t think that I’d play second fiddle to her, either, after she is through with you.”

“Ju! . . . Ju! . . .” pleaded Dan, reaching for her hand.

She snatched it back. “Let me alone! I’m thankful that I found you out before it was too late.”

“Found me out!” said Dan, flushing red. “By God! that’s too much after what I’ve just been through.”

“You have been with her!” said Julia.

“Sure I have.”

“You told me you were on business for the boss.”

“So I was. Christie said she had an important piece of information for me.”

“I dare say!” said Julia sarcastically. “I suppose I could get the whole truth out of you if I wanted to take the trouble. But I’m through, understand? I wouldn’t take you as a gift from her. If I ever take anybody it will be a man that I can have to myself!”

“I’ve learned something from this talk too,” said Dan sorely. “Never tell a woman the truth! It don’t pay!”

She left him.

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTIE, upon leaving the Hotel Vandermeer, drove direct to the Pennsylvania Terminal. There, in the crowded concourse, she found Joe Penman waiting for her accompanied by three stalwart, hard-faced young men, wearing the trim white uniforms of yacht sailors. Each of the three carried a dickey bag.

Joe glanced sharply into Christie's face. Seeing the passions that made it look pinched and mean, a look of satisfaction appeared in his eyes, and he rubbed his upper lip to hide a grin. "Well, you're a bit late!" he said. "I was almost afraid you wasn't coming."

"I said I'd come and here I am," muttered Christie.

"Here's the boys I told you about," said Joe. "Tom, Dick and Harry."

The sailors laughed at Joe's little joke. Christie scarcely glanced at them. She was like a woman in an ugly dream.

"Well, let's go," said Joe with his assumed heartiness.

"Yes, let's go," muttered Christie.

"I thought I'd drive over with you," said Joe carelessly, "so you wouldn't have to come back alone. I'll wait in the cab."

Christie said nothing.

All five of them entered a taxi in front of the terminal, and Joe gave an address on the East River. The ride was taken in silence. The three sailors eyed Christie covertly. Christie, sunk in her own painful thoughts, stared down at her hands.

Their destination was a small yacht basin and repair yard. Joe made the chauffeur drive inside the yard and stop in a place where he could overlook the scene that followed. Christie and the three sailors got out. Christie had roused herself and was acting now. Her face wore a careless smile.

A trim mahogany day cruiser was lying tied to the dock below. The name *Charmian* was lettered across her stern. Her engineer-skipper was sitting in the after cockpit smoking his pipe and reading a paper. Christie approached him.

"Good-afternoon, Captain Hudgins. Do you remember me?"

He jumped up and snatched off his cap. He was an honest looking young fellow, deeply tanned by wind and sun. His face beamed at the sight of the

beautiful Christie. "I sure do, miss. It would be a funny thing if I didn't know you, the many times I have taken you and Mr. Waters out."

"I came from Mr. Waters," said Christie. "He wanted me to tell you that he has bought *Charmian* from the yacht brokers, so he'll be your permanent employer now."

"I couldn't ask a better one, miss."

"Here's the bill of sale," said Christie, showing a paper.

"I don't need anything more than your say-so, miss," said the captain, glancing at it.

"I wanted you to know that everything was all right," said Christie. "Mr. Waters wants you to stay on as captain and engineer, but he's sent up his own crew. Here they are."

A shadow passed across the young man's face. "I'm sorry to let the other boys go, miss. Good boys. Been with me all season."

"Yes, it's too bad," said Christie; "but naturally Mr. Waters wants his own men. He said to give each of the others a week's extra pay so there would be no dissatisfaction."

The sum was named, and Christie handed over the money. The three new sailors introduced themselves to the skipper, who shook each by the hand, and showed him where to stow his bag.

"I suppose you'll be waiting for Mr. Waters at the usual place," said Christie.

"Yes, miss. Six-thirty as usual."

"I won't be with him to-day. I have another engagement."

"Too bad, miss."

"But we'll be seeing plenty of each other in the future. Good-bye, captain."

"Good-bye, miss."

She left him with a dazzling smile, and his admiring eyes followed her as long as she was in sight.

When she re-entered the taxi Joe said approvingly, "Good work, Christie! You sure are game!"

The smile had faded out of her face. Her lips were pressed tight together. Joe ordered the driver to take them to the Champlain.

When they turned out of the yard, Christie seemed to awake from her ugly dream. "Oh, what have I done!" she murmured involuntarily. Suddenly she started to weep quietly. "Oh, I can't! I can't!"

Joe's face turned hard and ugly. "What's done can't be undone," he said low.

Christie, in the grip of rising hysteria, did not hear him. "Let me go back! Let me go back!" she sobbed. "I didn't know what I was doing! Let me go back!"

"Be quiet!" ordered Joe, with a sharp glance at the chauffeur.

"I won't be quiet! Let me out! Let me out! I'll telephone! You can't stop me! I'll telephone to J. M. . . ."

Joe was sitting on Christie's right. His right hand slipped into his pocket and came out again gripping an ugly, slender weapon. Quick as a flash of lightning he raised his hand and brought it down above Christie's head. With a sigh she fell over against him.

The chauffeur, hearing a stir, sent a startled glance over his shoulder.

"The young lady has fainted," said Joe coolly.

The chauffeur headed for the curb and jammed on his brakes.

"Don't stop," said Joe. "Get her home as quick as possible. That's the best place for her."

When they drew up in front of the Champlain, Christie was still limp and unconscious. Joe paid off the taxi and carried her into the lobby in his arms. A sensation was created among the hall attendants.

"Miss Lauderdale fainted in the cab," said Joe. "It is nothing serious."

"Shall I call a doctor, sir?"

"I am a physician," said Joe coolly. "I'll take care of her."

Upstairs when Mrs. Blackie saw Joe and his burden she wrung her hands in despair. "Oh, what has happened now?" she moaned.

Joe reassured her. "I am a physician, madam. I know what to do for her."

Mrs. Blackie and a maid led the way into Christie's room, and Joe laid her on her bed. His hard and watchful eyes detected the first signs of returning consciousness.

"A glass of water, please," he said. "Quickly!"

When it was forthcoming he produced from his pocket a small bottle containing a colourless liquid. Pouring a portion of it into the glass, he raised Christie up and put the glass to her lips. Christie, beginning to moan and to stir a little, just had sense enough to swallow. Joe laid her back on the pillow and watched until he saw her relax and slip into a stupor. He turned around smiling.

"She'll be all right now. Let her sleep as long as she will."

“But to-night, the theatre,” stammered Mrs. Blackie.

“Oh, she will be quite herself before then,” said Joe.

“Who are you, sir?” asked Mrs. Blackie.

“Dr. McMichael at your service,” said Joe, bowing. He patted his pockets. “Bless me, I seem to have forgotten my card case. I will take the liberty of calling up on the 'phone later to see how the patient is.” He bowed himself out, smiling sardonically.

CHAPTER XXII

J. M., notwithstanding his advancing years, was still a glutton for work. It was his custom to remain at the office until six o'clock every day from Monday until Friday. The hour from five until six when all Wall Street had become quiet, when no appointments were made, and the telephone ceased to ring, was the only time he could get anything done, he said. He spent it in dictating letters and memoranda.

On this particular day he had a caller without appointment, a few minutes before six. It was Mr. Nicholas Malata, the meteoric financier, whose aim it was to gather the whole world trade in boots and shoes into his hands. He already had most of it, barring only America.

"H'm! The Bessarabian brigand," said J. M. to Dan, with dry humour. "Let him come in. He always stimulates me. Keep your hand on your gun."

Mr. Malata, forty-five years old, handsome, full-blooded, with a bold predatory gaze, came in with apologies. "I'm sorry to trouble you so late, J. M., but to-morrow is Saturday, and there's a matter I want to put up to you before the week-end."

"Sit down," said J. M. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks, I prefer these." Mr. Malata held up his jewelled cigarette case. He lit a Turkish cigarette of rare fragrance.

"Well, go to it," said J. M. "You will pardon me if I ask you to be brief."

"I am always brief, J. M. I have been having conversations with some of the leading shoe manufacturers in America with a view to forming an international company. They are agreeable to the idea and I have come to ask you to organise it."

"If the Americans are agreeable you don't need me," said J. M. "Go to it!"

"No! No!" said Malata suavely. "There are hundreds of millions of dollars involved. We feel that we must have your prestige and experience to launch the enterprise."

"In other words you'd rather have me for you than agin you."

"You shall name your own terms, J. M.," said Malata in his carefully learned English.

"Here's the point as I see it," said J. M. bluntly. "You can manufacture shoes in Bessarabia for the equivalent of thirty cents a pair our money,

whereas it costs the American manufacturers a dollar and a half or more. You have asked them why they don't make their shoes in Bessarabia, and they are saying why not? Our impoverished government would probably be satisfied with a duty of two hundred per cent. We could pay it and still double and quadruple our profits."

Malata fixed his hard, black, popeyes on J. M.'s. "That is about the truth of the situation," he said, with a shrug, "though you choose to state it so cynically."

"I have only one question to ask," said J. M. "Suppose the manufacture of shoes is transferred to Bessarabia, what is to become of the thousands of men and women who are engaged in making shoes in this country?"

"Oh, the change would be brought about very gradually," said Malata smoothly, "in order to give time for the workers who were let out to be absorbed in other branches of industry."

"Yeah," said J. M. dryly; "there are already several million workers in this country waiting to be absorbed."

"But, J. M.," said Malata, "manufacturing is bound to find its lowest cost level. If shoes can be made cheaper in Bessarabia they will be made there whatever you or I may do."

"Maybe so," said J. M.; "but I won't make them." He thrust out his hand in the familiar gesture. "That is final!"

"Then I am wasting my time," said Malata, with an ugly smile.

"You are wasting your time. . . . What is more," added J. M. dryly, "I reserve the right to release a little counter publicity if I see fit."

Malata rose. "Oh, I wouldn't think of going ahead without your cooperation, J. M.," he said suavely, but his eyes glittered. He retired with polite good-byes.

"There's a man who would enjoy sticking a knife between my ribs," said J. M. dryly. He swept the papers on his desk into a drawer, and locked it. "Come on! To the ship! I need a breath of ozone!"

On Friday evenings it was customary for Henry Waters and Reed Garvan to set off in advance in the Lawrence limousine, and drive to the yacht landing at the foot of East 26th Street where all the millionaires took to the water. Here a tender from J. M.'s big yacht *Iroquois* met them and carried them out to the ship. Meanwhile, J. M. and Dan, leaving the bank building by the rear door, entered the small closed car and were driven to a less-frequented landing further up-town, where a chartered motor boat, *Charmian*, waited for them and carried them out to the *Iroquois*. To the crew of the *Charmian* J. M. was known as "Mr. Waters."

“Ha! I look forward all week to this hour,” said J. M. to Dan as they drove up-town. “To have dinner on the ship and sail up the Sound. That’s my idea of good living.”

“Why don’t you stay on the ship for the next ten days,” suggested Dan.

“Still worrying about my safety?”

“Well, I’m thinking about something Inspector Scofield said to me,” said Dan gravely.

“What’s that?”

“No man has eyes all around his head.”

“Ha!” said J. M.

“You’re crazy about the ship,” Dan went on earnestly. “And Reed and I together could organise it so that you’d be perfectly safe on board. You could sail up the Sound every night, and come back in the morning and lie off Twenty-Sixth Street. Anybody who wanted to see you could come aboard, and you’d have wireless telephone connection to transact other business.”

“Not a bad idea,” said J. M. “I’ll think it over.”

One of the great new apartments that have lately been built along the edge of the river in the East Forties had provided a yacht landing in its basement as a novelty to attract tenants, and Dan had chosen this as a point of embarkation. The landing could only be reached through the apartment house; it was but little used, and the wide landing stage offered no cover for skulkers. It was as safe a place as could be found.

When they stepped out from the building to the floating stage the graceful *Charmian* was waiting for them, with her engine idling softly. She had a raised pilot house forward with the engines below; a glassed-in cabin amidships, and an ample cockpit astern. Young Hudgins stood outside the pilot house, and there was a sailor on the landing stage forward and one aft, holding the small craft fast with boat-hooks. All very trim and ship-shape.

J. M. sniffed the fresh salty air gratefully. The landing stage was in shadow, but across the river the sordid shore line of Long Island City was rendered almost beautiful by the last rays of the setting sun. Blackwell’s Island with its prison buildings lay to the left. The big square-rigged *Iroquois* could be seen anchored in midstream about a mile below.

Hudgins saluted and went into the pilot house.

“That’s an honest fellow,” said J. M.

He stepped into the cockpit, followed by Dan. The two sailors pushed the boat clear of the stage with their hooks, and stepped aboard. The clutch

engaged and they moved away swiftly downstream.

There was a wide cushioned seat in the stern of the boat, and J. M. sank into it as a matter of course. The sailor with his boat-hook was standing on the little deck at his back. There were wicker chairs in the cockpit, and Dan turned one of them around, saying:

“Sit here, sir, you’ll find it more comfortable.”

J. M., with a swift glance in his face, obeyed. Dan sat down beside him. They were now facing astern where the husky young sailor was leaning on his boat-hook, and gazing off towards Blackwell’s Island. The companionway to the cabin was at their backs.

J. M. said: “This is the best hour of the day.” And then without pausing, in a voice too low to carry to the sailor’s ears: “What’s the matter? Anything wrong with that guy?”

“Not that I know of,” said Dan. “But I don’t want anybody behind my back these days.”

While they talked together in low tones they watched the sailor without appearing to. A blonde, thick-set fellow with a round head and powerful neck. He was apparently quite unconscious, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, pursing up his lips to whistle noiselessly.

“He’s a good-looking lad,” remarked J. M.

“That doesn’t mean anything nowadays,” said Dan. “Some of the rottenest eggs are the best lookers.”

“This one seems harmless.”

“Too harmless,” said Dan. “A natural sailor would be embarrassed if we were looking at him.”

J. M. chuckled. “Ah, you see a redskin behind every tree!”

“Well, I got a big responsibility,” said Dan.

The panorama of the Manhattan shore slipped past on their left, the low cliffs rising from the water with the tall man-made cliffs built on top of them, and curious forgotten structures clinging like shellfish to the rocks below; fish-houses, boat-houses and the like, with furtive figures peering from the doorways. One of the big Sound steamers passed up slowly like an immense barn afloat, her orchestra playing in the cabin. The *Charmian* rocked gracefully over the bow wave she sent out. It was beginning to grow dark.

Suddenly a slight change took place in the face of the sailor astern. Nothing more than an increase of eagerness, but it caused Dan to look sharply behind him. He saw a second sailor sitting in the middle of the cabin roof,

binding a rope end. The man had come there without making a sound. Dan had the feeling that he had stopped moving just a second before he turned around.

“What are you doing there?” demanded Dan.

“Fixing this rope,” the man answered, with a cool and insolent look.

“Take it up forward,” said Dan.

The sailor did not move. “I take my orders from the captain,” he said, measuring Dan warily.

“What’s this?” cried J. M., firing up immediately.

Dan laid a hand on his arm, and J. M., with a glance in his set face, allowed him to handle the situation.

Looking beyond the sailor on the cabin roof, Dan could see through the rear windows of the pilot house, the back of Hudgins’ head with the head of a third sailor right close to it as if in affectionate proximity. Dan could not see below their shoulders. While Dan looked, Hudgins turned his head over his shoulder with an expression so wild and strained that Dan instantly guessed the sailor had a gun pressed against the skipper’s body. Dan said quietly:

“Go down into the cabin, J. M., but don’t hurry. We’re in for trouble.”

J. M. was game. “You come too,” he said coolly.

“Just a minute,” said Dan. “Till I get the hang of this.”

J. M. quietly descended the three steps into the cabin and seated himself with his back against the forward bulkhead. He drew his gun from his back pocket and laid it on a seat within instant reach. Meanwhile, he continued to roll the big cigar between his lips and to puff at it unhurriedly.

The *Charmian* having passed the rocks of the lower end of Blackwell’s Island, sharply veered to port, heading over towards the Long Island shore on a course that would take her far out of the path of the yachts anchored off Twenty-sixth Street and their tenders passing to and from the shore.

Shoving the chairs out of the way with his foot, Dan put his back against the rail of the cockpit in such a fashion that he had one sailor on his right hand and one on his left. He could not watch them both at once so he looked straight ahead of him trusting to catch any move from either out of the corners of his eyes. He did not draw his gun, because he knew that one would certainly get him before he could get both. Instead, keeping eyes front, he lit a cigarette.

“What’s the big idea?” he asked coolly.

The move, the question, disconcerted the two sailors. They glanced at each other uneasily. Neither answered.

Some moments passed without any move from either side. An express cruiser bound up the Sound passed them at a furlong's distance, the owner and his guests sitting comfortably astern. Dan, without changing his position, said:

"That's a pretty craft off to starboard, sir. Who does she belong to?"

J. M. instantly caught the idea that he was sitting directly in the line of vision of the sailor astern. He shifted to one of the side seats in the cabin where he was out of range.

"I don't know her," he answered as coolly as Dan had asked.

The *Charmian* began to behave very strangely. She swerved in the direction of the *Iroquois*, heeling over, then came back to her former course. The clutch was thrown out and the engines raced noisily. Suddenly there was a muffled shot from the pilot house, and Hudgins dropped out of sight.

That broke the spell on the afterdeck. Each sailor's hand went to his back pocket, and Dan dived head first into the cabin and rolled to one side. A shot rang out from the stern. The bullet ploughed into the cabin floor.

Dan hastily drew the curtains over the cabin windows on his side, and J. M. the same opposite. They pressed into their respective corners, each with a gun in his hand. There was a big mirror affixed to the forward bulkhead of the cabin, and in it Dan caught a glimpse of the sailor edging around the deck to get a shot at him. Dan stuck his gun around the corner and fired. At the same moment the sailor leaped to the other side of the deck, and running around the edge, jumped on the cabin roof.

Dan pressed back, his gun ready, watching the scuttle for the appearance of a head or a hand. But instead, the scuttle was shoved forward and the cabin doors slammed shut. Like all such doors, they were furnished with a hasp and a staple on the outside. They heard the hasp jammed home and caught with a pin. Dan lowered his gun.

"We appear to be prisoners," he said.

"So you were right," said J. M. grimly. "I was a fool not to listen to you."

"Never mind that now," said Dan.

"I trusted in Hudgins."

"Hudgins was square. I reckon it has cost him his life."

"The bloody scoundrels!" muttered J. M.

“There are only three of them,” said Dan. “The odds are not impossible. I have six shots in my gun and you have seven.”

J. M. opened his cigar case and glanced inside.

“And five cigars,” he said dryly.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE clutch was immediately thrown in, and the *Charmian* resumed her way at full speed. Not a sound was to be heard aboard except the muffled churning of the screws. Dan, pistol in hand, prowled around and around the cabin, peeping between one pair of curtains after another in the search for something to shoot at. But the men on deck took care to keep out of sight. Occasionally they could be heard stirring on the roof.

At intervals Dan reported their course to J. M. "Passing under Williamsburgh Bridge. . . . Manhattan Bridge. . . . Brooklyn Bridge. . . . Buttermilk Channel between Governor's Island and Brooklyn. . . . Heading down the Bay. . . . Passing through the Narrows. . . . Open water now; I can't see anything."

By this time it was perfectly dark outside. Dan lit a cigarette and cupping it in his hand, drew back a pair of curtains. "Just in case a pair of legs walks by or a head looks in," he said dryly. He dropped on the locker opposite the window.

J. M. just visible as a large shadow across the little cabin, was struck by the note of humour in Dan's voice. "You sound as if you thought it was funny," he said.

"I don't know how it is," said Dan; "but somehow when you're right up against it, your spirits go up."

"Some men's do," said J. M. "By God, you're a fine lad," he added with sudden warmth.

"Aw, cheese it, J. M.," grumbled Dan in confusion. "You make me feel foolish."

"Why shouldn't I say it?" said J. M. calmly. "I may not get another chance. I'm not the boss any more. We are just two men together in a damned ugly hole."

"If we get out of it, it will make us good friends, eh, J. M.?" said Dan diffidently.

"We won't get out of it," said J. M. in his calm voice.

"You're pretty game yourself, J. M."

"Hell, I've lived my life," said J. M. "What does a year or two longer matter? But I'm damned sorry I got you into this, Dan."

“That’s all right,” said Dan quietly. “I went into it with my eyes open. I was playing for a big stake!”

Somehow their hands met in the dark and gripped.

“I wish to God I was leaving a son like you behind me!” said J. M.

“You’re a man, J. M.,” said Dan. “I am proud to know you.”

Suddenly becoming ashamed of this display of feeling, they began to josh it. “Gosh! we’re getting sappy,” said J. M. “It’s like the last act of a play.”

“Yeah,” said Dan; “where Desperate Desmond shakes his pal’s hand before starting on the fatal ride.” Dan began to act out the scene.

The two sailors, sitting on the roof overhead, glanced at each other, startled by the hearty laughter from below.

After they had been under way for about an hour, the *Charmian* slackened speed, stopped, drifted for a while and reversed her engines. A voice was heard from a little distance.

“Have you got them?”

A voice answered from deck: “Okay, boss. The old rooster and the young rooster are in the coop.”

There was a loud laugh.

Dan, peeping through the curtains, said: “We are approaching a larger vessel. Looks like a lighter. I can see half a dozen men aboard.”

“Then put up your gun,” said J. M. “We mustn’t start the shooting.”

The *Charmian* bumped gently alongside the large vessel and was made fast. The engine was shut off. The sea was as smooth as glass and the two vessels floated without motion. The gunwale of the larger vessel now shut off the view through the cabin windows on that side, and Dan and J. M. could see nothing of what was going on. They heard footsteps back and forth and whispered voices. Suddenly the cabin doors were thrown open by unseen hands, and the scuttle drawn back. A hard, mocking voice said:

“Throw your guns up on deck, gentlemen, and come on up. You will not be hurt if you are unarmed.”

“We’ll keep our guns,” said Dan dryly. “And we’ll stay where we are.”

“Just as you like,” answered the voice. “I was hoping to have your company at supper.”

Silence followed. J. M.’s cigar glowed regularly from his corner. After a while to relieve the cruel suspense, he began to talk quietly.

“Funny how things come to mind! When I was about your age, Dan, I visited the island of Dominica in the West Indies. How plainly I can see it! It is one of my best memories.”

Dan suddenly realised that his feet were wet. Putting down his hand he found that the cabin floor was covered with an inch of water. “They have scuttled us, J. M.,” he said.

“Ah!” said J. M. “The mountains rose directly from the sea,” he went on, “and their heads were lost in the clouds. Beautiful! Beautiful!”

In a few minutes the water was over their ankles. The little vessel lost all feeling of buoyancy, and was like a dead weight under them. There was no sound from the deck.

Finally, J. M. said: “We’d better make a break for it. I’d sooner be shot down than drowned like a rat. Shall we throw our guns up on deck?”

“No,” said Dan. “But don’t shoot until they do.”

J. M. was already at the foot of the companion ladder. “Wait a minute,” said Dan. “I go first.”

“No, you don’t! I got you into this!”

“Nothing doing!” said Dan.

In a second they were struggling and cursing like deadly enemies at the foot of the ladder. J. M., however, was no match for Dan’s young strength. Dan took him by the shoulders and forced him back on the seat.

Dan ran up the ladder gun in hand. On deck he was silently seized by several pairs of hands and after a brief struggle, disarmed. The same fate awaited J. M. As soon as their guns had been taken, their assailants backed off, leaving them free.

A tall, lean figure stood on the deck of the larger boat alongside. It was from him that the mocking voice came. “Come aboard, gentlemen. You are my guests.” He put out a hand to assist J. M., but the latter stepped up to the bulwarks without assistance. He was still smoking the cigar.

“Shut the doors of the pilot house,” ordered the tall man, “so the body can’t float out. Then cast her off and let her go. A sunken ship tells no tales!”

Dan looked about him. The big boat had the appearance of one of the heavy, slow lighters that transport freight around New York harbour, but this was obviously camouflage, for through an open door he glimpsed a pair of powerful motors in the hull, capable of driving her at high speed. Rum-runner was more her style. Forward of the engine-room was a comfortably

furnished saloon; forward of that a state-room and a large pilot house. The back of the pilot house was filled with a powerful wireless apparatus.

J. M. and Dan were not molested in any way, but ten men stood close about them, watching their every move.

The tall man invited them into the brightly lighted pilot house. "First off I think we better send a wireless to the *Iroquois*," he said, "so your friends won't worry." From the desk he picked up a message that had already been prepared. "How's this?" He read it off.

"Unexpectedly called away on business. Henry and Reed should return to my town house and wait there until they hear from me further. Nobody is to say anything about my business trip to anybody."

"You are well informed as to the names of my employees," said J. M. dryly.

The tall man's deeply seamed face assumed a devilish smile. "Sure!" he said coolly. "For a month past I've had you surrounded by a ring of watching eyes and listening ears, J. M."

"Who are you?" demanded J. M.

"Don't let's be formal," grinned the other. "Just call me Joe."

"What's the purpose of this message?"

"It's like this, J. M. If your friends get excited and start investigating, and the word gets around that J. M. has disappeared, cheese! what a stink it would raise. It would raise such a stink that I couldn't return you in safety."

"Ha!" said J. M. "So that is the milk in the cocoon! I am being held for ransom."

"Well, I'm sure you put a good value on yourself, J. M.," said Joe, with his mocking grin.

J. M. turned to Dan. "What about it?" he asked softly.

"The message should be sent," said Dan quickly.

"There's a young guy has good sense!" said Joe. "J. M., have you got a code word that you use in sending messages to your employees, so they'll know for sure that it comes from you?"

"Yes," said J. M. "Sign it Letchworth, and they'll know."

The signature was written in, and the message handed to the wireless operator. "Now let's go to supper," said Joe. "We don't have to talk business to-night. Nothing can be done, anyhow, until the banks open to-morrow."

Upon turning around they saw two men in the doorway who appeared to be Joe's principal lieutenants. One was a scowling bull-headed young thug;

the other a ginger-haired young man with dark eyebrows who was grinning self-consciously.

“Look, J. M.,” said Dan dryly; “here’s our old friend Whitey Morgan.”

“Well, I’m damned!” said J. M., fixing him with a cool stare.

The two fell back to let them pass.

Outside, the *Charmian* was now lying a few yards off with her decks awash. They paused to see the last of her. It was one of the unseasonably hot nights that occasionally come in the Fall. The sea was like oil, the stars obscured behind a light haze. Some miles away to the northward lay a brightly lighted shore line identified by its big wheel as Coney Island. The *Charmian* gave a sluggish lurch and washed under.

“There goes ten thousand dollars to hell,” said Joe. “But what’s that to you, J. M.”

J. M. said nothing.

Joe, with a wave of his hand, invited J. M. to precede him into the saloon. J. M. went in, Joe followed. As Dan made to enter after him, the ring of men on deck suddenly and silently closed in on him. His arms and legs were pinioned; an arm hooked around his face to stifle any cry. The door of the saloon closed and the key softly turned in the lock.

A voice snarled in Dan’s ear: “You can’t eat with your betters!”

He was silently hustled up forward to the wide deck space in front of the pilot house.

Another voice said: “He won’t eat at all to-night. He’ll make a meal for the crabs!” There was a general laugh.

Without a chance to struggle or to cry out, a rope was wound around Dan’s body many times; a handkerchief was thrust in his mouth and held there by a turn of the rope forced between his teeth. A small anchor was dragged up, and a voice said:

“I got this off the *Charmian*. This’ll hold him down all right.”

The bight of the rope that bound Dan was knotted to the ring in the anchor. Dan was then hoisted to his feet, and his captors backed away, leaving him standing alone for a moment on the deck. The gag stretching his mouth gave him an inhuman look, but his head was up and his eyes looked steadily over the sea. It was evident from their expression that his thoughts were far away from that spot as he took his farewell of the world.

“Now, all together, boys,” said Bull Fellows. “Let him over quiet.”

The door of the mess-room burst open and J. M. appeared. He ran forward with a surprising quickness for one of his bulk. Joe Penman was

close behind him. J. M. forced his way to Dan's side. "If he goes I go too," he cried.

"He's only bluffing!" growled Bull Fellows. "Over with him, boys!"

Some of the men attempted to separate J. M. from Dan, but J. M. thrust his arm inside the rope that bound Dan in such a manner that they could not pull him away without breaking it. As Dan was shoved towards the edge of the deck, J. M. was dragged after him.

"Stop!" said Joe.

The struggling group of men became still.

"Why, J. M., you're plumb hysterical!" said Joe mockingly.

"Never was saner in my life," said J. M. curtly.

"You ought to see that you're in no position to interfere with our plans," said Joe, with a scowl. "Better accept it like a practical man. This guy is too sharp for our taste, see? Twice he has fooled us, and we don't mean to take no chances on his gumming the game now. I promised my men that our first act to-night should be to give him his."

"All right," said J. M. "If he goes, I go too."

"You're too old to be a hero, J. M.," sneered Joe. "It don't suit you."

"This is not heroics," said J. M.; "but plain horse sense. It is only through this man that I can hope to save my life. I'm so sure of that that I'm determined to go if he goes."

Joe was impressed by his cool earnestness. "How is that?" he asked.

"It is only with Dan's help that I can raise the money to free myself."

Joe grinned hardily. "Do you think we're going to let him off this boat?" he asked. "That would be too soft!"

"Then you'd better drop us both overboard and have done with it," said J. M.

"You can send an order to your head secretary for the money," said Joe, scowling.

"By whom?"

"One of my men."

"Yes," said J. M., "and his appearance in my office would be the signal for the tongues to start whispering. The story would be out in half an hour. I don't need you to tell me that if the story breaks in the newspapers that I have been kidnapped, it seals my death warrant."

Joe hesitated, half-convinced.

J. M. freed his arm, and laid a hand on Dan's shoulder. "This is the best man I've got," he said. "The last few weeks have tested him out. He is the only one who is in on the secret of the man who impersonates me in public. Dan can use that man to keep the press quiet. Dan is the only man with the brains and courage to carry this business through."

"Well, leave him lay on the deck," said Joe. "Come aft, J. M., and we'll talk this over further."

Joe's men began to murmur. Bull Fellows burst out openly: "He's fooling you, Joe! If you let this guy live he'll diddle you yet! Mark what I say, he'll find a way to set J. M. free, and land us all in stir!"

Joe's face darkened with rage. "Shut up!" he roared. "I'm the master here! Another word out of you and you'll feed the crabs to-night!"

Bull subsided, scowling.

"Unloose him," said J. M. "There's no sense in tying him up. He can't rescue me off this boat single-handed. He knows that his duty to me is to fetch the money that will free me. That's all he can do."

Joe shook his head. "Don't ask too much of me and my men, J. M.," he said hardily. "This is a slippery guy, and as long as he's on board this vessel he stays tied up, see?"

"Well, throw off the gag," said J. M. "Don't you understand, you fools, that if you put your mark on him we can't send him to my office either."

"Take off the gag," ordered Joe. "Give him his supper. Come on, J. M. You and me will settle everything together."

J. M. addressed Joe's men with quiet force. "Listen, you men, everybody knows me for a man who means what he says. You've got me, and I'm willing to pay. But it isn't going to be easy to pull it off. I'm not afraid of you, and I'm not afraid of kicking out either. Let me tell you this, if Dan is missing in the morning you may whistle for your ransom and be damned to you!" He thrust out his hand forcibly. Then he turned and coolly started aft. "Come on, Joe, I'm hungry."

The men grinned at each other. "Some guy, that," they murmured.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE mess-room or saloon aboard the lighter was more comfortably furnished than is ordinarily the case on a working boat. There were cushioned lockers on either side and a built-in sideboard aft. A clean cloth covered the table. J. M. and Joe Penman took their seats and each looked at the other with the same hard and quizzical grin. They were well matched. A waiter brought in the soup.

“Well, here we are, J. M.,” said Joe. “You and me is a pair, all right. The two biggest crooks in the country!”

“Oh, yeah?” said J. M. “I don’t know the extent of your operations.”

“Well, I admit this is my biggest deal,” said Joe.

“Well, I hope you pull it off all right,” said J. M. dryly. “I’m in with you on this.”

“J. M., it’s an honour to be associated with you!”

“What’s the name of this vessel?” asked J. M. casually. “I haven’t been able to find it anywhere aboard.”

“Yeah, we painted it out for this voyage,” said Joe. “She’s the cruiser *Incognito*.”

“Well, anyhow, I’m having my supper afloat,” said J. M. “I always enjoy that.”

“Sorry, I can’t offer you as good a meal as you’d have aboard your own ship, J. M.”

“Oh, I don’t know. This is real Canarsie chowder. My chef can’t make it. I’ll take another plate.”

“Does me good to see you eat, J. M.”

“On the level, Joe, who put you up to this stunt?” asked J. M. slyly.

This touched Joe’s vanity, and he lost his grin momentarily. “Do I look like a guy that any guy could put up to a thing?” he demanded. “This was my own idea from start to finish.”

“Well, I’ve got to hand it to you, Joe. Do you mind telling me why you have made two fake attempts on my life during the last few days? Neither Dan nor I could dope that out.”

“Sure, I’ll tell you, J. M. There’s no secrets between us now. It’s another guy that’s out to get you, see? Me, I’m no killer. I’m too tender-hearted, I am.” Joe laughed sardonically. “But this other guy approaches me, see; and I

takes his money and strings him along by staging these fake attacks. That's how I got the coin to hire this boat, and the other expenses of my own business. I stand to make five times as much by playing my own hand, see?"

"Clear as crystal," said J. M. "Who is this guy who is bent on sending me to Kingdom Come?"

"Don't ask me to split on a pal, J. M. As a matter of fact, I don't know who he is. I dealt with his attorney."

"Who's his attorney?"

"You'll never learn that from me. . . . But I'll tell you something else, J. M. This guy—we call him the Sucker—he finally caught on that I was stalling him, and to-day his attorney goes to Owney Randall with a wad of dough. Do you know Owney Randall?"

"What! The big shot of Corlears Hook? I've heard of him."

"And Owney Randall sends his torpedoes out on your trail under the lead of Smoke Atchey. To-night they'll be hidden in your park at Sands Point with four submachine guns, waiting for you to drive up from the dock."

J. M. shot a sharp glance at Joe from under his beetle brows. "Is this on the level, Joe?"

"Absolutely!" said Joe. "I had to work fast to-day to get ahead of them."

"Well," said J. M. coolly breaking a piece of bread. "According to that you have saved my life to-night, Joe."

"I sure did, J. M. Not to speak of your three—no, four men."

"It's preposterous enough to be true!" murmured J. M.

"I hope you'll take it into account, J. M."

"Joe, I look on you as my deliverer!" said J. M. dryly.

When J. M. finished eating he pushed his chair back and took out his cigar case. "Sorry I can't offer you one, Joe," he said. "I only have four left and I'll need those before I get off the ship. . . . Must remember to tell Dan to bring me some off to-morrow," he murmured.

A glint of real admiration showed in Joe's hard eyes. "J. M., you certainly are a cool hand!" he murmured.

J. M. merely waved his hand. When he got the cigar going to his satisfaction, he leaned back and looked at Joe through the smoke. "Well, Joe, what's your price?" he asked.

"You understand, I don't have to haggle with you, J. M.," said Joe, stiffening. "It's a case of take it or leave it."

“Exactly,” said J. M., with a powerful flash of his eyes. “On both sides. If I leave it you’re out of luck.”

“You won’t do that, J. M.,” said Joe, grinning.

“Well, we’ll see. What’s your price?”

“One million dollars,” said Joe softly.

J. M. never turned a hair. His cigar was not drawing perfectly, and he rolled it between his fingers before he answered. “You’d do well to name half that sum,” he said calmly.

“No haggling, J. M.!” said Joe, scowling.

“I’m not going to haggle with you. I’d as lief pay you a million as half a million—or nothing at all. But the size of the sum increases the difficulty of pulling off the deal.”

“I’ll take my chance of that,” said Joe.

“I suppose you would want it in gold,” suggested J. M. slyly.

“Sure!”

J. M. produced a pencil and made some calculations on the tablecloth. “A million in gold would weigh over a ton and a half,” he remarked off-hand.

Joe looked foolish. “Well, it would have to be in notes then,” he muttered.

“People talk about millions as if they were autumn leaves,” said J. M. dryly. “Especially people who have never handled them. But a million dollars is a whole lot of money. To attempt to get it together in cash within a few hours would certainly make the banks wonder. Dan can turn the trick if anybody can, but it will be no cinch. You would be much more likely to cash in on your half-million than your million.”

“A million is my figure,” said Joe stubbornly.

“All right,” said J. M., with a shrug. “If the thing blows up to-morrow my heirs will profit by your greed. . . . Any form of amusement on board?” he added. “It’s going to be a long evening.”

“The radio is behind you,” said Joe.

J. M. turned around and began to twist the dials. “Let Dan join us,” he suggested casually. “We have to make careful plans for to-morrow. I have a lot to tell him. You can be here if you want.”

“I can’t do it, J. M.,” said Joe, scowling. “I’m the boss of this outfit, but I can’t push my men too far. They’re afraid of this young guy.”

“Gosh! they must think he has supernatural powers,” said J. M. “Go and see that he is being treated all right. He must be in good shape when he goes to my office to-morrow.”

Joe’s face reddened at J. M.’s cool tone of command. He was on the point of refusing angrily, but he thought better of it and went.

CHAPTER XXV

DAN was freed and allowed to eat his supper sitting on the deck, while half a dozen armed men stood around him watching.

“You flatter me, boys,” he said dryly.

They didn’t appear to get the point.

Afterwards he was tied up again, but less cruelly than before, and carried down into the hold of the lighter. This was a wide space with bunks all around, a mess table in the middle and a big open hatch. Dan was laid in a bunk, and a man sat down in a chair nearby with a gun in his hand. The others went back on deck.

Dan’s guard was a blond young fellow with well-cut features. He looked less brutalised than some of the others, and Dan attempted to make friends with him.

“What’s your name, buddy?”

“Pete.”

“Been following the water long?”

“What’s that to you?” growled Pete.

“Nothing at all,” said Dan cheerfully. “But just to pass the time of day. Cheese, we’re both human, ain’t we?”

No answer.

“You fellows must think I’m a wild hyæna,” said Dan. “For God’s sake put your gun in your pocket.”

“You got too much gab,” growled Pete.

Time passed. There was a murmur of voices from the deck above, and Pete glanced desirously towards the open hatch. He was bored.

“Can’t we get up some kind of game to pass the time?” suggested Dan.

“Shut up!” said Pete. “I ain’t got nothing against you personally, but if Bull hears you he’ll come down and bawl me out.”

“How about a cigarette?” said Dan. “I’ve got a packet in my right-hand pocket.”

Pete was willing to put a cigarette between Dan’s lips and to light it. He kept the rest of the packet. Dan smoked, holding his head in such a position that he could knock the ash off on the edge of the bunk, and let the cigarette drop on the floor when it began to burn him.

A long time passed. Finally, there was a stir of activity on deck. The anchor was hoisted, and the engines started.

“What time is it?” asked Dan idly.

“Eleven o’clock,” answered Pete unthinkingly.

The powerful engines turned swiftly and the water sucked along the side of the vessel. Dan lay listening intently, but could obtain no clue as to the direction they were taking. There was no wind, no sea. But after another period of time had passed he heard a sound that caused him to smile at the back of the bunk, the whistle of a ferry boat. For reasons best known to themselves, Joe and his gang had returned to the harbour.

Pretty soon he heard another sound that he could identify, a characteristic rumble high overhead that could be made by nothing but an electric car passing over one of the East River bridges.

“What time is it?” he asked as if in utter boredom.

“Twelve-twenty,” answered Pete automatically.

Dan did a little figuring. He knew that the speed of the *Charmian* was twenty miles an hour, and he had timed her; one hour from the bridges to the point where they had met the lighter. If it took the lighter an hour and twenty minutes to come back, her speed must be fifteen miles an hour. Pretty good for a working boat. Probably they could get more out of her if they were pushed. He heard the sounds of other bridges, and knew from that that they were passing up the East River.

A long period elapsed. Pete was finally relieved by another man, and departed up the ladder in manifest relief. The new guard was a dark unshaven thug with the forehead of a gorilla, and Dan made no attempt to open friendly relations with him. The other men must have elected to sleep on deck, for none came below. Sleep was far from Dan’s eyes.

At length the engine was shut off, some low-voiced orders were given on deck, and the anchor dropped with a splash.

“What time is it?” asked Dan in a sleepy-sounding voice.

“Three o’clock,” muttered the man in the chair.

Two hours and forty minutes from the first bridges. If their speed was fifteen miles an hour, they had steamed forty miles up Long Island Sound.

By and by a man came down the ladder. “This guy is wanted in the saloon,” he said gruffly. “Watch him close while I untie him.”

Dan chuckled. “I certainly have a reputation aboard this lugger,” he murmured.

He climbed the ladder under his own power. It was great to be able to move again. Men were lying about the deck sleeping. He went aft. It was a dark starless night, nevertheless close abeam he could see a heavily wooded shore without a break or a light anywhere. Suspecting that there was no such wild spot along the Connecticut shore, he took it to be Long Island.

J. M. and Joe were waiting for him in the brightly lighted saloon. The two men remained out on deck, and Joe closed the door. J. M. was in pyjamas. "How are you, old fellow?" he asked in a voice so warm and friendly that it caused Dan to flush with pleasure. This was a new side of the grim old man.

"Fine as silk," said Dan. "And you?"

"Oh, they treated me like a patron saint," said J. M., chuckling.

J. M. and Dan sat down at the table, and J. M. handed over a bunch of cheques that he had signed in blank, a power of attorney, and a letter to Carrington, his private secretary. Dan received elaborate and detailed instructions as to raising the money in the morning. Joe sat nearby tipped back in his chair, smiling sardonically.

"Read the letter to Carrington," said J. M.

Following his instructions to his secretary, J. M. had written: "In case I should be prevented from rewarding him myself, it is my wish that Dan Woburn should be paid one hundred thousand dollars out of my estate. He has played a man's part throughout this affair, and it is due to no fault of his that I find myself in this hole."

Such a surge of feelings tightened Dan's throat that he had difficulty in speaking. "Oh, J. M., please . . . I wish—I wish you wouldn't," he murmured too low for Joe to hear.

J. M. clapped Dan's shoulder. "If I get clear of this I'll do better than that for you," he answered.

Joe bestirred himself, scowling. "What's this?" he demanded. "I was to hear everything that was said."

"Just a personal matter between my young friend and me," said J. M., keeping his hand affectionately on Dan's shoulder. "He's ready to go now."

They went out on deck. A small boat was floating alongside with four men in her, two to row and two in city clothes. In the light streaming from the open door, Dan recognised the last two as the bull-headed one who was appropriately called Bull, and Whitey Morgan. He gripped J. M.'s hand and stepped in. They pushed off in silence.

It was about three hundred yards to the shore. A spark of light occasionally showed in the dark wall of trees, and they steered for that. They landed on a stony beach, and without a word the rowers pushed off and started back.

Above the beach an old-fashioned limousine was waiting in a rough track through the woods. There were two men on the front seat. Dan could not get a good look at their faces. Not a word was spoken. Whitey got in the back; Bull with a jerk of his head ordered Dan to follow, and Bull followed Dan. The car started.

After bumping over the track for a while it became a dirt road, and that in turn became a gravel road which finally led them into a concrete highway. For a long time they passed through no villages, and the single houses were so scattered Dan was more than ever sure this could not be thickly populated Connecticut. It was the quietest hour of the twenty-four and they passed no other cars.

When the dawn began to break they were crossing a wide marsh upon a causeway. Dan watched keenly for some recognisable landmark. Soon afterwards they entered the raw outskirts of the city with newly-laid pavements, vacant lots filled with rubbish, and blocks of cheap new flats. Somewhere on the edge of the borough of Queens probably. Bull, observing Dan's sharp glances from side to side, pulled down the curtains and he could see no more.

But soon after that they passed over a long, smooth stretch where they were able to make good speed without pausing, and from certain sounds that reached his ears, a trolley car at one side whose wheels reverberated hollowly, a boat whistle from below, Dan knew they were crossing a bridge. So it *was* Long Island.

By and by Bull snapped up the curtains again, and Dan saw that they were driving through Central Park. It was full day then. They stopped near an entrance and one of the men on the front seat left them. Evidently they were only killing time. They made a complete circuit of the park and started around again.

Dan was suddenly struck by the absurdity of the situation, the three of them driving around endlessly, sitting side by side without opening their mouths. "Are you guys struck dumb?" he said.

Whitey grinned. "I ain't got nothing against you personally," he said.

Bull silenced him with a curse, and the conversation went no further.

At eight o'clock they left the park, and drawing up in front of a lunch-room, went in for breakfast. Dan talked to the counter-man while Bull,

Whitey and the chauffeur smoked in silence. Afterwards they resumed their round of the park.

Finally, they drove down-town and precisely at ten o'clock delivered Dan at the door of J. M.'s office.

Just before Dan got out, Bull addressed him for the first time: "Here are your instructions. At five o'clock this afternoon you are to ride up-town on a Lexington Avenue local. Get off at Fifty-Ninth Street, and walk east. Enter the park at the Plaza, and keep on by the footpath which runs inside the park wall all the way to Columbus Circle. Somewhere along that route, Whitey or me will meet you. You get into talk with us, and hand over the bag with the money, then beat it. If you are followed, or if you have cops planted along the way, you will never see us."

"Okay," said Dan.

CHAPTER XXVI

HUGH BRADY, who found the practice of the law outside the law extremely profitable, lived in a luxurious apartment in the Carlton Tower. On the same morning he awoke about eight o'clock, and instantly asked his servant for the newspaper. He sat up in bed and put on his glasses with an anticipatory grin, but when his eyes scanned the front page his face fell. No scarehead; no particular sensation that morning.

"Telephone to the news stand and see if there's an extra out," he ordered his servant.

He turned the pages hastily, but failed to find what he was looking for. Then he went over the paper column by column. On an inside page he found a brief item that caused his mean grey face to wrinkle up in perplexity and chagrin. This is what he read:

GANGSTER CRIME ON LAWRENCE ESTATE

Last night about one o'clock the servants on the J. M. Lawrence estate at Sands Point, Long Island, were aroused by screams from a remote part of the park. Arming themselves, the menservants proceeded to the spot where they found the body of a man lying in a pool of blood. He had been killed by countless stab wounds, and the body shockingly mutilated. It was still warm when found.

George Inman, a former police officer now employed as a watchman on the Lawrence estate, recognised the man as one Sliver Buckley, an individual well known to the police. Buckley who was about 48 and looked younger, was formerly a detective in the employ of a well-known private agency, and was considered a good one. In 1927 he was convicted of blackmailing one of the firm's clients, and was sentenced to Sing Sing, where it is said that he formed the cocaine habit. Nothing is known of his recent activities. The police are investigating.

Mr. Lawrence was not in his house at the time. It is his custom to steam up the Sound in his yacht *Iroquois* on Friday afternoons, and spend the week-end at his Sands Point estate, but yesterday he was detained in the city by unexpected business.

Brady broke into a low, furious cursing, and threw the paper on the floor. He saw a princely fee eluding his grasp, and rage made him look sick.

His servant entered to say that no extra had been issued.

Brady dressed hastily, and after snatching a breakfast, set off for the speak-easy on Division Street. He had to wait for Owney Randall.

When he finally faced the big shot in his private room he said bitterly: "So your men fell down last night!"

Randall, a hippopotamus of a man, squashed into a chair specially built to support his weight, answered coolly: "Yeah, thanks to you."

"To me!" said Brady, staring.

"That's what I said. Seems it was you brought this Buckley guy here yesterday on your tail. Cheese, Brady, I thought you was too wise to leave yourself open like that!"

"Who hired him to tail me?" muttered Brady.

"A guy called Joe Penman. Know him?"

Brady's face turned greenish, and his hand shook. He said nothing.

"I see you do," said Randall dryly.

"What happened?" asked Brady huskily.

"This Buckley guy was pretty smart when he had a shot of coke in him," said Randall. "He made up to Smoke Atchey so clever that Smoke hired him to drive the car last night."

"Smoke hired him!"

"Yeah, I told Smoke, one more play like that and he don't do no more work for me. But it was you brought Buckley here."

"How did it all come out?" muttered Brady.

"Well, when J. M. didn't come at the usual time last night, Smoke and the boys suspicioned something and they put it to Buckley. Buckley, he hadn't no coke in him then, and he begun to shake and cry. He couldn't bluff it out, and after a little sweating it all come out. How he was Joe Penman's man, and how he tailed you here, and afterwards made up to Smoke Atchey. In the afternoon he sneaked back to Penman and told him of the plant for last night. . . . Don't ask me what happened then," Randall concluded with a meaning grin. "Naturally, the boys was sore at being dished. But it's no business of mine."

"And Penman tipped J. M. off?" asked Brady.

"Well, I don't know as you'd call it tipped him off," said Randall, grinning still. "Joe Penman and his gang kidnapped J. M."

“Kidnapped!” gasped Brady.

“Yeah! Richest man in America! Some stunt, eh? This’ll make folks sit up when it gets out. But, of course, it’s no business of mine. This Penman must be quite a guy. Seems that was his real game all along. More money in it than murder.”

“Kidnapped!” muttered Brady as if he were unable to grasp the idea.

“Yeah, he was just taking money off you for his expenses. This’ll make you look pretty small if it comes out, Brady. But I won’t tell.”

“Kidnapped? How? Where? Where has he got him?”

“I don’t know any of the particulars,” said Randall indifferently. “Naturally, Penman wasn’t taking the world into his confidence.”

Brady got uncertainly to his feet.

“Well, better luck next time. Call in any time, Brady.”

Brady stumbled out of the speak-easy like a man in a dream. In the first telephone pay station that he came to, he shut himself in a booth, and dropped a nickel in the slot.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUCH was the power of J. M.'s name in Wall Street that even his private secretary loomed as a considerable figure there. Carrington, a man of fifty-odd, was more of the old-fashioned type of banker, dry, precise, punctilious. He was an able man or he couldn't have held his present position, but Dan's communication knocked him completely off his base. For a few minutes he was like a man stunned and bereft of all sense.

"J. M. a prisoner—a prisoner," he muttered. "A million dollars to be raised! I—I can't take it in!"

Unfortunately just at this moment D. D. Beddington happened to enter his office. Beddington was not the sort of man who could be kept waiting outside. Dan realising the supreme importance of keeping Beddington in ignorance, sprang up to meet him, hoping thereby to distract his attention from Carrington's stricken face.

"Hallo, Mr. Beddington."

"Is J. M. here?" asked Beddington. Behind the innocent-shining glasses his eyes were busy.

"Why, no," said Dan.

"I know he never comes down on Saturdays," said Beddington; "but I read in the paper that he had been detained in town by business this weekend."

"They didn't get it quite right," said Dan. "It was a slight indisposition that kept J. M. in town. He's up at the house."

"Sick?" said Beddington. "I thought J. M. had never been sick a day in his life."

"Oh, nothing serious," said Dan. "But he wanted to be near Doctor Pulford."

"If he's not real sick is there any chance of my seeing him to-day?" asked Beddington.

"I'm afraid not, sir," said Dan. "He won't do any business to-day."

Beddington wrinkled up his nose like a terrier scenting. He looked from Dan to Carrington, and turned to go. "Well, when you see him give him my best regards," he said, with an invidious smile.

He left, and Dan immediately telephoned to Dr. Pulford to warn him what to say if any inquiries as to J. M.'s health were made of him. Pulford

was an absolutely dependable man. Dan also called up Reed, so that he could not be taken by surprise.

By this time Carrington had recovered himself somewhat, nevertheless, Dan looked at his drawn white face with a sinking heart. "You must pull yourself together, Mr. Carrington," he said earnestly. "It is absolutely essential that nobody should guess anything is wrong."

"I'll—I'll do my best," stammered Carrington.

"You need a drink," said Dan bluntly.

"I never drink."

Just the same, Dan found a flask in the office, and insisted on his taking it. A little colour came back into his face, and they set out together. Whitey Morgan was waiting for them at the door of the building, and without making any attempt to conceal his purpose, he followed them from bank to bank. When Dan mentioned it to Carrington the latter said:

"We can shake him off by leaving from the back door of one of these buildings."

"Not at all," said Dan. "Let him see that I am faithfully performing my errand."

Cash had to be drawn from various banks, and loans negotiated in a dozen quarters. For the purposes of collateral it was necessary to procure securities from different safe deposit vaults. All this took time. J. M. had insisted that no single loan must be large enough to start talk.

It was necessary for them to return to the office several times. During one of these visits about eleven o'clock, word came over the telephone of a sudden inexplicable panic on the stock exchange. Stocks were tumbling two and three points between sales. A few minutes later the explanation came over the 'phone. It was being rumoured in the brokers' offices that J. M. Lawrence had been kidnapped and was being held for ransom.

Dan turned sick at heart when he heard it. All his resolution and energy failed him for the moment. "Oh, God, how did it get out!" he groaned.

"It was bound to get out," said Carrington helplessly.

"Do you realise," said Dan, "that unless we can kill this story it spells J. M.'s doom?"

"How can you kill a story if it's true?" asked Carrington with a frightened white face.

The older man's helplessness bucked Dan up. "Just the same, it's got to be killed," he said doggedly.

By this time there was a continual stream of inquiries over the 'phone. A dependable man was put at the instrument with instructions to deny the story. He was instructed to say that Mr. Lawrence was safe in his Fifth Avenue home suffering from a slight indisposition.

Worse followed. Within a few minutes the extras were being screamed through the street. No such story had ever broken within the memory of Wall Street and for the moment all traffic stopped. It was the *World-Telegram* that reached Dan's hands, and when he read it he was about ready to give up. After reciting the various rumours that were current the story went on to say:

“At 10.15 this morning Mr. Daniel Woburn, one of Mr. Lawrence's secretaries, visited the office of the *World-Telegram* and confirmed the news of his employer's disappearance. Mr. Lawrence accompanied by Mr. Woburn boarded the yacht *Iroquois* about six-thirty last evening according to custom. Mr. Lawrence felt a little indisposed later, and about eight he decided to return to his town house so that he could put himself under the care of his physician.

“They engaged a taxi at the yacht landing foot of East 26th Street. While they were stopped for traffic lights at 27th Street and Second Avenue four men boarded the running board of the car, two on each side. Mr. Woburn was rendered unconscious by a blow on the head, and thrown into the street. When he recovered his senses the car and his employer had gone. He did not have the number of the car's licence.

“At first Mr. Lawrence's family and business associates determined to keep the fact of his disappearance a secret until some communication was received from his kidnappers. But since the news has leaked out, anyhow, they now wish it to be given the widest possible publicity. Mr. Woburn asked for the co-operation of the *World-Telegram*, and of all the people of the city in assuring the safe return of Mr. Lawrence in his home.”

“Oh, God! Whose damnable plot is this?” groaned Dan. “It's a plot, a plot to make it impossible to save him! And if they show the story to J. M. he will think that I betrayed him!” He dropped in a chair, pressing his head between his hands.

“Oh, buck up, Woburn! For God's sake pull yourself together,” stammered Carrington. “Everything depends on you!”

Dan, gritting his teeth together in helpless rage, reached for the telephone. He called up the newspaper offices one after another and got the city editors on the wire.

“This is Daniel Woburn speaking. Some scoundrel has been going around the newspaper offices this morning, impersonating me and assuming to confirm the ridiculous rumour that Mr. Lawrence has been kidnapped. There is not a word of truth in it. Looks like somebody was trying to depress stock values. Mr. Lawrence is safe at this moment in his Fifth Avenue home, and I want you to send your best man up there or come yourself if you can, and interview him.”

Dan then hastened up-town to prepare Henry Waters and Reed Garvan for the interview. Henry was fixed up and put to bed in J. M.'s room. Dr. Pulford was sent for to add authority to the scene. The reporters were admitted in a body.

How well the affair passed off may be judged from the extras which appeared on the streets shortly after noon. The *World-Telegram* said:

“The *World-Telegram* is happy to be able to report that the story of the disappearance of J. M. Lawrence is a fabrication pure and simple. Unfortunately all the newspapers in town appear to have been victimised by a well-dressed and well-appearing young man who visited all the offices this morning representing himself to be Daniel Woburn, one of Mr. Lawrence's secretaries.

“The real Mr. Woburn called up and denounced the impostor. He invited every newspaper to send a man to interview Mr. Lawrence, and at eleven-twenty this morning the interview took place in Mr. Lawrence's bedroom. Mr. Lawrence was in bed but the smiling and jocular figure conveyed no impression of serious illness. Dr. Pulford, the well-known physician, was in attendance.

“Mr. Lawrence said: ‘Well, boys, the doctor says you can't stay long, but at least you can see for yourselves that I'm still here my usual solid self. I'm too big a baby to be kidnapped, I reckon.’

“‘Is there any foundation for the rumour that you were carried off?’ Mr. Lawrence was asked.

“‘None whatever,’ he answered energetically. ‘It is true that I came ashore from the *Iroquois* at eight o'clock last night. It was not Mr. Woburn who was with me, but another of my secretaries. We took a taxi at the yacht landing and drove straight home. Nobody offered to molest us. We were home before half-past eight and I was in communication with Dr. Pulford.’

“Dr. Pulford confirmed this.

“‘Have you any idea who could have started this story?’ Mr. Lawrence was then asked.

“‘Ask me something easy,’ the financier replied. ‘You might as well ask where the wind comes from as to try to run down the source of a yarn like this.’

“‘Could it have been a short interest in the Street?’

“‘Maybe so. In any case, I’m sorry for the folks who sold their good securities on a falling market.’ ”

The effect of this story was to arrest the panic on the exchange. Stocks rose again. Dan breathed more freely, and he and Carrington resumed their work of getting the money together. Now the bankers they visited looked at them rather peculiarly when they asked for loans. However, these were not men who were likely to talk about their business. By the time the banks closed Dan and Carrington had secured the entire sum.

And then at one o’clock the press released another bombshell that instantly destroyed all Dan’s work. Once more the extras were cried in the streets, and everybody stopped work while they rushed to buy them. In some cases the newsmen were mobbed, and their papers torn from them. No such scenes had ever been witnessed down-town.

The *World-Telegram* now said in bold-face type:

“It is true that J. M. Lawrence has been kidnapped.

“The *World-Telegram* has it on unimpeachable authority that the man who gave out an interview in the Lawrence mansion this morning was not Mr. Lawrence at all, but an actor named Henry Waters who was masquerading as the multi-millionaire. It is now known that Waters was engaged by Mr. Lawrence several weeks ago to impersonate him in public. All the supposed photographs of Mr. Lawrence which have been published recently are in reality photographs of Waters. Mr. Lawrence’s life having been threatened on several occasions, he adopted this means of protecting himself.

“The motives of Mr. Lawrence’s secretaries and his doctor in attempting to conceal the fact of the financier’s disappearance are, of course, easily understandable. They were afraid that publicity would interfere with the negotiations for Mr. Lawrence’s return. We sympathise with his family and associates, but since these

rumours are in circulation our duty as a newspaper is clear. We owe our readers the truth.

“The circumstances of Mr. Lawrence’s disappearance are not known at the moment of going to press. The police have no information.”

To Dan this seemed to end everything. He spread out his hands. There was nothing to say.

Then suddenly a ray of light broke on him. “Whitey Morgan!” he muttered.

“Eh?” said Carrington uncomprehendingly.

“That’s the man who has been following us about all morning. If I can get hold of him, perhaps I can convince him that I am dealing squarely with the gang.”

Dan ran downstairs to the street doors of the office building. He saw Whitey mixing with the crowd that was already milling in front, but when he attempted to approach him, Whitey sheered off warily. He had his right hand in his pocket, evidently grasping a gun. At that moment a taxi drew up at the curb, and Inspector Scofield stepped out, followed by a couple of detectives.

“Beat it! Beat it!” Dan cried.

Whitey turned to run, but the crowd blocked him. Scofield’s lynx eye had already spotted him. He and his two men leaped on the young man, and in a jiffy he was disarmed, handcuffed and flung into the taxi.

“Who is it? Who is it?” people were asking.

A detective, unable to pass up the chance of applause, said: “One of the kidnapers!”

A cheer went up from those within hearing. They shouldered each other at the cab doors trying to look in.

Scofield was angry. “Take him to headquarters,” he said, “and for God’s sake keep your mouths shut!”

Scofield took Dan’s arm and led him inside the building out of the way of the crowd.

“Oh, God! How unfortunate!” Dan groaned.

“Why unfortunate?” demanded Scofield, staring.

“Suppose there is another spy in the crowd there. It would look to him as if I had delivered Whitey into your hands. Believe me, if that message is conveyed to the gang, J. M. will be dead within an hour.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

DAN and Inspector Scofield went into J. M.'s private office where they were safe from interruption.

"Everybody seems to know more about this case than the police," said Scofield sorely. "There have been so many statements and counter-statements, and interviews and denials, I don't know how the thing stands. Why didn't you come to me in the beginning."

"How could I?" said Dan.

"Well, give me the straight dope now."

"If I do," said Dan, "will you give me your word of honour not to act on it in any way?"

"Certainly not!" said Scofield. "I've got to be free to act according to my judgment."

"Then I can tell you nothing."

"You've got to tell me!" said Scofield forcibly.

Dan faced him out. "You've got no authority over me now. My duty is elsewhere."

The inspector was taken aback by his firmness. "You expect to come back to the department, don't you? That's your life."

"I'll have to take my chance of that," said Dan.

"Were you with him when he was seized? What sort of a proposition have the kidnappers made? Have you any idea where they are keeping him?"

"I won't answer any of those questions," said Dan. "Good God, inspector, have a heart!" he cried brokenly. "Don't you see what a hellish position I'm in? I'm fond of the old man. He has treated me white. It's driving me crazy to think of him helpless in the hands of those dirty crooks!"

"Then work with me," said Scofield.

"I can't work with you. Your job is to catch those crooks, and my job is to save J. M., even if the crooks get away."

"But they're warned now, Dan," urged Scofield. "The secret is out. What can you do?"

"I don't know," said Dan doggedly; "but I've got to keep on trying."

That was all Scofield could get out of him. He finally left in anger, and returned to headquarters to question Whitey Morgan.

There was a whole battalion of reporters waiting in the outer office on the chance of something turning up, and Dan went out to them.

“Any news?” they asked eagerly.

Dan shook his head. “No. But I’ve had an idea that may help. I want to send a message to the kidnapers, and I’m going to ask each of you men to take it down and publish it in order to give it the widest possible circulation.” He dictated:

“TO THE KIDNAPPERS”

“I have faithfully followed all instructions. The stories given out to the papers to-day came from other sources. I have not given out one word of information. I have raised the money as instructed, and am holding it. If I am prevented from handing it over according to the instructions given me this morning it will be through no fault of mine. I ask that other instructions be sent me for paying over the money.

“DANIEL WOBURN.”

There was a marine wireless installation in the Fifth Avenue house for the purpose of exchanging communications with the yacht, and Dan’s hope was that J. M. would persuade Joe Penman to send him a message by that means in J. M.’s private code.

The reporters fired a whole barrage of questions at Dan. He shook his head to all. “Read the statement,” he said. “That tells you why I can’t give any information.”

As the reporters were filing out Julia Dormer entered the outer office. At sight of her Dan’s face turned red and then pale again. His harassed eyes lighted up. He was so glad to see her he forgot they had quarrelled. Seizing both her hands he drew her in.

“Oh, gosh, it’s good to see a friend!” he murmured. “I was going down for the third time, pal! Come inside where we can talk.”

Julia was her usual perfectly-turned-out self, a little miracle of charm, and good taste, but she was not smiling; her manner was strange. Dan drew her arm under his, and led her into the private office. There he held her off at arm’s length where he could look his fill.

“Gee! what a sight for tired eyes!” he murmured.

Julia drew away from him. "I must be honest with you," she said in a constrained voice. "Inspector Scofield sent me here."

All the light went out of Dan's face. "Sure, I understand," he said heavily. "To get information out of me. Gee! what a dirty advantage to take of a fellow! It's so damn hard to refuse you anything."

"I was instructed to come here, and here I am," said Julia doggedly; "but understand, now I'm here I'm talking for myself. Why can't you work with the inspector, Dan? He's an able man; he isn't going to let you down?"

"Gosh! must I go over all that again?" said Dan, with a rueful smile. "Listen, honey, Inspector Scofield is a police officer, and I'm anti-police for the time being. My job is to pay over the ransom in such a way that the crooks can make their getaway. In other words, I'm compounding a felony, see? What have I got to do with the police?"

"But, Dan——!"

Dan went close to her. "Wait a minute, Ju," he said softly. "Let's postpone the discussion a little while. You quarrelled with me yesterday. Tell me it's all right now. Don't kick a man when he's down. Look at me! You must be able to see that there isn't a woman in the world but you who means a darn thing to me. Not if she were Cleopatra in her glory!"

"Oh, that's not fair," said Julia in distress.

"What's not fair, honey?"

"To try to make me show my personal feelings when I—when I have a job to do."

"Then you *have* personal feelings?" said Dan, with a delighted smile.

"I won't tell you."

"Listen, Ju, it's all right, see? Because you've failed in your job. That's out. I can't go into the pros and the cons of this thing even with myself. What I've got to do is as plain before me as a shining light. And that is to save J. M. I'd commit every crime in the calendar to save him. And nothing can turn me aside from it."

Julia sighed with relief. "Well, that's all right then. I have failed." Her voice deepened. "Oh, Dan——!"

"Oh, Julia!" He took her quietly in his arms. "You blessed girl! This makes a new man of me. I can face anything now! It's all right, isn't it? You're not angry with me any more?"

"Oh, you darling fool! Couldn't you see that I was just jealous?"

"Imagine you being jealous!"

"Oh, Dan, what have you been through?"

“Plenty!” said Dan dryly. “I’ll tell you when I can.”

“You are still in danger!”

“Oh, what do I matter alongside a valuable life like J. M.’s?”

“You matter more to me!”

“Bless you for these kind words, sister!”

“Don’t make fun now!”

“I’ve got to, honey. Or fly clean off the handle. . . . On the level, dear, do you love me?”

“With all my heart, Dan.”

“Cheers! You never would admit it before.”

“You are in danger now!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Dan dryly, “not if I can persuade those crooks they still have a chance of getting their money.”

“If I could only be with you, Dan!”

“You’re a darling for wishing it,” said Dan. “But I’ve got to forget everything that is sweet and lovely until the chief is out of danger.” He released her with a sigh. “I’ve got to go now.”

“Where are you going?” she asked anxiously.

“Up to J. M.’s house. You’ll understand when you see the next editions of the papers. I’m hoping I may get a message there. The first plan for turning over the money has been knocked galley west by this damned publicity.”

They paused for a moment to look down in the street where the crowd now reached from curb to curb.

“How can you hope to do anything with this mob at your heels?” said Julia.

“They’re actually giving up their Saturday half-holiday to get a glimpse of me!” said Dan. “Such is fame! . . . There’s a back door in Cedar Street, but I reckon there’s another mob there.”

Just within the door of the big room they had their last brief embrace.

“God protect you!” murmured Julia.

She hastened away—to headquarters as Dan thought.

Dan and Carrington took the big bag containing the ransom money between them, and left the building by the Cedar Street entrance. A guard followed them. Nobody but themselves knew what was in the bag, but its size and weight were significant. A small crowd shoving back and forth on

the pavement peered at it curiously. Dan was relieved when it was thrown on the floor of a taxi-cab and they drove away.

Dan and Carrington sat on the back seat of the taxi with the guard facing them. The treasure bag rested on the floor between their knees. The guard, who had been borrowed from the Columbian Bank for the occasion, was a burly man with a hard and steady eye. He had not been told what the bag contained, but he must have guessed that it was something more than a change of clothing.

As they found their way through the narrow down-town streets, Dan occasionally glanced through the rear window, and by the time they had reached the clear going on Lafayette Street, he was satisfied that they were being followed by another taxi. The person riding in it was holding something dark in front of his face.

“Still on our trail,” murmured Dan to Carrington with a dry smile. “I wish I could hang out a sign telling him that we have the money, and that it is his as soon as he fixes a way to receive it.”

They found another great crowd completely filling the broad pavement in front of the twin palaces on Fifth Avenue, and the little yard between them. More were banked on the park wall across the street. Four policemen were required to keep the roadway open for traffic. Seeing this, Dan ordered their driver to run down to Madison Avenue and make a circuit that would bring them up to the small door at the rear of J. M.’s house. The following taxi stuck to them throughout.

In the side street cars were parked along the curb on both sides and they had to stop outside the rank in order to reach the little door. There was nobody standing about on the pavement, but a number of people at the corner were watching. Carrington and the guard carried the bag, while Dan preceded them with the key to the door. At sight of these figures the curiosity seekers at the corner charged down on them, afraid of missing something.

As Dan was about to insert the key in the door, a shot rang out from behind, and he crumpled up on the pavement. The guard whirled around, drawing his gun, but for the moment he could not see whence the shot had come. The white-faced Carrington was like a man turned to stone with terror. All the running people hearing the shot, faced about like one man, and ran back again.

Dan twisted on the pavement and groaned. Instantly a hand holding a gun appeared through the window of a car parked at the curb. Before it could fire again, there was a shot from the other side of the car, the hand

went limp and the gun dropped to the running board of the car, exploding as it fell. The guard fired a second afterwards.

The car at the curb jerked forward, but a taxi beyond turned sharply in front, blocking it. The driver slipped from under his wheel and started running down the street. A uniformed officer coming from the corner and running like the wind collared him before he had taken twenty steps. Meanwhile, the bank guard pulled open the door of the blocked car and the body of Bull Fellows pitched out head first. He was still alive. Out of the taxi stepped Julia Dormer, very pale and bright eyed.

By this time Dan was sitting up on the sidewalk holding his left shoulder. Blood was seeping between his fingers. Julia ran to him. The curiosity seekers, satisfied that the shooting was over, crowded around them. Dan pointed to the key lying on the sidewalk.

“Quick! Open the door, and let’s get inside.”

A moment later they were grouped around the body of Bull Fellows lying in the little cement-paved yard at the back of J. M.’s house; Dan, Julia, Carrington, the bank guard, the uniformed policeman, and the latter’s prisoner. This was the driver of the car from which Bull had fired. Dan looked at him keenly, but it was a new face to him.

“What happened?” asked Dan. “I couldn’t see.”

“This fellow shot at you from a car parked at the curb,” answered the bank guard. “As he was taking aim to shoot again, the young lady plugged him from a taxi on the other side.”

“Then it was you who followed me up-town,” said Dan to Julia.

“I knew you were in danger,” she murmured half-apologetically.

“You saved my life!” said Dan.

“If I could only have been a minute sooner!” she said, looking at his wound. “You must have attention.”

“Just a minute,” said Dan. “It’s nothing.”

He knelt beside Bull. Julia’s bullet had gone clean through his body in the neighbourhood of the heart, and it was clear to all of them that the man was done for. He made no sound, but apparently he was conscious. Weak as he was, his eyes glared up at Dan full of hate.

“Oh, you fool!” groaned Dan. “I have the money for you. My only aim was to get it to you safely.”

“You lie!” murmured Bull.

“Would I lie to a dying man?” said Dan. “Quick! before it’s too late, tell me where you were to meet Joe to-night, and I swear I’ll take him the

money myself, alone.” He put his head down close to Bull’s.

“Go to hell!” whispered Bull.

They were his last words. A spasm twisted his body; he rattled in his throat, his jaw dropped. He was dead.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE body of the dead man and the prisoner were taken together to the police station. Dan was assisted into the Lawrence mansion, and Dr. Pulford sent for.

Dan was found to have a bullet hole through the flesh of his left shoulder. The bone was untouched. After dressing it, and putting the arm in a sling, Dr. Pulford said:

“Nothing serious. But you must keep quiet if you want to avoid fever.”

“No quiet for me,” muttered Dan under his breath.

However, he consented to lie down for a while in a small room on the ground floor that was used by Wheatley, the butler, as an office. Reed fetched him fresh clothes to replace the bloody ones. Afterwards Dan sent everybody from the room. At this juncture it was impossible for him to confide in his dearest friends, for both Julia and Reed owed allegiance to the police.

He found it impossible to lie still. He paced the little room, smoking one cigarette after another to deaden the throbbing of his wound, while he tried to dope out a course of action. The wireless station in the house was useless to him, because he did not know what call Joe Penman’s craft would answer. All Dan had to go on was the vague knowledge that he had been landed that morning somewhere on Long Island about forty miles out.

When he came out of the little room his friends were in the hall. Julia ran to him. She read his intention in his eye.

“You can’t go out!” she said stormily. “Where are you going? What can you expect to do, wounded as you are?”

Dan merely smiled obstinately.

Julia abruptly changed her line of attack. “Let me go with you,” she pleaded.

Dan’s face softened. “Don’t tempt me, honey!” He shook his head firmly. “It’s impossible.”

“Who will you take with you, Mr. Carrington?”

They looked at the elderly, sedate Carrington who was still in a state of semi-collapse as a result of what he had been through, and both smiled ruefully.

“You see there is nobody but me,” said Julia eagerly.

“I was thinking of taking the bank guard,” said Dan. “He is a good hard guy.”

“But he’s heavy and slow,” objected Julia. “You’ve got to have a real partner. Why won’t you take me?”

“Honey, you’re a police woman.”

“I’m not!” she said instantly. “I won’t be to-day. To-day I am your man, and nothing else. Don’t you trust me?”

“Certainly I trust you. But I couldn’t take a woman where I am going.”

“Do you doubt my courage?”

“No.”

“Can’t I shoot as quick and straight as a man?”

“You’ve proved that.”

“If the danger is so great it’s not fair to leave me out of it. We belong together.”

“You win!” said Dan, with a sudden smile. “God knows I will need you!”

Julia flushed red with pleasure, and became very quiet. “What are my instructions?” she asked.

“Tell good-bye to everybody here, and announce that you are returning to headquarters,” said Dan. “Drop into the first pay station outside and call up Roosevelt Field. Order an amphibian ’plane to be made ready. Must be able to carry four passengers. Then go on over to the Field. Don’t worry if you have to wait a good while for us, as we may have to shake off some trailers.”

After Julia had gone Dan said to Carrington: “I’m going to make one last attempt to find J. M. I have a clue which may or may not result in anything. Do you want to come, sir?”

The private secretary shook his head. “No,” he said wretchedly. “I’m no good in such a situation. You’ll be better off without me.”

“All right,” said Dan, concealing his relief. “I’ll take the man from the bank to carry the bag.”

“I never expect to see any of you again,” said Carrington hopelessly. “Nor the money either.”

“Well, we’ll do our damndest,” said Dan cheerfully.

He telephoned for the little black car with the keen driver that he could depend on. Guided by Wheatley, the butler, he went through the passage into

Miss Lawrence's house, and out through the rear to the side street where the car was waiting. He and the guard got in with the bag at their feet.

"I reckon we've got ticklish work ahead of us," said Dan to his companion. "What's your name?"

"John Dolan," answered the guard, grinning. Apparently he had no nervous system.

There was no crowd in this street, but somebody was watching, because as soon as they turned up the avenue Dan became aware that they were followed again. It was a taxi-cab with two men passengers. They made no attempt to hide their faces, and Dan recognised two headquarters men. So this was Scofield's doing.

There was no use trying to evade these men by speed, because they would be armed with police badges, and could go as fast as they liked. Dan had to trust to his wits. He ordered his driver to take him to the front door of Grand Central Station.

"If we can shake them in the station you can pick us up at the Biltmore."

The trick worked. At the station entrance they had a hundred feet start of the detectives. Immediately inside, Dan turned sharp to the left and entered the drug-store, where he and Dolan lost themselves amidst the thronging customers. The detectives went on into the station. Dan and his companion gained the street by another door. Five minutes later they were picked up by their own car at the hotel around the corner.

They proceeded to Roosevelt Field, free of all surveillance. Julia and a big 'plane were waiting for them. Dan surveyed their pilot with approval. Bronzed and blue-eyed, a war veteran by the look of him, with years of flying experience behind him.

"What's in the bag?" whispered Julia.

"A million dollars," said Dan, grinning.

Julia grinned too. She didn't believe him.

It was after four when they left the ground, and they had only two hours of daylight remaining. According to his instructions, the pilot headed for Long Island Sound, and flew east at low elevation and moderate speed, along the Long Island shore. A clear afternoon with almost the warmth of summer, all the holiday craft were out.

Over each harbour they circled once or twice while Dan searched among the shipping below for a vessel answering to the description of Joe Penman's lighter. He was pretty sure that he could recognise her if she were there, though it was not likely she would be found in such a place. A work-boat

would stand out too conspicuously amongst the sailing yachts and the dandy motor cruisers.

One after another the beautiful harbours succeeded each other; Little Neck Bay, Manhasset Bay, Hempstead Harbour, Oyster Bay, each like a fork of blue struck deep into the green country. Finally they passed over the heavily wooded promontory of Lloyd's Neck which had only two or three houses upon it. Somewhere along here Dan was certain he had been put ashore that morning.

Inside the neck lay the maze of waterways variously known as Lloyd Harbour, Huntington Harbour, Northport Bay, etc. No creek however tortuous could hide a vessel from the eyes above, and Dan made sure the boat he was looking for was not there. Afterwards they flew across the Sound and searched the waters along the Connecticut shore with no better result.

The sun was sinking, and Dan's spirits with it; his last chance of success seemed to be gone when suddenly a cry of triumph broke from him. He saw Joe Penman's lighter steaming down the middle of the Sound. There was no mistaking her. She had been built to look like a lighter broadside on, but seen from above the slenderness of her hull was fully revealed. She was designed for a more lucrative trade than lugging cotton bales.

The 'plane went on until it was out of sight of the vessel, and rose high in the air before it came back. Just before it became too dark to see anything, they saw the lighter drop anchor in a lonely spot off Lloyd's Neck. As far as those in the 'plane could tell, she was showing no lights.

Dan slipped into the seat beside the pilot, and spoke in his ear. "Can you land on the water somewhere inside the Neck? We've got to get a boat."

The pilot nodded. A few moments later they coasted down the air, and taking the water like a duck, sped up between the shores of narrow Huntington Harbour. Summer estates lined both banks, most of them with docks and floating stages. Thus there was no lack of places to land. Handling his 'plane with great skill, the pilot brought her about and taxied up to one of the floating stages.

Dan and Julia walked out on a wing and stepped to the float. The 'plane was moored. They left Dolan aboard, intending to pick him up on their way back. Making a detour around the house whose landing they had borrowed without asking leave, they gained the highway, and turned towards the lights of Huntington village at the head of the harbour.

It was a cool, clear night with all the stars in Heaven hanging out their little lanterns. The smell of Fall was in the air. Walking along the road

together, Dan and Julia had their first opportunity to talk. Since Julia had joined her fortunes to his, there was no further need for secrecy, and he frankly told her what the situation was, concluding by saying:

“Whitey is under arrest, and Bull is dead. It is possible that Joe Penman has had no news of what happened in town to-day. The fact that he has returned to the rendezvous suggests that his suspicions are not aroused. I may be able to make a dicker with him.”

“But if you approach him direct,” Julia objected, “how is he to know but what you’ve got a whole platoon of police hidden behind you?”

“I’ll have to take my chance of that,” said Dan.

“Your wound will make him suspicious.”

“I’ll put off the sling while I’m talking to him.”

“You ought to be in your bed at this minute,” said Julia bitterly.

Dan only squeezed her hand. “We’ll have to hire a skiff,” he said. “A motor boat would give too much warning of our approach.”

“Get a canoe,” said Julia. “It’s quieter.”

“It’s a two-mile pull out to where the lighter is anchored. You and Dolan will have to do all the work.”

“I’m good for my half of it,” said Julia.

The brightly lighted village with its cheerful shops and the parked cars along the curb had a homely familiar look that was remote from suggestions of kidnapping and murder. Already the couples were lining up for the usual Saturday night promenade on the main street.

“Wouldn’t it be sweet if we could be like them,” murmured Julia wistfully, “with nothing to think about except each other?”

The newspapers on the stands with their screaming headlines reminded them of the grim business they were on. Many of the peaceful villagers were reading the latest editions.

“How they would stare if they knew the famous Dan Woburn was passing!” said Julia.

After eating a hasty supper in a lunch-room, they proceeded to a boathouse. There were plenty of canoes for hire though the hiring season was over. The boathouse-keeper looked hard at the wounded man who wanted to take the girl out paddling on a chilly night in October. However, as Dan was willing to put up the sum he demanded as security for the safe return of the canoe, it was all one to him.

It appeared that Julia was well accustomed to handling a canoe. She sat up on the stern seat wielding the paddle, while Dan supplied ballast

amidships. As they pushed off from the float, a skiff propelled by an outboard engine appeared out of the dark. There was a floodlight trained on the float and as the skiff came within its rays a slight exclamation escaped from Dan.

“Wait a minute,” he whispered.

The skiff contained two men. They landed on the float and asked permission of the boathouse-keeper to moor there for a few minutes. They then went up the bridge and through the boathouse to the street. The boatman followed them.

“Those two men belong to Joe Penman’s mob,” said Dan. “The good-looking blonde fellow stood guard over me last night. You had better follow and see what they are up to. I’ll wait here. Be sure to get back before they do.”

They brought the canoe back to the float, and Julia went over the bridge. The floodlight was turned off from inside, and Dan was left alone in the darkness. He quietly climbed into the skiff, and loosened the screw that fastened the engine to the stern.

While he was so engaged, Julia came running down the bridge from the boathouse. “Quick!” she whispered. “They are just behind me!”

Dan could not lift the engine clear with his one good arm. He had to leave it. He and Julia scrambled into the canoe anyhow, and pushed off in the darkness. At the same moment the two men came out of the boathouse.

“They came ashore for newspapers,” whispered Julia. “As soon as they saw the headlines they started back.”

“I thought so!” said Dan.

The two men tumbled into their boat, and cast off. One gave the flywheel a turn, and the skiff roared off in the darkness.

Dan cursed helplessly. “Once they get aboard the lighter it is all up with J. M.,” he groaned.

Though their efforts appeared to be perfectly hopeless now, Julia made the water fly from her paddle.

All of a sudden the loud noise of the outboard engine was wiped out. “Oh, what a stroke of luck!” gasped Julia with renewed hope. “Their engine has broken down!”

The sounds of furious cursing came back to them on the wind. “Better than that,” said Dan, grinning into the darkness. “It has hopped overboard!”

“You loosened it!” cried Julia gleefully.

“Did you think I was tuning it up?”

She paddled on, and in a moment or two they saw the skiff ahead merely a darker shadow on the dark water. They bore away to one side. Meanwhile, the men in the skiff were running out oars. They heard the creak of the oarlocks. With a man at each oar the skiff soon pulled ahead of them, and was lost in the darkness.

“Don’t give up hope,” said Dan. “When we pick up Dolan we may catch them yet.”

Dolan and the bag were taken aboard from the ’plane. The big guard stepped in gingerly.

“This is a new stunt for me,” he said.

“It’s all right,” Julia reassured him. “It has sponsons, and it can’t turn over. Dan provides plenty of ballast.”

Notwithstanding his fears, Dolan proved to be a mighty man with the paddle. The water hissed alongside, and the dark shore moved steadily past. Soon they came out into wide water, and breasted a choppy little sea. Julia steered for the light on Lloyd’s Neck.

Presently the wind brought them the sound of creaking oarlocks again, and soon afterwards they saw the shadowy skiff ahead. This time they headed directly for it, and Dan issued low-voiced instructions to his crew.

CHAPTER XXX

THE two men in the skiff heard the slap of the waves against the approaching canoe, and rested on their oars.

“Who are you?” one called out suspiciously.

“Friends,” answered Dolan in a cheerful voice. “Gee! we’re lucky to meet a boat out here. We’re out of matches. Can you spare us a box, matey?”

“Don’t carry matches,” growled the voice in return.

“Aw, don’t be a crab,” said Dolan. “Our tongues is hanging out for a smoke.”

Meanwhile, Julia was manœuvring the canoe closer. Dan, the only one who might be recognised, turned up the collar of his coat, and pulled his hat brim down. He had his gun out, but kept it in the bottom of the canoe for the moment.

“Keep off!” warned the man in the skiff. “We don’t know you!”

Dolan affected a hearty laugh. “Gee, fellow! I got a lady with me. I’m not looking for trouble.”

The man on the after thwart of the skiff produced a pocket flash, and cast his light on them. Dan lowered his head slightly. He held his gun ready, out of sight, but he was not recognised. It was Julia sitting in the stern who chiefly occupied their attention. With a side stroke she was drawing the canoe towards the skiff, broadside on. They exclaimed in wonder at her skill.

The two little craft appeared to have the whole expanse of Northport Bay to themselves. There was not a light afloat or anything in sight. Dolan put down his paddle. When the canoe and the skiff came together, he grasped the gunwale of the skiff with his left hand, and producing a gun in his right, shoved it into the ribs of the man on the forward thwart.

“Hands up, friend!” he said cheerfully.

At the same moment the man who was holding the flashlight saw the muzzles of two more guns rise above the gunwale of the canoe.

“Stick ’em up!”

He dropped the flashlight, and they were all in darkness again. Both men flung their hands above their heads. The rear man—it was the good-looking

blond one who had stood guard over Dan in the hold of the lighter, gasped out:

“You got us wrong! We’re poor fellows! We got nothing!”

The canoe and the skiff bumped and scraped together in the short sea. While Dolan held the skiff, Julia, the lightest and surest-footed of the three, sprang into the skiff. She knew exactly what she had to do. In a trice she had the gun out of the hip pocket of Blondy, and threw it in the canoe. After patting him all over to make sure he had no other, she turned to his mate and served him in the same fashion. She then handed the oars one after the other to Dolan, who laid them lengthwise along the thwarts of the canoe.

The two men could make nothing of it. “What’s the idea? What’s the idea?” they kept asking. “What do you want of us, anyhow?”

They were not seasoned sailors, for when Julia stepped back into the canoe, and they realised that they were to be set adrift, they both began to wail like children. “You can’t leave us like this! We got no way of helping ourselves. We’ll drown!”

“The wind will blow you ashore,” said Dan.

“Paddle with your hands,” suggested Dolan, chuckling.

Still pleading pitifully, they caught hold of the canoe and held on. A couple of sharp raps over the knuckles with the paddles forced them to let go. Dolan and Julia paddled away. When darkness swallowed the skiff, her occupants began to shout lustily for help. For a long time their mournful cries rang over the water.

“I suppose we ought to have cracked them over the head,” said Dan; “but I hated to do it.”

“Let them holler,” said Dolan calmly. “They can’t be heard aboard the lighter with the wind in this quarter.”

As soon as they were well out of reach of the skiff, they dropped the oars overboard.

As they rounded the Sound side of Lloyd’s Neck the cries died away. It was rougher out here, but the waves were longer, and gave Julia no trouble. A moderate surf beat on the shore, and the steady wind hummed in the branches of the trees. The wind gave everything life and movement.

“We will always remember the feel of this night,” said Dan.

Soon the shadowy form of the lighter could be made out, riding at anchor with her nose pointed out into the Sound. She showed no lights, but a faint radiance shone up through the saloon skylight. The sea scarcely moved her. No figures showed on deck. The paddlers rested for a moment.

“What are you going to do?” asked Julia in a strained voice.

“There is only one thing I can do,” said Dan. “That is to go aboard and have it out with Joe Penman.”

“Shall you take the money?”

“No,” said Dan. “I want to make sure first that J. M. is all right. I want to make a dicker with Joe.”

“What will we do?”

“Stick under the overhang of the stern. They can’t find you with their searchlight there. . . . If they get me,” Dan went on coolly, “your best plan will be to paddle straight ashore. They can’t pick you up astern with their light until you’re out of range. They have another boat on davits, but it will take time to launch it. If you have time you can carry the canoe right into the woods and hide it. But if there’s any trouble I reckon their first idea will be to get away from here.”

Julia, sitting behind Dan, leaned forward and touched his cheek with fingers that trembled a little. He caught her hand and pressed it. No word was exchanged between them.

They paddled nearer, keeping close to the beach. “Come up on her from dead astern,” whispered Dan. “If they have a look-out he’s likely to be in the bow.”

“Put your paddle down, Dolan,” whispered Julia. “I can bring her up without making a sound.”

Softly they approached the stern of the lighter. No one could be seen on deck. Dan had thrown off the sling from his arm. When Dolan caught hold of the stern rail, and the canoe swung under the overhang, Dan stood up, and careless of the pain it caused him, drew himself aboard. The canoe remained half-hidden under the stern.

Dan had carried two guns aboard. One he put down by the stern rail of the lighter where he could get it in case he should be disarmed; the other he carried in his hand. He walked forward around the narrow deck without meeting anybody. He listened at the saloon door, but could hear no sound from within. He rapped. Joe Penman’s voice ringing loud out of the stillness, bade him to come in.

Dan opened the door. The bright light dazzled him. J. M. and Joe Penman were seated opposite each other at the table playing cards. J. M., stroking his chin and studying his hand, did not even look up. At sight of that peaceful picture, a warm flush of relief coloured Dan’s face. So far so good. Obeying a sudden impulse, he reached over his head, and laying his gun on the cabin roof, walked in unarmed.

Joe with an oath, sprang up so quickly that his chair fell over. "What the hell does this mean?" J. M. looked up. "Dan! Good, lad, you're back!" he said with calm satisfaction.

Joe pulled his gun. "Give an account of yourself, and damn quick!" he commanded. He looked beyond Dan through the open door. "Are you alone?"

Dan's face became set and pale, but he showed his empty hands and coolly faced out the gun. "I'm alone," he said. "I came with two friends who are waiting near by."

"What brought you here?" demanded Joe with a furious oath.

"That's simple," said Dan. "Whitey and Bull didn't keep their date with me this afternoon. I don't know why. I waited half an hour for them. I didn't know what to do. I decided to come myself."

"How did you know the place?"

"Well, I knew it was somewhere on Long Island. Any fool could have told that. I hired a 'plane at Roosevelt Field, and searched from the air until I found the boat."

Joe's face was a study in chagrin. He who prided himself on leaving a closed trail behind him, discovered that it was wide open. "Stick up your hands!" he snarled.

Dan obeyed. Joe, coming so close that his breath was in Dan's face, patted him all over. It seemed to increase his suspiciousness to find that Dan was unarmed.

"Did you bring the money?" he demanded.

"My friends have it," said Dan.

"If you're on the square, why didn't you bring it aboard with you?"

"I wanted to make sure first that J. M. was all right," Dan retorted coolly. "I didn't want you to get it if you were going to shoot me down at sight."

"Come inside," ordered Joe, with a jerk of his head.

Dan came farther into the cabin, while Joe, without taking his eyes from him, circled around and backed out on deck. He spoke to the pilot house.

"Turn on your searchlight, and sweep it around until you pick up a small boat."

He returned to the cabin. "By God, if there's a trick in this you'll be sorry you ever came up against me!" he muttered. "I'll kill you slow!"

"If there's a trick in it would I come aboard alone and unarmed?" answered Dan.

“Why don’t you call your friends aboard?”

“If the money is all right, will you let J. M. go?”

“Sure!” said Joe quickly.

Dan hesitated. The man’s face was as false as hell. It would have been obvious to a child that he had no intention of keeping his word.

“Well, what’s the matter with you?” demanded Joe.

“You are still suspicious,” said Dan. “I reckon you think I’ve got an army of police hidden in the woods, or waiting on a boat around the point ready to fall on you as soon as J. M. is clear.”

“You read my thoughts!” said Joe, with an ugly grin. He backed out on deck. “Pick up anything?” he asked the pilot house.

“No, boss,” came the answer.

Joe came back, and he and Dan faced each other with stony faces. “Bring the money aboard,” said Joe.

“I don’t know whether I will or not,” answered Dan.

It was a complete deadlock.

CHAPTER XXXI

DURING this scene J. M. had remained sitting at the table carelessly shuffling the cards and dealing them out for solitaire. There was something uncanny in his air of detachment. It was as if he had no interest in the affairs of this world. He now spoke calmly.

“I believe that Dan is telling the truth.”

Neither man answered him.

“After all, you want this money, Joe.”

No answer.

“And all things considered,” J. M. went on, “if you get it you would prefer to release me in safety. . . . Not that you give a damn about what happens to me, but it would make your getaway easier. The public would not be so much aroused. Am I right?”

Joe gave a grudging assent.

“Then I propose that Dan call his friends aboard,” J. M. said, gathering up the cards, “and that you carry us all to some place of your own choosing; up the Sound, down the Sound, across the Sound; any place you like. If you are followed you will know it. A ’plane cannot follow you at night.”

“Sure!” said Dan eagerly. “That’s the way to fix it!”

“Are you agreeable, Joe?”

Joe hesitated. But his face had partly cleared. He was half-convinced.

At this moment one of Joe’s men appeared in the doorway. It was the gorilla-like thug who had helped mount guard over Dan the night before. He answered to the name of Bat. At sight of Dan now, his stupid eyes goggled, his mouth dropped open, he completely forgot what he had come to say.

“What do you want?” snarled Joe.

“There’s a vessel coming out of Northport Bay, boss. She’s heading directly for us.”

Joe’s face turned black, and he showed his crooked yellow teeth. For an instant he seemed to be about to shoot Dan down.

J. M. said quickly: “If Dan had brought her she wouldn’t come with her lights blazing.”

Joe lowered his gun, and ran out on deck. Dan and J. M. followed. Men were clambering out of the bow hatch to look. Every eye was turned towards the red and the green light bearing down on them at about a furlong’s

distance. There was no one behind Dan. Putting his hand over his head, he hastily felt for his gun on the cabin roof and dropped it in his pocket.

Joe ordered them back into the cabin. "Bat, you watch them," he growled. "Keep them quiet. They're not armed."

Inside, the human gorilla locked both the cabin doors, and dropped the keys in his pocket. His face appeared to be completely devoid of intelligence. He placed a chair against the forward bulkhead, and sitting, took a gun out of his pocket and played with it in his lap.

"Put that thing up," said J. M. "Joe told you we were not armed."

There was something in J. M.'s quiet voice that the moron could not stand against. Muttering and scowling, he put the gun away, unable to meet J. M.'s eye.

Dan drew back one of the shutters, and he and J. M. stood at the window watching. Joe had sent his men below, and only he and the pilot stood on deck waiting. The oncoming vessel hove to a hundred yards or so to windward. The lighter's searchlight revealed her as a trim mahogany and white cruiser with a uniformed crew. Her skipper put a megaphone to his lips.

"Ahoy, there!"

"Ahoy!" answered Joe. His voice was smooth enough now.

"Captain, we found two of your men drifting in the bay," came the voice. "If we put them in their boat can you pick them up? They have no oars."

"Sure!" answered Joe. "And much obliged to you, captain."

A stern voice came through the other megaphone: "Where's your riding light, captain?"

"Thanks for calling my attention to it," answered Joe smoothly. "It has burned out."

The cruiser was towing the skiff she had picked up. It was brought alongside, and Joe's two men stepped in. All this was clearly revealed by the searchlight. They cast off and began to drift towards the lighter on the wind. The pilot coiled a light line, preparatory to casting it to them. The cruiser's engines whirred and engaged, and she moved away, describing a wide circle and disappearing from view. The searchlight clung to the drifting boat.

"The moment those two step on board the jig is up," Dan whispered to J. M. "Can you go through that skylight in the ceiling?"

"A man can do most anything when he has to," said J. M.

"When I give the word, place a chair on the table and go to it," said Dan. "I'll take care of this fellow."

“How can you?” said J. M. “He’s armed.”

“So am I,” said Dan dryly.

J. M. stared.

“Run aft along the cabin roof and let yourself down to the deck,” whispered Dan. “My friends are waiting in a canoe under the stern. Better take a life preserver in case you are thrown in the water. They’re under the lockers.”

Voices began to shout back and forth between the skiff and the lighter. “What happened to you?” . . . “Our engine jumped overboard.” . . . “Where are your oars?” . . . “We were held up . . .”

Dan quietly slid the shutter to and hooked it. “Now,” he said softly to J. M. At the same moment he whirled around gun in hand. “Stick ’em up!” he said to Bat.

Bat, with a sobbing gasp of surprise, quickly obeyed. He was caught in a completely defenceless position; chair tipped back against the wall, feet on the rungs. His stupid eyes were fixed in terror on the gun.

“If you let a sound out of you I’ll fill you full,” whispered Dan.

Behind Dan J. M. was showing that he could move quickly in spite of his years and his girth. He placed a chair on the table; he pulled a life preserver from under the locker; he climbed to the table and to the chair; he threw the life preserver out on the roof. It was a hard task for him to wriggle under the raised skylight, but he accomplished it without too much noise.

“All clear,” he whispered down to Dan.

At the same moment feet came running along the deck. The door was furiously shaken. “Open! Open!” cried Joe’s voice.

The gorilla man cried out involuntarily: “Help, boss!” Dan’s gun spoke, and he crashed over sideways to the floor. Dan sprang to the table, to the chair. As he drew himself out on the roof, he kicked away the chair, and it smashed to the floor. The light dome was within reach of his foot, and he waited to smash that, plunging the cabin in darkness.

“Fetch an axe!” roared Joe on deck.

Another voice cried out: “They’re on the roof!” A head appeared over the edge. Dan fired and it disappeared.

As Dan let himself down to the deck astern, he was right on top of J. M. He picked up the gun he had left there. He spoke softly over the rail: “Are you there?”

“Okay!” was whispered below. J. M. clambered over the low rail. Julia’s quiet voice said:

“Let yourself down easy. We’ll catch you.”

Dan looked around the corner of the deck-house. A figure was creeping along the narrow deck. He fired. It stopped, and those behind it drew back. Dan looked around the other side. Nobody there.

Julia’s low voice was heard again. “We have him! Come on!”

Dan spoke over the rail. “No room! I’ll swim it!”

“We don’t move till you come!” answered Julia.

He rolled over the rail. As Julia eased him into the already laden canoe, she whispered sharply: “Your shoulder is all wet. You have opened your wound.”

“Never mind,” said Dan. “Paddle! Paddle!”

They made the water fly from their blades. In a moment the men on the lighter realised that they were away, and came running aft. Several shots were fired from the deck, but they went wild. Joe’s voice could be heard bawling orders.

“Fetch oars for the skiff! Lower the other boat and come on!”

When the canoe was half-way to the shore the searchlight picked it up. Renewed shouts went up from the lighter, and more shots spoke out. They were out of range now. Men could be heard tumbling into the boat. The oars were run out, and the boat came after them. It made twice the speed of the overladen canoe.

Dan, lying half-stupefied with pain, roused himself with an effort. “The moment we get in the breakers,” he said, “you must all spring out and carry the canoe ashore, or she’ll smash on the stones.”

The searchlight held them steadily. It enabled them to see their way. Just outside the breakers they tumbled out, and splashed ashore carrying the canoe out of harm’s way. The oncoming boat was less than two hundred feet behind them. Dan said:

“Carry her into the woods. There’s a rough road that follows the shore line. Wait for me there. I’ll hold this boat.”

Dan dropped behind a big boulder on the stony beach. The boat and its occupants were sharply silhouetted against the searchlight. He waited until they came within range, and taking careful aim, fired. There was a scream of pain from the boat. The oarsmen backed water sharply, and they sheered off shore.

By this time the second boat had left the lighter. The first boat waited for her to come up. There was a low-voiced consultation that Dan could not hear, and they parted company, one turning up the beach and one down. The

searchlight continued to play on the stony shore. Dan retreated to the trees, where he found his friends waiting with the canoe in the rough road.

“They know about this road,” he said, “and they’re aiming to trap us in it. Let’s see if we can beat them to it.”

Picking up the canoe between the four of them, they started to the left in the road.

“Isn’t this the wrong way?” suggested Julia.

“No,” said Dan, “I studied the map to-day. This road follows the shore of the neck right around and back on the other side. The other end goes nowhere.”

Each of them had hold of a thwart of the canoe, but Dolan was the only able-bodied man amongst the four. The heavy bag was in the canoe. They stumbled slowly along the rough track. The flashing searchlight, like lightning, gave them glimpses of their path, and enabled them to follow the course of the boat off shore. It landed a hundred feet up the beach, and the men in it made tracks for the trees. Seeing that they were about to be cut off, Dan gave the word to turn into the woods.

Here the going was doubly difficult. Dan, afraid they might betray themselves by the noise they were making, ordered a halt about twenty-five yards in from the road.

“Each of you choose a tree for cover in case they try to sneak up on us,” he whispered.

As Dan lay on the ground in the dark, grinding his teeth in pain, gentle hands undid the buttons of his coat, and eased it over the wounded shoulder. Julia called for a knife, and cutting the saturated bandages away, bound up the wound afresh. Dan never knew where she procured the materials.

CHAPTER XXXII

FOR some minutes nothing happened. Dan and his three friends lay with their ears to the ground. There was no sound. They put their heads together to consult.

“They couldn’t pass along the road in front of us without our knowing it,” whispered Dan. “What they’ve done is to ambush themselves alongside the road farther along where they think we have to pass. We must make a detour around them.”

“Couldn’t we hit straight back through the woods to the other side of the neck?” suggested Julia.

“It’s more than a mile,” said Dan. “And we couldn’t guide ourselves amongst the trees.”

“Why not abandon the canoe, and trust to our legs?” asked J. M.

“We’d have a long walk,” said Dan dryly. “And in order to get off the Neck we have to cross a causeway where one man with a gun could hold us up. We need the canoe.”

“How can we carry it through the woods without giving ourselves away?”

“Take it slow,” whispered Dan. “Pause between every step and feel for your footing.”

J. M. and Julia took the stern between them, and Dolan carried the bow. Dan went ahead to feel the way, guiding Dolan with a touch this way and that. It was impossible to avoid making some noise; bushes switched against the side of the canoe; more than once it jammed softly between the tree trunks. But the lash of the breakers on the stones, and the steady humming of the wind in the trees absorbed these sounds.

They proceeded at a snail’s pace, pausing often to listen. By and by they smelt cigarette smoke, and knew that they were near their enemies. A moment later a spark showed momentarily on their left, and a whispered voice was heard. For a full minute they rested with fast-beating hearts; then took a cautious step ahead, and another. Over their heads the reflection of the moving searchlight could still be seen.

Unluckily a stone turned under J. M.’s foot. He staggered, pulling the canoe out of Julia’s grasp and it banged down on the stones. Instantly the quiet woods were in an uproar. Several men leaped up shouting. A flashlight was snapped on. Dan fired in that direction and it went out again.

Dolan snatched up the bag, and the four of them ran ahead, bent over double, leaving the canoe to its fate. Their pursuers found it immediately and jumped into it, smashing it to matchwood. This diversion gave Dan and his friends a few precious yards start. Dan guided them sharply to the left, and pressed them down in a bed of ferns. They stood a better chance of escaping by keeping still.

A shrill whistle sounded behind them, and was answered by a shout in the distance. At the same time they heard a man running and slipping over the stones below. Julia whispered excitedly in Dan's ear:

"They've left their boat unguarded! Can we make it? Can we make it?"

"Let's try," said Dan.

While their pursuers thrashed and shouted in the woods behind them, they crept across the road, and peered between the outermost trees. The searchlight was now fixed steadily on the spot whence the whistle had sounded. Below them, and a little to one side the boat lay shadowy and deserted at the edge of the stones. Sounds from up the beach indicated that the rest of the men were running to join their companions.

"Come on!" whispered Dan.

They ran down over the stones. The searchers in the woods were making so much noise they were not heard. Above all the other voices could be heard Joe Penman's harsh tones ordering them to be quiet. But his men were out of hand. Dan and his friends got the boat launched; Julia and Dolan picked up the oars, and still no alarm was raised.

"Luck is with us," said Dan grimly. "Let's go back and try to take the other boat. Then we'd have them dead to rights."

They pulled back along the beach, passing under the shaft of light which was fixed on a point between the trees. They had made perhaps half the distance when a yell of rage behind them gave notice that the theft of the boat had been discovered. A moment later the searchlight picked them up, and the yells were redoubled. They could hear men stumbling and slipping on the stony shore.

"Pull!" said Dan strongly. "We'll make it yet before they can! The road is no better for running than the shore!"

Dolan and Julia each had a pair of oars. They put their backs to it. They out-distanced the men on the shore. The searchlight clung to them, making a vividly coloured picture of the moving boat framed in blackness; Dan in the bow; the two straining figures at the oars, and J. M. in the stern.

They reached the second boat. Jumping out all together, they seized her and ran her into the water. There was a groaning figure lying in the bottom,

but they disregarded him. It was the man that Dan had shot in the first boat. While Julia and Dolan picked up their oars, Dan steadied the second boat through the little breakers. J. M. held the painter. As they floated clear Dan scrambled in.

At the same moment men came leaping down from the bank above the beach. They were too late. Running down to the water's edge, they discharged their guns, but the boats were out of range. The searchlight revealed the man leaping and yelling in impotent rage.

"Take a rest!" Dan called to his oarsmen in an exultant voice. "We are masters of the situation!"

"Gosh! I wish I had a cigar!" said J. M. plaintively.

They all laughed to ease the strain they had been under. The second boat with Dan in it was drawn alongside, and Dan joined his friends.

"I have an idea," he said.

"What, another!" said J. M. with dry humour.

"There's a life raft stowed on the cabin roof of the lighter," said Dan. "If we row away from here they'll launch it and get the men aboard after a fashion. If we undertake to row to Huntington they might even overtake us before we got there unless we crawled around close to the shore which would be miles out of the way. In any case, those devils would probably make a safe getaway. It goes against the grain."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked J. M.

"I propose that we try to seize the lighter."

"I thought so!" said J. M. dryly. "You're never satisfied."

"There can't be but two men aboard," said Dan. "Probably the regular crew. Sailors are not fighters. They may not even be armed."

"It is useless to try to dissuade him from it," said J. M., grinning.

"Anyhow, let's parley with them," said Dan.

They rowed up the path of the searchlight, but took care to stop outside the range of pistol bullets. Two men could be seen standing on deck. Dan stood up.

"Can you hear me, captain?" he shouted against the wind.

"I hear you," came the sullen answer.

"You see we have both boats," said Dan. "We have the bulge on you. You had better come in with us while you can. I have a police officer here with me. . . . That means you," he added in a lower voice for Julia's benefit.

There was no answer from the lighter.

Dan tried again. "Are you a member of this gang, captain?"

"I am not!" came the answer. "They hired the boat. I didn't know what it was wanted for."

"Which may or may not be true," said Dan low-voiced to his friends; "but we'll make out to believe it for the moment." He raised his voice: "You'd better make the best of a bad matter by helping me to catch these crooks, captain."

Only silence answered him. After waiting a while, Dan said: "Well, to hell with you! . . . Pull away," he said to Dolan.

They had not taken two strokes before a voice came from the lighter: "Wait a minute, mister."

Another silence. Apparently the two figures on deck were conferring. Finally, a sullen voice said: "All right. Come aboard."

"Captured without a shot fired," said J. M. dryly.

"Put up your hands!" ordered Dan. "We have three guns covering you."

Both pair of hands shot up. Julia took in her oar and pointed a gun. Dolan rowed alongside the lighter.

One at a time Dan and his friends clambered aboard. The two men proved to be captain and engineer of the lighter. Hard-faced men, not above a bit of shady business when it offered, but not out and out crooks. They each owned a share in the trim lighter and they had good cause to look glum now. Neither of them was armed. They appeared to be completely cowed, but Dan kept a sharp watch on them.

Bat, the gorilla man, lay dead where he had fallen in the saloon. His gun was still in his pocket, and Dan took possession of it. The body was carried outside and covered with a piece of canvas. The wounded man was laid on one of the saloon lockers where Julia made him as comfortable as possible. He was shot through the chest.

"You need attention as much as he does," said Julia to Dan.

Dan shook his head, grinning. "I'm all right now. There's no medicine like winning."

The captain and Dolan hoisted the anchor, while the engineer, watched by Dan, started his engines. Julia was told off to search the ship for firearms. She brought three more assorted guns to Dan. When the lighter started to move, the chorus of yells and curses that went up from the beach was like a blast out of the open doors of hell. They suddenly fell quiet, and like one man turned and took to the trees. They foresaw what was going to happen.

Dan put Dolan on guard in the engine-room while he took his place in the pilot house. He surveyed the wireless apparatus longingly.

“Where’s the wireless operator?” he asked.

“Went ashore with the others.”

“Can you or the engineer work this thing?”

“No more than you can,” growled the captain.

“Too bad,” said Dan. “Well, run into Huntington and I’ll get a telephone.”

Half an hour later Dan was in a booth. The events of this violent evening had been crowded close together, and it was not yet midnight. Inspector Scofield was still in his office at headquarters working on the baffling Lawrence case. His curt voice over the wire betrayed the strain he was under.

Said Dan: “This is Dan Woburn speaking.”

“Woburn!” exclaimed the inspector sharply. “Where are you?”

Dan grinned into the instrument, for the inspector’s voice was still full of anger. It was a triumphant moment for Dan. “Speaking from a pay station in Huntington, Long Island, sir. I have Mr. Lawrence safe. I didn’t pay the ransom.”

“Good God!” said the inspector eloquently.

“His kidnapper was a man named Joe Penman,” Dan went on. “He and ten men are at large on Lloyd’s Neck. No, eight men, because I have a dead man and a wounded man with me. They have no boat and can only escape from the Neck by walking. It’s about six miles back to the main island, and they have had half an hour’s start.”

“Okay,” said the inspector. “I’ll ’phone Huntington, Hicksville and Mineola. I’ll come by ’plane.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

LEAVING the telephone, Dan proceeded to the local police station. He found the sergeant in charge in the act of talking to headquarters, New York. Immediately afterwards the place became a scene of activity. The chief was summoned, and the whole force gathered together to deal with the emergency. Within ten minutes a car full of men had been despatched to Lloyd Beach, the narrow strip of sand that connected the Neck with the main island.

The sergeant and three men returned with Dan in a car to the water front and were rowed out to the lighter anchored in the harbour. All those aboard her were brought ashore. The captain and the engineer were lodged in cells, the wounded man carried to the hospital and the dead man to a mortuary. J. M., Julia, Dolan and the precious bag were safely lodged in the village hotel.

Dan resisted all Julia's appeals to allow himself to be put to bed, and a doctor sent for.

"I must be in at the finish," he said. "I'm entitled to that."

Dan, with the sergeant and the three officers, then set off to follow the first car to Lloyd Beach. Dan had been doing some thinking.

"I don't believe that Joe Penman will walk into a trap like that," he said. "He's too damn conceited to own defeat. He would take any desperate chance sooner than that."

"What could he do?" asked the police sergeant.

"That's what I'm trying to dope out," answered Dan. "What could he do? . . . According to the map the stretch of water back of Lloyd's Neck is only half a mile wide. Less than that in one place. Suppose he undertook to swim it."

"Is he a swimmer?"

"I don't know. Judging from his physique, I should say he had been a swimmer in his youth."

"Well, it's something you never lose."

"Joe must know the map as well as I do," Dan went on; "because all his arrangements depended on it. He knows where the narrowest spot is. If I remember rightly there's a road ends at the shore there on this side."

"You sure know the map," said the sergeant.

“If we went down that road I believe we’d stand as good a chance of catching Joe Penman as at Lloyd’s beach.”

“Sorry,” said the sergeant; “but I was told to go to the beach. I got to follow orders.”

“Sure,” said Dan. “But I’m a free lance. There won’t be any excitement at the beach. There are too many of you. If you’ll lend me a pair of handcuffs and a flashlight I’ll toddle down that road just on the chance. I’ve got a gun.”

“I’ll run you down to the shore. Won’t take but a few minutes.”

“No. If Joe should be anywhere about he would take warning from the headlights of the car. I’ll walk.”

“Well, I’ll take you to the cross-roads. It’s only half a mile from there down to the water.”

Dan was put out at the cross-roads, and the police car sped on. Dan’s way led over an old shell road very little used and full of holes. It descended a low rise and went on between wide, flat fields without a building of any sort showing anywhere. It would have been hard to find a more deserted neighbourhood. There was not even a telephone line to remind the walker that he was in an inhabited country.

The flat fields merged imperceptibly into marshlands with their strong, salty smell. Here the road was built up on a foot-high embankment. There was no cover of any sort, no way to pass; if Joe was somewhere ahead, Dan was bound to come face to face with him. He walked in the short tough grass at the side of the road, and his footsteps made no sound. The northerly breeze blew freshly in his face and rattled the dry reeds of the marsh with a sound like faint laughter. Off to Dan’s right a wasted moon began to climb the sky and he could see the shine of open water under it.

He came to the end of the road without meeting anybody. The rising moon now revealed the features of the scene with more clearness. He was on a blunt point with water on three sides of him. Off to the right shone the light on the end of Lloyd’s Neck that he had passed twice that night, going and coming. In front lay the bold, dark, wooded slope of the Neck itself. On his left a hundred feet or so from the road he saw a rickety shanty built on piles in the water. Several boats were moored beneath it. The shanty showed no light to the road, but as Dan came closer he saw a feather of smoke blowing from the chimney. At such an hour this was unusual, to say the least. Coming nearer, he heard voices from the shack, and a hard smile crossed his face. He transferred his gun from his hip pocket to the side pocket of his coat.

On firm ground alongside the road there was a shed which housed an old Ford car. The shanty itself was approached by a dilapidated wooden bridge. Dan felt his way over it slowly. In spite of all care occasionally a board creaked under his weight, but he trusted to the wind and waves to cover these sounds.

A window faced him in the shanty, closely covered inside. The platform extended around the outside of the house. The door was in the side facing the water, with another window beside it, likewise covered on the inside. But a crack of light showed at the edge of it, and Dan put his eye there.

The shanty contained but a single room. Dan saw Joe Penman seated at a table with two other men. Joe had a blanket pulled around him, and his wet clothes were hanging in front of the cook stove, steaming. His gun lay on the floor under the stove. The other two, rough, bearded men, typical squatters, were only half-dressed as if they had been lately roused from their beds.

Joe had a plate of food before him, and was eating voraciously. There was also a bottle of liquor on the table. It was evident at a glance that he had found a pair of kindred spirits. The rude shore men were gazing at him in open admiration. The first words that Dan overheard revealed the nature of the charm Joe exerted over them.

Said Joe: "They got my boat and they got my cargo, but they didn't get me, by God!"

The shore men, with violent oaths, condemned all prohibition officers to perdition.

"You got a swell place here to run a little high-class foreign stuff," said Joe. "Me and you must fix up something. There's good money in it."

The other two grinned appreciatively.

It was obvious that none of the three men was armed. Dan doubted if the shore men even possessed pistols. He saw their shotguns hanging on the wall behind the stove. He opened the door of the shanty and walked in, gun in hand.

It was a cruel shock to Joe. He leaped up naked, empty-handed and snarling. "The prohibition agent!" he cried. "Kill him! Kill him! We're three to one."

The shore men, however, stood in healthy awe of Dan's gun, and they sat still, staring stupidly.

Dan moved over to the stove and, squatting without taking his eyes from Joe, picked up the wet gun as a measure of precaution and dropped it in his pocket. He backed to the door where he could command all three of them.

“I’m no prohibition agent,” he said. “Neither is he a rum-runner. Do you read the newspapers?”

“Not every day,” said the hairiest of the two shore men.

“He’s wanted for kidnapping a rich man and holding him for ransom. If you’ll help me to take him into Huntington it will be worth a hundred dollars to each of you.”

“He lies! He lies!” yelled Joe.

“Shut up!” said Dan. “If you make trouble with these men I’ll start by shooting you dead. And the whole world will praise me for the act!”

The shore men’s eyes glittered at the mention of so much money. Noting it, Dan went on: “Besides that, you can sell the story to the newspapers and make more money. They’ll write you up like heroes.”

The men looked at each other, and rubbed their stubbly chins in a painful state of indecision.

“What can he do for you?” Dan continued. “The whole country is roused and looking for him. There are cars on every road and motor boats patrolling the water. He’ll be taken inside an hour, anyhow, and you’ll be charged with harbouring a dangerous criminal.”

That decided them. “All right, mister,” said the hairiest one. “We’re on your side.”

“Will your car run?” asked Dan.

“Sure.”

“Then get dressed and make it snappy.”

“We got to shave before we can go to town.”

“The hell with it! To-morrow you can hire a barber and get the whole works!” Dan turned to Joe. “Put your clothes on!”

Joe made no objection to dressing. A change had come over him. There was a remote and sullen expression in his eyes that suggested he was plotting something. Dan made him keep his distance from the door.

“You’ll never take me alive,” muttered Joe.

“Then I’ll take you dead,” retorted Dan. “But I’ll take you.”

Dan did not neglect to keep the tail of his eye on the two shore men. A slack-twisted pair, they could have been as easily persuaded in one direction as the other. Dan undertook to fire their vanity with his talk.

“Wait till you see the newspapers, men. This is the biggest case in years. The man he kidnapped was J. M. Lawrence. Ever hear of him?”

They nodded.

“He got away all right. He’s in Huntington now at the hotel. They say the police commissioner of New York City is there too, and all the big fellows. Reporters from every newspaper. Big time, and you’ll be right in the thick of it. You’ll be the biggest guys there when you bring him in.”

When the first man was dressed, Dan sent him across the bridge to start the Ford. As soon as Joe was ready Dan ordered him to turn around and put his hands behind him. He snapped the handcuffs on his wrists. There was no further outbreak from him. Joe’s face bore a strange, dark, brooding look that made Dan vaguely uneasy.

When they were ready to start Joe said coolly: “My clothes are still wet. I’ll catch my death in the night air. Can I have a blanket round me?”

“Sure,” said Dan. “Give him a blanket,” he said to the shore man. “You can bring it back with you when you come.”

A grimy blanket was fetched from one of the bunks.

“I can’t keep it around me with my hands locked behind me,” said Joe. “Tie it around my neck. Tie it good.”

The shore man duly knotted and double knotted it around Joe’s neck.

Joe stood up straight in the slovenly shanty with the dirty blanket hanging down his back like a travesty of a king’s mantle. At that moment there was something magnificent in his wicked, ugly face. Though he was handcuffed and licked, there was neither weakness nor fear in him, but only contempt for the fate that had overtaken him. A kind of admiration came into Dan’s eyes.

“By God, you’re a crook, but you’re big in your way!” he said.

“Yeah?” said Joe scornfully. “A crook! There are crooks and crooks. There are the respectable crooks who generally head the Sunday schools and spend their lives swindling the widows and orphans. They die rich. And there are the straight crooks who rob in the open and take their chances. They die hard. Cheese! how I hate respectability! I never cheated men; I robbed them. My life is my own and I lived it to please myself. I never bent knee to any man yet, and I don’t propose to take water now.”

“If you had gone straight you would have made your mark in the world,” said Dan.

“Yeah?” said Joe. “I regret nothing that has happened.” Without another word he strode out of the door with his blanket flying behind him, and over the bridge to the road.

Dan stood aside to allow the shore man to lock his shanty, and followed them both. By this time the engine of the Ford was whirring crazily. The

first man backed it out of its shed, and turned around. It was an old touring car with the top missing. The second man climbed into the front seat beside his partner, while Joe and Dan got in behind. With his foot on the running board, Joe paused and looked around him.

“A pretty night,” he said.

They were his last words. When the car started ahead he leaned far out on his side.

“What are you doing?” said Dan sharply.

He saw then that Joe, manacled as he was, had contrived to shove up the blanket behind him, and to drop it over the side of the car. Dan caught at his shoulders to pull him back, but it was too late. Joe’s body was jerked from his grasp. As the car gathered speed, the end of the blanket caught in the rear wheel and wound up. Dan heard Joe’s neck break.

“Stop! Stop!” he yelled.

Before they got the car stopped, Joe was dragged bodily out of the car, and flung in the road. They leaped out. They had to cut the blanket from around his neck. The three of them stood looking down at his body lying limply in the dim moonlight, and for a moment none spoke.

It had happened so quickly Dan could not take it in. He glanced around to assure himself of the realness of the scene. The salt marsh, the leaning shanty, the wide stretch of water shadowed by the wind, the single light on the end of Lloyd’s Neck, the wildness and the emptiness of it all made a fit setting for tragedy.

“Is he dead?” muttered one of the shore men.

“Look at his head,” said Dan curtly. “His neck is broke.”

“He did it a purpose!” said the other. “He must have been a bad one!”

“Bad? Sure!” said Dan. “But he was game! Damn it, you’ve got to hand it to him, men!”

They laid him back in the car, and went on.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN they got to the Huntington Police Station it was empty except for a single officer, and a police surgeon who waited up in case wounded men would be brought in. The two shore men's faces fell. They felt cheated of the promised excitement.

"Stick around a little while, and there will be plenty doing," said Dan dryly.

The body of Joe Penman was laid on a stretcher and carried into the back room. Dan was staggering with weariness now. The surgeon dressed his wound, but still he refused to call it a day, because he was told that the Commissioner of Police and Inspector Scofield had flown up from New York, and were at Lloyd Beach. While he waited to report to them, he fell asleep with his head on a table in the front room.

He was awakened by the entrance of the commissioner and the inspector with a mob of police, prisoners, reporters and people generally, behind them. Dan dashed the sleep out of his eyes and saluted. The two dignitaries looked at him with mixed expressions. It is not pleasant, of course, for the commanders of any force to be proved in the wrong by a mere private. However, they were square men.

The commissioner thrust out his hand. "Congratulations, Woburn! You have acquitted yourself in the most brilliant fashion."

"Thank you, sir."

"Let me add mine," said Scofield. "They tell me you're wounded. I hope it's not serious."

"Only a scratch," said Dan. "I have a request to make of you, inspector."

"What's that?"

"Special Officer Julia Dormer was with me to-night. I suppose that will be considered insubordination. Since it's turned out all right, I hope you will overlook it, sir."

The commissioner and the inspector looked at each other and grinned. "Well, the circumstances are exceptional," said Scofield ruefully. "I suppose I'll have to."

"We have rounded up the eight men you spoke of," said the commissioner; "but Joe Penman has not been taken. His men say that he

faded away in the darkness. We are organising an intensive search, and he's bound to be caught in the morning."

Dan smiled. His moment of triumph was very sweet. "He's in the back room, sir," he said off-hand.

"What!"

"When he saw that the game was up he killed himself," said Dan. "Even in his method of suicide he was original."

The two officials went off to have a look at the famous criminal followed by the crowd.

Some of the newspaper reporters were the first to return. "Give us the story of his capture," they said to Dan.

"You'll have to excuse me, boys," said Dan. "I'm all in." His eye happened to fall on the two embarrassed shore men, twisting their caps in the corner. "There are your men!" he cried. "They saw the whole thing! Swell copy for you, boys."

And so the humble fishermen achieved their hour of glory. They were interviewed singly and together. Photographers were brought in with their flashlights to take pictures.

Every moment more and more cars were pouring into the village; police from Northport, Hicksville, Mineola and other nearby towns. Reporters from New York, and householders from everywhere. The lunch-rooms and candy stores began to open up. Dan made a sneak out of the back door to the hotel, but the hotel was soon besieged by a greater crowd than the police station, and he saw that sleep would be impossible in Huntington. Moreover, it was going to be difficult to protect J. M. from annoyance when morning broke.

He consulted with his friends, and as a result Dolan was sent to rouse up the pilot of the 'plane which had brought them to Huntington. J. M. despatched a hundred dollars with his compliments to each of the shore men. At three o'clock they took to the air, and at four-thirty they were safe abed in J. M.'s house in New York. J. M. refusing to allow Julia to leave them, handed her over to the care of his daughter.

Dan awoke in the middle of Sunday afternoon sore but happy. He lay for a moment looking around at his delightful bedroom with a peaceful grin. It seemed a little difficult to believe that such a haven could exist. When he rang for a servant the magnificent Wheatley himself appeared. His face wore an expression of hero-worship, and he carried a bundle of papers under his arm.

Dan caught a glimpse of his ragged friends, the shore men, on the front page. "They can wait," he said. "How is J. M.?"

“Fit as a fiddle, sir. He’s been up since ten o’clock.”

“Wonderful man!”

“He’s been asking for you, sir, but his orders were you mustn’t be disturbed until you rang.”

“I’ll go down and see him.”

Wheatley, standing at attention in the middle of the room, began a little set speech. “On behalf of myself and all the other servants, sir, we want to express our admiration and our gratitude, if it’s not taking a liberty, for the way in which you have taken care of Mr. Lawrence. Every one of us looks on Mr. Lawrence as something more than just a master. He—he——” The dignified Wheatley suddenly choked up and beat a retreat.

“Good scout,” said Dan.

He found J. M. in his study on the second floor. The old man showed no ill effects of his experiences. He was seated at his desk rolling and smoking the inevitable cigar, holding his head on one side and turning over a lot of little squares of white pasteboard. The footmen were constantly bringing more. Through the window Dan caught a glimpse of a big crowd milling in the street below.

“Callers to inquire after my health,” said J. M. dryly indicating the pasteboards. “And just now when I went to the window to look at the crowd, it suddenly began cheering and waving its hats. I declare I have suddenly become popular. It embarrasses me.”

“That’s human nature,” said Dan.

J. M. separated three calling cards from the pile. “I have asked these men to wait,” he said. “Thought it would be amusing to have them up together.”

Dan read the names: Mr. Ashley Barnes; Mr. Nicholas Malata; Mr. D. D. Beddington. He shrugged.

J. M. instructed a footman to show the gentlemen up one at a time, and half a minute apart.

Ashley Barnes, elegant, cadaverous and effusive, was the first to enter. His single lock of hair was carefully plastered down the middle of his skull. “J. M., I was stunned when I read of what had happened!” he cried. “This is the most fiendish thing I ever heard of. It strikes at us all! Such a man ought to be drawn and quartered; hanging is too good for him!”

His indignant exclamations were cut short by the entrance of Malata, red-faced, pop-eyed, beautifully dressed; looking like a pugilist who had been spoiled by fat living. The two men cast glances at each other that were anything but friendly.

“I couldn’t rest until I had called personally to inquire how you were,” said Malata in his too-correct English. “I am delighted to see you looking so well. According to the newspapers you must have had a terrible time!”

Little Beddington, true to his assumed character, came scampering in like a terrier. He was slightly taken aback at the sight of the other two. He pumped J. M.’s arm as if he would never leave off. “Certainly is good of you to let me come up,” he said. “After the way we parted last time. It meant nothing, J. M. My bark is worse than my bite. Imagine how I felt when I read yesterday that you were kidnapped, and my joy to learn that you were safe!”

“Of course I can’t see everybody,” said J. M. dryly; “but just a few good friends like you fellows.”

They felt the irony of his words, and there was an uneasy silence.

“I’m glad the man is dead!” cried Beddington. “I shall sleep sounder because of it.”

“Who, Joe Penman?” said J. M. in the same dry voice. “Oh, Joe was a gentleman alongside of some others. I got quite attached to him during our voyage together. Joe only wanted to relieve me of a million dollars, but there’s another scoundrel who is bent on having me murdered.”

All three of the callers voiced their horror and indignation.

“I could respect a man who put a pistol to my breast and pulled the trigger,” J. M. went on; “but this slimy coward goes about hiring braver men than himself to kill me.”

Ashley Barnes looked suspiciously at Malata and Beddington; Malata scowled at Barnes and Beddington; Beddington repudiated their suspicions with angry scowls at Malata and Barnes. J. M., glancing at them under his eyebrows, took it all in with a glint of grim humour.

“How do you know this, J. M.?” asked Malata.

“Joe Penman told me. My enemy tried to hire him to bump me off, but he thought there was more money in kidnapping.”

“Have you any suspicion of who it is?” asked Barnes.

“No, Penman didn’t know,” said J. M. blandly. “He was approached by a shyster lawyer.”

“Maybe it’s only a yarn,” said Beddington hopefully. “You can’t believe anything a double-crosser like Penman would say.”

“I hope you’re right,” said J. M.

“J. M., I hope you’ll forget our business differences at a time like this,” said Beddington earnestly. “If there is anything I can do to help you in this

matter, please call on me. This affects all of us, and we ought to stand together.”

“And me! . . . And me!” echoed Barnes and Malata.

After some further conversation along the same lines, they took their leave. Immediately outside the door of the study they flew apart; each wishing to make it clear that he was leaving as he had arrived, alone.

“Good comedy!” said J. M. grimly. “Two of them are innocent, and each of them is genuinely suspicious of the other two. One is guilty, and he is making out to be suspicious of the other two. I ask you again, Dan, which is it?”

This time Dan answered without hesitation: “Beddington.”

“How do you know?”

“By his use of the word double-crosser. You hadn’t told him that Penman double-crossed anybody. You only said that he had been approached.”

J. M.’s eyes flashed. “Good!” he said, pounding his desk. “That’s enough for you and me. But how about a jury? Can you hang it on Beddington?”

“It will be difficult,” said Dan soberly. “Joe Penman and Sliver Buckley are both dead. It will depend on what we can get out of Whitey Morgan.”

CHAPTER XXXV

ON the following morning Dan and Inspector Scofield sat in the latter's private office at headquarters. The relation between them had altered a good deal since Dan's last visit there. The inspector addressed him as lieutenant—half-jokingly, for Dan had not yet taken his badge back.

"Have you had any experience in questioning suspects?" asked Scofield.

"No," said Dan.

"Well, take this man in hand and let's see what sort of fist you make of it."

Whitey Morgan was brought in. His conductor was told to remain outside. A day in the Tombs had not improved Whitey's appearance. His face was lividly pale; his eyes frightened and shifty.

"Sit down," said Dan mildly. "Can he smoke, inspector?"

Scofield rubbed his lip. "It's all right with me," he said dryly.

Whitey gratefully accepted the cigarette that Dan offered him.

"The inspector has given me leave to question you," Dan began. "You're not going to be sweated. I've got a simple proposition to put up to you, and you can take it or leave it."

Whitey appeared to be startled by this unusual beginning.

"Joe Penman and Bull Fellows are both dead," Dan went on, "and you will have to bear the brunt of the kidnapping charge."

"I was only Joe Penman's hired man," muttered Whitey.

"All right. But you're the principal figure that remains alive. The kidnapping is proved up to the hilt, and we're not bothering about that. All you can hope for is a recommendation to mercy. Well, here's how you can earn it. We want to know who hired Joe Penman to kill J. M."

"I don't know," said Whitey eagerly. "On the level, I don't know. Joe Penman didn't know either. Anyway, he made out to us he didn't know. Amongst ourselves we called him the Sucker."

"Can you tell us what sums of money Joe Penman got off him and when?"

"Sure, I can tell you that," said Whitey. "The last was on Friday. Ten grand. That wasn't meant for us. Joe took it from the guy at the point of a gun. I mean the guy who brought us the jack. On Thursday he got four

grand. The guy paid regular on Thursdays. Four grand each Thursday for three weeks before that.”

Dan made a note of the sums and the dates. “Now, where does Sliver Buckley come into it?” he asked.

“Bull hired him,” said Whitey. “Because Joe says when the Sucker begun to get sore we must have somebody to tail his man so we’d know if he hired anybody else to do his business.”

“What did Buckley report to Joe on Friday?”

Whitey hesitated for a moment before replying. “I don’t know,” he said. “He talked to Joe private.”

“Now you’re lying,” said Dan quietly. “You answered all my questions up to that one right off the bat.”

“Cheese, mister,” muttered Whitey in distress. “I don’t know nothing. If I told you what I think, them bloody devils wouldn’t let me live.”

“Then you do know,” said Dan. “You’ll be in a safe place, remember, where no killer can get you. Whether you are put away for five or ten years probably depends on what you tell us now.”

“All right,” muttered Whitey. “Sliver Buckley tails the lawyer guy to his office. His name is Hugh Brady. From his office he goes to the Park Bank and draws another wad of money to take the place of what Joe lifted off him. Then Brady drives to a ‘speak’ on Division Street, and hands the money to Owney Randall.”

“Did Sliver see the money change hands?” asked Dan.

“No. Owney’s too smart for that. Owney gives orders to his head torpedo, Smoke Atchey. Sliver makes himself solid with Smoke by stealing a car for him, and Smoke gives him the job of driving it that night. They are going to hide themselves in J. M.’s park at Sands Point, and let him have it from four Thompsons when he drives up from his private dock. That’s all I know.”

“Well, that’s about enough,” said Dan dryly. “When J. M. failed to come, the torpedoes turned on Sliver Buckley and let him have it.”

“I reckon,” said Whitey.

“Any questions, inspector?” asked Dan.

Scofield shook his head. The policeman was called in, and Whitey was taken out to be returned to his cell.

Scofield held out his hand for the memoranda Dan had made. “If I can establish from whose account these sums were drawn in cash on or about the dates given, we’ll begin to have a case,” he said.

Dan arose. "I'm going to find out who gave out the story that J. M. had been kidnapped."

Two hours later the District Attorney of New York County, Inspector Scofield, Dan and J. M. sat in the office of the last named. The faces of all four were grave.

"So the money was drawn at Beddington's order on the dates given," said J. M. "I knew it!"

"And it was a man called Leavitt, one of Beddington's under secretaries, who gave out the story that J. M. had been kidnapped," said Dan. "I got the city editor of the *World-Telegram* to go to Beddington's office on a faked errand, and he identified Leavitt."

"What do you make of it, Mr. District Attorney?" asked J. M.

"It is the most serious case that was ever brought to my office, sir."

"Sure. But can you convict him? That's the question."

"No, sir," said the district attorney gloomily. "Not on hearsay evidence from a witness of the character of Whitey Morgan. Why, just picture to yourselves what a monkey high-priced counsel could make of Whitey on the stand. And there's no corroboration of his story."

"Then I strongly advise you to leave it alone," said J. M. "A scandal of these proportions is demoralising to the whole public. If Beddington were arrested on such a charge and acquitted, it would bring the law into disrepute. Because everybody would feel that he was guilty."

"That is what I feel, sir."

"I leave Hugh Brady, Owney Randall and the torpedoes to you," J. M. went on. "Forewarned is forearmed. If you keep a fatherly eye on these gentry you will get them in the end. But Beddington I will take care of. And I promise you I will punish him more effectively than the law could. . . . Good-morning, gentlemen, and thank you."

When they had gone, J. M. called up Beddington and asked him to drop over. Beddington said he would be delighted. While they waited for him, J. M. dictated some memoranda to Dan.

"I shall have to tamper with the truth a little," he said dryly; "but it's all in a good cause."

Beddington in his baggy tweed suit bustled into the room with his glasses gleaming. If he was impressed by the stony faces of the other two he gave no sign of it. "Good-morning, gentlemen! On the job, I see, J. M.,

without the loss of an hour. You're a wonder! I was glad to hear from you. I hope you're ready to talk turkey in relation to the O. and M. I issued a kind of ultimatum the other day, but I'm always reasonable, J. M."

J. M. shut off his yapping with a powerful gesture. "Sit down! And listen to me!" He proceeded to read a memorandum that Dan had just written from his dictation. In concise phrases it set forth the known facts of Beddington's plotting.

Beddington, when he got the purport of it, was like a man paralysed. He seemed to shrink in his chair. There was a silence after the reading. Without knowing what he was doing, Beddington removed his glasses and polished them with shaking fingers. The pale-blue eyes that he was usually so careful to keep covered revealed his guilt and his terror.

At length he tried to laugh. A pitiful cackle issued from his throat. "Pre—preposterous!" he stammered. "Is this one of your jokes, J. M.?"

"Don't waste my time," J. M. rapped out. "You understand English. You know you're found out!"

"There's no proof!" cried Beddington shrilly.

"There is the deadly testimony of your own bank accounts!"

"It's false! It's false!"

"Be quiet!" said J. M. "I have just been talking to the district attorney and Inspector Scofield. I have succeeded in persuading them not to arrest you under certain conditions——"

"Arrest!" whispered Beddington, with an awful fear in his eyes.

"Because," J. M. went on, "to my mind it would be against the public interest to spread such a hideous scandal in the newspapers. God forgive you, Beddington, you're looked on as one of our leaders. You're known abroad. If you were disgraced it would discredit the whole country!"

"Water—water——" murmured Beddington.

Dan made haste to fetch him a glass. Beddington spilled most of it in carrying it to his lips.

"For that reason," J. M. continued relentlessly, "I have drawn up a form of agreement, and if you will sign it I am in a position to assure you that there will be no prosecution."

"What is it?" snarled Beddington instantly full of suspicion.

J. M. pushed the second memorandum in his direction. "You bind yourself to resign your directorships in any and all companies whatsoever. You agree to turn over to me and my associates, at the market value of the securities as of to-day, the controlling interest in all your railways."

“This is a plot! . . . A plot!” shrilled Beddington, showing his teeth. “You’re seeking to control the entire industry!”

“Who is the plotter?” demanded J. M. forcibly. “If your plot has proved a boomerang, you have only yourself to thank!”

“I won’t sign it! I’d sooner die!”

“Very well,” said J. M. coolly. “Then the police must deal with you.”

Beddington weakened. “You’re taking my occupation,” he whined. “It would be like death in life. What could I do?”

“Travel abroad and improve your mind,” said J. M. contemptuously.

“Have mercy on me, J. M.!”

J. M. jumped up, magnificent in his anger. “Mercy!” he roared. “You dare to ask me for mercy, you cur! After shopping all over town to buy my murder! Sign!”

“Leave me one road, J. M. The Nebraska Pacific.”

“Not a mile of track! Sign!”

Beddington signed the paper. He got up and looked around him stupidly. He had left his glasses on the table. Dan folded them and thrust them in his pocket; handed him his hat. He stumbled towards the door, suddenly an old man with palsied hands and moving lips. Both J. M. and Dan turned away their heads from the sight of so abject a collapse.

CHAPTER XXXVI

At the inquest upon Joe Penman, Dan's sympathy was aroused by the sight of the plain, black-clad, stony-faced woman who appeared as his widow. She came alone. It seemed pitiful that a woman should have no one to support her during such a painful ordeal, and after the proceedings Dan got into talk with her.

"You seem to be a foreigner, Mrs. Penman."

"Yes, sir. I am French."

"Have you no friends in this country?"

"No, sir. My husband didn't like me to make friends. I have no life apart from him."

She was so quiet, so stony, Dan was at a loss what to say to her. However, it appeared that she appreciated his sympathy, for she began to speak of her own accord.

"I knew he was a bad man," she said very low; "but he was my husband. It was not for me to judge him. He never made me do anything wrong. I knew nothing about his business. A few weeks ago I heard the name of Mr. Lawrence spoken, and I guessed that they intended him harm. I sent a little warning to his daughter, but I suppose she didn't get it."

"So that was from you!" said Dan with strong interest. "Miss Lawrence did get it, and that note of warning started the train of circumstances that saved J. M. in the end. I'll tell him about it."

"I want nothing for it," said Mrs. Penman quickly.

"What are your circumstances?" asked Dan.

"I found money at home," she said bitterly. "Much money. I suppose it is stolen money."

"I reckon it is," said Dan cheerfully. "But it will never be claimed now. It is yours. . . . And did you know that your husband was the proprietor of a business down-town?"

"No. I not know that."

"He bought it and paid for it honestly," said Dan. "It is the Exchange Office Supply Co., on Beaver Street. That is yours now. If you like, I'll take you down there to-morrow."

Mrs. Penman showed signs of human feeling at last. "You are very kind," she murmured. "I did not expect it."

Dan slept that night in his own humble boarding house, where he and his pal Reed had a good confabulation. Reed, the recipient of a handsome present, was back on the force, and Henry Waters had been pensioned off. In the morning Dan took Mrs. Penman down to Beaver Street according to promise, and found her an honest lawyer. Consequently it was after eleven before he got to J. M.'s office. He sent in his name like an ordinary caller, but he was not kept waiting. The instant he entered the private office he ran into heavy weather.

“What’s this tomfoolery?” shouted J. M. “Sending in your name! There’s your desk. Sit down and get busy. Where the hell you been all morning? Where were you last night?”

Dan, all taken aback and grinning at the same time, said: “Why, J. M., I didn’t know I had a job here any more.”

“That’s for me to say! I’ll fire you when I’m through with you! And I expect you to stick on the job until you’re fired, see?”

Dan knew J. M. well enough by this time to realise that all this heat and fury was merely a cover for feelings of another sort. A strong bond of affection united him with J. M. as a result of all they had been through. Dan’s face was full of regret when he spoke again. He hated to go against the old man.

“J. M., I couldn’t go on with this job regularly.”

“What the hell!” cried J. M., with an angry stare. “Are you too good for it? Don’t I pay you enough?”

“Too much! It isn’t the pay. I want to be on my own.”

“Will you be on your own when you’re tramping your beat as a cop?”

“No. But a lieutenant of detectives has a good bit of leeway.”

“Here in my office you’re at the very centre of things!”

“I know it,” said Dan. “But I’m not cut out to be a private secretary. I don’t fit the job.”

“What is the real reason, Dan?” asked J. M., with a shrewd look.

“You’re too powerful a personality,” said Dan coolly. “I can’t be myself here.”

J. M. was not ill pleased by the implied compliment. He arose from his desk and hit Dan a clap on the back. “Damn it all, you make me mad!” he said. “But you’re a lad after my own heart. Maybe the same office is too small for us both. . . . But you’d be wasted in the police!”

“Wasted?” said Dan, ready to fight for his beloved force.

“Oh, a fine body of men,” said J. M. “Nobody has better reason than I to know it. But you’ve got executive ability. On the police that won’t be called for until you’re middle-aged. In the meantime you’re wasted.”

Dan said nothing.

“They can’t have you!” said J. M. in his imperious way. “You’ve got to work for me. What do you want to be? President of a bank or a railway company? Or would you rather head an industry?”

“You’re making a fool of me, J. M.,” said Dan, grinning. “I’d like an executive job all right, but I’ve got to work up to it. How about secretary or assistant secretary of a small railway? While I was learning something?”

“All right,” said J. M. calmly. “I’ll put you into the O. and M. It’s a small road, but it will become more important as a link in a larger system. How much money do you expect?”

“Whatever the job is worth.”

“Oh, say five thousand a year.”

“I believe that’s too much,” said Dan. “I want to stand on my own bottom.”

“Damn it all!” cried J. M. “I’m not going to stand here and argue with you. You can take it or leave it!”

“All right,” said Dan, grinning. “I’ll take it.”

J. M. scowled at him from under his jutting brows. “I can see that you’re going to give me trouble right along,” he growled. “With this craze to stand on your own bottom. Are you too proud to come to dinner with your boss?”

“Try me,” said Dan, laughing. “Can I bring the wife?”

“Sure,” said J. M., without turning a hair.

“I haven’t got her yet,” said Dan. “But I have hopes.”

He telephoned to headquarters and made a date. At one o’clock he entered Angelo’s. Everybody in the place who was connected with the department was anxious to claim acquaintance with him. Never had Dan’s back been so clapped, and his hand so shaken. It was very pleasant.

Julia was waiting for him in the last alcove, looking prettier than he had ever seen her. There was something special about her to-day. Dan slid under the table opposite her with the grin of a man surf-boarding on the crest of popularity.

“Hello,” said Julia coolly.

Her tone was like a dash of cold water. “Is that all?” he said.

“What did you expect? Hail the Conquering Hero Comes!”

“Aah!” said Dan sorely. “On Saturday you——”

“Oh, Saturday was different,” she said quickly.

“Well, women beat the Dutch!” said Dan. “Seems as if a man must be up against it before he can expect decent treatment from them!”

“Women are human,” said Julia. “What did you want to see me about?”

“Well, I like that!” he said, staring. “Wasn’t there a certain understanding between you and me?”

“Oh, that’s all off now,” said Julia quickly.

“Off!”

“How could I foresee what was going to happen? A great man like you can look much higher. You ought to marry Miss Lawrence now.”

“She’s thirty-eight years old and a philanthropist.”

“What difference does that make?” she asked sarcastically. “It would be so romantic. Your public expects it of you.”

“My public be damned!” muttered Dan.

“By the way,” said Julia, “I understand that you saved my job for me. I certainly am obliged to you. Now that you’re a lieutenant I hope I’ll have the chance of working under you sometimes.”

“I’m resigning,” said Dan. “J. M. has offered me the job of secretary to a railroad.”

“Congratulations,” said Julia, with a glassy smile.

There was an unhappy silence. Finally, Dan began to feel around under the table for her feet. He enclosed them between his own.

“Julia,” he murmured, humbly enough, “I’m just crazy about you. What are you punishing me for?”

She melted. “Why didn’t you say so before?” she murmured, lowering her head. “That was what I wanted.”

He took her hands in his. “You never gave me a chance. You flew out at me so!”

“Well, I’m no clinging vine. When you come around singing ‘See what a great boy am I!’ I’ve just got to stick out my tongue. I’m sorry, Dan.”

“’S all right, honey. It’s good for me, I reckon.”

“I’ve got a perfectly horrible nature!”

“It suits me!”

“Let’s get out of here,” she said suddenly. “I think I’m going to cry.”

However, she thought better of it when they got outside. They walked along happily in silence, arms linked together. Finally Julia said:

“I see by the papers that your friend, Christie Lauderdale, is going to marry Nicholas Malata, the Bessarabian.”

“Yes, poor girl!” said Dan. “She deserves a better fate.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Julia, making as if to draw away her arm.

“Now don’t begin again!” said Dan warningly.

“Where are you taking me?” she demanded suspiciously, as he steered her masterfully around one corner and another.

“To a jewellery store,” said Dan. “To be fitted.”

THE END

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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 *The Ring of Eyes* by Hulbert Footner]