

Officer!

**Hulbert
Footner**

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By HULBERT FOOTNER

Officer!

Ramshackle House

The Deaves Affair

The Owl Taxi

The Substitute Millionaire

Thieves' Wit

New Rivers of the North

NEW YORK:

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

OFFICER!

BY

HULBERT FOOTNER

NEW YORK

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OFFICER!

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OFFICER!

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CHAPTER I

AN ARREST

WHAT do patrolmen think about during their long, solitary tours of duty at night? Take young Larry Harker, number X5667, he was thinking about girls. His beat included several of the quiet, elegant side streets lying east of the Avenue in the fashionable Fifties, and the hour was about ten thirty, that slack period midway between the departure and the return from evening entertainments. East Fifty-first Street offered nothing of interest to the eye, and Larry was driven in on himself. He was thinking pleasantly of girls.

. . . Peggy Bilton, comical little thing! Bright as a newly minted dime! How she could make a man laugh with her funny faces. . . . Pretty too, like a fluffy kitten. . . . But was there anything *to* her? . . . Somehow you couldn't see her cooking good meals, and making a man comfortable around the house. . . . Well, there was Alice Shannon, she was a household treasure all right. Gosh! What a meal she could serve up! Made your teeth wet just to think of it! Easy to look at too. . . . But no! you couldn't get up any excitement about Alice. Too soft . . . And in five years she'd be all over the place. . . . Just like her mother . . . Always want to look at a girl's mother before you make up your mind . . . Irene Tanner, plenty of excitement about *her!* . . . Gee! you couldn't come anywhere near the girl but your heart beat faster. . . . Something in those long black eyes of hers . . . dangerous! . . . With her fine figure and her style and all, she'd be a credit to a man, but . . . but . . . The trouble about Irene was she went to every man's head just the same. It was fun to take her out and make the other guys look jealous, but to *marry* her . . . and have the other guys hanging around . . . Not on your life! A man wants some peace of mind when he's married . . .

And so on, through the lengthy list of his female acquaintances. None of them exactly came up to specifications. He was not at all disturbed about it. Plenty of time. Plenty of time. Meanwhile it was interesting to put them through their paces. He was sustained by the comfortable feeling that any one of them would jump at him. It was a little cruel perhaps to keep them all guessing, but that was their lookout.

Larry did not consider himself conceited, but he could not help knowing how good-looking he was. It was a fact which had coloured and shaped his whole life hitherto, and he had long ago taken it for granted that he was set apart in that respect from the ordinary run of men. There is a lot going on in all of us that we never acknowledge. When Larry came out on the running-track clad only in singlet and shorts he could *feel* the admiration of the crowd, and was uplifted by it. Like men in general, and policemen in particular, he affected to despise such a thing as beauty in a man; nevertheless the consciousness of the possession of beauty was revealed in his gallant carriage. Young policemen are not supposed to look much in the mirror, but Larry knew very well that his sea-blue eyes had a peculiar liquid shine that was extraordinarily potent with the other sex.

In short Larry's digestion was perfect, and he had yet to experience the difficulties of life. His good looks and his muscle had carried him along so far on the crest of the wave; first as schoolboy athlete, then as the football star of a suburban college, and now to the force, where he was one of the newest of patrolmen, but already a figure looming big in the Annual Games. The best-looking young fellow, and the best athlete in his circle, and already a settled man with an assured future—well, if life had anything more than that to offer, he didn't know about it.

Midway through Fifty-first Street there stood a small hotel called the Colebrook. It was the sort of hotel that does not hang out a sign. A mysterious aura of "exclusiveness" enveloped it, which was worth thousands to the proprietors. It was supposed to be the favourite haunt of English people of rank and fashion when sojourning in New York. Larry, who had heard that lords and ladies stopped there, gave it a glance of unwilling respect, as he came abreast of the building on the other side of the road.

The street was very still. All the front windows of the hotel stood open. Suddenly from one of those windows sounds issued that brought Larry up with a round turn; a startled exclamation, a scuffle, the overturning of a chair. Immediately afterwards a man's figure appeared at a window on the third floor, shouted "Police!" and disappeared.

Larry, as if a spring had been released inside him, sprang into action. In five seconds he was inside the hotel lobby. There was no one in view but an idle clerk behind the desk. The elevator stood open and unattended on the other side of the foyer.

"Trouble on the third floor," said Larry crisply. "Take me up!"

“Eh, what?” said the astonished clerk. Evidently the cry had not reached his ears.

“Get a move on!” cried Larry. “Up-stairs!”

The clerk, not fully comprehending, nevertheless made haste to obey the peremptory command.

“Third floor front,” said Larry. “Fellow calling the police.”

The car had no more than started upward when Larry heard flying steps on the stone stairway that surrounded the shaft. With a gesture he commanded the clerk to stop at the floor above. Springing to the foot of the stairway, he was just in time to receive the descending figure within his outstretched arms—a slight figure, lithe and tense.

She started to struggle like a trapped cat, but suddenly becoming aware of the blue coat, the brass buttons, she went flaccid in Larry’s arms with a gasp of terror. A pursuing figure precipitated himself upon them, a man, the same, apparently, who had shouted from the window.

Larry, still embracing his trembling little prisoner, saw that her accuser was one of the highly finished Englishmen that he associated with the Colebrook. As a good American he felt a sort of uneasy disdain for the type. This was a man fifteen years older than Larry, but lean and erect as a youth. It pleased Larry to see him thoroughly flustered.

“That girl is a thief!” he said excitedly. “I caught her ransacking my room!”

Larry held his prisoner away from him in order to get a look at her. In half a glance he saw that she was extremely pretty. The fact lent a great zest to the commonplace situation, and he grinned delightedly. He had never been called upon to take up anything like this. More than pretty! she set his pulses leaping. Her thick black hair cut short at the neck, stood out straight with every quick turn of her head, lending her a strange, boyish grace. She had glorious dark eyes, full of terror now, but still not abject. Terrified *and* flashing.

“It’s a lie!” she said quickly. “He invited me into his room.”

Larry’s smile hardened. So that was the sort she was! Somehow he felt disappointed.

The Englishman stared at her in pure amazement, then laughed. “Well, that’s a new dodge,” he said. “And a good one.” He turned to the clerk who was peering fearfully out of the elevator. “Didn’t you carry me up-stairs five minutes ago?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wasn’t I alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“He met me in the corridor up-stairs—my room is on the same floor,” the girl put in quickly, “and invited me in.”

“I found her in my room,” insisted the Englishman. “I didn’t know she was there until I started to turn on the light. She knocked my hand away from the switch, and tried to get out. I grabbed her, but she broke away.”

Larry felt an instinctive antagonism to this man, but it was clear that he was telling the truth. It made Larry feel more kindly towards the girl in his grasp. He liked better to think of her as a thief than the other thing.

The clerk was comically scandalised. “How did you get in here?” he demanded of the girl. “We don’t allow . . .”

Larry silenced the feeble voice with a gesture of his big hand. To the girl he said, grinning once more—there was something delicious in the spectacle of her mixed boldness and terror, “If he invited you in, what started the trouble?”

“I changed my mind,” she said instantly. “I didn’t like him.”

The modest clerk gasped.

“It won’t go, sister,” said the grinning Larry. “Under the circumstances a man doesn’t holler for the police.”

“I couldn’t see whether it was a man or woman,” put in the Englishman. “I didn’t know how many there might be. That’s why I called for help.”

“Sure,” said Larry. “Is anything missing?”

“I don’t know.”

“Better go and look. I’ll wait.”

The Englishman went back up-stairs.

Aroused by a certain disturbing tone in the voices in the corridor, heads were now sticking out of the doors here and there. Seeing a policeman under the light, eyes opened wide, and agitated inquiries were addressed to the clerk. That poor timid soul, whose one idea it was never to let the truth become known under any circumstances, was seized with a panic.

“It’s quite all right, Madam . . . Quite all right sir, I assure you. Merely a slight misunderstanding which can be quite satisfactorily explained . . . No occasion for you to leave your rooms . . .”

To Larry he whispered, sweating: “Get her down-stairs, or you’ll have the whole house roused up.”

The three of them went down in the elevator. A few of the guests more or less fully dressed, started to follow down the stairs, and the clerk was in despair.

“You can’t wait here!” he said to Larry. “It’ll create a regular sensation. What can I tell these people? . . . Take her on to the station house. I’ll follow with Mr. Felix as soon as I can call the manager.”

Larry was not at all averse to the idea of a promenade through the dark streets alone with his pretty prisoner. “All right,” he said. “If you and His Nibs get a taxi you’ll overtake us.”

At the first move towards the door, a shiver passed through the girl. But she kept her head up. “I am a guest here,” she protested indignantly. “My room is 317. My name is Phillida Kenley. You can find out all about me. I have nothing to conceal.”

They always talked in this strain. “Sure! Sure!” said Larry soothingly, and kept her moving.

They started down the quiet street. Larry had a grasp of one of the slender arms, and was looking down at her with eyes full of delighted amusement. Such a little thing and so full of ginger! He believed her a thief, but he could not take it seriously. She was so different from the other thieves he had known. Besides, there was something about the Englishman, her accuser, that made his bristles rise. The man’s eyes were too close together. Larry had to take the girl in, of course, but he was all for her.

He greatly wished to enter into a more human relation with his prisoner. He desired to make her talk. There was something about her voice, irrespective of what she might be saying, something he had never heard in any voice before, that made the heart stir in his breast. Unfortunately under the circumstances he couldn’t think of any suitable opening; he could only go on smiling at her.

After awhile she said stiffly: “Can’t you let go of my arm?”

“Sure,” he said, instantly doing so. “But I ought to tell you, if you think of making a break, running is my specialty.”

Another silence.

As they went on her courage seemed to ooze out of her a little. “I am a guest at the Colebrook,” she began again in a smaller voice; “you will find my things in my room . . .”

“Sure, they’re always guests,” said Larry. He designed to be comforting, but his words were badly chosen.

“Who are?” she asked.

“Hotel thieves.”

“Ohh!” she breathed, freshly indignant.

They crossed Park Avenue, attracting curious stares from the passers-by, and struck into the quiet block beyond. Larry, bethinking himself that he was losing time, searched around in his mind for some safe and comfortable matter. He was not much of a diplomat.

“You’re too pretty for this business,” he blurted out at last. “You don’t have to.”

Silence from his companion.

“Got anybody to go bail for you? I’ll telephone anywhere you want.”

An involuntary groan broke from the girl. “Oh, what rotten luck! What rotten luck!” she murmured, more to herself than to him. “Everything is spoiled now!”

“Sure,” said Larry sympathetically. “It isn’t worth it, I tell you. Chuck it!”

“I’m not a thief,” she said sharply.

“I’d like to believe you,” said Larry, “but . . .”

As she offered no rejoinder to this, Larry supposed that he was making headway, beginning to soften her hard little heart perhaps. The thought pleased him greatly. He proceeded:

“It isn’t the morals of it. Although I wear the uniform I don’t set up to be a moralist. It’s the commonsense of it. A crook has no life at all. Always on the run. Got no friends. And bound to be caught in the end. You’ve made a bad start, sister, but . . .”

She interrupted him by saying in a weary voice: “You’d be funny, if I didn’t have other things on my mind.”

Larry stared at her. A hot flush crept up from his neck and made his scalp prickle. In all his experience no woman had ever spoken to him in accents of such cool and detached scorn, and for a moment he could scarcely credit his ears. He could only stare at her. She was not paying the slightest attention to him. A *crook*! It was intolerable!

“Ahh! You’d best keep a civil tongue in your head,” he growled.

She made no answer. Larry’s rage and soreness struggled for expression. He pretended to himself that it was the insult to the uniform he resented, when all the time it was only the handsome youth’s vanity which had got a jolt. Soreness got the better of rage. Hadn’t he meant well by the girl? Wasn’t he trying to be friendly? And to have her turn on him like that! He wanted to crush her with a lofty rejoinder, but all he could get out was:

“Ahh! A policeman is only human.”

“That always means the worst, doesn’t it?” she said contemptuously.

“I don’t get you,” he said stiffly.

“You wouldn’t.”

Larry’s Irish blood boiled over at that. “Ahh! you think you’re funny, don’t you?” he burst out hotly. “Let me tell you a person can get too funny for their own good! It’s nothing to me who you are or what you did. I just offer to be friendly, as you might to anybody, and you air your wit at my expense! You’d better curb it before you go before the magistrate, or he’ll soak you the limit!”

Larry’s injured feelings made no impression on her. All she said was, a little defiantly: “What can he do to me? I didn’t steal anything.”

“Attempted burglary’s just about as bad,” said Larry. “It’s a felony. You can be sent to State’s prison for it.”

She said nothing to that, but Larry, who had again seized her slender arm in his anger, felt it tremble in his grasp. It was like a telegraph message to his breast. In spite of himself he softened. Muttering under his breath, he strove to keep his righteous anger burning, but it flickered and went out.

“Ahh!” he growled, looking at her with eyes soft under his scowling brows.

But she looked straight ahead.

Crooked or straight she was maddeningly sweet. All Larry’s values were upset. He did not know what was happening to him. “Ahh!” he murmured. “Forget I’m a cop, and just look on me as a fellow.”

“What for?” she said with weary indifference.

“Ahh!” growled Larry, helplessly grinding his teeth.

CHAPTER II

THE RELEASE

AS LARRY and the girl went up the steps of the station house a taxicab drew up before the door, and the Englishman got out. "Mr. Felix" the clerk had called him. The clerk had not come with him. He followed the other two in.

Out of the corners of his eyes Larry sized him up with a growing antagonism. Mr. Felix's excitement had calmed down, and his face was now as guarded and inexpressive as the typical Englishman's. From shoes to hat he was turned out with a perfection that Larry (who was somewhat of a dresser himself in his off hours) realised with exasperation he would never attain to. A well-set-up, greyish-faced man, handsome in a regular, conventional manner; cold and correct; everything about him was antipathetic to Larry. What the young man chiefly resented was his air of aristocratic disdain. What the Hell! thought Larry, he's in America now.

Meanwhile the police Lieutenant at his high desk had looked up with a bored air. But a gleam of interest appeared in his disillusioned eyes as they took in Phillida. "Well?" he said.

Larry said: "This man caught this girl ransacking his room in the Hotel Colebrook."

The Lieutenant dipped his pen. "Name?" he asked Phillida, preparing to write in his blotter.

The girl had become very pale. She was fighting hard to keep up her courage, sticking out her chin defiantly, and biting her lower lip to keep it from trembling. But like a frightened child she cast a stricken glance at the rear door which led to the cells.

Before she could answer the Englishman spoke up. "I beg your pardon." He spoke correctly and beautifully. He had adopted an ingratiating air towards the Lieutenant. He could be very agreeable when he chose. But his eyes were cold and guarded. "I am afraid a mistake may have been made."

"Hey?" cried Larry, quite forgetting the decorum due before the desk.

The girl too stared at the Englishman wildly.

“It is not quite correct to say that I discovered her in my room,” Mr. Felix went on blandly. “I said I thought that she had attempted to rob me.”

“What’s the difference?” said Larry.

“I suspect now that I may have been mistaken.”

“What were the circumstances?” asked the Lieutenant.

“I returned to my room in the hotel a few minutes after half-past ten,” said Mr. Felix with the utmost self-possession. “As I was unlocking my door this lady passed along the corridor. I looked at her and she looked at me . . . with a smile rather. I invited her in . . . I am not attempting to excuse myself. It is no crime, I suppose. She came in. Just inside the door she made a movement that suggested she was drawing a gun on me. I have heard of your female highwaymen. I attempted to disarm her as I thought, but she broke away from me. In my excitement I ran to the window and called for the police. But upon thinking it over I am satisfied I may have been mistaken. No gun was found upon her.”

As he listened to this cool tale Larry progressed from astonishment to violent anger. His face crimsoned, and his blue eyes shot forth steely sparks. The man’s devilish aplomb infuriated him. All the time you could tell that the Englishman was lying by the shape of his mouth.

“Lieutenant, that’s not the story he told me!” cried Larry. “He said when he opened the door of his room he found the girl inside!”

“You misunderstood me, officer,” said Mr. Felix squarely meeting Larry’s blazing eyes with his cold grey ones. “She went in with me.”

“Misunderstood nothing!” cried Larry. “The clerk heard what you told me. Where is he?”

“He agreed with me that it would be better to let the whole matter drop.”

“Well, I’m not going to let it drop!”

“What is it to you, Harker?” said the Lieutenant mildly. “No blame is attaching to you. You did your duty.”

“He’s lying!” insisted Larry. “You can see it!”

“What is it to us if he is,” said the Lieutenant philosophically. “If he doesn’t want to lay a charge against the girl it’s just a job less for us. The cells are full enough already.”

Larry’s anger was understandable enough. No man likes to be made a fool of before his officer. But there was a good deal more than that in it. There was an unaccountable tearing pain at his breast. That little thing with her fine brave eyes snooping about a hotel corridor smiling in a certain way at men! A lie! A lie! Larry felt like killing the Englishman for uttering it.

How could he explain all this to the Lieutenant? He was further confounded by the fact that the girl instead of repudiating the slander, welcomed it of course. After her first glance of astonishment at Mr. Felix, the colour came back in her cheeks and the shine to her eyes; her back stiffened, one could almost say that she began to look amused.

“That is exactly what I told you,” she said to Larry.

“It’s a lie, anyhow!” cried Larry, sore and bewildered. “You went into that room to steal something. I know it!”

“Whisht, Harker,” said the Lieutenant in reproof. “Don’t be so hard on the girl. You can see she’s not a professional. Give her the benefit of the doubt.”

The benefit of the doubt! The situation was too much for Larry. He turned away, impotently grinding his teeth.

“Whichever way it was, Miss,” said the Lieutenant to Phillida, “if you’ll accept a word of advice from an older man, you’ll stay out of strange gentlemen’s rooms, whether asked in or not. You may go.”

His homily fell on deaf ears. The girl’s eyes turned desirously towards the door, but she cast a doubtful look on the Englishman and hesitated.

The Lieutenant was in turn addressing a reproof to that person, but the worthy officer was impressed by Mr. Felix’s air of rank and authority, and the reproof was a mild one. “Next time I hope you’ll think twice before making a charge, sir, and when you do make one, see it through.”

“I am extremely sorry, Lieutenant,” said Mr. Felix blandly. “I would be only too glad to make it up to this young lady if there was any way in which I might do so.”

“I dare say, I dare say,” said the Lieutenant dryly.

“My taxi is waiting outside,” Mr. Felix went on to Phillida. “Perhaps you will accept my escort back to the hotel?”

The girl shrank from him involuntarily. “No, no, thank you,” she said nervously.

“Please,” he said with his most winning air.

“I shall not leave here until after you have gone,” she said a little hysterically.

Larry’s sore heart was somewhat eased by this. It suggested that there was really nothing between them. The man, having discovered that he had lost nothing, was now disposed to make up to so pretty a thief. And she had turned him down. So Larry undertook to explain the baffling situation, without entirely believing his own explanation.

Mr. Felix bowed to Phillida with entire self-possession, and with slighter salutations to the Lieutenant and even to Larry, left the station house. A moment later they heard the taxicab drive away.

The girl then, without a look at either officer, quickly slipped through the door.

“Hm! Queer piece of goods that,” remarked the Lieutenant. “Something out of the common.”

His relaxed and gossipy air suggested that he was expecting to hear Larry’s further ideas about the case. But Larry within his breast felt a tug as if a high-powered magnet had moved away. “Well, I guess it’s back to the pavement for mine,” he said a little too quickly.

The Lieutenant grinned.

Larry, highly self-conscious, added with the idea of saving his face: “I’ll just keep an eye on her as she goes through the streets.”

“Well, if you asked me I’d say she was able to look after herself,” said the Lieutenant cynically.

Larry was already outside the door. Once out of the Lieutenant’s view he made no bones about concealing his eager haste. The girl was about two hundred feet ahead of him. For the sake of his own peace of mind he felt that he had to clear up this matter. Either she was an out and out bad one or else just a common thief. Whichever it was, it might have been asked what had a policeman to do with her, personally? But Larry did not ask it of himself. He was not thinking at all. Under the pull of that magnet ahead he was as helpless as any particle of iron.

He overtook her. She gave him the perfectly blank look that one turns to discover the cause of a sound. It cut the ground from under his feet. How was he to explain his own eagerness? The tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

But as he walked along beside her, she looked at him again in an annoyed way there was no mistaking. He either had to fall back, or walk on ahead, or explain himself. “I’ll walk along with you to see you’re not annoyed,” he said gruffly.

“Thanks, it’s not necessary,” she said indifferently.

She was much more self-assured now. She was free, and her terrors were laid. More than ever she made it clear that she did not give a hang for the policeman beside her. But Larry’s most conspicuous characteristic was doggedness. Let her discourage him as she liked, his feelings *would* find utterance.

“I don’t believe that yarn you told,” he blurted out. “Even if he did bear you out. You’re not that kind of a girl. Anybody could see it.”

“Thanks,” she said in an amused way that rasped Larry’s vanity horribly.

“But you got a hard nature!” he cried, exasperated.

“A good thing to have, don’t you think?” she said lightly. “Especially for a woman. In this town.”

“You don’t have to be hard to them as would be friendly.”

“You have to make sure of your friends first.”

Larry had an uneasy feeling that her answers would always go him one better. It occurred to him that it would be advisable to lead up to things with a little general conversation. “You’re right, this is a bad town,” he said affably. “The half of it is not known. I could tell you things. Of course in my position I see the worst of it.”

“Naturally,” she said with the amused look that made him grind his teeth. It dried up all his conversation.

They came to the corner of Lexington Avenue, and the girl paused. “I leave you here,” she said.

“Our way is the same,” protested Larry.

“I am not going back to that hotel,” she said quickly.

“Where can you go . . . at this time of night?”

“I’ll stay with a friend all night.”

“Where is it?” demanded Larry.

She stared. “Well . . . If you must know it’s in Thirty-sixth Street.”

“That’s only a few blocks out of my way,” said Larry, turning downtown.

“You have to get back to your post.”

“Oh, they give you a little leeway when you make an arrest.”

“I don’t want you,” she said clearly.

“I’m coming anyhow,” said Larry doggedly.

She shrugged and started briskly down Lexington Avenue.

They walked in silence for a while. Things were going on furiously within Larry, as was evidenced by his continual swift glances down at her. So desirable and so exasperating! He felt that he could not recover his manhood until in some way he forced her to regard him. Meanwhile she looked undeviatingly ahead.

“I suppose you’re still sore at me for taking you in,” he said at last.

“Not at all,” she answered instantly. “You only did what you had to do.”

“But you think I cut a pretty poor figure in the affair,” he said sorely.

“That never occurred to me,” she said in accents transparently honest.

It made Larry sorer than ever. “Ahh!” he growled.

“Why can’t we be a little friendly?” he presently demanded.

She did not answer, and his anger rose high. “I asked a civil question.”

“I didn’t answer it because I didn’t wish to hurt your feelings,” she said coolly. “Why should we be friends?”

“Ahh! it’s no harm,” he protested, aware of the feebleness of his own words. “A friend is a friend. It’s good to have friends.”

Again no answer.

“I asked you isn’t it good to have friends?” he demanded.

“Certainly. But you force me to remind you that one has a right to choose one’s friends.”

“Oh, excuse me,” said Larry like a boy intolerably hurt.

But he continued to walk along beside her.

In Thirty-sixth Street she stopped before a smallish brown-stone house with a high stoop, one of twenty in a row exactly alike. A little ticket pasted alongside the door suggested that it was let out in furnished rooms.

“This is the house,” she said. “You needn’t wait.”

“How are you going to get in?” asked Larry gruffly. For the outer doors of the vestibule were closed, and no light showed in any window.

She threw back her head and whistled like a boy or a bird, an intricate, rippling call that somehow in that street of ugly darkened houses suggested the open, sunny fields. In spite of his soreness Larry smiled, enchanted.

“Who taught you that call?” he asked involuntarily.

“The meadow-lark,” she said dryly.

She repeated the call. Finally from a window in the top of the house a head stuck out and a gentle voice came floating down.

“Is that you, Phil?”

“Yes,” answered the girl. “Let me in, will you?”

“Surely,” said the voice in undisguised gladness, and the head was quickly withdrawn.

“Please go,” said Phillida to Larry. “I don’t want to have to explain a police escort to my friend.”

To go! To lose touch with her altogether. Larry's heart went down like a stone. He forgot all his soreness. "All right," he said, desperately anxious, strangely humble for him, "but . . . but . . . are you going to stop here awhile?"

"I don't know."

"Is that your real name, Phillida Kenley?"

"Yes."

He plunged stumbingly on. "I know you don't think very much of me . . . you saw me at a disadvantage to-night . . . I wouldn't force myself on you . . . But maybe if I had half a chance I might make good with you . . . If you'd let me come to see you without my uniform . . . maybe you'd understand a policeman can be a man too, like other men . . ."

He was interrupted by—her laughter. She tried to stop it. She bit her lip, but her eyes became liquid with mirth, and she exploded. She put her handkerchief to her mouth, but it still broke out in ungovernable silvery peals. "I'm so sorry . . . so sorry!" she stuttered breathlessly. "But I can't help it! . . . Oh!" She ran up the steps.

With burning cheeks and pounding ears, Larry walked stiffly away.

CHAPTER III

RE-ARREST

NO woman had ever laughed at Larry like that. To appreciate the effect it had on him, one must bear in mind that for years he had been accustomed to the homage of the sex. The fact that she had tried to suppress her laughter made it the more devastating; for it suggested that she was really amused, and not just trying to get back at him. No matter how fast he walked he could not escape the horrid sound of it. Through one street and another he went unheeding, blind with rage.

Of course he would not admit to himself that it was he, Larry, she was laughing at. He made believe to ascribe it to the uniform he wore. “. . . If she has such a contempt for the police she must be a crook all right. That stands to reason . . . A common thief! I’d never run after such a one. I despise her! I ought to put her behind the bars where she belongs. Oh, God! I’d like to lock her up! That would stop her laughing, I guess! . . . A crook laughing like that at a decent fellow! The nerve of it! That’s my only offence in her eyes. She despises me because I’m on the square! . . .”

But these comforting assurances failed altogether to stanch the wound in his vanity.

By and by Larry found himself patrolling his beat again, without any very clear notion of how he got there. Passing the Colebrook in due course, he scowled at it as if he would force the very bricks to yield up the secret of what had taken place within. His mind was busy with schemes of revenge.

“. . . Maybe I can persuade the English guy to lay a charge against her after all. She turned him down. Very likely he’s sore against her now. I’ll see him in the morning. . . . As soon as I’m off duty I’ll inquire around the hotel. I ought to be able to turn up some new evidence. . . . Anyhow I can force that young clerk to testify. The management ought to take up the case. It’s their duty to prosecute hotel thieves to protect their guests. . . .” And so on. And so on.

But his impatience would not brook the long wait until morning. He went into the hotel. The same young clerk was on duty alone in the lobby, still somewhat scary as a result of his experience. He was the sort of person who runs ahead to agree with everybody. He had previously agreed with Mr.

Felix that it would be better not to prosecute the girl, and he now agreed with Larry that the girl ought to be prosecuted. They discussed the case at length. Larry was in that state of mind when anybody's sympathy is sweet and comforting.

"Maybe she did take something out of Mr. Felix's room, and threw it away afterwards," suggested the clerk.

"Couldn't have been much," said Larry. "I was watching her every minute." He pondered upon this possibility. "When I brought her down to the lobby she sat in that chair yonder, as if her knees had given under her. . . . Maybe she was bluffing . . ."

The chair was a large padded affair upholstered in tapestry. Larry suddenly went to it and slipped his fingers around the edge of the seat. They came in contact with a small hard object that he drew forth in some excitement—a key!

"Does that look like one of the room keys?" he demanded.

The clerk with gaping eyes nodded.

"If it opens the Englishman's door," cried Larry in triumph, "and if I can prove where she got it, I have her!"

At the earliest possible hour next morning Larry, now dressed in plain clothes, was back at the Colebrook. He was off duty, therefore his own master for the moment. There was another young clerk behind the desk. Without attempting to take this one into his confidence, Larry asked for Mr. Felix. A disappointment awaited him.

"He just left."

"What!"

"Paid his bill and left."

"Where has he gone?"

The clerk shrugged. "When I asked for a forwarding address he said nothing would be coming here for him."

Ugly new suspicions thrust up their heads in Larry's breast. ". . . There is more in this than I thought! . . . There *is* something between them. Not a robbery at all. Still, there's the key! . . ."

A knife seemed to be thrust in and turned around in his already smarting wound. Oh, the hateful charming creature!

Larry interviewed the manager of the Colebrook, a dapper little man of the world in the Continental style, Mr. Flavelle. Larry explained who he

was, and showed the key he had found. Without exactly lying, he contrived to convey the impression that his Captain was backing him in this further investigation. They went up to the third floor and found that the key did indeed fit the lock of the room lately occupied by Mr. Felix. Mr. Flavelle began to be impressed.

At first he declined to prosecute. Nothing had been stolen, the guest was gone, better to let the matter drop. Larry, with an eloquence that surprised himself a little, set out to persuade him. He cunningly intimated that the police were now bound to see the matter through anyway, and it would show up Mr. Flavelle in rather a bad light if he declined to appear against one who had clearly tried to rob a guest of his hotel. Mr. Flavelle hesitated. He finally said he would appear against the girl if Larry could make out a fair case against her.

They took the chief clerk, Mr. Alden, into their discussion. Mr. Alden had a distinct recollection both of Mr. Felix and of Miss Kenley. The former had been in the hotel two days, the young woman but a single day. Mr. Felix had room 309, the young woman room 317. Upon prodding his recollection Mr. Alden brought up a highly significant circumstance. On the day before Miss Kenley had asked for the key of room 309, and he had passed it to her without thinking. A moment or two later she had returned it with apologies, saying that she had mistaken the number of her room. Hers was 317.

“She took an impression of it then!” exclaimed Larry.

“Undoubtedly!” they agreed. Mr. Flavelle began to grow keen in the pursuit.

“Know anything about this fellow Felix?” asked Larry.

They shook their heads. A man of wealth and position unquestionably, but he had volunteered no information about himself. Even the labels had been removed from his luggage. Mr. Flavelle, whose business it was to keep track of people of wealth and position all over the world, had never heard the name Felix as a surname among the eminent.

“An assumed name perhaps,” suggested Larry.

“Very likely.”

“Perhaps there was some previous association between the two,” suggested Mr. Alden. “Maybe it was not just an ordinary attempt at theft.”

This suggestion, which bore out Larry’s secret suspicion, caused him a nasty pang. He would not admit it before the two men. “Anyway, a thief is a thief,” he said doggedly.

“Certainly, a thief is a thief.”

“And if I can find the locksmith who made her the key, we’ll have a complete case against her,” said Larry.

In brief, he did find the locksmith in the neighbourhood of the hotel. This man unhesitatingly acknowledged the key as his handiwork; described Phillida Kenley to the life (“Swell-lookin’ girl with a proud black eye. Looked as if she’d take no nonsense”) and told how she had come to him asking how she and her sister could get a duplicate key to their flat. They couldn’t spare the one key they had, she had explained, because they needed it to go in and out with. The locksmith gave her a piece of wax, and showed her how to take an impression of the key. Later she had returned with the impression, and he made her the key.

Larry took his witnesses to the police station, and a charge was duly laid against the girl. Larry’s chief, Captain Craigin, while somewhat astonished by such zealous activities in a patrolman off duty, was approving of course. After the witnesses had left, he asked curiously:

“What started you off on this, Harker?”

“Everybody was lying last night, sir,” said Larry with a self-conscious virtuous air. “I thought it was up to me to turn up the truth.”

“Hm! yes, of course!” said Captain Craigin, not altogether convinced. “You say you know where the girl is?”

“Yes, sir, unless she has skipped since twelve o’clock last night. That’s hardly likely because she wouldn’t be expecting any further trouble.”

“Very well, go get her.”

Larry, in uniform, set off for the Thirty-sixth Street house with his breast burning with triumph. But not a happy sort of triumph. There was an ugly twist to his lips that suggested an inward torment; the sort of torment men invite when, finding themselves in a false position, they determinedly burrow in deeper. As he went he pictured the scene ahead of him. There was a horrid exultation in the thought of reducing that delicately laughing girl to a state of terror again. . . . Laugh at the police, will she? I’ll show her! . . .

At the same time he was throbbing with an extraordinary anticipation of joy merely because he was going to see her again.

In Thirty-sixth Street from afar off he perceived a taxicab standing in the street about where the house would be. A slight anxiety attacked him, and he quickened his pace. He was still half a block away when the door of the house above the cab opened, and a man ran down the steps. Even at the distance it was impossible to mistake that slender, elegantly-clad figure. It was Mr. Felix.

Larry shouted, and started to run.

Mr. Felix cast a startled look in his direction, sprang into the cab, and was swiftly driven away. Larry was too far off to obtain the license number.

The smouldering suspicion that scorched Larry's breast blazed up furiously. It was no longer suspicion, it was assurance. Under his breath he cursed the man horribly, without obtaining any relief. There *was* something between them! Something crooked. She had fallen for the foxy, sneering Englishman. That girl with her fine straight eyes! . . . What a fool, what a fool to let it *get* him like this! God! how it hurt! She wasn't worth it! Anyhow he'd break up their game whatever it was! If he only *knew* what there was between them, maybe he could drag her out like the barb she was in his flesh!

But it was a perfectly wooden-faced Larry that presented himself at the door of the furnished-room house. The number was 138A. The door was opened to him by the landlady herself, an odd-looking woman in a red flannel dress with black crescents printed on it. The redness accentuated the paleness of her flabby face with its pale lips, pale eyes and pale hair. Her open mouth revealed curiously pale gums. Seeing the policeman in her vestibule her face offered a study in conflicting emotions; she was scared, she was preparing to be indignant; she was slyly aware too, of the young man's uncommon good looks.

"Is Miss Phillida Kenley here?" asked Larry stiffly.

"She doesn't live here . . ." the woman began.

"I didn't ask you that," said Larry. "She's here with a friend."

"What do you want of her?" the woman asked breathlessly.

"That's for me to tell her," said Larry.

The pale woman started up-stairs with many a backward look.

Presently, high up in the house, Larry heard a swift, light trip-trip, trip-trip, trip-trip start on the stairs. His heart set up a furious beating, and his breath failed him a little. He silently cursed her for the power she had over him, and his hungry eyes fastened on the turn of the stairs where she would appear. Like a bird she came down through the house with that funny little double hop. She turned into sight, and his heart seemed to go leaping up to meet her. Let him accuse her of what he would, his subconsciousness recognised in that high look of hers something worthy of being worshipped. And the little thing, so terribly sweet, so plucky, so dear to him! The sight of her simply slew him. He could have grovelled at the bottom step and let her trip down over his neck!

Man is a complex animal. As she came close, and Larry could read the expression on her face, his anger blazed up all over again. For she looked a

little annoyed, though trying to conceal it politely—just the way a nice girl might be supposed to look, finding herself still pestered by a man she thought she had got rid of. “. . . I’ll show her!” he said to himself.

“Good morning,” said Phillida with a cool upward inflection meaning: What do you want?

“Sorry, you’ll have to come with me,” said Larry.

Her eyebrows went up. “What do you mean?” she demanded.

“You’re under arrest,” said Larry bluntly.

Phillida blanched a little, and put her hand back of her against the wall. But this was far from satisfying Larry’s longing to humiliate her. Her eyes never quailed. The queer-looking woman in the red dress who had come clumsily running down after her, was making a picture of dismay and horror a few steps higher up. But she seemed to be enjoying it in her way.

“I thought that matter was settled,” said Phillida firmly.

“New evidence has turned up.”

“What sort of evidence?”

“The key with which you entered the man’s room has been found. Also the locksmith who made you that key.”

“Oh, Miss Kenley, whatever have you been up to?” gasped the pale woman.

Still the girl refused to be crushed or (what Larry most desired) to beg for mercy. She bit her lip, and her head went down for a moment. She appeared to be thinking hard. When she raised it, her expression was calm; there was even the flicker of amusement that so exasperated Larry. It was not natural! he told himself.

“Oh, all right,” she said coolly. “It doesn’t matter now.”

Larry took this somehow, as a reference to the Englishman’s visit, and experienced a fresh pang of jealousy.

“I’ll get my hat,” said Phillida, turning to mount again.

“Sorry, I’ll have to go with you,” said Larry.

“Why?”

“You might go over the roofs.”

She laughed briefly. “I hadn’t thought of that. . . . I would rather not have my friend frightened by the sight of you. She is not well.”

“I’ll get your hat, Miss Kenley,” said the landlady breathlessly.

“No,” said Phillida. “Doreen would insist on coming down to see what was the matter. That would be worse. . . . I suppose she’s got to know. . . .”

Come along if you must,” she added to Larry.

She went back up-stairs almost as quickly as she had come down, and Larry in his thick-soled clumpers was compelled to foot it nimbly behind her, feeling very ridiculous. Up three flights. Phillida’s friend occupied the front hall room on the top floor.

She was at the door, and backed into the room at their approach. She was smaller than Phillida. (Phillida it might be remarked, was an average size girl, and it was only a fancy of the big Larry’s to think of her as a little thing.) Doreen was a piteous little thing with golden hair bobbed at her thin neck, and blue eyes much too big for her face. Her cheeks were significantly hollowed, almost transparent. Tubercular, Larry thought, with an anxious glance at Phillida’s firm, pale cheeks; they shouldn’t sleep together.

At the sight of the brass buttons Doreen began to tremble. Phillida went to her swiftly. Clearly in this association Phillida was the oak and Doreen the ivy. Observing the tender affection that united them, it was impossible for Larry to believe that Phillida was all bad, much as he wished to. Phillida took Doreen in her arms. Larry remained at the door of the tiny room, feeling a good deal like a brute.

“Oh, what’s the matter?” gasped Doreen.

“Nothing at all, dear,” said Phillida equably. “This is the officer who walked home with me last night.”

“What does he want now?”

“Oh, it seems some new evidence has turned up as they call it. I shall have to go and explain.”

“He’s arresting you!”

“Not at all! They’ve just asked me to come and explain.”

The blonde girl’s voice scaled up hysterically. “They’re going to lock you up!”

“Now, Doreen . . . now, Doreen,” murmured Phillida, as one would seek to quiet a child. “You know very well that everything is all right now.”

Larry pricked up his ears.

“He’s going to lock you up!” wailed Doreen witlessly.

“They cannot do anything to me unless *he* makes a complaint,” said Phillida significantly. “Is that likely now?”

What would not Larry have given to know what was behind her words!

Doreen was deaf to them. She tore herself out of Phillida’s arms. “You’re just trying to soothe me!” she cried. “You would say anything to soothe me.

How do I know what the police are going to do?" She suddenly came to Larry. "What do you want with her?" she demanded.

Larry, horribly disconcerted, stood there like a wooden image.

Doreen of course placed the worst construction on his silence. "You see! You see!" she cried. "He's going to lock you up!"

Phillida was pulling her hat on before the mirror. "Well, if he does," she said composedly, "he'll soon have to let me out again."

Doreen addressed Larry wildly. "She's not a bad girl! Can't you see it? Can't you see it? She's the finest girl . . . the finest . . . the best friend . . . the honestest and bravest and kindest . . ." Sobs choked her utterance.

Larry listened to this standing stock-still and scowling. This poor girl was nothing to him. He had a strong young creature's natural disgust of illness, and he hated to think of this broken creature's being associated with the perfect Phillida. She made him uncomfortable and he blamed her for it. He only longed to have this scene over with.

Phillida flung an arm around her friend and drew her away to the window. "Hush! Hush! You must not excite yourself like this," she murmured. "It is so bad for you! You know that everything is all right now."

"I will not be quiet!" cried Doreen, struggling feebly. "I will not let him lock you up. I will tell him the whole truth. I will tell him . . ."

Phillida clapped a quick hand over her friend's mouth. "Ah, be quiet!" she murmured urgently, but tender still. "You'll spoil everything! They can't do anything to me now. If there *should* be any danger, then you can speak. But to the proper person. Don't blurt it out to a mere policeman!"

Larry's face slowly turned a brickly red and paled again. The girls paid no attention to him. They were by the window with their backs turned.

Under the soothing of Phillida's voice, Doreen's febrile excitement suddenly dissolved in tears. "Well, anyway, let me go with you," she pleaded brokenly.

"No! No!" said Phillida, "you know that would only make you worse. You must stay here quietly until it is time to start for the train."

"Do you think I will go away not knowing what has happened to you?" cried Doreen.

"You shall be told everything," said Phillida patiently. "As soon as I have gone, call him up and tell him what has happened. He will know what to do."

("Him! Him! Him!") thought the wooden-faced Larry. ". . . Oh, damn him!")

Doreen, yielding to the stronger nature, flung herself weeping on the bed.

Phillida came quickly towards the door. "Come!" she said peremptorily to Larry. She closed the door softly after them.

Larry followed her down-stairs in great relief. He could not but admire the girl's fine composure and readiness. . . . Whatever happened, this one would never lose her grip, and bawl and carry on, he said to himself. Involuntarily, the thought found words.

"You're all right!" he said.

She surprised him again. She looked over her shoulder and he saw that her face was all broken up, the tears running down. "Ah, be quiet, you fool!" she said angrily. "You don't know what you're doing! . . . She's just at the turning-point. This may kill her!"

The astonished Larry's mouth opened. He turned red and hot again. The *nerve* of it! "Well, Miss, if it comes to that," he fairly stuttered, "what do you want to break into a man's room in the middle of the night for?"

She was not listening. He followed her down, in a great fume.

She went down slowly, and by the time they reached the bottom, she had recovered her composure. She paused to bid good-bye to the woman waiting there. Larry's anger quickly failed him. There was something so fine about her! He could not bear to think of subjecting her to the humiliation of being marched through the streets by daylight. In some queer way the humiliation promised to be his own instead of hers.

"Have you got a telephone?" he asked the landlady gruffly.

The woman, weeping like a fountain, mutely nodded.

"Then call a taxi," said Larry.

Phillida looked at him defiantly. No more tears. "Do you expect me to pay for it?" she asked.

Larry could almost have struck her. "Ahh!" he growled savagely. "Did I ask you to?"

The taxicab duly appeared. They drove almost the whole way to the police station without exchanging a word. Phillida looked out of the window, and Larry looked at Phillida. These silences worked havoc in the young man. The last of his defences against her were undermined. The sleeves of her dress came but to her elbow, and one bare forearm was lying negligently in her lap, the palm of her hand turned down. Larry was astonished at the pure line of her arm, and the lovely way in which it merged into her quiet hand. He had never noticed such things before. She had so

many beauties! The delicate curve of her cheek as one looked at it obliquely from behind; the soft swell of her throat. It made him ache.

And while he ached he raged because she, who had so entangled him, remained herself quite free. Looking out of the window like that as if she were alone in the cab! He burned to embrace her, to strike her, anything to make her aware of him. Nothing of the sort happened of course. He simply sat and glowered at her with a hurt look in his blue eyes. He couldn't understand why he had to be punished like this. He wasn't a bad sort of a fellow, he told himself. He meant well.

Finally she said without turning her head: "Will they lock me up in the police station?"

"Yes," mumbled Larry.

"How long shall I have to stay there?"

"I suppose you'll be taken to the Woman's Court this afternoon."

"Then what?"

"You'll probably be remanded to the Tombs for trial."

"Locked up again?"

"Unless you can get bail."

She nodded.

"Can you get bail?" Larry asked anxiously.

"Oh, I think so," she said confidently.

Him again!

When Larry led her into the station house he had again that extraordinary feeling that he was the real culprit. Phillida carried her head high, while he dreaded to face the glances of his fellow officers. But these glances were all for the girl. She was like a light in that place. Even Captain Craigin made an occasion to come out of his office to look her over.

Larry's feelings were leading him a strange dance. For the last twelve hours he had been hotly bent on bringing this girl in, and now that he had accomplished his purpose, he was filled with a horror of himself. There was a different Lieutenant at the desk. The necessary formalities having been quickly accomplished, it was Larry's duty to conduct Phillida to the rear door, and hand her over to the warder of the cells. He did so like a man in a dream.

The warder was a superannuated officer who had been given this sinecure. He was a harmless old fellow, but his pendulous cheeks, and the red rims falling away from his eyes, gave him a curiously repulsive aspect. His repulsiveness had never occurred to Larry until the old man looked at

Phillida. Then Larry's hands involuntarily clenched in the desire to strike him away from the girl. But it was too late. He had to hand her over.

Larry remained standing at the door watching the warder conduct Phillida down a few steps, across a narrow paved court and thence into the separate building that contained the cells. His head was spinning dizzily; his surroundings no longer seemed real. He had to fight a crazy impulse in himself to whirl around and make a wreck of the place, to defy them all, that he too might be carried to a cell, struggling blindly. He felt a loathing for the blue coat and brass buttons that had been his pride. What had he to do with them? He belonged out there!

But he never moved a muscle. After he had lost sight of them, he remained there listening with strained ears. The faint clang of the great steel gate within the cell house reached his ears, and his heart seemed to drop into a pit. ". . . Oh, God! what have I done?" he asked himself.

Later, in the patrolmen's common room, young Matt McArdle who was Larry's special pal, evinced a desire to talk about the case.

"How come you to bring her in a second time after she was discharged last night?" he asked.

Larry looked at him moodily. In his utter distraction of mind he felt that he had to have help. And Matt was a friend. "Matt, I believe I made a mistake," he said slowly.

Matt was an honest fellow, and a real friend, but not knowing what was going on inside Larry, the latter's expression of awful solemnity struck him as funny. "Oh, well, it ain't a hanging matter," he said with a laugh.

"Sure!" said Larry. His desire to confide in his friend suddenly dried up. He realized the great truth that in a matter of this sort, nobody on earth could give him any help. He had to see it through alone.

CHAPTER IV

ESCAPE

THE “wagon” called for them at half-past two that afternoon. It was already well filled with women prisoners gathered from several precincts, and the officers who were to appear against them in court. Larry and Phillida were the only passengers from their station.

The motor-van backed to the curb, and the inevitable children gathered to see. Up in the front there was one of those battered and utterly reckless old harridans who are the policeman’s bane. As Phillida climbed in she sang out:

“Hello, deary! You are a fresh peach to be sure! What did they take you up for?”

“Be quiet there!” cried Larry indignantly.

“Now, Adonis!” drawled the old soul derisively.

There was a general laugh which greatly encouraged the humorist.

“A pretty boy like you oughtn’t to be rude to the ladies,” she croaked. “You were cut out to be a ladies’ pet!”

All the way to the Courthouse she made Larry the target of her wit. He had to put up with it. You can’t threaten an old woman with a club. His fellow-officers, having been in a similar situation themselves, had small sympathy with him. Phillida laughed with the rest. Oddly enough Larry was a little consoled by Phillida’s laughter. It suggested that she was at least aware of his existence.

Being the last to get on they had the desirable places at the open or airy end. Up in the front of the tightly curtained body it might have been supposed that the atmosphere was rather spicy. Phillida sat on the end seat on one side, while Larry shared the rear step with another officer, swinging against her with every jolt of the machine. But close as they were, a wall of non-understanding divided them. She baffled him completely. At present, while he in distress of mind was trying to shield her from the possible glances of people in the street, you might have said that she was enjoying herself, from the quick way her eyes darted to and fro, sizing up her fellow-prisoners, lighting up at their jokes.

The mid-town Courthouse for the sake of cheapness was built in the middle of a block, and ran through from one street to another. It looked like a factory of justice. The prisoners were brought in from the rear. Their way lay up an endless straight stair, for the courtroom, in order to obtain the necessary light in those narrow streets, was superimposed on top of the jail where light is not necessary. At the top of the stairs they were thrust into the "pen" which is literally a great cage of thick steel bars. The officers stood about outside, chatting and killing time until court should open.

Larry stood by himself, covertly watching Phillida through the bars. There were about twenty-five women in the pen, ceaselessly and uneasily milling about, weaving a strange pattern of drab and gay. They ran to extremes. But a great camaraderie prevailed amongst them. Many women approached Phillida in curiosity. How strange it was to see her receive them unaffectedly, answer their questions unhesitatingly, listen to their tales with interest. It was Larry who suffered all the indignities for her, on the outside of the cage.

He could not hear anything that was said in the pen. He was feeling an unbearable sense of inferiority. He who had always thought so well of himself! He did not know it, but the look of pleasant complacency which until yesterday had distinguished him, was now gone forever. On the other hand the pain he was enduring and concealing, was beginning to give his smooth face a new strength and character.

A long, narrow passage artificially lighted, connected the pen with the courtroom. It was lined for its whole length with a bench. When word came back that his Honour had taken his seat, the prisoners were let out of the pen and seated in a long row upon this bench. The officers sat democratically amongst them or lounged against the wall. For the most part a great good feeling prevailed; prisoners and captors conversed amicably together.

Larry did not talk to his prisoner. He stood in front of her, steeling himself not to look at her, but tinglingly conscious of her every move. He didn't need his outward senses to tell him she was there. In the darkest night he would have known her. The sorceress was creeping into his very being. A policeman sitting next to her engaged her in talk, making Larry very angry. What had that fellow to do with her? She wasn't *his* prisoner.

When her case was called they entered the courtroom together, Larry with a painfully beating heart. His eyes flew among the spectators looking for the detestable Englishman. He could not find him. He went on the stand and told his story without any very clear notion of what was coming out of his mouth. Phillida was in the dock, somewhere behind him, out of his sight. She challenged none of his statements.

While the others were testifying, he sat on a bench below the witness stand. He had been in that courtroom a score of times before and had never taken the least notice of it. Now, the particular mustard-yellow of the walls was making an ineffaceable impression on his consciousness. Face by face he was searching for the Englishman among the spectators. If that fellow went on the stand and attempted to get her off, he would nail his lies. Yet there was nothing in the world that Larry desired so much as to get her off. Mr. Felix was not there.

A well-known criminal lawyer had arisen in Phillida's defense. Larry sneered. No need to ask who was paying him. Larry's own sneers hurt him like self-inflicted wounds. He couldn't think the situation through at all. He could only writhe under it.

The lawyer was being prompted by a plump, red-faced young man sitting beside him, another object for Larry's jealousy to fix upon. He suspected him of being an Englishman too. So far as Larry could tell, no glance of recognition passed between Phillida and her defenders.

The hearing pursued the ordinary course. Such proceedings are more or less informal. The magistrate, having listened to the testimony, asked where Mr. Felix was.

"He has left the hotel without giving any forwarding address," said Larry.

His Honour looked dubious, and a keen ray of hope lightened Larry's breast. At the same time something prompted him to say bitterly: "Perhaps the prisoner's lawyer knows where he is."

The magistrate looked surprised, but nevertheless put the question.

"I know nothing of such a person," said the attorney. "My services were engaged by Mr. Glanville, the gentleman beside me."

The same question was put to Mr. Glanville who returned a bland denial. "I wish I could put my hands on him," he added. "He could clear the prisoner with a word."

Larry ground his teeth, hearing the well-bred English inflections. . . . Liar! he thought.

"What is your interest in this case?" asked the magistrate.

"I have known the prisoner for many years," said Mr. Glanville.

"You are prepared to testify to her good character?"

"Should your Honour consider it necessary to hold her, any number of such witnesses may be produced."

The magistrate addressed the attorney. "Have you consulted with your client?"

"I have not yet had an opportunity."

"Do you want an adjournment?"

The lawyer whispered with Mr. Glanville before he replied. "No, if your Honour pleases. I respectfully submit that there is no case against her. Nothing was stolen. And the one person who might be considered to have suffered an injury does not think it worth while to appear against her."

His Honour deliberated. Larry held his breath. The facts adduced by Larry, the hotel-clerks, the locksmith could not be ignored.

"Held for trial," he said with a weary air.

It was like a smart blow on the head to Larry. Yet he sneered at Phillida's defenders. . . . That for you! he thought.

Being held, Phillida passed automatically out of Larry's custody. She was passed back into the corridor in charge of another officer, who returned her to the pen. Larry left the courtroom also. He hung about the pen in the miserable hope of receiving a glance from Phillida. She vouchsafed him none of course.

He presently had the added sting of seeing Glanville enter the corridor from the courtroom under conduct of an officer. It appeared that he had permission to speak to the prisoner before she was transferred to the Tombs. How soon would she be transferred, Larry heard him ask. In about half an hour, was the reply.

Larry watched that interview from a little distance with jealous eyes. He could have sworn from Phillida's blank look that she had never seen the man before that afternoon. On the other hand Glanville approached her with an oily and ingratiating smile. He put his pudgy, rosy face between the bars and whispered some communication close in her ear—quite a lengthy communication. Phillida's face, which Larry could see clearly, betrayed nothing whatever. She only looked at the man sharply, appeared to deliberate a moment, then decisively nodded. Something passed between them; money, no doubt. The whole transaction did not occupy more than fifteen seconds. Glanville immediately returned whence he came.

Half an hour later with other officers, Larry was hanging about on the sidewalk outside the prisoners' entrance to the courthouse. Strictly speaking they all ought to have been on their way back to their precincts, but policemen are only human. Going to court is like a recess in school hours,

and the idea is to prolong it as much as possible. Larry in particular could not tear himself away from the spot; for the “wagon” which was to convey the held prisoners down to the Tombs was momentarily expected, and he was counting on getting a final glimpse of Phillida.

The car backed up to the curb, and presently half a score of women were brought down the long stairs, the hardened ones making a good deal of racket on the way, for they had nothing further to fear now. They flowed out on the sidewalk under conduct of four officers. These women were the more serious offenders, and, quaintly enough, the most respectable looking. Some of them enjoyed their conspicuous position—or made believe to. Phillida with her quiet air stood out strangely from amongst them. She was still keenly interested in all that was going on about her. Larry, concealing himself behind his fellows, gazed at her with all his sight.

The women started to climb aboard the car. Phillida spoke to one of the officers. Larry guessed that she was asking if she might sit at the end. She was so obviously superior to the lot, that the man assented as a matter of course, and Phillida stood aside a little. What happened next came as swiftly as a flash of light. Nobody had a hand on Phillida. Suddenly she was across the sidewalk and out in the middle of the street. A taxicab was passing slowly, the door hanging invitingly open. She whipped inside it, and slammed the door. The cab set off down the street at thirty miles an hour.

A gasp of pure astonishment broke from the watching bluecoats. Then of one accord they uttered loud shouts, to which the women prisoners added shrieks of delight and encouragement. With their prisoners half in and half out of the van, the officers in charge were helpless.

No sound escaped Larry. With the outbreak of the shouting he was already in full pursuit, running with beautiful clean action, all hampered as he was by clothing. Several other policemen followed him, but he left them far behind. He ran so fast there was a moment he almost had his hand on the cab. But the contest was too unequal; it drew away.

Not having his gun, Larry could not shoot at the tires. He continued to run at top speed until, far down the block he came upon another cab standing alongside the curb. He flung himself in beside the driver, and silently pointed out his quarry. Precious seconds were lost in starting the engine; then the second car flew after the first.

At the Broadway corner, one of the most dangerous in town, though the traffic officer’s hand was raised against him, the driver of the first car with a wide sweep that almost sideswiped the cars bound in the other direction, turned down-town. The traffic officer, seeing his fellow-bluecoat on the

pursuing car, held up the down-town stream, and Larry and his driver likewise turned into Broadway teetering on two wheels.

Of all chases that by motor-car through crowded streets is the maddest. The awful chances that are taken! The hair-raising grazes and misses! In the broad thoroughfare the traffic was dense, but the street was not completely filled. In and out the two flying cars threaded their way, the advantage now with one, now with the other. It was up to other cars to get out of the way; there was a general drawing towards the safety of the curb. All the drivers infected with excitement, sounded a hoarse chorus of horns. Some attempted to follow. The more timid spectators ducked for doorways, instinctively expecting a fusillade of bullets to follow.

At Fiftieth Street the first car, taking advantage of an opening, turned precariously west into the side street, and Larry's driver managed to follow, but lost some ground. Larry realised sorely that the man beside him notwithstanding all urgings was not disposed to take such long chances as the other fellow. No doubt Phillida's driver had a big price.

Somehow they both got across Seventh Avenue without a smash, and flew down the long empty block towards Sixth at an increased speed. Here Larry's driver a little more than made up what he had lost before. But the driver in front with truly insane recklessness, took the Sixth Avenue crossing without a pause; trucks, trolley-cars and elevated pillars notwithstanding. Larry's dreadful thought was: He'll kill her! He'll kill her! But—reward of recklessness! the cab won across in safety. Larry's driver who slackened speed, narrowly escaped being crushed between advancing car and elevated pillar.

In the next long block both drivers gave their cars every bit of power they had at command. The way here was lined with handsome dwellings and fine shops. The well-dressed pedestrians stood rooted to the sidewalk, gaping. Ahead loomed Fifth Avenue, main artery of the city's traffic, and now in mid-afternoon at its most crowded. Motor-cars four abreast were moving up and down in a solid procession.

“We've got him here!” muttered Larry grimly.

But by the chance of fortune, when the first car arrived at the corner the up and down traffic was halted by the signals from the light towers, and the driver had a clear way across. Instead of taking advantage of it, to Larry's astonishment he turned into the Avenue heading down-town. Larry's driver was just able to follow him before the up and down traffic was released again.

The driver in front had a hundred yards clear space, then the almost solid lines of cars all moving down town together. By taking mad chances on the wrong side of the street he contrived to put two or three cars between him and his pursuers. Larry could then catch only occasional glimpses of the edge of his car. He began to see the wisdom of the man's ruse in mixing with the throng. All were moving ahead at a brisk pace as one, and there was nothing the exasperated policeman could do at the moment. At Forty-second Street they were stopped again by the red light on the tower. Dropping off, Larry sprang ahead and looked eagerly into the cab he had been chasing.

It was empty.

The driver looked around with a smooth face. "What's up?" he asked.

Larry cursed him savagely, a breach of the regulations perhaps excusable under the circumstances. "Where's your passenger?" he demanded.

"I have no passenger." He pointed to his flag which was up of course.

There was a cry from another car: "She slipped through to the sidewalk!" There is always somebody to give information.

Calling the officer at the crossing to his aid, Larry bade him watch the driver while he searched the sidewalk. It was in vain. The throng of pedestrians stopped to gape, and he had a solid mass of bodies to push his way through. There were scores of ways out; the great stores with their many aisles, the office buildings, the arcades. Larry quickly realised that the girl had made a clean getaway. He returned to the cab.

His feelings were mixed. The instinctive part of him which had set off in pursuit was enraged at being balked. But another part of him was glad that the girl was free. And still another part was madly jealous. To whom had she gone? Anyhow, he still had the driver. Mounting the running-board of his cab, he ordered him to drive to the police station.

"Aw, what's the matter with you?" the man protested virtuously. He was young, and he looked the dare-devil he had proved himself. His eyes glittered derisively at the discomfited policeman. "I ain't done nothin'! I got a right to know what the charge is."

"You'll find out at the desk."

"I was just on my way to get a fare in front of Sterns'."

"You're on your way to a cell, now."

"My stand's in front of the Amsterdam Hotel; I was there three minutes ago when the call came in. I dare you to ask the starter."

Larry accepted the challenge. They stopped in front of the Amsterdam. The starter glibly corroborated the chauffeur's story—a little too glibly. Not

five minutes before, as his book would show, he had received a call for a taxi to go to Sterns', he said, and he had sent that man. Moreover the other waiting drivers bore him out.

Larry was not much impressed by this array of evidence. It must have cost the Englishman a pretty penny, he reflected with a heart full of angry jealousy.

"You never saw my face before," the chauffeur cunningly protested.

"That's all right, my lad," said Larry. "I got your number at the rear door of the Mid-Town Court, and there's a dozen other officers got it too. You drive on to the station house."

CHAPTER V

A STEP UP

THE newspapers made a big story out of the sensational escape of Phillida Kenley. Big, that is, in point of position and headlines, for in reality they had not much to go on. Nothing of the prisoner's antecedents had transpired. The Girl of Mystery they termed her. The question was, who was her powerful backer? "Mr. Glanville" who had claimed friendship with her in court had vanished into thin air. Mr. Sam Leavitt, the noted criminal lawyer, was very much perturbed by his connection with the case. He knew nothing, nothing, he insisted. The man who had engaged him to appear for the girl was a stranger to him. He had worked on his sympathies with his tale of the falsely accused young lady. But never again! never again! Whoever she might be, the manner of the girl's escape appealed to the popular imagination. No such bold attempt had ever before been made, it was said.

The police were very sore. The impudent girl had administered a slap in the face of the whole force it was felt. That it was a woman who had flouted them, made it all the worse. It had been hinted in certain quarters that the police had been privy to her attempt, or she could not have got away with it. Of all the thousands of bluecoats patrolling their beats, there was not one but who had Phillida Kenley's description by heart, and kept his eye peeled for her. Honour awaited the man who would bring her in. The taxicab driver was held, but he was not of any use to them without his principal. The man stoutly stuck to his first story.

For an hour or two Larry dwelt in the limelight while he was questioned by this high official and that, and by the various detectives who were detailed to the case. No blame attached to Larry for the girl's eventual escape. It was recognised that his promptness in taking after her was worthy of the best traditions of the force. After they had got all he knew out of him he was relegated back to his beat. This was cruelly hard. To be condemned to pound the pavements, idly swinging his club when his breast was on fire, when he felt of all men this was *his* concern—well, it was almost more than he could bear. The lot of a patrolman that he had been so proud of, seemed very inglorious to him then. He even had a desperate notion of chucking it, and going after her himself.

Continued inaction was impossible to one in his state of mind. Early next morning when he was off duty, he forewent his proper sleep, and commenced his own private investigation. He called at the lodging house on East Thirty-sixth Street.

That pale wraith of a woman in the flaming dress let him in. It appeared that her name was Miss Corkerell. It was not difficult to make her talk; the difficulty was to restrain her. She had read the newspapers and was all agog over the case, but she was so flattered by having a call from a good-looking young man, that she couldn't keep her mind on it. Her talk about Phillida and Doreen was all mixed up with the information that she, Miss Corkerell had had nervous prostration, and all her finger-nails had dropped off; and that she painted in oils on velvet, and wouldn't he like to see her work? She told Larry that he looked much nicer in plain clothes, more personal-like. Wouldn't he have breakfast with her? She was just sitting down. Larry politely declined.

As to Phillida, Miss Corkerell's information was mostly conveyed in unfinished ejaculations. "The nicest girl you'd ever . . . And such a lady! . . . The last one you'd think . . . But you never can tell . . .!"

"What facts can you give me?" said Larry. "Who was she?"

"Mrs. Innes's best friend."

"Is Mrs. Innes Doreen?"

"Yes. Such friends those two! I never . . ."

"What was Miss Kenley's occupation?"

"She was an art student!" cried Miss Corkerell, as if that was something any fool ought to have known. "Painted oil-paintings. Not that I thought very much of them being an artist myself. But I'm no art-artist. I love the beautiful. I . . ."

"Sure," said Larry patiently. "Do you know where Miss Kenley lives?"

"Only that it's down Washington Square way, somewheres, where all the art-artists live. What they call Greenwich Village. I sometimes go down to Greenwich Village to my dinner. The restaurants are more friendly-like . . ."

"Yes, but about Miss Kenley . . ."

Miss Corkerell had a wealth of surmises which she regarded as highly important, but no more facts.

"Well, let's stick to Mrs. Innes then," said Larry. "Is she here?"

"Went away yesterday evening and took all her things."

"Do you know where she went?"

“No. Naturally I expected to be told . . . after all I had done! But they got secret all of a sudden. Said they’d let me hear later. Went away for her health . . .”

“How long has Mrs. Innes been living here?”

“Seven months,” said Mrs. Corkerell, “but not in the top front hall where you saw her. Her and her husband took the second floor rear, one of my best rooms with the sun all day, and the view of the ailanthus tree in the next yard but one . . .”

“Never mind the view,” put in Larry.

“Always paid up in the end too,” Mrs. Corkerell rushed on, “though I had to wait for it. At the end of every month they were flat broke, but the remittance always came sharp on the first of the month from England . . .”

“England!” said Larry sharply.

“Mr. Innes was English, very good family, I believe, though he was somewhat reduced. . . . Two hundred dollars. Sometimes I cashed it for them through my bank. The officers know me very well. They’re always saying, Miss Corkerell, you . . .”

“But Innes,” cried Larry, “what has become of him?”

“That’s what we’d all like to know,” was the surprising answer. “Just walked out of the house one day, he did, and him so sick he could scarcely stand, and none of us never laid eyes on him again, though he telephoned in once to say she wasn’t to worry because she wouldn’t never see him. And a couple of weeks afterwards Miss Kenley told me he was dead, but I don’t know how she knew it. Good riddance she said, and I say so too. But of course the poor little thing mourned, being a good wife, and moved up on the top floor. . . . An ugly customer! Half crazed with drugs, and far gone with the t. b. She took it off him, the poor lamb! The way he yelled when he couldn’t get his drugs was something blood-curdling. Very bad for the house, yes, but I couldn’t put them out with him so sick, and her sick too. I’m softhearted, I am, I can’t help it. . . .”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” said the bewildered Larry. “An Englishman, you said. Had he anything to do with the Englishman who called here yesterday morning, just before I arrested Miss Kenley?”

“Oh, no,” said Miss Corkerell. “That was just a caller. Gave the name of Anstruther. I don’t know what he wanted.”

“That was Mr. Felix,” said Larry grimly.

“No!” said Miss Corkerell amazed.

After half an hour's patient work, out of oceans of talk Larry strained the following story:

Mr. Innes had been getting worse and worse and had finally taken to his bed. One day about three weeks before, when his wife was out of the house, he had been called on the telephone by a man. There was an extension to the second floor, and he had been able to go to the phone. Mrs. Corkerell had not been able to make much of the conversation that ensued. The person on the other end had done most of the talking. But as a result of the conversation, Innes, weak as he was, had dressed himself and left the house. Nobody had seen him go, but when his wife returned their room was empty.

Mrs. Innes had been left without any money at all, and this time when the first of the month came around there was no remittance. She had kept herself going by pawning what little trinkets she had. Then, only three days ago, something had happened. Miss Kenley had told Miss Corkerell Aleck Innes was dead, but she looked so funny when she said it, the landlady was sure it was not just a regular death. Miss Kenley and Mrs. Innes had had long, whispered conversations of which the landlady had not been able to hear a word. Mrs. Innes had been crying terribly, and Miss Kenley's face had been getting harder and harder, until Miss Corkerell had felt in her bones something awful had happened.

All this was highly stimulating to Larry's curiosity, but it gave him nothing to go on.

When he reported for duty he was told that Captain Craigin wanted to see him. In some trepidation Larry hastily reviewed his actions of the past few days. What had he done? He went into his commander's office stiffening himself to meet trouble.

But the Captain's face was bland. His first words almost bowled Larry over. "You are temporarily detailed to the Detective Bureau."

"Yes, sir," stammered Larry, wondering if he dared believe his ears. Every square-toe condemned to slap the pavement for hours at a stretch, dreams of fluffing around in plain clothes with a cigar between his teeth.

"You're to work on the Kenley case," Captain Craigin went on. "They want a young fellow who is new to the force. One who would not likely be mistaken for a detective. Your work in first bringing the girl in is known. And you have the advantage of knowing her by sight. Report to Inspector Durdan as soon as you can change your clothes."

Larry flushed red with pleasure. It was like the granting of a secret prayer. Like every young man he was ambitious, but there was much more in it than that. His attitude towards Phillida was scarcely that of the force in general, but to find her was an imperative need of his nature. He attempted to stammer his thanks.

“Oh, don’t thank me,” said the Captain. “If you make good, I’ll be satisfied.”

“I’ll make good, sir!” said Larry fervently.

He proceeded down to Headquarters full of rosy dreams for the future. He would find Phillida and win promotion. He would win promotion and win Phillida. If it had been put to him squarely he must have admitted that these two aims were incompatible with each other; but few men put things to themselves squarely; it was a pleasant delusion.

The great Inspector Durdan looked him over somewhat grimly. Larry had not been long enough on the force to have taken its stamp when off duty. He still indulged his own ideas as to how a young fellow should dress, and rather fancied himself as a dresser. It was true that he did not suggest the policeman when he was wearing his own clothes. The Inspector who was a dyed-in-the-wool policeman disapproved of Larry’s get-up, but on the other hand it was what he wanted at the moment.

“You’ll do for this job,” he said. “Can you dance?”

“Yes, sir,” said Larry, somewhat disconcerted by the question.

The Inspector summarized the present status of the Kenley case. “The girl made believe to be an art student,” he said. “She shared a studio with two other girls at 49½ South Washington Square, and made a bluff of attending the classes at the Art Students League. Once in a while she sold a picture to the magazines, but as this wouldn’t support her, it’s clear she must have had some other source of income. Nothing is known about her people, or where she came from.

“The names of the two girls she lived with are Arline Teague and Cynthia Robin. Get that. There’s nothing to connect these two with her criminal activities. They make an honest living by helping to run one of those little artists cafés and dance halls on Sheridan Square. It’s called the Spotted Pup. They must know something, but they refuse to give any information about their friend. Whenever they smell an officer they close up like clams. Direct measures are no good, so I’m trying indirect measures now. That’s what I want you for. Get next to these girls either in their restaurant or elsewhere, and gain their confidence.

“Another thing I want to tell you for your own information. The theory is held in certain quarters that this Mr. Felix who first accused the girl, is himself a high-toned hotel thief, and the girl’s principal. If that is so, the fuss at the Colebrook was simply the result of a dispute between them, and that’s a side show. Anyhow we want the man too, if you can find him. The Hotelmen’s Association, a very powerful organisation, has taken the matter up, and they have engaged William B. Shane himself to conduct an independent investigation for them. Now, I don’t know what line Shane is taking; he hasn’t been to me, but I don’t have to tell you we don’t want Shane to get ahead of us, see? This girl has defied the New York police force, and it’s up to us to see that she gets what is coming to her.”

“I get you, sir,” said Larry.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPOTTED PUP

A PLAIN little old red-brick house on Sheridan Square had come out in a lurid yellow shop front with purple curtains hanging inside. Over the door swung a flamboyant sign depicting a yellow pup rampant with splashy purple spots. It was one of a score of places in the neighbourhood all vying with each other in the outlandishness of their colour schemes.

At half-past six Larry turned in at the door with a good deal of diffidence. The point of view represented by the impudent sign was strange to him, and he considered it rather scandalous. Inside, the rough walls had been frescoed in what seemed to him crude and hideous designs. All around the walls ran a wooden bench painted yellow with purple tables placed in front, each just big enough for two at a squeeze. In the middle a small space floored with linoleum had been left clear for dancing. The room was lighted by half-a-dozen paper lanterns decorated with designs featuring spotted pups.

The encircling bench was well filled. Larry perceived that they were nearly all young, and clearly on the most unconventional terms with each other. Talk was shouted back and forth across the room; the racket was tremendous. To his dismay they were all facing the door, and they all looked at him. He made hastily for the nearest vacant table, and sank behind it sweating gently. As a matter of fact his diffidence stood him in good stead. Nobody would connect the idea of a police officer with a blush.

After one good look they all went on eating and talking. He was a strange bird to them as well; but after all the place hung out a sign to attract custom.

A good-looking girl with bobbed bronze hair and wearing an "artistic" linen slip came to take Larry's order, and he began to perspire again. What did you order in such a place? The girl too, had an assurance; clearly not the ordinary waitress. How were you supposed to treat her? He grinned at her in sheepish fashion.

"Dinner?" she asked, offhand.

Larry nodded gratefully.

While he waited for his food he took further stock of his surroundings. He was struck by the curious tone of equality that existed between the young fellows and the girls. It was not so in his world. Positively, the girls spoke up just like the fellows. The girls, though he disapproved of their style of dress, Larry judged in male fashion according to their looks, good or ill. The average seemed to be about the same as elsewhere. The young men he resented somewhat; poor physical specimens they nevertheless looked and talked as if they owned the earth. "Bolshevists!" said Larry to himself.

As for the talk, Larry could make nothing of it. Actually though it raged back and forth on both sides of him he could not guess what it was all about. He heard such unnatural words as "values" "planes" "atmosphere" "technique" repeated over and over. What was this for fellows and girls to get so excited about? He was a good deal bothered. How could he extract any information from such a senseless jabber?

The food when it came was good; Larry was obliged to admit it. But the portions were scarcely designed to satisfy a policeman's appetite, and he hadn't the nerve to ask for more. Meanwhile time was passing. How was a man to start getting acquainted with these strange creatures? Particularly the girls who ignored all the rules of the game as Larry knew it. Bold—yet not exactly bad either.

He ordered coffee as he saw everybody else doing, and smoked. He wondered which of all the girls present might be Phillida's two pals. The bronze-haired one who waited on him maybe. She had a touch-me-not air. At the thought of Phillida Larry seemed suddenly to see her sitting before him, dark-haired and vivid, and his breast was wrenched with the need of her. The others faded out. He resented the fact that Phillida belonged to this place. It made her out a stranger to him. She's too real for this gassy bunch, he told himself. He dragged himself back to reality with an effort.

At a larger table in the corner sat a man who looked as incongruous in that place as Larry did. Fat, bland, well-dressed with a cagey eye and a smooth manner, Larry knew his sort. He had evidently ordered a special dinner and he was treating three girls of the place. The way the girls were hanging on his words caused Larry to think cynically: "I guess girls are much the same here as up-town."

Presently the orchestra arrived; that is to say a wan pianist, and a drummer with jazz effects who made the dishes jump on the little tables. When the dancing commenced Larry's task became suddenly simplified. The girls lost interest in the talk; other qualities in a man became worthy of notice. As they danced past Larry they smiled at him unseen by their partners. And indeed Larry was rather splendid among the sallow,

undersized art students. In spite of his hang-dog look it was evident that he was very much of a man. They smiled with a frankness that disconcerted Larry. The girls of his acquaintance were more indirect in their methods. But he smiled back.

There was one little thing who suggested a sort of pretty baby monkey with her turned-up nose, her wide reproachful stare and her fine, slinky, black hair, bobbed of course. She and Larry exchanged smiles, and later, seeing her left alone for a moment, Larry made bold to ask her to dance. She submitted to his encircling arm nonchalantly. Larry reflected that girls are girls, and he was not entirely inexperienced. He began to feel more sure of himself. Meanwhile they were admirably suited as partners.

“Will you sit down with me?” he asked, when the music stopped.

“Surely!”

“What can we have?”

“Oh, the usual slops.”

They laughed, well-pleased with each other.

“Great little place, this,” said Larry.

“What brought you here?” she asked curiously.

“Why shouldn’t I come?” he asked a little alarmed.

“No reason. But why did you?”

“Just on impulse. I fell for the sign outside.”

“I can’t place you,” she said. “We get lots of young fellows from up-town who think they’re seeing life, but you’re not like them either. Solider, somehow.”

“Oh, I’m solid all right,” said Larry. “Especially in the dome.”

“You’re very good-looking,” she said, with her innocent baby-monkey stare.

“Thanks. Same to you.”

“What’s your name?”

“Harry. What’s yours?”

“Tina.”

In short they got along like a house afire. Tina made it clear that she had adopted him for the evening, and when any other lad asked her to dance, she made a monkey face at him, and Larry said: “Toddle along, old fellow,” as if he owned her. They released great quantities of talk which had no significance whatever; merely the froth of youth, much the same at the Spotted Pup as at a ball of the Turtle Bay Social Club, Larry’s usual

hangout. Youth and good looks are great levellers. After three dances they sat with linked arms and clasped hands like most of the other couples present.

Larry was behaving exactly as he had behaved many other nights before, but his mind remained coolly detached, studying the girl, and wondering how he could turn the situation to his advantage.

In the end she provided him with a startling opportunity. As they circled around the corner table, Tina murmured, referring to the fat man:

“Disgusting old thing! Makes me sick! . . . Do you know who he is?”

“No,” said Larry idly.

“William B. Shane, the famous detective.”

Larry almost dropped her on the floor. He turned his head sharply. Shane, of course! Had he not seen the man’s published photograph a score of times! He was aghast at his own blindness. What sort of detective would he make if he overlooked the obvious like this? He must brace up! . . . Shane here! The sharpest anxiety attacked Larry. Already getting ahead of him perhaps.

The girl on his arm babbled on: “He came here to find out about Phillida Kenley. But the girls are just pulling his leg. Making him spend money in the place. If we could only sell champagne we’d soak him proper!”

“Phillida Kenley?” enquired Larry cautiously.

“Haven’t you been reading the papers?”

“Oh, the girl who escaped from the police yesterday.”

“Wasn’t it splendid! We’re all crazy about her!”

“What have you got against the police?”

“It isn’t that. But such pluck! such nerve!”

“They say she’s a pretty bad lot.”

“Don’t you believe it, fellow! I don’t know what’s behind it all. None of us knows. Not even Arline or Cynthia, her pals. Whatever it was, don’t you think it’s fine to thumb your nose at the police like that?”

Larry controlled his feelings. “It hadn’t occurred to me,” he said.

“Oh, you’re so bourgeoisie!”

This was one of the words Larry had been hearing all evening. He didn’t know exactly what it meant.

“Me, I despise all police and detectives and so on!” cried his vivacious little partner. “They’re just the servants of the kept classes!”

. . . Bolshevik! thought Larry again, getting a little hot under the collar.

The music stopped, and they returned to their table.

“Never mind!” said Tina, snuggling. “I’ll teach you sense!”

“. . . Will you!” thought Larry dryly.

He did not wish the conversation to become personal again. “Why should Shane come here to find out about the Kenley girl?” he asked carelessly.

“Because the two girls she lived with help to run this place. That’s Cynthia Robin yonder in the yellow linen dress; the one who served you. Arline’s in the kitchen . . . The stupid old pudge!” she added, looking at Shane. “Thinks we don’t know who he is! He wouldn’t get any info’ here if he came every night for a month!”

Larry was not so sure of this. Shane had a great reputation for sagacity. “It’s a funny case,” he said craftily. “I couldn’t make anything of it in the papers.”

“Oh, the police always get hold of the wrong end first!” said Tina. “Stupid owls!”

. . . Thank you for nothing! thought Larry. Aloud he said: “What do you suppose is the rights of it?”

“Search me! Sounds like a glorious adventure of some kind. You can depend on it, if Phil Kenley is in it it’s something unusual. Oh, she’s a stunning girl! I’ve admired her for years!”

Larry’s divided breast warmed towards her a little. “You know her then?”

“Not very well,” said Tina modestly. “She hardly noticed me. Phil Kenley has real talent. The only one of this bunch. The others just talk.”

“But they said she couldn’t make a living out of her painting.”

Tina looked at him pityingly. “What a lot you have to learn, man! With all your bright eyes and rosy cheeks! I suppose you’re one of these now, athletic guys.”

“Yes, I am,” said Larry. “What of it?”

She laughed like tinkling strings. “Oh, you duck! I adore you!”

Larry reflected that he couldn’t afford to get sore when on duty. “What’s foolish about that?” he persisted. “That’s what everybody works for, isn’t it? To earn their living?”

“Yes, if you’re a navy or a grocer’s clerk. But in art the best work never sells—until after you’re dead.”

“Well, I’m glad I’m not an artist,” said Larry.

“So am I,” said Tina. “Artists are all right but . . .” She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder.

Larry called on all his guile. “Phillida Kenley must be a dandy girl!” he said. “But how did she get along if she couldn’t sell her work?”

“Oh, she has a father and mother who believe in her. It’s not common.”

“Here in town?” asked Larry carelessly.

“No, up in the back counties,” said Tina in her thoughtless way. “Barnstaple, N. Y.”

Larry’s heart swelled. He doubted if Shane had got as far as this. . . . At that I’m not such a slouch! he told himself with delicious self-approval. The garrulous Tina herself felt that she had gone too far, and cast an anxious glance in his face. It was a perfect blank.

“Gee! I wish the music would play!” he said.

They danced again.

Larry got nothing further out of Tina, and by and by he began to long to get away. He had made up his mind to pay a hasty visit to Barnstaple. Phillida would not go home perhaps, but it was likely that she would write to her people. It was not so easy though, to think up a good excuse for shaking Tina.

Finally the whole party gave signs of leaving in a body.

“The gang’s going on to Tim Dorlon’s studio,” said Tina. “He’s the fellow who makes ukuleles out of cigar boxes and plays them. Will you come?”

“I don’t know him,” said Larry.

“Oh, it’s a public resort. I’ll take you.”

Shane and the three girls were getting under way with the rest.

“Are they going?” asked Larry.

“Sure, they’ll make him buy a ukulele. Tim needs the money.”

Larry, following the line of least resistance, drifted out on the street with the rest. The whole party, singing, dancing, arguing loudly, made its disorderly way around the corner into Waverly Place. Larry watched that Shane did not drop out en route. They climbed many flights of stairs to a vast bare studio where there was already a dense, noisy crowd.

Here Tina met old admirers whom she could not ignore. While she was philandering in a corner with one of them, Larry took the occasion to make his way out quietly. . . . It’ll take her awhile to find out I’ve gone, he thought. Shane was still there, surrounded by his galaxy of girls. Larry hustled down-stairs in high satisfaction. . . . I’ll beat him to it!

At the corner of Sixth Avenue he paused to wait for a taxi. The hands of the clock on Jefferson Market tower were pointing to eleven . . . Maybe there's a night train, he thought.

Suddenly he beheld Shane coming along Waverly Place, and stiffened . . . Oh, well, he thought, he doesn't know me. I've got the advantage of him there. He whistled a careless stave. Shane was plodding along dejectedly, a ukulele hanging from one hand. . . . Stung! thought Larry triumphantly. All he's got to show for his evening is the cigar box!

A taxi came along and Larry caught it on the wing. "Hotel Madagascar" he said, in case his rival were within earshot. When they had gone a block he stuck his head out of the door. "Make it Grand Central Station, Jack."

Larry was not sure where Barnstaple was, but he knew that the New York Central served the whole state. Strictly speaking he ought to have communicated with headquarters before leaving town, but he was afraid if he did, they would send a more experienced man in his stead. And he had the excuse that Shane might get ahead of him if he delayed. He was well supplied with money.

In the station drug-store Larry bought tooth-brush, comb and collar. This constituted his baggage. He proceeded to the ticket-office.

"Is Barnstaple, N. Y., on your lines?"

"Sure."

"When can I get a train?"

"Midnight express. Change at Albany in the morning."

"Give me a ticket."

As he turned from the window, Larry looked up and saw, next man but one in the line behind him—Shane! The fat man's face was as bland and blank as a baby's. Larry's heart seemed to drop into his stomach.

Shane must have overheard him ask for the ticket. Shane was following him. In a flash he saw it all. The girls had not spotted him, Larry, but Shane had. And unable to learn anything from the girls himself he had trailed Larry. What a fool he had been! the young man thought in bitterness of spirit. Why hadn't he looked behind him before he spoke the name of that place? Would he ever learn the simplest rudiments of his trade?

Under pretext of counting his change, Larry lingered near, and presently heard Shane ask for a ticket to Barnstaple. He was then miserably sure that he had been done. All his clever work earlier in the evening had been spoiled by that one slip. The old man had made him a cat's-paw. They were now on an equality. What chance would he, Larry, stand against the

experienced old fox? However, there was nothing for it but to plug ahead. Larry unhappily secured a berth, and boarded the waiting train.

CHAPTER VII

UP-STATE

SHORTLY before eight o'clock next morning Shane and Larry got off the local train at Barnstaple. They were the only passengers for that small place. The two men still maintained a blank front towards each other, though by this time Shane must have been aware that Larry knew who he was. There was an element of absurdity in their continuing to make pretences to each other, but Larry had the feeling that if he made believe not to know Shane, he would be in a better position to outwit him.

Larry had a wild idea of hiring a car and drawing Shane off into the country somewhere. But upon descending from the train Shane, ignoring Larry, proceeded direct to the station agent and asked a question. Larry could guess what that question was. He loitered on the platform awaiting the outcome.

Receiving a satisfactory answer, Shane went to engage one of the waiting rigs, passing in front of Larry as if he were not there. Larry heard him order the man to drive him to the hotel. Larry felt that to repeat Shane's question to the agent would appear too extraordinary. Better ask somebody else. He followed Shane on foot. It was not difficult to keep the plodding vehicle in view.

Larry knew the country districts only from moving pictures. Barnstaple was just what you'd expect of a small country town: any movie director would have approved it as the setting for a drama of the American home. Slightly faded and old-fashioned it looked as if the past thirty years had passed it over. The principal buildings were decorated with squat steeples and brick turrets and a deal of fancy iron railing, all of which Larry thought very cute. The whole place was embowered in trees, just as it ought to have been, and the inhabitants, such as were astir so early, undeniably slow.

The rig ahead drew up at the hotel and Shane went in. When Larry passed by he saw the fat detective in the act of seating himself at a table in the dining-room. . . . Feels sure of his game, thought Larry bitterly; thinks he may as well eat. Larry was sharp set himself, but he did not follow Shane's example. He went on slowly, looking for somebody to whom he might address his question.

At the principal corner (Main Street and Railway Avenue) he came upon a gaunt youth with a prominent Adam's apple, the first loafer of the day. He had the true hick air of being vitally interested in everybody, and clearly spotted Larry from afar as a city feller. Larry accosted him.

"Know anybody in this place called Kenley?"

The young man prepared for a comfortable chat. "Sure. Dominie Kenley, the retired preacher. Folks of yours?"

Larry ignored the question. "Where does he live?"

"Next cross street. I'll show you the way."

"Thanks, you needn't put yourself out," said Larry dryly.

"Oh, all right," said the other with an affronted stare. "Turn to the right. Fourth house on the right." He gaped after Larry until he turned the corner.

The fourth house was a modest, dun-coloured frame dwelling with a single wide gable turned to the street that somehow gave it the effect of a benignant countenance. It had not been painted in many a year, but the yard was trimly cared for, and showed borders of thriving flowers. Flowers don't cost anything but a little labour. The windows of the little house shone and crisp curtains hung inside. Larry was pleased with its aspect.

As he turned up the path his heart set up a perturbed beating. ". . . What's the matter with you?" he said to himself. "She's not here. She would never come home to this nosey little burgh where everything is talked about."

There was a metal plate in the middle of the door with a key in it and an invitation to "turn" cast in the plate. He turned, and a bell whirred on the other side. Not until the door was opened by a smiling pink-cheeked old lady did he bethink himself that he had not prepared any story to account for his early call. However his tongue began to wag of its own accord.

"Do the Kenleys live here?"

"I am Mrs. Kenley."

"How are you?" said Larry affably. "I am a friend of Phillida Kenley's."

In surprise and pleasure the old lady's face turned pinker than before. In a way she was like a little girl. A nice little girl, so ready to be friendly. Phillida did not in the least resemble her. "Oh," she said, "come right in. What is the name?"

"Harry Johnson," said Larry. He felt no shame. Wholly possessed by his aim as he was, anything that contributed to it seemed right and proper. But it should be remembered that his private feelings were not at all those of a

policeman seeking to arrest a criminal. He felt like a son towards this old lady, and in a way he was proud of her.

She looked a little blank at the name he gave.

“I expect she never mentioned me to you,” said Larry quickly. “She’s got so many friends. Very likely she means more to us than we do to her.” He was a little surprised at his own readiness of speech—and pleased.

“Come right in,” the old lady repeated, smiling. “I’m just putting on breakfast. Step into the parlour while I lay an extra plate. I’ll call Mr. Kenley. He’ll be so pleased!”

“I didn’t want to impose on you,” murmured Larry deprecatingly, “but I was just passing through town . . . Bet this’ll be better than Shane gets,” he added to himself.

He was left alone in the little parlour. In the place of honour over the mantel hung an oil painting, a landscape one might suppose. Phillida’s work. But Larry’s eyes merely skated over it. High art. His eyes had been caught by a photograph of Phillida herself standing on the mantel in a silver frame.

It was a formal portrait of Phillida in her prettiest clothes looking at you with a somewhat conventional smile. But Phillida! It seemed to bring you into her presence! Larry’s eyes devoured it, and all his self-assurance was drawn out of him. Phillida! Phillida! How he longed for her!

The room was full of her. Turning around he saw hanging on the wall alongside the door by which he had entered, an enlarged and tinted photograph of Phillida as a child. This was less disturbing. Larry smiled at it delightedly. The comical grave little thing! The black hair hung to her shoulders then, and was well spread out; on her forehead an absurd straight bang. But the child, eight years old maybe, had exactly the same high look as the woman. . . . Like nobody but herself, thought Larry.

On a small table in the bay window he spotted a pile of snapshots, and pounced on them. As he expected, all of Phillida. Phillida alone and Phillida with her friends. Girl friends luckily. How the picture of a man standing beside her would have tortured him! Phillida sitting on a bench in Washington Square; Phillida working at her easel; and best of all one of Phillida in the act of breaking a branch from a flowering shrub and looking around at the photographer. In this one the high look was lightened by laughter and affection. (Who had taken the picture? Larry wondered anxiously.) She had never looked at Larry like that, but he dreamed of it. With a guilty look over his shoulder, he slipped the card into his breast pocket. It was an act of theft which never troubled his conscience afterwards. The card made a warm spot over his heart.

Mrs. Kenley returned bringing a tall old gentleman who wore a grey beard and had an air of otherworldliness. His manner was gentle, but he was not quite of the same childlike nature as his wife. Not prepared to yield himself all at once to a stranger, his grave eyes measured Larry shyly. Phillida resembled her father more than her mother. The old gentleman made Larry feel vaguely uneasy.

They sat down to breakfast in the adjoining room. Such a breakfast! The good food, the sunshine in the open window, the flowers on the table; it all satisfied something deep in Larry. He lived in a boarding-house. But it all seemed slightly unreal too. He was uneasy. . . . What am I doing here? he asked himself. But his tongue still performed its office—a little independently of him one might say.

He was expected to do most of the talking; he had to tread warily.

“Phillida tells us everything,” the old lady said happily; “but it’s so nice to hear about her from somebody else too. I suppose you know all her friends.”

“Some of them,” said Larry. “I know Arline and Cynthia and the other girls at the Spotted Pup.”

“The Spotted Pup!” sighed the old gentleman with a shake of the head.

“My dear, it wasn’t our Phillida who gave the place that name,” admonished the old lady.

“She goes there, my dear.”

“She says the food is good and cheap.”

“I can say it is,” put in Larry.

“Our daughter’s life is strange to us, Mr. Johnson,” said the old gentleman sadly. “But we have always felt that there was something exceptional about Phillida, and that she must not be hampered in her development.”

There was a simple honesty about this that surprised Larry out of his caution. “Ah! she turns you upside down!” he said with a sort of exasperated fondness that they both seemed to understand perfectly.

“And do you know poor Doreen?” enquired Mrs. Kenley.

“Oh, yes, quite well,” said Larry. “Poor little thing!”

“What do you think can have become of that scamp of a husband of hers?”

Larry was not there to give information, but to get it, so he replied cautiously: “I don’t know, I’m sure.”

In such gentle and immaterial talk the meal passed. Larry spread his information about Phillida as thin as possible. He was never in any serious danger of being found out. It was too easy to deceive such a pair of old innocents. He felt a curious reluctance to question them, and simply waited for something to turn up.

“When did you see Phillida last?” asked Mrs. Kenley.

“About a week ago,” said Larry evasively. “I’ve been travelling. I’m on my way to New York now.”

“Oh-h!” said the old lady clasping her hands. “Could you carry her a little package from me? A pot of my strawberry jam, a little jar of pickles . . . I suppose you wouldn’t have room for a loaf of yesterday’s baking . . .”

“My dear Mary!” said her husband.

“Well, there is nothing like home food!” she said.

“I expect you have later news of your daughter than I can give you,” ventured Larry.

“I had a letter three days ago,” said the old lady brightly. “Twice a week she writes. Never fails. This was only a short one. She had finished her picture—the one of the salt marshes, you know, but she was not pleased with it. She was much worried about Doreen. That was all . . . I shall have another letter this morning,” she added full of happy confidence, and glanced at the clock. “Posty will be here any minute.”

A thrill of rising excitement struck through Larry.

The old lady chattered on.

The bell out in the hall whirred. She sprang from her seat and hastened out. They heard her exchanging pleasant comments on the weather with the postman. She came back waving a letter.

“Here it is!”

Larry, affecting no more than a decent interest, waited breathlessly.

“Why, it’s from Atlantic City!” she cried.

Larry suddenly began to feel ashamed. He could feel the hot tide creeping up from his neck. He kept his eyes on his plate.

“Atlantic City!” cried the old gentleman excitedly, “she gave us no hint . . .”

“I can’t think what has happened!” said the old lady.

“Open it, open it, Mary!”

Larry heard her tear the envelope, and spread the sheet. “This is only a short one too,” she said disappointed. She skimmed over it, giving them the

gist. “Unexpected trip to Atlantic City . . . Guest of a rich woman who is interested in her work . . . Nobody she has ever told us about, a Mrs. Fletcher . . . Doesn’t know how long she’ll be there . . .”

“Where is she stopping?” murmured Larry.

“She doesn’t say. Says for me not to write until she writes again . . . Oh!” The old lady broke off with a startled exclamation.

“What is it, Mary?” her husband asked anxiously.

“She says,” the old lady faltered, “she says not to tell anybody where she is . . .”

Larry was conscious of both pairs of innocent, troubled old eyes being turned upon him. He kept his head down. He wished that the floor might open up and swallow him. . . . Brazen it out! Brazen it out! a voice within him whispered. But he could not obey it. Such gentle, kindly, reproachful old eyes!

“Let me see the letter, Mary,” said the old gentleman tremulously.

“That is all there is in it,” she said, handing it across.

There was a silence while he read it.

“Who are you, sir?” he asked Larry in a grave voice.

The inner voice prompted the young man . . . There’s nothing in the letter to show you up. You’ve got nothing to be ashamed of anyhow. They would have fared worse at Shane’s hands . . . Still he could not get his head up.

“I’m a friend of Phillida’s as I told you,” he murmured.

The meal was over. They all stood up.

“We are old people,” Mr. Kenley said quietly, “and we keep simple ways. We are slow to suspect deceit . . . But your coming to this out of the way place so early, followed by this letter, seems more than accidental. Who are you? And what do you want of us?”

“Do you think I’d wrong you—or her?” stammered Larry.

“You could not wrong us,” said the old gentleman quickly. “If you are deceiving us that is a matter for your own conscience.” He was not angry, but sorrowful and perplexed.

Larry simply could not bear it. It would be as well to draw a veil over the remainder of the scene. In after life Larry could not think of it without hot cheeks. Nobody said very much. They did not abuse him. It was the way they looked! He got out of the house as quickly as possible. He felt like the lowest dog in creation. And at the same time he was asking himself angrily . . . What’s the matter with you? You’re only doing your job!

As he turned up towards the main street, Larry saw Shane lounging at the corner. Of course the old detective knew where he had been. Shane seemed to have an uncanny faculty of forecasting Larry's movements. Perhaps it was because he had been a young detective himself. Larry wondered if Shane would speak to him now, and braced himself for it.

Shane did not speak, but only cast a wary look at Larry as he passed. Larry, full of bitterness, gave him look for look. Larry's look seemed to say . . . Go on in, old man, you won't get much there now! Shane declined to accept the challenge. Turning his head after he had gone some yards, Larry saw that Shane was sauntering after him. Turning his head again, he saw Shane go into the hotel.

. . . Still willing to let me do the dirty work, Larry thought bitterly. Thinks I've got the dope now, and he's only got to keep me in sight!

Larry kept on to the railway station. He learned that the first train back to Albany left in an hour's time. There was nothing to do but pace the platform, and tread the mill of his thoughts.

They never got him an inch ahead. They were scarcely thoughts at all, but merely painful sensations. Like most men in a false position Larry was suffering the torments of the damned because he would not or he could not think things through. He had to find that girl; passion, ambition, all the mixed elements of his being drove him to it. He was willing to die for her if need be. In his soul he knew that this was an honest passion, and in his soul he knew that she was a glorious creature. Why, then, was he suffering so?

Because he could not face the situation squarely. He could not reconcile the rôles of lover and policeman. In order to justify his pursuit of her as a policeman, he had to go on making believe to himself that she was a criminal. An older head than his might have been excused for getting in such a maze. At any rate there was no doubt about the reality of the pain he was suffering.

Five minutes before the train was due, Shane turned up on the platform with his bland and leisurely air. All the pain-engendered rage that filled Larry instantly fastened itself on the old detective's unconscious person.

. . . Unnatural brute! Got no human feelings at all! Just a sleuth hound! He doesn't give a damn for Phillida—or her people. He'd drag her down just as if she was any common crook. And then go to his dinner! . . .

Larry was aware of no inconsistency in himself.

When the train came along they seated themselves at opposite ends of the same car. Shane had the wit to pre-empt the rear-most seat so that Larry was bound to be under his eye.

As they jogged along their slow way to Albany Larry began to feel a little better. The natural elasticity of youth and health came into play, and he had youth's marvellous capacity for deceiving itself.

“. . . Anyhow, I know where she is. That's something. And the old folks can't warn her against me, because they don't know where she's stopping. I'm a lap ahead of old Shane again, too. I'm wise to him now. If I play my cards right I ought to be able to shake him altogether. He's a bit too sure of himself. . . .”

CHAPTER VIII

THE CITY BY THE SEA

IN ALBANY there was an ordinary train for New York standing in the station, but Larry, learning that there would be a fast non-stop train in half an hour, let it go. Shane waited too, of course. The two men sauntered about the magnificent station keeping the tail of an eye on each other. Shane despatched a couple of telegrams. Larry would have given something to know what was in them.

On his part Larry consulted the railway guide. Shane could not possibly tell what tables he was looking up. From it Larry learned that there was a way of reaching Atlantic City by way of Scranton and Philadelphia without returning to New York. For a while he dallied with the idea, but gave it up. There was no fast through train that way; moreover, it was in the crowded ways of the big town so familiar to Larry, that he counted on losing his tracker.

There were compensations for the young man in all this business of travelling. One cannot be keyed up all the time. A bit of a thrill in the sight of the heavy train rolling into the station, with its locomotive of the latest and biggest type, insolent as a pouter pigeon with its button of a smoke-stack scarcely showing on top of its swollen boiler. And when they started off, what of the boy there was in him was charmed by the way they spurned the way-stations and ate up the miles without any jar or noise or fuss. The ever-changing panorama of the river was highly agreeable too: he had not seen it on the night trip coming up. He did not see Shane on the train, but had no doubt that the old man was keeping him under observation. He used up a lot of the time by ordering an extensive meal in the dining-car.

No limits had been placed on Larry's expense account; nevertheless he had a twinge whenever he thought of headquarters. What was happening there, and what would the Inspector be thinking of his long silence? Moreover, Larry had not the slightest intention of reporting on his way through town. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb now. When he brought the girl in everything would be all right. If he did not bring her in—but he refused to entertain that possibility.

Arriving in Grand Central, Larry walked down the long platform without looking behind him. Let the old man keep him in sight if he could! The dense crowd was all in Larry's favour, but on the other hand he knew that in Shane he had no novice. Trolley-cars and taxicabs were too easy to follow through the streets, and Larry had determined to trust to the subway. On the platform he caught a glimpse of Shane, but his rival did not seem to be looking at him.

With the cunning of a fox, Larry led his supposed pursuer up and down-town, squeezing himself aboard the most crowded trains, in order to make the chase as difficult as possible. To Times Square, to Seventy-second Street, down to Fourteenth Street, and back to the Pennsylvania Terminal. At each station he did a little scout work, but was unable to find his tracker. Gradually he became assured that he had shaken him. He stood in the centre of the vast hall of the Terminal, but was unable to discover that he was overlooked from any point. At the last moment he made a dash for the Atlantic City train.

When the train issued out of the Hudson tunnel Larry went through it car by car. Shane was not aboard, and he was filled with a sweet satisfaction. ". . . I've diddled the old fox! Left him at the post! He'll never come up with me now! Let him do his own work, and not lay back on me!"

Larry settled himself comfortably in his seat for a nap.

He had never been in Atlantic City. He knew that it was a big and busy place, "America's Holiday Capital" they called it, but had pictured it only as a sort of superior Coney Island. He received his first surprise in the row of motor-busses backed up to the station platform. Side by side in a close rank extending as far as the eye could reach, there seemed to be hundreds of the elegantly appointed vehicles, and each one from a different hotel. Larry's heart sunk. If there were as many hotels as this, he'd have his work cut out for him!

At the station gate he paused uncertainly. He was not feeling so conceited then. After all he was a very green detective and he had no clear notion of how to set about finding a person in a strange town. He looked up and down the Square for inspiration, and received none. All those hundreds of people bound on their own business. They all seemed at home in the place except himself.

He supposed that the proper thing to do was to go to the local police, present his credentials, and ask for their co-operation. He had a great reluctance to do this. His dream was to find Phillida unaided. For the

moment he temporized with the necessity . . . Anyway, I might as well take a look round on my own first.

He found his way to the Boardwalk since all roads lead there. From that point of vantage the amazing town burst on him complete; that stupendous sea-front with its staggering, fantastic, cloud-piercing towers, its miles of giant hotels. There were enough hotels, one would say, to house all the standing armies of the world. He crept along the edge of that unique footway, wider than many an avenue but thronged with promenaders from edge to edge, feeling small and helpless. . . . Good God! what a place to look in! Where would a fellow begin?

There was nothing for it, but he must have help. He turned back into the town, and asked the way to the Central Police station.

His way led through one of the smaller streets that extend inland from the sea. It was a street of small second-rate hotels and little eating-places that Larry was to know well. A flimsy stage-setting, most of the buildings had a rakish and temporary look characteristic of the by-ways of shore resorts the world over. Suddenly upon the corner of a cross street, Larry came face to face with . . . Shane!

A mutual recognition was not to be avoided now. "Ah!" said the fat man running up his eyebrows mockingly.

Larry choked with a sudden rage. After all the pains he had taken! The reaction from his supposed triumph was too sudden. He forgot his prudence. "Damn you!" he said. "What right have you got to follow me about?"

"You get me wrong, young fellow," said Shane coolly. "Your movements are nothing to me."

"Weren't you in Barnstaple this morning?" demanded Larry.

"Certainly. On business of my own."

"You lie! You did nothing there but spy on me!"

"My business took me about five minutes," said Shane with his aggravating smile. "At the post-office I asked to look at certain letters that were being sent out in the first delivery. The handwriting on one of the envelopes corresponded with a sample of handwriting that I held. From that envelope I took the postmark, and here I am."

Larry's jaw dropped. It was a bitter dose for the young man's pride to swallow. He could only stare at Shane angrily and helplessly. Shane, with an ironical nod, walked on and presently disappeared within a doorway a few yards down the street through which Larry had come.

Larry retraced his steps. The door through which Shane had gone showed a neat brass sign alongside, reading: The Hotelmen's Association—Shane's employers of course. Shane was on his own ground then, and a grave anxiety attacked Larry. The young man walked on, and crossing to the other side of the street, came back to get a better look at the premises. It was a more substantial building than the others in that street. There was a novelty store on the ground level, and the Association's offices were overhead. All Larry could see was a row of well-washed windows with screens in them which prevented him from seeing in.

Immediately opposite was an humble eating-house which advertised itself as the Sunset Restaurant. Larry turned in. He had a good excuse, inasmuch as he had not had any dinner yet. It was one of those standardised restaurants of an older fashion, with a row of long tables placed one end to the wall, and on the wall between each pair of tables, a lozenge shaped mirror surrounded by coat hooks. Larry took a seat at the first table where he could watch the building across the street, and await Shane's reappearance. It was a little past the dinner hour, and the place was beginning to thin out. There was but one other man at Larry's table.

Larry soon observed the interesting fact that men, singly and in couples, were approaching along the street from either direction, and turning in at the doorway opposite. A curious thing was that they all had the same general look; that is to say men of a settled age well-dressed, even fashionably dressed, but with a purposeful air that distinguished them from the mere holiday-seekers their clothes suggested. Shane's men, all these? he asked himself in alarm.

Like the restaurant itself, the waitress who took Larry's order conformed to type. She was a young woman with a thoroughly disillusioned eye, and a quantity of crass yellow hair teased into strange quirks and whorls. At first Larry, intent upon what was going on across the way, paid no attention to her. When she was not waiting upon Larry she was engaged in sprightly repartee with the man across the table, a hard-faced man in sport clothes: white flannel trousers, tweed coat, etc. Larry did not regard him either until, having finished his meal, he left the restaurant and followed the other men into the building opposite. Larry was sorry then that he had not taken better notice of him. Possibly the girl could tell him something.

The next time she came to the table Larry smiled at her according to the ritual of such affairs. He knew her kind. She was not at all backward about answering the smile. Indeed she had already wasted several perfectly good looks on the handsome young man.

"Ain't see you before," she remarked.

“Just come,” said Larry.

“On a bit of a holiday?”

“Im-hym.”

“Fellas don’t gen’ally come to Atlantic alone,” she said offhand.

“I suppose not.”

“You don’t look like the lonely kind,” she said with a provoking look.

“I’m not,” said Larry, accepting the challenge.

She laughed as if he had uttered a pearl of wit. “Where you stopping?” she asked.

“Haven’t got a place yet.”

“We got good rooms up-stairs.”

Larry reflected that if Shane’s headquarters were opposite he could scarcely do better. “All right,” he said, “if you got a front room.”

It appeared upon inquiry at the desk that number one immediately overhead was vacant, and Larry agreed to take it.

“I’ll fetch my bag afterwards,” he said.

The ice was broken now—for that matter there never was any ice, and they went on playing the game with due regard to the unwritten rules.

“You’re not the lonely kind yourself,” said Larry, with a glance at the chair lately occupied by the man in sport clothes.

“Oh, him!” she said with a flirt of her straw-coloured head.

“Quite a swell dresser,” said Larry.

“He has to be.”

“Why?”

“He’s a house detective at the Donoughmore,” she said in a tone intended to impress.

“No!” said Larry.

“They have to dress swell to mix with the guests,” the girl went on, “but they feed their employé’s rotten, so he comes here for his dinners.”

“I guess you’ve got hundreds,” said Larry. “All kinds.”

She shrugged elaborately, and followed it with a certain look at Larry. This was intended to convey that she was indeed pestered by hundreds, but that there was still room in her affections for the right one. Larry made a suitable reply.

Presently some more men arrived at the building opposite. The girl watched them curiously, and that gave Larry the opportunity to ask

naturally: "Friends of yours?"

She shook her head. "More detectives from different hotels."

"What they having, a meeting?"

"They're coming to meet William B. Shane the famous New York detective . . . Wisht I could see him."

"What's he doing here?"

"Oh, after some swell New York crook, I guess. He's giving the detectives the description, see?"

Larry's heart sunk. What chance had he against such an organisation? "They all work together," he said.

"Why, sure," said the girl. "What do you care?"

Larry made haste to create a diversion. "I bet you could show me this burg," he said.

She allowed that she could.

It was difficult for Larry to keep the game up. His heart was not in it.

He had finished his meal, and was standing in the deserted restaurant with an elbow on the counter, still chaffing Maud (for such was her name) when he saw Shane issue out of the building opposite.

"Well, I must be fetching my bag," said Larry carelessly, and strolled out.

His action was instinctive. He was so afraid that Shane was about to find Phillida he could not bear to let him out of his sight. Thus the situation was completely reversed. The tracked one had become the tracker.

However, on this occasion Shane merely led him to a comfortable and unfashionable hotel near the Coastguard station, where the old detective sat down to his dinner. Satisfied of this, Larry continued on his way sore and dejected. In this game the cards were stacked against him. What could he hope to do? He had given up the idea of consulting the local police. They would only call on the hotel detectives, who were already working in Shane's interest. He would get no help from them.

Proceeding to the shops, Larry bought a few necessities and a bag to put them in. This he dropped in the restaurant at a moment when Maud was not visible. He had no enthusiasm for another bout of repartee with that vivacious young person.

He then went down to the boardwalk again. This was the way he had doped the matter out—though without any great hope of success; everybody who comes to Atlantic City walks on the Boardwalk; therefore if he took up a good position there, Phillida must pass him sooner or later. The only card

that he held against Shane's crowd was that he knew the girl by sight and they didn't. At any rate nothing better occurred to him.

He found his observation post in a niche between the show windows of a sweet shop on one side, and a trinket shop on the other. Here he stood, slowly turning between his teeth the cigar he had so often dreamed of smoking on duty. But it had not much savour now. The brightly lighted shops cast out a strong reflection on the faces of all the passers-by. At nine-thirty the walk was not crowded, and Larry had no difficulty in getting a good look in every face. At eleven in the morning or five in the afternoon there would have been a different story to tell.

The day trippers had all gone home; the well-to-do hotel patrons were off amusing themselves in one way or another, and at this hour the principal element was the real Atlantic Citizen; queer craft finally come to anchor there. In the main they had a sort of down-at-the-heel sporting air; both sexes; young sports trapped by domesticity, pushing second-hand baby carriages; old sports retired on a small annuity, flaunting the sport clothes of other years. Across the wide walk there was a great darkness, and the ocean snoring on the sands. Larry watched, hating the people, full of a bitter sense that this was a slow, slow way of achieving a burning desire.

And then most miraculously, he *did* see her. She was not in the passing procession; out of the tail of his eye he saw her, and jerked around his head. He was just in time to catch her disappearing within a picture theatre a door or two away. He had only the briefest glimpse of her, but it was enough; the delicate profile slightly lifted, the adorable thin, firm cheek, even the little black hat and the blue silk dress had not been changed. Quicker than thought almost, the tumultuous blood rushed to his heart.

He hastened into the lobby of the theatre. In an instant he was cool again; cool and single-minded. There was his mark and he went to it. Phillida had already passed into the theatre. He bought a ticket and followed. After the lighted lobby it was very dark, and there was some confusion, for the last show had just started, and people were both arriving and leaving. Larry got hold of a girl usher.

"Young lady just came in," he whispered. "Short, dark hair, black hat, blue silk dress. Which way?"

The girl resented the question. "You'll have to find her yourself," she said shortly. "It's not what I'm here for."

"Police officer," whispered Larry sternly.

She gasped: "Oh! . . . Honest, I can't tell you, sir. I only throw my flash on their hands to see their tickets. They're finding their own seats now."

Larry remained standing by the entrance doors. The stir in the house quieted down, and his eyes became accustomed to the semidarkness. There were three aisles. It was impossible to guess which one she had gone down. If he attempted to search the aisles in the dark, she would be almost sure to see him first. But he was not greatly disturbed. At any rate she could not get out again without passing him.

But presently he reflected that any one entering so late would be likely to remain until the end. He knew that in such places it is customary at the end of the show to throw open the supplementary doors to facilitate the egress of the audience, and he became anxious again.

He returned to the lobby; asked for the manager; privately showed his badge.

“The woman I am after is inside,” he said. “I saw her go in a moment ago.”

“Well . . . how can I help you?” the man asked reluctantly.

“Do you open the side doors at the end of the show?”

“Yes.”

“Well, keep them closed to-night, and force everybody out this way. I’ll get her.”

“I can’t do it, friend,” said the worried manager. “It’s against the law to lock the doors, and if they’re not locked the folks who come here every night will push them open anyhow and go out.”

Larry considered, frowning. “Well . . . turn up the lights for a few minutes and I’ll pick her out of the house.”

The well-meaning man was divided between his respect for the law, and his fear of his audience. “What will you do?” he grumbled. “If I make them wait all the time you’re going through the house, they’ll get ugly.”

“I won’t go through the house,” said Larry. “You’ve got a box alongside the stage. I’ll stand in the back of that and give them the once over while the lights are up.”

“Well, give me five minutes to warn the operators,” said the manager.

Larry was conducted to the box. There he waited with all his faculties tense. In due course the picture on the screen was suddenly shut off. A hastily written slide took its place: “Film broken; will continue immediately.” Then the lights went up and all those hundreds of faces sprang into view.

The silent house broke into a murmur of talk. Bored at the sudden interruption of the entertainment, the people moved in their seats and

shuffled their feet. From back within the shadow of the box Larry's strained eyes searched the floor row by row. But to pick out a single face from that sea of faces was not so easy as he had supposed. Many heads were down, and some were turned around. After he had looked at fifty faces, all became slightly blurred.

He might very well have failed altogether, had not Phillida betrayed herself. She must have caught sight of Larry in the shadow of the box. Across the house at the end of one of the rows Larry saw a slight figure in blue rise. One of the exit doors was beside her. She put a hand on it, and it swung out. She was gone like a shadow. One or two sitting near, looked after her curiously.

Larry had a policeman's wholesome fear of starting anything in a crowded house. He would not cry out to stop her. At his back was a door to the stage. He went through it and in an instant had gained the street. But on the other side of the house from Phillida. By the time he had run around the building, she was safely swallowed up amongst the promenaders on the Boardwalk.

CHAPTER IX

DETERMINATION

LARRY'S astonishing glimpse of Phillida had been followed so quickly by her escape, that she was gone before the full realisation of what had happened overcame him. A helpless grinding rage filled him then. To have been given such a chance and to have muffed it! Not likely he would get another. Shane would surely take her now. Oh, what a fool he had been!

His great fear was, that having caught sight of him she would immediately fly from Atlantic City without leaving any clue. Satisfied that it was useless to search for her on the Boardwalk, he ran to the nearest railway station. Unfortunately for him there were two stations, and from each there were still trains to leave that night. Larry ran from one to the other.

In each station he perceived a casual, wary gentleman casting an eye on all who passed through the train gates. Shane's men were on the job. This added a new element to Larry's torments. Suppose Phillida turned up in one station while he was in the other? In the confusion that filled him the young man was clear only as to one thing; he would sooner, oh, far sooner have Phillida escape than to be taken by another man. If any other man laid hands on her Larry could see himself fighting blindly to free her, no matter what ruin and disgrace might ensue.

However the last trains departed without Phillida's having shown herself in either station. If she had peeped in, she too had perceived the wary, watchful figure at the train gates, and had retreated.

At midnight Larry returned to his uninviting lodging in the side street, and flung himself on his bed. He was appalled by the thought of the long hours of darkness that remained. There was nothing he could do until morning, and while he was forced to lie there idle on his bed, he could no longer keep his warring thoughts at bay. His thoughts were like two armies in his head, hacking and slashing at each other.

Over and over he was compelled to make the same weary round. What had Phillida done anyway? That damned Englishman, Felix. What was he to her, and she to him? How was it that sometimes they appeared to be fighting each other, and sometimes helping each other? An ugly mystery here! . . . How could Phillida, when her guilt was so clear, still keep that high proud

look of hers? A girl with a look like that *must* be on the square; there must be something fine about her. Hell! he *knew* she was on the Square! . . . What was he doing then, trailing her—like a hound? Bent on taking her in and disgracing her . . . But he couldn't let her go either—not to that Englishman! . . . Where was she now? Hiding terrified in some room within a stone's throw perhaps. His breast was wrenched with compassion, but it was too late to turn back!

"A blind confusion like this could only be met by a blind determination. . . . I don't care!" Larry said to himself. "I'm going to take her in. That's my job. It's useless to think about it. By God! I'll take her in. In spite of Shane and all his men I'll find a way. I'll take her back, or I won't go back myself . . ."

When Larry went down to breakfast the straw-haired girl in the restaurant was decidedly huffy. She considered that she had been badly used the night before. In the morning light she was horrible to Larry (he was filled with the vision of Phillida!) nevertheless he set out to conciliate her. She promised to be useful. He sat down at the first table where he could still watch Shane's office across the street.

"When I came back last night you were gone," he said.

"I was simply off duty," she said stiffly. "I was sitting up in the parlor if you want to know. You could have asked."

"Gee! and I made sure you'd gone out with some other fellow!" said Larry regretfully.

"Oh, well, it rully doesn't make any difference," she said grandly.

Larry looking at her dispassionately, told himself that the reason she looked so horrible in the morning was because she looked just the same. You couldn't get away from the feeling that she had gone to bed with that overelaborate hair-do and those paint-clogged cheeks, and had got up with them again. But he needed her as a means to acquaint himself with what was going on between Shane and his men. Through Maud he designed to make friends with the detective from the Donoughmore.

He knew that Maud in spite of her scornful airs had a sturdy appetite for flattery. "You're a swell-looking girl to be working in a place like this," he said unblushingly.

"Think so?" said Maud, with a toss of the yellow puffs.

"Yeh, you ought to go on the stage."

"Well, if I don't, it isn't for the lack of opportunities," said Maud.

She allowed herself to be mollified. In fact she could not help herself. There was something about Larry that “got” her, as she would have phrased it. He came down to breakfast with a jaded air that lent a piquancy to his blooming good looks. What he had suffered during the night made him interesting. His reticence and his ill-concealed scorn were irresistible to the girl. Half aware that she was making a fool of herself, she nevertheless could not hold back.

“Where did you go last night?” she demanded with her hightly-tighty air. “You didn’t get in until near morning.”

“Just bumming around,” said Larry.

“Yeh, you look it. You look as if you had been drawn through a knothole.”

Larry shrugged, knowing by instinct that this was nothing derogatory in her eyes.

“Well, I suppose you found amusement,” she persisted.

“Damn little,” said Larry. “Now if you had been along . . .”

“Ahh!” she said, scornful and pleased.

In the course of this conversation Larry saw Shane come along the street and enter the building opposite.

“I’m off from three to five to-day,” said Maud suggestively.

“That so?” said Larry with a false geniality. “We must do something.”

He made haste to finish eating, that when Shane reappeared he might be ready to follow him.

“Oh, I already got a date,” said Maud.

“Too bad,” said Larry.

She did not expect to be let down so promptly. “I got your number,” she said bitterly.

“I only aim to please,” said Larry.

“If you was on the level, I might put the other fellow off,” she volunteered, her wistful eagerness peeping out.

But Shane had come out of the building opposite. Larry rose. He lit a cigarette to show that he was not in any hurry. “I don’t see your friend the detective guy this morning,” he said carelessly.

“He don’t come here to breakfast,” said Maud. “Only to dinner and supper . . . Where’ll we go?”

“I’ll be back to dinner,” said Larry. “We’ll talk it over.” He strolled out.

The girl's eyes followed him with a wistful and resentful look. Larry took that sort of thing as a matter of course. Most girls were like that—except the one a fellow wanted!

Shane was making his leisurely way in the direction of the Boardwalk, slapping the sidewalk with his ample feet, and looking in the shop windows as he passed, like a man at peace with himself. He never troubled to look behind him. But Larry was no longer contemptuous of his adversary. Larry had matured over night and his wits were sharpened. It was present in his mind, that if Shane had wished to conceal his movements, he would probably have acted quite differently.

If Shane had no object in concealing his movements, there was little to be gained by following him. However Larry saw him as far as the Lonsdale, one of the big hotels on the ocean front. Shane ensconced himself in a comfortable chair on the "deck" (as they call the broad veranda overlooking the Boardwalk) where he lit a cigar and ordered a long drink. He made a picture of a man yielding himself up to the enjoyment of the breeze from the sunny ocean, but Larry never doubted that the keen little eyes were sizing up all who passed below. Shane was proceeding just as he, Larry, had proceeded the night before. Out of his superior wisdom Larry smiled a little scornfully. . . . She'll never venture out on the Boardwalk to-day!

Seeing Shane safely anchored, Larry went on about his own affairs. He had been debating the idea of disguising himself—not from Shane, but from Phillida. For while he had an advantage over the Shane crowd in knowing Phillida, he suffered from the disadvantage that Phillida knew him. She would not know any of the others. In fact she might not know that there was anybody looking for her but Larry. The question was, What disguise could one get up on the spur of the moment? It must be something most unlike himself, yet not too conspicuous. One out of every three young men that he passed supplied the answer—one of these Shore Johnnies of course!

The mode of the moment for young men comprised white shoes and socks, cream colored flannel trousers, white outing shirt left picturesquely open at the throat. Over this was worn a tweed Norfolk jacket left unbuttoned, but loosely belted around the waist; no hat. The more dashing spirits negligently carried a racket to convey the impression that they were on their way to or from tennis. There were not enough courts in Atlantic City to accommodate one tenth of the rackets that were to be seen.

Being in the fashion, all these things were easily procurable at the shops. Larry had not the face to go the tennis racket, but knowing that his eyes were his most conspicuous feature, he added to the rest of the outfit a pair of

broad-rimmed glasses with slightly smoked lenses. These also were much worn.

He carried it all to his room and dressed. Larry had a thick crop of bright, tawny hair with a wave in it, almost too picturesque for a regular fellow. He was a little ashamed of it, and always wore it brushed tight to his skull. He fluffed it up a bit now. It made a startling difference in his appearance.

Surveying himself in the mirror finally, he had to admit that though he despised the part, he certainly looked it. As a matter of fact he more than looked it; he was it; he was the actual thing that all the poor little clerks on their two weeks' vacation made believe to be: a blatant physical specimen. Few were the bare throats as strong and comely as Larry's.

At dinner time he went down-stairs feeling highly self-conscious. He had the smoked glasses in his pocket. He feared that Maud might be surprised into making loud and indiscreet comments on his changed appearance. Before venturing into the restaurant he surveyed it from the passage at the side. It was filling up, but the man he so much desired to make up to had not come. Larry loitered in the side door of the place, smoking one cigarette after another, until he saw his man come along the street and turn into the restaurant. The detective was dressed much as Larry was, but with the addition of a necktie and hat, which gave him a soberer look.

Larry followed him in. There was a vacant seat at the same table, and Larry took it. With covert glances he sized his man up. Like most detectives he affected a hard-boiled air, but Larry was not much impressed by it. There was a suggestion of foolishness in the hard eye. A man who would bluff his way along, Larry thought, but would cut a pretty poor figure in the final showdown. Fifteen years older than Larry, and conceited. You could tell it the way his eye roved around looking for approval. Necessity was making Larry observant. The man's glance at Larry suggested antagonism towards the younger and better-favoured man. Larry tried to look humble in order to propitiate him.

When the busy Maud caught sight of Larry, she said nothing, but her mouth opened in astonishment. Then she flushed under her rouge. The poor girl evidently thought he had dressed himself up to take her out. For a moment she lost her grip and looked soft and foolish. It was quite touching, but Larry was merely annoyed. Above all he didn't wish to arouse the other man's jealousy.

But Maud quickly recovered herself. And while she gave her eyes to Larry, she devoted all her conversation to the other man. Her eyes said to Larry: I have to string this guy along, but you don't need to feel jealous. A very sprightly exchange took place. Larry picked up the man's name: Klein. Klein evidently prided himself on his restaurant wit. Larry, with the wisdom of the serpent, permitted himself to laugh discreetly at Klein's jokes, and glanced admiringly at the older man. Klein's antagonism vanished.

As in all such places, the dinners were served and swallowed with a marvellous celerity. The meal was over almost as soon as it had begun. Only Klein had wasted time in joshing Maud, and Larry had held back in order to keep pace with Klein. Presently the two of them were left alone at that table. Larry was determined to make friends with the man, and determination is usually rewarded in a world full of weak-willed people. Klein warmed to the young man who so obviously admired him.

"Seen you before, ain't I?" he asked.

"Had supper here last night," said Larry.

"Oh, that was it. I never forget a face . . . Not so bad for a cheap place, is it? I only come here because it's convenient to my business."

"Sure," said Larry. "I came here because I didn't know any places."

"Well, you might 'a' done worse," said Klein condescendingly. "Not a bad little place. Not a bad little place."

"So you're in business here," ventured Larry. "Not just a visitor."

Klein declined to be drawn along that line. "Yes, sort of," he said vaguely.

Maud returned to their table. To Klein she said confidentially: "The peach dumpling's the best on the dessert to-day. I put one aside for you."

"Thanks, darling," said Klein jocosely.

"Fresh!" said Maud with a toss of the straw-coloured puffs.

"I hope so," said Klein with a wink at Larry.

Larry thought he might get in this now, as long as he took care to play second fiddle to Klein. "How about me?" he asked Maud.

"Oh, do you want one too?" she asked coldly. But the glance she gave Larry was not cold. "I'll see."

"She's a wise one," said Larry to Klein.

"Wise!" said Klein. "The Queen of Sheba had nothing on her!"

"A girl working in a place like this sees life."

"You bet she does, fellow. Inside *and* out."

“You know how to handle them!” said Larry deferentially.

Klein swelled a little. “Why shouldn’t I? I know life myself.”

“Anybody could see that. I bet there isn’t much doing here that you’re not wise to.”

“Not much,” said Klein. “It’s my business to be wise to things . . . I’m in the management of the Donoughmore,” he added with an air.

“That so?” said Larry with an increased air of respect. “The biggest hotel here!”

“The biggest resort hotel in the world, young fellow!”

“Gee! I’d like to see the inside of that place!”

“Why don’t you stroll in and take a look?”

“Would they let me?” asked Larry with an innocent air.

“Oh, we don’t try to keep people out of the lobby,” said Klein. “If they look all right it’s all right. And if they don’t look all right they’re scared to come in.”

To Larry’s annoyance, Maud returned to their table with the dumplings. She had not so much to do now, and she lingered while they ate them, retorting to Klein’s sallies, and casting side glances at Larry.

Finally Klein arose. “Got to see a man across the street,” he said.

A sharp anxiety attacked Larry. What did he want to see Shane about?

Larry rose also. As the two men started to move away, he became aware that Maud was looking at him queerly, and he recollected with a disagreeable start that he had allowed her to suppose he was going to take her out that afternoon.

“I’ll be back,” he whispered.

At the door of the restaurant he contrived to detain Klein for a moment with the offer of a cigarette. They lit up.

“What’s your particular job at the Donoughmore?” asked Larry.

“It’s my job to protect the management and the guests from crooks,” said Klein, blowing a cloud of smoke.

“That so?” said Larry. “You wouldn’t think crooks would dare to operate in the Donoughmore.”

“Don’t you fool yourself, young fellow. The bigger the place, and the more rich people that go there, the more tempting it is to crooks. Not the common rat-faced kind of course. Swell crooks. Hard to detect from the real thing.”

“Gosh!” said Larry. “Interesting work. What sort of games do they try on now?”

“All sorts. All the games you ever heard of, and many a new one too.”

“Women too?”

“Them’s the worst,” said Klein. “I got a case on to-day. Sweetest looking girl you ever saw. You’d swear she was a lady born and bred. Wanted by the New York police for robbing the Hotel Colebrook.”

Larry’s heart gave a great jump. He studied his cigarette. He needed every bit of self-control that he possessed. He managed to say casually: “What about her?”

“Every detective in Atlantic City is looking for her,” said Klein. “William B. Shane’s in charge of the case. She’s supposed to be in with a big gang of hotel thieves, see? Well, she registered at our hotel an hour ago, cool as you please.”

“Have you arrested her?” asked Larry, with his heart in his mouth.

“Not yet,” said Klein. “A fellow in my position has to be damn careful, you see. If I made a mistake it would be awkward. I only have a verbal description of the girl.”

“What you going to do?”

“I’ve got a date to meet Shane across the road at one o’clock. He’s got a photograph of her. I’ll borrow it.”

Larry clamped down the lid of self-control. He could not afford to get excited now. But it was maddening to think that the information vital to him was inside Klein’s thick skull, and he not able to get it out. The name Phillida had registered under, the number of her room! He could not ask Klein such questions of course.

“Then what will you do?” he asked in a carefully-controlled voice. “Go to her room and arrest her?”

“Not on your life!” said Klein. “You learn to be prudent in our business. I’ll let her come out of her room, and walk around a bit, and compare her with the photograph before I act, see? If you want to see how we handle these things, be around the lobby in about half an hour.”

“All right,” murmured Larry.

“But don’t recognise me, see? I’ll be on duty then.”

“I get you.”

“Well, so long,” said Klein, and struck off across the road.

Larry turned blindly in the direction of the Boardwalk. As soon as he could get around the corner, he broke into a run.

CHAPTER X

THE DONOUGHMORE

FROM the Boardwalk the Hotel Donoughmore, the tallest tower of all on the sea-front, is entered under the "deck." You pass through a short arcade between very smart shops, mount a half stair and find yourself in the amazing lobby. A majestic carpeted Mall flanked by lofty pillars leads to the centre of the long building. The great height of the place is accentuated by its narrowness; tall palms spread motionless over your head. The deep bays between the pillars are set out with "over-stuffed" settees and deep chairs. The whole is designed out of a subtle knowledge of humankind, which divides itself generally into performers and spectators. What greater satisfaction could a well-dressed woman know than to parade that Mall with a man at heel? And for mere spectators what a show is spread before those cushioned seats! On the other hand, the humbler-minded sort of people find it rather embarrassing when they in turn have to hump and shuffle along that carpet. It seems like half a mile from the head of the stairs to the elevators.

When Larry entered the Donoughmore he was far too excited to be afflicted with self-consciousness. His only concern was not to look as wild as he felt. Ah! if Phillida were only there! If she were only there! His strained eyes flew from face to face among the promenaders, and searched among the chairs and settees. She was not there. He walked the length of the corridor, and came back again. She was not there.

He had hardly expected to find her there on display, nevertheless a sickening disappointment filled him. For what could he do now? Somewhere in that vast warren of rooms over his head she was concealed, and he was unable to get her out. He was ready for any desperate measures, but desperate measures were of no avail. Suppose he stood in the rotunda and shouted for her; she would not come; and he would quickly be hustled out.

He went to the desk with the idea of consulting the register. He was not familiar with Phillida's handwriting. He had had a glimpse of it across the table the day before, but too far away for its characteristics to have become fixed in his mind. Still Klein said she had only been there an hour. The register might give him a clue.

As he started to read the framed card that lay on the desk, a clerk asked him courteously: "Whom do you wish to see?"

"Miss Esterbrook," Larry answered at random.

"Enquire at the telephone desk, please."

"But she's just come," answered Larry. "Her name wouldn't be entered yet."

He was allowed to read the names of the latest arrivals. For convenience's sake there were several cards. It appeared that the principal trains of the day arrived at this time, and even within the hour there had been fifty arrivals. Among these there were half a score of women travelling alone; some Mrs., some Miss. Any one of these might be Phillida. What good did that do him? He couldn't ask for them one by one. In any case Klein would be along in a few minutes. He turned away from the desk in despair.

Back and forth through the main floor he searched. There were two great dining-rooms. Phillida was not in either one as far as he could see from the doors. In the rotunda opposite the semicircle of elevators, there was a wide, shallow stairway curving up from below. At the foot of it was the entrance from the side street, used by those who arrived at the hotel in taxicabs or wheel chairs. There were many smaller rooms opening off the lobby; parlors, writing rooms, a beauty parlor for women and so forth.

It finally occurred to Larry that in wandering back and forth he stood the best chance of missing her. Much better take up a fixed post where he could observe all who came and went. He chose a seat facing the grand promenade in a spot where he could see the desk, the elevators, the stairway, the entrances to the two dining-rooms. Moving his chair slightly behind one of the great pillars, he seated himself outwardly composed, inwardly burning.

Very soon Klein came along the promenade from the front entrance, and Shane was with him. Evidently the great man considered Klein's information of sufficient importance to warrant his presence. They passed by Larry without paying any attention to him, and proceeded to the hotel desk where Klein made an inquiry. The clerk glanced in the rack of letter boxes behind him, nodded, and put out a hand towards the telephone. Shane stopped him with a gesture.

All this was perfectly comprehensible to the anxious watcher. The lady they had asked for was presumably in her room, but Shane did not wish to have any word sent to her.

The two men held a brief colloquy in the centre of the rotunda, then Klein went down the stairway. Evidently they had decided that since the

elevators ran through to the lower entrance, it would be safer to watch both floors. Shane came and seated himself alongside the promenade on the same side as Larry, but nearer the elevators. Producing a cigar, he carefully trimmed the end, removed the band, and, lighting up, leaned back in evident enjoyment. To the tormented Larry there was something wildly exasperating in the older man's impassivity. He glared at Shane's bald spot, gritting his teeth.

There followed for Larry a truly hellish period, forced as he was to sit there waiting, waiting for almost certain disaster; unable to move a muscle to forstall it. There was a chance that he, knowing Phillida in the flesh, might recognise her before Shane, but how remote a chance! Meanwhile his strained eyeballs were scorching in his head, and all his energy was used up in the effort to sit quiet. The people drifted aimlessly back and forth . . . Silly, overdressed fools! he thought, as he searched amongst them longing and dreading to discover the only one in the world who mattered to him. How long a time passed he never could have told.

The beating of Larry's heart suddenly altered its tempo. The eyes almost started from his head. He had the impulse to dash away some obstructing cloud in front of them. He beheld a woman swaying towards him—Phillida, and not Phillida! His heart recognised her while yet his eyes were deceived. Of all the women he had seen in that place the most worldly, the most artificial, the most exotic! Every head in the hotel turned to look after her, and the mock demure expression of her slightly downcast eyes suggested that she was fully aware of it, and deeply gratified.

It was not only her appearance that was changed—the skillfully made-up face, the clinging, eccentrically-draped black dress, the amusing short wrap, the daring little Paris hat with its provoking veil to the tip of her nose, but her very character seemed to have been metamorphosed, and therein lay the real disguise; the affected, undulating walk, the languid, assured look of one who had been years on parade; in short the hotel beauty par excellence. But though Larry might have the impulse to rub his eyes, it was certainly Phillida; Phillida's magical eyes under the little veil.

Stepping out of an elevator, she had turned towards the front of the building. She had the key to her room in her hand. It was possible for Larry to have run down the corridor and seized her before she reached Shane. But he held himself down. So marvellous was her disguise that a wild hope sprang up in his breast that Shane would not be able to penetrate it. Larry suddenly became quite cool. It was worth risking. He awaited the test with all his faculties hanging suspended, as one might await the supreme issue.

Would she succeed in deceiving the old fox? Like everybody else in the vicinity Shane was watching the girl, but Larry could see only the back of his head. Phillida, idly twirling the metal tag attached to her room key, slowly came closer. She came abreast of Shane. He did not move. She passed him, whereupon he turned his head, and Larry could see his face. It betrayed only the interested look that one bestows on any fine specimen. She *had* deceived him! Larry's tight breast relaxed. The reaction was too violent. The hardy young man was guilty of trembling a little.

Before Phillida reached him he had drawn a little further behind his pillar. She did not see him. Larry wished to let her get away a little. If he arrested her in the very sight of Shane, there would be a certain triumph in it, but Larry mistrusted lest the experienced old man should somehow contrive to steal the credit from him. Larry allowed her to get well by and then arose negligently. There were plenty of people in the corridor, and his action was not at all noticeable. He sauntered after the girl. Outside on the Boardwalk he could quietly take her arm, and there need be no fuss. At the thought of taking that soft arm, what a strange tingling shot through his arm to the very shoulder!

But Phillida did not descend the few steps that led into the arcade, and thence to the Boardwalk. Instead, she turned aside out of the promenade, and disappeared within the "beauty parlour" that opened out of a corner of the lobby. When the curtain was held back from the doorway, Larry had a glimpse of an exquisite little salon in grey and rose, with lady attendants of an extreme hauteur. He dared not follow into such a sanctuary. A knifelike anxiety attacked him. However, a moment's investigation of the rooms on either side convinced him there could be no other entrance to the place. He sat down to await Phillida's reappearance.

When she disappeared his unnatural coolness went with her. His pulses pounded queerly; he was alternately elated and depressed. He could scarcely believe that the game was actually in his own hands. Yet Shane had certainly been fooled; Shane was still watching the elevators. And he, Larry, against whom that disguise had been adopted, had had the wit to see through it. (He didn't give any credit to his heart for that.) He had her, and there was the journey to New York to follow; all those hours side by side together . . . After that there was a grey curtain of dread hanging down, and Larry refused to lift it.

In due course Phillida reappeared. Larry was keeping himself carefully in the background, and she did not see him. As to what mysterious spells had been worked upon her in the beauty parlour he could not guess. She looked just the same. To his dismay, instead of leaving the hotel now, she

turned back through the promenade towards the elevators. This would bring her past Shane again. No particular danger in that; if he had been fooled once he could be fooled again; but Larry could hardly expect to pass him without being recognised, and if Shane saw Larry following the girl . . .

Larry made a wide detour around the chairs and settees in the rear of Shane, and crossing the rotunda (keeping the back of his head turned towards the old detective), contrived to arrive at the elevators about the same time that Phillida did. She entered an elevator; he followed. The car was full, and she did not look at him. She got out at the ninth floor, and unconcernedly made her way towards the front of the building. Larry loitered behind her. She unlocked the door of a room and went in without looking behind her.

Larry, breathing deep to steady himself, knocked on the door. It was promptly opened. He advanced his foot. Phillida stood holding the door, her look merely one of cold surprise. But as her lips were in the act of shaping the words: "What do you want?" she recognised him. Her lip curled in pain and scorn; her eyes turned sideways full of a sort of disgust. She shrugged and let the door swing wide.

"So it's you again," she said with a mirthless laugh.

That was how she took it. Her disgust had the effect of hardening Larry, and the policeman in him took the ascendancy. "You're under arrest," he said without a tremor.

Turning her back on him abruptly, she walked away into the room. Larry took one step over the threshold. She leaned her head against the window frame, and looked out to sea. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding her cool airs, she was badly shaken, and was fighting to regain her composure. He could hear her muttering under her breath just as a strong man might curse his luck. "All my work for nothing! . . . Spoiled by a blundering dunderhead of a policeman! . . . It's too much! . . ."

Larry flushed darkly, and his eyes fairly stuck out with indignation. A common crook to be taking this high and mighty air with the police! Trying to belittle him in the performance of his duty! Her old tricks! "That will do you no good!" he said.

His anger bucked her up. She turned to him with a mocking smile. "You must be cleverer than you look," she said coolly. "How did you manage to follow me to this place?"

To have her eyes fixed full upon him confused Larry very much. There was a destroying power in them. He tried to harden himself against it. "Never mind that now," he said.

“And this disguise,” she went on, looking down at herself. “I spent some hours thinking it up. It cost me a pretty penny too. It ought to have deceived sharper eyes than yours.”

“You couldn’t get by me with any disguise,” retorted Larry. He did not add: “Because I love you,” but it was the truth.

“Well, what are you going to do with me?” she asked.

“Take you to New York.”

There was a silence. She was now standing in front of the dressing-table, her knuckles upon it, her head lowered, her face a thoughtful mask. Larry, watching her uneasily, wondered what was going through her head. It was fatal to look at her. The pure, childlike profile outlined against the window behind, melted his breast. In a panic, he could feel his strength slipping from him.

“Get your things together,” he said harshly. “The last through train’s at 3.30.”

His tone caused her to glance at him again with quick, mocking amusement. Larry scowled. “What is there about me that’s so funny?” he asked himself. With a swift glance at the watch on her wrist, Phillida commenced very slowly to gather up her belongings.

“I hope you’ll let me change this rig,” she said presently. “I feel like a fool in it . . . I wish I could return it, and get my money back.”

“You’ll have to come as you are,” said Larry, blushing. “I won’t let you out of my sight.”

She laughed at his discomfiture. “Oh, I can change in the bathroom,” she said carelessly. “Take a look in there to satisfy yourself there’s no way out.”

Larry closed the door into the hall, and stuck his head through the bathroom door, feeling like a fool. She made it so clear that she scarcely regarded him as a man at all. I’ll show her! he said to himself, knowing all the time that if he let himself go at all it would only be to grovel before her. She had taken something from him that he couldn’t get back. And it was nothing to her.

She slipped into the bathroom leaving Larry standing stiffly with his back against the hall door. When she was out of sight his eyes went eagerly about the room; her room; her hair brush on the dressing-table, her old soft slippers on the floor. Ah! if only things had not set them against each other!

She came back wearing an embroidered blue kimono, and carrying the slinky French dress over her arm. She tossed it on the bed. Larry made believe not to look at it, but it had a curious attraction for him. How he

would have liked to touch it, warm from her body! Phillida sat before the dressing-table, and commenced to dab cold cream into her cheeks. All her movements were free of self-consciousness. Larry might as well have not been there at all.

While she was intent upon the mirror he could watch her; the flying fingers, the loose sleeves falling back from the perfect forearms. It gave him a pleasure that was as much pain. When she got the make-up off, her own clear, pale cheeks and unmarked eyes were infinitely prettier. Putting up her hands she drew out various pins, and removed some sort of an arrangement. Then with a shake of the head, her own short, dark, shining tresses fell about her ears, and she looked perfectly adorable. That remembered head, so like a boy's and not like a boy's! Grace rested upon it. Larry could no longer pretend to stand out against her. His soul yielded itself up through his blue eyes.

Phillida turned her head and caught him unawares. Her mouth opened, and her hands dropped on the table. A quick, bright flush overspread her face, and her eyes flashed angrily. "What's the matter with you?" she demanded.

Larry, turning red too and scowling, could only mutter: "Ahh! What do you think I am? I wouldn't harm you!"

Phillida's anger was gone in a flash, but she seemed to have received a slight shock. She looked away from Larry, and looked back again, a little surprised and incredulous. Her own soul was guarded deep. Then she shook her head as if to rid herself of something troublesome, and went on with her preparations. Nothing more was said, but each was dimly aware that they had passed a stage in their relations. Phillida had looked at Larry as at a man. Her subsequent movements betrayed a trace of self-consciousness.

She went back into the bathroom, and presently emerged wearing the blue silk dress that Larry knew so well. Standing before the mirror, she pulled on the little close-fitting black hat that he thought became her better than the finest confection from Paris. Then she set to work collecting her things.

So slow was she about this, that Larry to save his own self-respect was forced to take notice of it. "Please hurry," he said stiffly.

"You can't expect me to rush to my own doom," she said with her mocking smile—but she did not look at him.

"If we miss the train I'll have to put you in the lock-up here for the night," said Larry.

“We’ve already missed it,” she said with a glance at her watch. “It’s twenty-eight minutes past.”

“Then we’ll have to go by Philadelphia. It’s longer.”

“Thought you said you were going to put me in the lock-up here?”

Silence from Larry.

“Shall you handcuff me?” she asked wickedly.

“Ahh!” muttered Larry.

Just the same, there was a fearful joy in the thought. He could handcuff her if he wanted to. For the next few hours she would be absolutely within his power. He was not at all sorry that they were forced to go the longest way. He longed for that railway journey unspeakably. Not that it would bear thinking out. But just to be sitting beside her.

She made no pretence of hurrying her preparations.

“What made you so keen on my trail?” she asked abruptly.

“It was just my job,” said the startled Larry.

She shook her head. “There’s more in it than that. You’re vicious about it . . . You never would have run me down if you hadn’t made it a personal matter. Will it mean promotion for you?”

“Ahh! to hell with promotion,” muttered Larry.

“What have you got against me, then?”

Larry took refuge in silence.

She looked at him speculatively. “You’re very young for a policeman,” she remarked.

“You’ve got to begin sometime,” said Larry.

“But I can’t understand a young policeman.”

“What’s your youngness got to do with it?”

“Well, you think of a young man as a natural rebel.”

Larry was more than ever startled. For how many times within the past few days had he not longed to tear off his badge and grind it under his heel. That he might be free, free to follow his inclinations like other men! If he were only free at this moment—but it would never do to let her know what he was thinking, the witch.

“It’s a good enough job,” he began. “It’s honest work. There’s nothing to be ashamed . . .”

She was not listening. A certain abstracted look suggested to him that she was just stringing him along to gain time. He got hot again.

“If you don’t get a hustle on I’ll have to take you without your things,” he said gruffly.

Again, that lightning glance at her watch. “I’ve got about everything now,” she said coolly. She held the French hat away from her, regarding it. “I’ll have to carry this thing in my hand. Don’t suppose I’ll ever wear it again, but it cost too much just to let it go.” The glint of mockery was in her eye.

“Bring it or leave it as you please,” said Larry. “Come on!”

“One moment,” she said. “I’ve lost something.” She commenced to search through the empty bureau drawers.

“What have you lost?”

“A gold bar-pin. I had it a little while ago.”

She searched all over the room, including the most unlikely places. There could be no doubt but she was just fooling him.

“Come on!” he said harshly. “I’ve had enough of this.”

“I won’t come until I have found my pin,” she said coolly.

“You’ll come when I tell you, or I’ll . . .”

“What? Drag me through the corridors?” she asked mockingly. “Why don’t you telephone down to the office for assistance?”

Larry could only stand glaring at her while she continued her pretended search.

Suddenly she changed her tone. “Oh, let it go!” She went to her valise where it stood on a chair, and appeared to be struggling with it. “I’ve put so many extra things in it I can’t get it shut,” she complained. “Will you try?”

Larry went to her, and pressed the edges together. It latched easily. He looked at her with a sudden suspicion. She was unnaturally still. A flicker of her glance in the direction of the door, caused him to turn his head quickly. The door which he had shut, was open, and he beheld an elegantly-dressed figure slipping around it, drawn revolver in hand. Larry became aware of Mr. Felix.

The Englishman’s revolver arm went up, and Larry was unpleasantly forced to take notice of the bullets in the visible chambers. “Put your hands up,” Mr. Felix said, not loud. With his free hand he was softly closing the door behind him.

Larry automatically obeyed.

In the first moment he felt nothing at all. In the second moment a blinding flame of rage seared his brain. Not at the thought of having his hard-won prize snatched from him—that came later; it was the sight of that

damnable Englishman entering the girl's room as a matter of established right. Without moving his head, Larry turned his eyes on her, full of an unfathomable reproach. Because he had banked on her straightness! Had she mocked him in that moment, or exulted, he would have gone mad and flung himself on the loaded revolver. But her face was neither glad nor sorry; just very still. She did not look at Larry.

Her stillness saved him. He kept his hands up. The other man had the drop on him, a situation to which the bravest man must yield. There was no doubt but that the Englishman was desperate. His light grey eyes betrayed a panic fear more dangerous to Larry than the most reckless courage.

“What's he doing here?” he whispered to the girl.

“He followed me, I suppose.”

“How long has he been here?”

“Half an hour perhaps. I kept him.”

Larry's eyes blazed at the girl, but she declined to look at him.

“Is there anybody with him?” whispered the Englishman.

“I don't think so.”

The Englishman hung in horrible indecision; his finger itched on the trigger. Larry's eyes held his unflinchingly.

Then Mr. Felix made up his mind.

“Get behind me,” he snarled to the girl.

She made to obey, automatically picking up her valise.

“Drop it! Drop it!” he said sharply.

She got behind him.

Without taking his eyes from Larry, he said: “Open the door, and change the key from the inside to the outside.”

She did so.

“Now get on the outside of the door, and hold it open wide enough for me to back through.”

The instant he was through it, Larry flung himself at the door, but they got it closed and the key turned. He beat upon the door, and shouted, but there was no sound from the other side.

Bethinking himself there was a quicker way to summon help, he ran to the telephone. A precious half minute slipped away before he got the desk.

“This is Harker. New York police. A man and a woman are trying to get out. Hotel thieves. Stop them. Girl in blue silk dress, small black hat; man in grey suit, looks like an Englishman.”

The frightened voice at the other end of the wire stammered: “Wh . . what? Wh . . what? . . .”

“Stop them! Stop them!” shouted Larry. “Tell Klein! Tell Shane! They’re in the lobby.”

The receiver at the other end was dropped with a crash, and Larry knew that he had obtained action of some sort. He listened, gritting his teeth, unable to call attention to his own plight until the receiver was picked up again.

Finally the scared voice reached his ears once more. “Hello? Are you there?”

“I’m here.”

“I told Mr. Shane. He’s after them.”

“Then send up here quick and let me out,” said Larry. “Room 920. I’m locked in.”

CHAPTER XI

THROUGH THE AIR

LARRY was quickly liberated. When he got down to the hotel lobby, he found a little group of clerks gathered outside the desk. With the first instinct of a hotel-man, they were trying to conceal their excitement to keep it from communicating to the guests. The fugitives had not been intercepted, and every moment it was becoming clearer that they had made a getaway.

Shane came strolling up to the group. He was not in the least excited. The invariable cigar was rolling composedly between his lips. "Well, young fellow," he said jocularly to Larry, "here we are again! You seem to have balled things up nicely!"

Larry had to take this standing. His heart was bitter.

"Well, I guess they're gone," said Shane with maddening cheerfulness.

"How *could* they get out?" Larry burst out. "Within half a minute I had a call through to the desk. Somebody else has balled things up!"

"It was easy," said Shane calmly. "Got off at the first bedroom floor, and made their way down by the deck. This hotel is ideally planned for crooks. I've pointed it out before."

Larry could no longer hold himself in. He broke into a low heartfelt cursing. He had lost more than his prisoner.

"Keep your shirt on," said Shane. "You may not know it, but Atlantic City is built on an island. There are only six ways of getting off it. They're all watched."

"What are you going to do?" asked Larry.

"Ah! you're willing to work with me now?" said Shane.

Larry had to swallow that too. "Yes, if you'll let me," he muttered.

"Sure," said Shane good-naturedly. "But I don't know anything you can do. I'll have 'em by nightfall. Tell me what took place up-stairs."

"People are beginning to look at us," said the chief clerk nervously. "Come into the office."

In this little room behind the elevators Larry told his tale briefly. Shane listened to it with the air of one who understood more than Larry related. To

the office of the Association he telephoned additional particulars of the description of the fugitives.

Klein came in to report that the two were not in the hotel. When he saw Larry, the house detective's face offered a study. "What the hell . . . !" he stuttered.

"So you know this young fellow, too," said Shane humorously.

"I don't know what his name is," said Klein violently. "But I know him all right!"

"It's Officer Harker of the New York police force," said Shane.

"You—! You tried to double-cross me, didn't you?" said Klein hotly.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" said Shane, grinning.

"Cut it out!" said Larry to Klein. "I'll see you later if you want. I'm not interested now." To Shane he added pleadingly: "Give me something to do!"

"My lines are all set," said Shane with a shrug. "What do you propose?"

"I can't stand around doing nothing," said Larry. "I'm going out to look for them!"

"Oh, all right if you feel like that," said Shane. He did not spare Larry, but he was a big enough man to feel friendly towards the young fellow. "Here, take my gun in case you stumble over them," he added, grinning, "and this time watch you get a bead on the other fellow first, see? When you've tired yourself out, come back here."

Larry slipped the gun in his pocket, and ran out of the hotel.

The spectacle of a wild-eyed young man rushing along the Boardwalk, created such visible excitement among the promenaders that Larry was quickly forced to quiet down. He scarcely knew where he was going. It didn't make much difference. Anything to keep moving. He pushed his way through the crowd, searching the faces, knowing in his heart that they would never be hanging around here waiting for him . . . But anything to keep moving!

A roaring overhead caused all the people on the Boardwalk to turn their faces to the sky. It was the hydroplane that, for a generous fee, carried passengers for short flights up and down the sea-front. Larry had already seen it rise and descend at a point on the beach beside the Inlet. Sharpened as his faculties were, it instantly struck him that here was a means of escape from the Island which had not occurred to Shane. Shane was an old-timer; hydroplanes, probably, did not enter into his calculations. But Phillida and the Englishman would hear it, and their faculties were sharpened too. They

would know that it was for hire. Expense was nothing to the Englishman. Perhaps they were already at the Inlet waiting for it.

The machine was bound towards its starting-point. Larry turned around and ran after it. He was more than a mile from the Inlet, and he quickly realised he could never make it on foot before the plane descended and rose again. At the first street leading away from the Boardwalk he ran down the incline. In a hundred yards or so he was lucky enough to pick up a standing taxicab.

“Double fare to the Inlet if you get a move on,” he cried to the driver.

But there his luck ended, for the engine balked, and precious moments were lost in starting. Getting under way at last, they flew down a quiet block, lined with the continuous porches of big wooden hotels. All the rocking-chairs stopped rocking, and curious heads stuck out over the rails. Turning into the main East and West thoroughfare they had to slow down for the traffic, while Larry twisted with impatience, and swore under his breath.

“I could have made it quicker running!” he thought.

They tried to slip across an intersecting street after the signal had been set against them, and they were stopped by the officer on duty. Larry’s driver was in awe of the whistle. To be sure, at the sight of Larry’s badge, the officer released them, but more precious seconds had been lost. It seemed as if all the private motor-cars, jitneys, and trucks were in a conspiracy to block them. To Larry, ages passed before they won clear of the centre of the town, and could let go through unfrequented streets.

At the point where the Boardwalk curves around the end of the island, it is separated from the street by a foot-bridge some two hundred feet long, across a marshy place. The plane landed on the beach here, but the beach was hidden by the intervening Boardwalk. As Larry jumped out and flung his driver a bill, all was quiet on the beach. As he ran across the foot-bridge he heard the roar of the engine recommence.

He arrived at the rail of the Boardwalk in time to see the plane skimming the surface of the sea like a gigantic waterfowl. Over the edge of the fuselage he saw a little black hat side by side with a grey Fedora. There was a third head in addition to the pilot. Larry let out a great shout.

All the watchers on the beach looked around startled, but those in the plane were deafened by the roar of the engine. Larry’s hand flew to his hip-pocket with the design of shooting his gun in the air—but he held his hand. Of what avail a pistol shot against the fusillade of the engine in their ears? The plane rose from the water. It was moving away at a hundred feet a second. He stood there gripping the rail for self-control, his face a wooden

mask, while his heart swelled with rage. People came running to ask what was the matter. He roughly silenced them.

As he expected, instead of turning on its usual course along the sea-front, the plane headed straight away in a northerly direction, obliquely across the wide bays and the sea marshes towards the mainland. It rose as it flew until it was a mere speck against the sky. Larry grimly watched it out of sight. There was no other plane available.

He continued to stand there immovable. At first his mind was just a blank of rage and disappointment, his only instinct to conceal his feelings. Then little by little he began to stir inside. The pilot would have to return to his usual stand; very well, when he did return, he, Larry, would force him to carry him after the fugitives. Perhaps after all they might not get too great a start. All depended on how far they could persuade the pilot to carry them.

As patient as an image he watched the sky.

In less than half an hour the plane hove into view again and Larry's heart beat strongly. Not until that moment did he recollect Shane. He had thrown in his lot with Shane, and he must therefore keep him informed. Very reluctantly Larry sought a telephone booth in a near-by pavilion, and sent word to Shane at the Donoughmore that the fugitives had escaped by hydroplane, and that he, Larry, was now starting after them in the same plane. He was not without a spice of malice in sending this message. Shane had been so sure of himself!

When the pilot jumped out on the sand, Larry peremptorily ordered the curious listeners to stand back. Flashing his shield on the pilot, he said grimly: "Those two you carried away from here were wanted."

The pilot spread out his hands. "How was I to know? They looked all right . . . There were three of them," he added.

"Where did you put them down?"

"Fifteen miles up the shore at the edge of the barrens. He wanted me to make it Long Branch, but I hadn't the gas."

"Fill up quick, and take me after them," said Larry curtly.

The man hesitated. "Who's to pay me?" he muttered.

"The City of New York," said Larry.

Gasoline was at hand in tins. With an acquiescent shrug, the pilot ordered his tank filled. Larry climbed into the seat that was pointed out to him, and the pilot seated himself in front. An order was given, on the beach the mechanic twirled the propeller, and the roaring of the engine beat about Larry's ears. They began to move.

It was Larry's first flight. At first they went tearing through the water like some incredible speed boat. Then, without any perceptible change of motion, suddenly the noise of the water ceased, and looking over the edge of the car Larry saw with astonishment that the ocean was dropping away beneath them. An extraordinary sensation, the solid earth slipping down sideways; Larry was afflicted with a slight nausea.

As they quickly rose, the earth seemed to shrink, and a wider and wider expanse of waterway and marsh was revealed. Looking back, the dizzy towers of the sea-front had assumed the proportions of a toy town. Higher still, and the earth seemed to have become concave, the edges rising up all around. When they found their flying level it remained like a great map spread beneath them, unrolling with a motion as imperceptible as that of the hands of a clock. It was only when you looked away for a while, and looked back, that you could see it had changed.

The wind tore at the roots of Larry's hair, inducing a feeling of wild exhilaration. But it struck a chill to his bones, too. There was a great coat lying on the seat beside him. He cautiously wriggled into it, fearing that the slightest disturbance of the equilibrium might upset the craft. The pilot, glancing over his shoulder, grinned derisively at Larry. He was master up here; he condescended to his passenger. They could not speak to each other.

It was all over in a few minutes. Seeing the pilot begin to manipulate his levers again, Larry looked over the edge. The supposedly flat earth was cocked up in the queerest fashion, and drunkenly eddying around. It brought back his nausea. Then he realised that they were only flying in circles, preparatory to alighting. The character of the picture had not changed; still the silver waterways, the green marshes, and the darker green of oak scrub where the dry land began. As it flew up to meet them Larry distinguished a toy roof amidst the waste, and had a glimpse of a black insect that was probably human. The pilot shut off his power, and they presently struck the water with a long sliding splash, sending out sheets of spray, like a three-hundred-horse-power swan alighting.

When Larry got his sight adjusted to an even keel once more, the scene that met them offered a violent contrast to the scene they had left on earth a few minutes before. Instead of hotels, motor-cars, crowds of people, here was a great solitude. The single man-made building on the shore, and the lonely figure standing in front of it, only gave the emptiness an additional point. On the one hand the flat marshes seemed to disappear over the curve of the earth; on the other, interminable sand dunes covered with scrub oak. The little weatherbeaten house displayed a dim sign across the front: "Bayhead Hotel. Sportsmen Accommodated." It had a rundown and illicit

look. With its tumbledown outbuildings clustering around it, it seemed to be making a last stand for man against the crowding, stunted trees.

There was a rickety wharf running out from the land, and the pilot paddled his giant water-spider alongside it. Larry climbed out. The solitary figure came down to meet him. He was quite in character with his house, a lanky, shambling roustabout, with a loose, good-natured grin.

“H’ are yeh?” said he. “Didn’t expect you back so soon. This is sholy an exciting day!”

Larry had no time for amenities. “The man and woman who landed here; where are they?” he demanded.

“Two men and a woman,” the other amended. “Sho!” his eye brightened as he took in the fascinating possibilities. “Fly customers, maybe?”

“Where are they?” repeated Larry.

The Jersey cracker was not to be hurried. “I says to me son there’s something fishy about them three, I says. But he says, ‘Well, they’ve been dumped on us here; we gotta dump ’em somewheres else,’ he says. We never thought anybody would come after them here. He’s took ’em inland in his car.”

Larry swore. “Is there another car here?” he demanded.

The shore man seemed to regard this as a joke. He chuckled silently. “’Tain’t much of a country for automobiles, Mister. We does most of our visitin’ by water, we does. The car is just a play-toy like, of my son’s. ’Tain’t much of a car let alone . . .”

Larry cut him short. “Where’s the nearest car?”

“Ten mile in.”

“Have you got a horse?”

“What would I feed a horse on here?”

Larry perceived in this man a policeman’s natural enemy. He flashed his badge. “New York City police,” he said harshly. “If you try to put anything over on me it will go hard with you.”

The other continued to smile. He had the imperturbable assurance of a man at the bottom of the scale; nothing to lose. “Look around! Look around!” he said amiably. “You’ll find few enough hiding-places in this shebang.”

Larry scribbled his address on a piece of paper, and handed it to the pilot. “Send your bill, and I’ll see that it is paid,” he said.

The man pocketed the slip somewhat dubiously. They left him.

The old shore man did not in the least resent Larry's suspicious manner. "They on'y been gone ten minutes," he volunteered good-naturedly. "My son had tire trouble. He's always got tire trouble. It's chronic."

"Might as well be ten hours if I've got to follow on foot," muttered Larry.

"Well, I dunno. My son often comes home on foot. They're sure to get stuck in the sand once or twice."

It was Larry's intention to search the premises before starting after the fugitives, but on his way up from the shore he changed his mind. For the story of what had happened was written in the loose sand, and it bore out the shore man's words. There were the trim, small tracks of Phillida's shoes; there was the shed with open doors, out of which the car had been backed. Phillida's tracks ended at the spot where she got into it. The prints of the tires then led away through the trees, and they bore that unmistakable fresh look, which loose sand will not retain more than a few minutes.

"Where was your son going to take them?" he asked.

"To the railway, fifteen miles back."

"How far is it to a good road?"

"Acrost the barrens. Nine miles."

With a curt nod, Larry turned his face towards the trees.

But the other stepped out smartly to keep up with him. His little eyes glittered with inquisitiveness. "A pretty bad gang, I expect," he said ingratiatingly. "What they wanted for?"

"I can't stop to tell you that," said Larry.

"I'll come along with you a piece."

"I'm not going to talk about the case."

The shore man shrugged philosophically, and fell back. Suddenly recollecting that the pilot was a possible source of information, he hastened back to the water's edge.

The instant Larry entered among the trees, he seemed to lose all touch with the inhabited world. It was a strange, desert sort of place that supported no animal life. The little trees sprung from the sandy soil as thickly as hair. The silence was complete; not even the cheep of a bird disturbed it. For a minute or two the roaring of the sea-plane filled the air; then it faded away, and the silence resumed its sway. It was heavy going underfoot. In places where the car had stuck at one time or another, an effort had been made to improve the track by throwing sods in it, but one spot was about as bad as

another. The sand dragged at Larry's feet in a pertinacious way very trying to the patience of a walker.

Not a breath of air stirred among the little trees, and having been half frozen in the air, Larry was now grilled on the burning sand which sent up as much heat as the sun sent down. The clothes stuck to his prickling skin. He was one mass of uncomfortable sensation. To make matters worse a sort of little stinging fly buzzed around his neck looking for a place to land. No amount of slapping discouraged it. It was determined to accompany him the whole way. At last with a devilish satisfaction he contrived to kill it—but not before it had stung him. Another fly of the same species took its place.

Ten miles of this to cover, and certain disappointment waiting him at the end! It was well for Larry that his immediate discomfort was too great to permit him to look ahead very much. A black, mad rage lay that way. Phillida fleeing to safety with the crooked, shifty-eyed Englishman. A man almost middle-aged. Walked into her room without so much as by your leave as if he owned her! They were almost surely safe by now—and laughing at him! Yet it never occurred to Larry to give up the chase. He plodded on with his head down.

The track twisted among the trees this way and that in a foolish way, as if it had been made in the first place by a straying horse, and no man had ever had the energy to straighten it since. It continually climbed little mounds, and crossed shallow gullies. Larry could never see far along it either before or behind, and he quickly lost all sense of the distance he had covered. There was nothing to mark the way. He might as well have been walking in a void. Ten miles of it loomed ahead like infinity.

As a matter of fact he had not been walking half an hour when the heavy silence was startlingly broken by the sound quite close to, of a sharp hammering on metal. Larry's senses sprang into alertness, and gone was all discomfort of the flesh. The nature of the sound was unmistakable. Somebody was changing a tire.

He broke into a run, seeking to pierce the screen of thickly springing stems that concealed all. The loose sand swallowed the sound of his steps. Presently he fixed the sound on the other side of a rise in the road. Instead of showing himself over it, he struck into the trees, and made his way around under cover. Noiselessly stealing back towards the road, he dimly perceived stationary objects there. Letting himself down he crawled the last yard or two, and finally with infinite care parted the leaves and looked out.

A few yards ahead he saw the car standing in the track, one of its wheels jacked up. A roughly clad lad was kneeling on the ground beside the rim,

and a man was bending over him in the attitude of one offering to help or urging the lad to hasten. This man had his back to Larry. Nearer Larry, and facing him, Mr. Felix and Phillida stood side by side in the road. The man had his gun in his hand. They were watching the road, both on the *qui vive*. Naturally they had taken warning from the sound of the returning plane.

CHAPTER XII

THE DECREPIT CAR

LARRY, concealed behind the leaves, deliberated upon what to do. Of the three men in the road before him, the first had his gun in his hand and the second was no doubt armed also. The third, that is to say the country lad, was probably not armed, and it was possible he might remain neutral. But besides the men there was the girl. Larry was far from despising the aid that a determined woman could lend his adversaries. He hesitated. It was heavy odds. What a bitter, bitter pain it caused him to see Phillida standing side by side with another man making common cause against him, Larry!

But presently the lad half raised the detachable rim as if the repair was completed. The move spurred Larry into action. They would be going on directly. It was unthinkable that he should let them go without striking a blow. Better be shot than that. The only possible course for him was the boldest one. Larry pulled his gun out of his pocket, and standing up, stepped out into plain view.

The Englishman's gun went up automatically. With a cry Phillida seized his arm and dragged it down. The gun was discharged. The bullet ploughed up a little cascade of sand half way between him and Larry. The young man looked death in the face without flinching. A thrill of the sweetest joy went through him. After all, his life meant something to Phillida.

"Get back! Get back!" Phillida cried to Larry. "He'll kill you!"

The Englishman was struggling with her. He tore his pistol arm free. But the second man, springing up, flung his arms around him. "Don't shoot! Don't shoot, sir!" he gasped. "You'll ruin us all. He's only one. We can handle him."

When he saw this man's face Larry was not surprised to recognise the mysterious Mr. Glanville who had come to Phillida's assistance in the magistrate's court.

Mr. Felix's involuntary panic quickly subsided. "You're right," he said with a disagreeable smile. "No need to shoot him."

The other man released his arms. Mr. Felix kept his gun in his hand.

"You are my prisoners," said Larry.

The two men laughed derisively. Phillida did not laugh, but only watched Larry with inscrutable eyes. As for the country lad, at the sound of the shot, he had dived headlong into cover, and was now nowhere to be seen.

“What are you going to do with us?” asked Mr. Felix mockingly.

“Lock you up!” said Larry, unabashed.

Renewed laughter.

“First catch your chickens,” said Mr. Felix. “Or in other words, get us out of the woods.” He looked about him. “Where’s that damn boy? . . . Come out!” he called. “There’s no danger!”

A paper-white face, none too clean, showed itself among the leaves. “I won’t go near the car unless they puts away their guns,” the boy stammered.

With a laugh, and a great parade of indifference, Mr. Felix dropped his gun in his pocket. Larry put away his weapon also. The boy crawled out into the road, half-stupefied with terror.

“Get the car going,” commanded Mr. Felix.

“Wait!” said Larry. He showed his badge. “Do you know what that is?”

The boy nodded miserably.

“If you take the part of these people against the police you’ll go to jail with the rest of them.”

He stared at Larry witlessly. The two men, who had drawn close together, looked on contemptuously. Phillida was standing apart from them, nearer Larry.

“You understand me?” said Larry harshly.

“Well . . . well, what do you want me to do?” blubbered the boy.

“Get the car going,” said Larry. “But take your orders from me.”

With many a backward look of terror, the lad fitted his rim over the wheel, and screwed the nuts home. He let the axle down, and stowed away his jack in the tonneau. Larry did not need to be told that the next crisis was due when the engine started. The two men had ostentatiously lighted cigarettes. A simpleton might have guessed from their sidelong looks what was passing in their minds.

The lad cranked his engine, and after the expenditure of a good deal of muscular persuasion it condescended to start. Larry, bethinking himself of the advantage that lies in making the first move, put a hand on the gun in his pocket, and taking a stride forward, gripped Phillida’s shoulder, and drew her away a little. The girl gave him an extraordinary glance, not in the least afraid. She made no attempt to resist.

Mr. Felix scowled, and his hand likewise went to his pocket.

Phillida's voice spoke up clearly. "Let him take me. It's the best way. You two go on."

Larry's astonished eyes flew to her face. What did this mean? There was no sign of weakening in her.

"Can I trust you to keep your mouth shut?" said Mr. Felix, with his scowl.

"I have kept it shut so far," Phillida said coolly.

The man hung in a state of indecision, biting his fingers.

Phillida turned to Larry. "If I go with you freely, will you let them go their way?"

A surge of joy pressed up in Larry's breast. To part her from that Englishman. "Sure!" he cried. It was involuntary. But immediately afterwards he recollected his duty. "No, I won't," he said doggedly. "He's wanted, too."

"You can't take all three of us in," she said with an exasperated air.

"I'll make a stab at it," said Larry.

"Oh, you fool!" she cried, losing her temper. "This is nothing but your schoolboy vanity! They're in earnest, I tell you! They'll kill you sooner than let you take them. I don't want your blood on my conscience. Listen to reason, can't you? Let them go and drag me back in triumph. That ought to satisfy you!"

This affected Larry in precisely the opposite way to what she wished. He was conscious of only one thing; she wanted to get the Englishman off, she was willing to sacrifice herself for the Englishman. It lighted the fires of jealousy again, and drove him mad with stubbornness.

"I'm damned if I will," he said. "I'll take you all in."

Phillida was for continuing the argument, but Mr. Felix silenced her. "Come on, come on," he said. "We can't stop here in the woods arguing it. There's only one way out for all of us, and that's the car."

Thus he admitted Larry's right to share the car. But Larry knew well that they had not given in. The final showdown was simply postponed to a moment that was to be chosen by themselves.

Keeping his hand on Phillida's shoulder, Larry led her to the car on the side opposite to that where the two men were standing. She got in, and seated herself in the middle of the tonneau; and Larry following, took the corner seat where he could command them all with his gun. For the moment, the advantage was with him. The two Englishmen, with shrugs of pretended

indifference, climbed aboard, Mr. Felix seating himself beside Phillida, Glanville next to the lad who drove. They started on through the stunted forest.

Phillida sat between the two men with her hands lying calmly in her lap. Such fine, still, capable hands! Her face was a composed blank, but her eyes missed nothing of what passed. Occasionally they flashed in Larry's face, and the young man had the uneasy feeling that he was being read through and through, while he could read nothing in return. What possible explanation of her could there be, maddeningly desirable as she was? She treated him with the utmost scorn, yet by an involuntary movement, she had saved his life. Was there nothing more in it than a woman's natural horror of bloodshed? On the other hand, while she fought on the side of the Englishman, there was something in her eye that suggested she despised him too.

Meanwhile the two men were grinning derisively at Larry with the design of destroying his morale. But it had not that effect. He did not mind them. They were just men like himself. Moreover he suspected that they were secretly ill at ease. In Mr. Felix particularly there was a sort of frantic, unmanly terror that had flared up more than once in Larry's sight. Larry held his gun in his hand. He had this important advantage over the other two men; there was no reason in the world why he should not shoot either or both of them, if they interfered with him.

It soon became evident to him how it was he had been able to overtake them. In order to get through the sand, they had to run nearly the whole time on first gear. After a few hundred yards of this the water in the radiator would begin to boil, and they must needs stop awhile to let it cool. The car was in an advanced state of decrepitude, and Larry, registering its various complaints with a practised ear, was surprised that it ran at all. Mr. Felix cursed it fervently.

They had not gone far when the lad who was driving, happened to glance over his shoulder. He saw the naked pistol in Larry's hand, and his face went livid with terror. The steering-wheel wobbled in his nerveless hands.

"Buck up!" the man beside him said, with a laugh. "The gun's not for you, but for us!"

However, the lad could not control his shaking. The car lurched out of the track, and stalled against a hummock. The boy burst into tears.

"I want to go home!" he wailed.

Mr. Felix cursed him in his beautifully modulated voice.

Glanville spoke up: "I'll drive."

They put the boy in the back seat. Here he could keep his eye on Larry's gun, and his excessive terror moderated. With both Englishmen in front of him now, Larry felt safer. Neither could very well make a hostile move without giving him warning.

Mr. Felix rode sitting sideways in front. Except for the one or two occasions when he had been startled out of it, the man had a devilish aplomb. By turns he studied Larry and Phillida with his cold and insolent stare. It was suggested to Larry that Phillida was just as much of a puzzle to the Englishman as she was to himself, and this afforded him some satisfaction. Certainly Mr. Felix's glances at Phillida were anything but loverlike. But what *was* the relationship between them then?

Larry gave him stare for stare. It was the first opportunity he had had to examine his man at his leisure. The light grey eyes did not give much away. There was a cold haughtiness of mien in Mr. Felix that indicated he had been accustomed to subservience all his life. But if he really was a man of place and power, thought Larry, what was there for him to be afraid of? Afraid he certainly was. Now Glanville who had less on his mind, could joke about the situation. Glanville, of course, was a sort of servant or employé to Mr. Felix. A servant who knew enough of his master's secrets to feel pretty independent of him, Larry judged.

Mr. Felix said coolly to Phillida, as if Larry had not been there at all: "Is this the fellow who first arrested you in New York?"

"Yes," she said.

He favoured Larry with a hard stare. "What is there in it for you, my man?" he said. "Promotion maybe?"

"I'm not your man," said Larry.

"I beg your pardon. . . . But that only means a small increase of pay, I assume. Wouldn't you rather have it in a lump sum down?"

Larry made no answer.

"How much will you take to get out and walk?" said Mr. Felix boldly. "No blame could possibly attach to you."

"I'll see you damned first," said Larry as coolly as he.

Mr. Felix shrugged indifferently, and faced front.

All this time as they were ploughing their slow way through the sand, Larry was sitting beside Phillida in the way he had dreamed of. But he was scarcely conscious of her nearness now. The situation was too highly charged with danger for him to have any room for the softer feelings. All his

faculties were concentrated on the two men in front. He knew very well that they had no intention of driving meekly up to a police station door. Watching them, it never occurred to him to suspect danger from alongside.

The hand which grasped the pistol was lying on his thigh. Suddenly Phillida flung the weight of her body on his hand and arm, and hung on desperately. Larry struggled with all his might, but she had him at a cruel disadvantage. He could not shoot *her*, though his own life depended on it.

“Help me! Help me!” she gasped. “Seize him!”

The car stopped, and the two men in front came tumbling over the back of the seat. There was a mad, confused struggle within the narrow confines of the tonneau. They got Larry down on the floor, but they could not hold him there. He reared up with the two men clinging to him; they fell against one of the doors, which burst out, precipitating them all into the road. In the road Larry felt the added weight of the boy upon him. The revolver was wrenched out of his hand.

“A rope! A rope!” cried Glanville.

A rope was produced from somewhere. That must have been the boy. The rope fired Larry to an increased effort. Let his bones crack and his muscles be torn from them, he would not submit to the rope. They rolled and strained and panted in the sand. They could keep him down, but there were not men enough to tie him.

Finally Mr. Felix cried: “Let him have it!”

Larry heard the crack on his skull that he did not feel. He passed out. When he came back to his senses his wrists and ankles were fast.

But only a moment or two had passed. When he opened his eyes, it was to see Phillida’s great, dark eyes fixed upon him. She swiftly turned her head, but not before he had caught the grief and compassion with which they were filled. Her remorse, if it was remorse, only reminded him of the injury he had received at her hands. A frightful pang of rage and pain constricted his breast. His eyes would have scorched her had she seen them. I loved you, they said, and you gave me up to them! In the face of the grinning men he was forced to be silent. Even the chicken-livered lad felt safe in grinning at Larry now. Larry’s eyes blazed from one to another, and in silence he wrestled with the torments of rage and jealousy and defeat.

“That was well done, my girl,” said Mr. Felix to Phillida.

“It was the only thing,” she said in an indifferent tone.

The men moved towards the car. “Come on,” said Mr. Felix.

“What are you going to do with him?” asked Phillida sharply.

“Why, leave him here, of course,” said Mr. Felix, astonished by the question.

“He’d starve to death here,” she said indignantly. “If the flies and mosquitoes didn’t sting him to death first.”

(Just like a woman! thought Larry bitterly. Deliver a man up to murder, and then try to make out she can’t stand it!)

“Oh, the boy can let him loose when he comes back,” said Mr. Felix carelessly.

“The boy is frightened to death of him. He wouldn’t go near him.”

Mr. Felix shrugged. “He’ll have to take his chance, then. Come on. The afternoon’s getting on.”

Larry, lying trussed on the sand, rolled on his side to get a better view of Phillida’s face. Its expression was cold and withdrawn again. But she said with unmistakable firmness: “If you leave him, you leave me.”

Larry gazed at her in astonishment.

Mr. Felix, impressed by her firmness, started to expostulate with her in a conciliatory tone, under which he sought to conceal his exasperation. Glanville came up and added his voice to that of his master. But Phillida stood her ground with a woman’s invincible obstinacy.

“If you leave him, you leave me.”

Mr. Felix’s exasperation broke out at last. “By Heaven!” he cried, “I’m not going to waste any more time in arguing with you. You make me repent of my own moderation. A common policeman! If he insists on sticking his nose into what does not concern him let him take the consequences. Another word and I’ll give him his quietus, and stick his clay where it will never be found!”

“I am not talking,” said Phillida coolly.

“I’ve had enough of this!” cried Mr. Felix, livid with rage. He made a move to draw his gun.

Phillida never budged. “That is an empty threat,” she said. “You know very well that if you injured him, I should immediately denounce you.”

“Denounce me! Denounce me!” cried the Englishman. “And who are you I should like to know? What do I owe you? What’s to prevent me sending you after him? That’s what I ought to do. You’re the original cause of the trouble. You’re the wasp who stung me first!”

“It was your own meanness and cowardice that originally caused the trouble,” said Phillida. “If you’re paying for it now ten times over, that’s not my fault.”

“By God! . . . By God! . . .” stuttered Mr. Felix, becoming speechless with anger.

Glanville was in a panic now lest dangerous secrets be revealed. His eyes darted terrified glances in Larry’s direction. “Miss . . . Miss,” he said imploringly, “don’t anger him, I beg of you! No good can come of it!”

But Phillida’s chin went a notch higher. “Why shouldn’t he be angered as well as anybody else?” she said clearly. “It would do him good if he heard the truth oftener.”

“I’ll leave them both here!” cried Mr. Felix, beside himself.

Glanville clung to his pistol arm. “My Lord! *My Lord!*” he whispered softly and imploringly.

But Larry heard it, and grimly put it away for future use.

“You heard what she said,” stuttered Mr. Felix. “Do you think I’ll . . .”

“She was right!” cried Glanville, suddenly raising his voice. “It *is* all your own fault!”

The noble Englishman was so astonished to hear this from his own creature that he ceased to struggle, and simply stared with his eyebrows running up into two haughty peaks. But Glanville was not impressed by it. He possessed himself of the revolver.

“You will thank me for this some day,” he said quietly.

Mr. Felix turned his back on them all, and stood pulling at his moustache. And so it appeared that Phillida’s firmness had won the day.

Presently Mr. Felix turned around, and said sulkily: “What the devil was the use of disarming him and tying him up if you insist on carrying him with us?”

“We can leave him in some spot where he’ll be discovered,” said Phillida.

The upshot of it all was that Larry was picked up and dropped into the same corner of the tonneau that he had occupied before. They started again. Phillida still rode beside him, but she sat a little forward, so that he was unable to see into her face.

That strange quarrel afforded Larry plenty of matter for reflection. Unfortunately it did not throw any light on the facts of the case, but rendered them more inexplicable than ever. None of the cases that Larry had ever heard of had any bearing here. It was all topsy-turvey. Twice the Englishman had rescued Phillida from the law, but he hated her; and she despised him. At least it seemed that way. Larry rejoiced in their quarrel until the discomforting thought came to him that there are no quarrels so bitter as

those between lovers, or former lovers. They knew so much about each other there must have been something between them! And so in the end he was no farther forward than he had been in the beginning.

Meanwhile he bent all his energies to the single end of freeing his hands. They had been tied behind him, so they were now out of sight. Neither of the two Englishmen was an adept with the rope, he judged. Larry himself knew something about tying a man up, and he guessed from the feel of his bonds that the case was not hopeless. Secretly twisting and working his hands behind him, the rope yielded them more and more play.

Finally they came to the edge of the little wood. Flat, cultivated fields lay before them. Their way was stopped by a gate. On the other side, the track they were upon ran along the edge of the first field, then emerged through another gate on to a country road. At some distance along the road the houses of the first scattered village were visible.

Before they went through the first gate another argument started.

“We’ll drop him here,” said Mr. Felix.

“This is no better than the other place,” said Phillida. “We don’t know that anybody ever comes here.”

Her first victory had given her a certain ascendancy, and Mr. Felix was obliged to submit again. The two men gagged Larry with a handkerchief, and, dropping him in the bottom of the car, covered him with a dust cloth. Larry contrived to conceal from them the fact that his hands were almost free.

Turning into the road, which was the merest beginning of a road, they bumped and rattled along at a slightly better rate of speed. In order to make themselves heard above the many noises of the car, the others had to raise their voices, and from time to time Larry caught snatches of their talk. Sometimes they seemed to forget that bound, gagged, and out of sight as he was, he still had his ears.

After they had passed through the village—Larry was following the course by the various references they made to it, they began to dispute where they should drop him. Various suggestions were made, but none upon which Mr. Felix and Phillida could agree. Apparently the country was flat and open on either side of the road, with very little cover.

“Why not drop him behind the bushes?” suggested Phillida.

“Yes, and have him get to his feet and exhibit himself to the first person who passes,” snarled Mr. Felix.

“Well, what do you propose?” she asked.

“We’re saddled with him now,” he said bitterly. “I ought to have had my way about it.”

Thus it went until at last the lad (who was driving again) said: “Yonder’s the town and the railway.”

“Slow up then,” cried Glanville. “We can’t carry him into the town. We’ll have to go back.”

The car stopped.

“What’s the use of going back?” said Mr. Felix morosely. “We haven’t passed any places.”

“Do you know anything about the trains?” Glanville asked the boy.

“Up train at six eleven,” was the reply.

Here they evidently consulted their watches. “Twenty minutes!” exclaimed Mr. Felix. “We’ve got to get that!”

Phyllida spoke. “That barn is not near any house. Why not lay him down behind it? In time he can make his way to the road, but we’ll be gone.”

Mr. Felix agreed, because there was nothing else for it.

The car started again and, Larry judged, presently turned into a side lane. It bumped along for a hundred yards or so, and stopped. The cover was pulled off him, and he was roughly and hastily pulled out by the heels, picked up, carried a short distance and dropped in sweet-smelling clover, close under the high weathered wall of a barn. His hands were now free, but he held them within the rope in such a way that it was not apparent. They were in too much of a hurry to give him a close inspection. He struggled a little, and groaned under his gag to give verisimilitude to his apparent helplessness. They dropped him and were instantly gone.

He lay until he heard the car turn around and make its way out of the lane. When it started down the road, rattling and barking at the greatest speed of which it was capable, he sprang up. They had taken his gun, but had not searched him. He had a pocketknife. It was but the work of a moment to pull off the gag, and cut the ropes that bound his ankles. In a flash he got the lie of the land: barn, lane, road, town and railway line. He ran to the road bent over double. But there was a bend in the road, and they were already out of sight. He ran down the road at the top of his speed; the distant whistle of a train acted as a spur.

The little town lay about half a mile in front of him, half hidden amongst trees. He could not distinguish the railway station, but he could see the line approaching the town on one side, and leaving it on the other. Presently in the distance a long plume of steam denoted the approaching train. The road

he was on was a little used one; there was no one in sight upon it; no possibility of help. For a moment his heart failed him. He felt he would never make it. But he repudiated the thought of failure. Digging his toes in, he contrived to let out a little more.

He saw the train. It disappeared among the trees, and presumably stopped at the station. Everything depended on the duration of its stop. The station was still out of sight around the bend; there was no way in which he could signal. He gained the village; he ran around the bend, and saw the train standing a couple of hundred yards ahead. Only the last car was visible athwart the crossing. Larry shouted, but he had not breath enough to make himself heard far. He covered half the distance. The train began to move.

He cut obliquely across the station yard. The battered car was standing there. Its owner, leaning against it, stared at the flying Larry with eyes that protruded from his head. Larry gained the track on the other side of the station. The rear platform of the moving train was perhaps a hundred feet from him. But it was slowly gaining headway. At first he overhauled it, but before he had quite made the distance, train and man were on equal terms, and before he could lay hand on the rear rail the train began to draw away. But Larry *would not* be beaten. He had one more magnificent spurt in him. His legs devoured the last few yards. He caught the rail, and swung himself aboard the platform, sinking to his knees with bursting heart.

Before he could gain his feet, he saw a figure rolling down the embankment on the other side, then a second figure. Mr. Felix and Glanville had seen him coming, and had jumped from up ahead. Glancing inside the car, Larry saw Phillida, and made a quick decision. If they separated, she was his mark. He made no move to follow the men, but pulled the signal cord. He heard the shrill air whistle in the engine cab, and the brakes went on.

On the side from which the men had jumped, a highway paralleled the railway line. The two quickly gained their feet, and leaped the fence to the road. A motorist bound in the opposite direction to the train, having seen them jump, slowed up as he approached, no doubt out of curiosity. He must have regretted it quickly, for the two of them leaped on the running-board of his car. Felix whipped out the ever-ready gun, and put it to his head. The car sprang ahead. All this Larry could see from the rear platform of the slowing train. The train stopped, but the two men were gone. Larry let them go with a shrug. He had done his best.

The conductor came running through the train. By this time Larry was at Phillida's side, and had a hand on her shoulder. The strange girl was smiling in a secret sort of way. To the conductor Larry showed his badge.

“This is my prisoner,” he said. “The other two got away. I’ll take this one, and you can go on.”

Phillida made no objection. In fact she said nothing. She looked right through the gaping passengers.

Larry and Phillida dropped off the rear platform, and the train proceeded. The two started back along the track towards the station. Larry still felt a little shaky as a result of his heart-bursting run, but he had full command of his faculties. He looked sideways at his pretty companion with a great, grim satisfaction. What a queer, deep joy there was in *capturing* her! Strange, strange girl! What would be going on inside that graceful head of hers now?

She presently showed him. “Well, here we are!” she said. “What a lot of trouble you would have saved yourself if you had taken me in the first place to-day as I suggested, and let them go. But men never will listen to sense.”

“It’s not quite the same thing,” said Larry. “It’s true they got away, but I didn’t *let* them go. I did my best.”

She gave him a veiled look that he did not understand at all. “You’re a great nuisance, but you *are* rather splendid,” she remarked offhand.

Larry supposed that she was still making fun of him. “Ahh!” he said, scowling blackly.

When they got back to the station, the boy was gone in his decrepit car, of course. Heavens knows where the miserable lad had flown to in his panic. Larry was not bothering about him. From the telegraph office he sent messages in several directions, describing the fugitives and the car they had commandeered (medium-size grey touring car, driven by a man with a grey beard) and asking that they be held.

As he was completing this, a great, high-powered car rolled up outside the station, and Shane and Klein jumped out. The face of the latter offered a study when he saw the girl in Larry’s custody. Shane had his features under better control. Mutual explanations were hastily made.

Said Shane: “I talked to the pilot when he came back. It was no use my planing after you if there was no other car at this end. So I got a car, and came all the way round the Bay by road. Bad going.”

Shane announced his intention of going on after the two men. “Will you come?” he asked Larry, including Phillida in his glance.

“No, thanks,” said Larry dryly. “You’re welcome to the men if you can catch them. I’ll take my prisoner back to New York by the first train.”

Shane clapped him on the back with the greatest good will. “That’s all right, young fellow! You’ve earned it! You’re a full-fledged member of the

Union now. Look me up some time.”

Larry began to wonder if he had not misjudged the wise old fox.

They went off in their car.

Larry looked at Phillida comfortably. His prisoner! All his bitterness had flown away. How finely she took defeat! Still that calm and even humorous look; no hatefulness or meanness to destroy the image of her that he had built up. A *wonderful* girl! His breast was secretly reassured. With a look like that she must be on the square!

“We’ve got plenty of time,” he said cheerfully. “Come on, let’s eat.”

CHAPTER XIII

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

THE place where Larry and Phillida waited for the train was something more than a village, and not quite a town. It supported three hotels. Two of them were in the ordinary country style, unchanged in many years, solid places no doubt, but uninviting. The third place set up to be an automobile roadhouse, and while probably the poorest eating-house of the three, with its gay electric sign, the cars standing in the driveway and the screened porch with little tables, it was inviting. Thither Larry led Phillida. In his present humour none but the “best” would do.

Seated opposite Phillida on the porch with a rosy-shaded light on the table and flowers in a glass, he was filled with a queer, shaky pleasure that he did not stop to examine very closely. What of it? He had been through such a hellish time, surely he could let himself go for a while, and make believe he was just a fellow taking his girl out. Phillida, so quiet, so ladylike, so full of sense, was exactly what a man would choose to have sitting opposite him. None of the queer circumstances that surrounded her had been explained, but when you were with her, it was impossible to doubt her. Fearful that somebody might suspect the true relation between them, he treated her with a slightly exaggerated courtesy.

As usual in such places, there was a long and elaborate menu card, mostly printed in French. Upon inquiry, however, you discovered that the choice lay between chicken and steak. Larry handed the card over.

“What will you have?”

“This sort of place always makes me angry,” Phillida said, with a glance at it. “It’s plain robbery.”

“Sure,” said Larry. “But never mind. The other places were fierce.”

She chose the simplest dish.

“Is that all?” he said with falling face.

“Oh, I wish you wouldn’t!” she said, with a flash of annoyance.

“Wouldn’t what?” he asked blankly.

“Treat me so! . . . It creates a false situation. I cannot be natural.”

He was as disappointed as a boy that she refused to play up to his dream. “I wish you well,” he murmured.

She laughed, then seeing his hurt look added quickly, “I can’t help it! It’s all so . . . so perfectly ridiculous!”

“Don’t you believe that I wish you well?” persisted Larry.

“That’s just it! . . . Oh, it’s altogether too much for me!” She shrugged, and laughed again, half annoyed, half friendly.

The situation was too much for Larry likewise, but he would not think about it. He was lost in her. How wonderful she was to him with all that her lovely, composed face half-expressed: so wise, so ready to laugh, so honest! In the literal sense of the word he became rapt as he gazed. He was forced to speak low; his voice was shaken with emotion.

“I wish we could go back to New York in a car,” he said at random, “but I doubt if they’d stand for it.”

“I doubt it too,” she said dryly. . . . “What a lot of money you must have spent chasing me!”

“Oh, it’s all right as long as . . .” Delicacy forbade him to finish.

“As long as you’ve got me!” she said wickedly.

Larry blushed.

“How will we go?” she asked.

“Local trains. It’ll be after midnight before we arrive.”

“Well, I’m in no hurry,” she said, smiling.

“Neither am I,” he said, not smiling at all.

Her eyes suddenly discovered business elsewhere.

“I want you to have something nice,” urged Larry. “I want this to be a real meal.” He became confused again. “Look here,” he blurted out, “this doesn’t go down on my expense account. This is on me.”

“Oh, I couldn’t have that,” she said quickly. Then she laughed helplessly. “You’re so funny!” she said. “You always take me by surprise.”

“That’s nothing to what you do to me,” murmured Larry.

“Please don’t mind my laughing,” she said apologetically. “One has to laugh . . . there’s nothing else to do!”

“I don’t mind it . . . when you laugh like that,” said Larry softly. “. . . But what was funny?”

“Why, you’re expecting me to help you celebrate my capture!” she said.

“Oh!” said Larry. “I never thought of it that way. I just wanted to see you eat.”

His shocked expression caused her to laugh afresh.

"I am a fool," said Larry, looking in his plate.

She made no comment on that remark, but when he took his eyes from her face, her eyes flew to his. There was astonishment in her glance, and a certain tenderness. No true woman can mistake a deep and genuine passion for herself, nor can she be affronted by it, however extraordinary the circumstances under which it may be offered.

Larry raised his head. "Just the same I'm going to order a proper meal," he said doggedly. "If you won't eat it, I won't either."

"Go as far as you like," she said. There was something almost maternal in her kind glance upon him.

In the end they both ate largely, and felt correspondingly refreshed.

It was curious how, though their kindness towards each other could no longer be hidden, they could not discuss their situation without Phillida falling into helpless laughter, and Larry into helpless scowling. Neither wanted to talk about it, but it was continually getting itself dragged back into their talk. Larry wished to ignore the situation; Phillida, unconquerably honest, insisted on recognising it, but held that it was not improved by being talked about. It was generally Phillida, of course, much more nimble and ready than the man, who steered the conversation away from the rocks.

The roadhouse, which was comparatively remote from the main routes of travel, and was therefore considered discreet and attractively fast, was better patronised than the run of such places. It was a characteristically flash automobile crowd. Phillida, whatever her private anxieties were, could be interested in all of them.

"That woman yonder would be interesting to paint," she remarked. "That's not real red hair, but her instinct was sound in dyeing it red. . . . There are so many ways you can paint a person; as you see them, or as they see themselves; as they are, or as their mothers expected them to be. . . . She's not having a bit of a good time. Paying for her dinner with hollow smiles. He knows they're hollow too, but is satisfied that he's getting his money's worth, because she's conspicuous."

Larry had never known a woman who talked like this. High-brow stuff—yet when *she* spoke it, how natural and simple it sounded. It charmed him, and rendered him very uneasy too. How could he, plain fellow that he was, hope to aspire to a woman who had such thoughts?

"I don't believe any of the people here are having a good time," Phillida went on. "They just think there must be fun here, because it's so expensive."

Larry concealed a smile. His thought was, I'm having a good time! But he knew if he spoke it she would laugh at him.

"They're not even crazy about each other, poor things!" said Phillida. "They only wish to be. Strange, isn't it, how people insist on deceiving themselves. If they'd only be natural they'd feel so free and jolly!"

Larry only heard a part of this, a sentence that made his pulses stir. "How do you know they're not crazy about each other?" he asked very offhand.

"That is something anybody can tell, isn't it?"

"Do you mean you always know when a man is crazy about you?"

"Certainly. That is what one's instincts are for."

"I suppose there have been a good many," said Larry, in what he supposed was a very subtle manner.

"Oh, let's not get personal," she said, with a shrug. "It's tiresome. Look at that man by the door with the funny bumps on his head. Self-esteem. He thinks he's a sad dog!"

Larry had not assurance enough to bring the conversation back to the personal again.

It was presently time for them to go for their train. When they boarded it, he apologised for the lack of a parlour car, and Phillida laughed again. In his heart Larry was thankful there was no parlour car, for thus he could sit side by side with her in the ordinary coach. He wished there might be some slight accident to delay them on the road for hours. Or if it was only winter and the train stuck in a snowdrift. She was so friendly it made him foolish with happiness. If you could only stay forever floating in that delicious state without the necessity of thinking or doing!

The slow train jogged from station to station. The last train of the day on that branch, it was filled with weary families returning from a day's outing at the shore with depleted lunch baskets and replete stomachs. The children slept sprawling on their parents, or squabbled unpleasantly with each other; the aisle was littered with orange peel and crumpled paper. The last slow train is an uncomfortable vehicle, but that was nothing to the good-looking couple laughing together on the last seat.

They were happy, God knows why. Because they were young, and tired of racking their brains. The fact that their laughter was but a thin covering for the deepest of feelings gave it a rare quality. They were dancing on the crust of a crater so to speak.

Phillida was pleased with Larry's exterior, and made no secret of it. "You look much nicer in those clothes," she remarked on one occasion.

"Think so?" said Larry, looking ridiculously self-conscious.

She laughed her silvery laugh.

"I'm not conceited!" said Larry.

She renewed her laughter.

"Well, you're conceited yourself," said Larry. "You think there's nobody like you."

"That's true," she said, cocking up her chin. "Everybody ought to be conceited. It makes life interesting. Conceit striking sparks from conceit! The humble ones are not worth bothering about. They simply invite you to tread on them."

"You're a great little treader," said Larry.

"How do you know? You're not humble."

(Delicious flattery!)

"You treated me as if I simply wasn't there," said Larry.

"You must excuse me," she said demurely. "I never was arrested before. How ought a girl to treat the man who takes her to the station house?"

Even Larry had to laugh at that, though the subject was a sore one. His laughter had a generous, deep ring, and it set her off afresh. Seeing them, one would have supposed them bound on a honeymoon instead of to jail.

But it was a precarious jollity; a word was likely to wreck it. As when she said thoughtlessly:

"Having a good time?"

Larry instantly went grave, and all his pent-up feelings began to struggle for utterance. "On the outside, yes! . . . But inside . . . No! . . . No! . . ."

"Oh, well, let's stick on the outside," she said quickly.

But it was too late. Larry was too heavy moving a body to be so easily diverted. His voice had become low and deep. "I never could be really easy in my mind . . . unless I knew . . . that man . . ."

"What man?"

"You know . . . the Englishman . . ."

"But what has he got to do with you . . . really, I mean?" she asked, genuinely astonished.

"If you know so much about people," Larry murmured low. ". . . You must know that."

Then she understood. “Ohh!” she breathed. “But do you mean . . . it really hurt you?”

“Hurt me!” said Larry. “What do you think I’m made of?”

Neither could bear to look at the other in that moment. “I thought you were just conceited,” she murmured. “It started that way.”

“Maybe,” said Larry. “Who’s to know how a thing’s going to end?”

She had nothing to say to that. She made believe to look out of the window, though it was perfectly dark by now, and all she could see was a tenuous reflection of her own face. After a while she said in a careful voice:

“He is nothing to me.”

“How can that be,” said poor Larry, “when he’s all mixed up with you in this?”

“That’s just accident.”

“He’s been backing you right along.”

“It was to his own interest to do so.”

“You were expecting him at the hotel to-day all the time you were stringing me along.”

“That’s true,” she said at once. “I had an appointment to meet him there to talk over our business—his business it is really.”

Larry’s voice dropped lower still. “He came right into your room . . . as if he had a right there . . .”

“And did you mind that?” she asked, with a quick, astonished, soft look in his face.

“I could have killed him for it,” muttered Larry.

She looked away very quickly. There was a silence. She presently said in an elaborately offhand tone:

“But be reasonable. He couldn’t very well send up his name, could he? As a matter of fact I had telegraphed him the number of my room, so he could come right up without applying at the desk. When he got to the door he heard voices inside. He listened, and the situation became clear to him. That was why he came in without knocking.”

It was impossible not to believe her. An unspeakable joy flooded Larry’s breast. He felt as if he had got rid of a corroding ulcer there. “I’m glad . . . I’m glad . . .” he stammered, with a foolish air, and terribly in earnest.

Phillida was prepared to be angry then. Her speech bubbled out. “What’s the matter with *your* instincts?” she demanded. “You saw the man. You must

have known what he was. It's written in his face clear enough. How could you suppose that I . . . that I . . . *That!* . . . Oh-h-h!"

Larry laughed out of pure gladness. His eyes adored her. "You . . ." he said confusedly, "when you're mad . . . you look so . . . I . . ." Speech failed him altogether. He instinctively put his hand over hers.

With a sharp intake of the breath, she snatched her hand away. "Not that! Not that!" she said in a muffled voice. "That would be too grotesque!"

He felt dimly that *she* was not facing the situation then. It was very difficult to express himself. "What's that got to do with it . . . how it looks, I mean . . . if you . . . if you . . ."

"I don't!" she said quickly. "You have no reason to suppose anything of the kind!"

He took her at her word, and was greatly cast down again. There was a long, unhappy silence.

"Who is he, really?" Larry asked at last.

"I can't tell you that."

"I heard the other man call him: 'My Lord.' "

Phillida laughed nervously. There was fright in the swift look she gave Larry. It distressed him very much to see it in those brave eyes. "That's just a name they give him, because of his high and mighty airs," she said.

He did not believe her. All his miserable doubts and suspicions came thronging back. "I suppose you're not going to tell me what lies behind all this," he said sullenly.

"How could I?" she asked distressfully.

"Sure, you couldn't. I'm the police."

"That's not it. I cannot tell anybody."

"You'll have to tell in court."

"I shall not, though."

"Then you'll be convicted."

"I have that in mind."

To question her only rendered her stubborn. Larry felt as if he was beating his head against a wall. After he had opened his breast wide to her, after he had handed himself over to her, to find that she could still be stony, caused him unendurable pain. His temper gave way at last.

"Huh! You talk about being natural and honest! Either you're lying, or just play-acting! . . . You say this man is nothing to you, yet you're willing to go to jail for him! What am I to believe from that?"

Phillida merely looked into the blank glass of her window.

Such was their stormy journey. In all it lasted five hours. They had to change twice—in each case to another slow train. Over and over the same ground they went, without getting an inch ahead. Most of the time they were quarrelling in low, sharp, embittered voices. They were able to hurt each other so! Even in the heat of quarrelling Larry never succeeded in extracting any admission from Phillida that would throw a gleam of light on the situation.

“You entered his room at the Colebrook with a false key! That’s proved!”

“Well, if it’s proved, let it go at that!”

“But why? Why did you do it? I don’t want to think you’re a common thief!”

“Then call me an uncommon one.”

“You’re only tormenting me.”

“Well, what do you think you’re doing to *me*?”

“Then tell me why you broke into his room.”

“*If* I broke into his room,” said Phillida cautiously, “you might know that I had a good reason for doing so.”

“That’s just spinning words!”

“Well, what do you expect? I told you in the beginning that I wasn’t going to explain anything.”

“When you were caught in his room you said that he had invited you in. You made out that . . . well you know what you made out! I can’t stand it!”

“You’re always accusing me of lying,” said Phillida very low. “Maybe I was lying then.”

“Ha! You admit it then!”

“I admit nothing.”

“What *did* you go in for?”

“You do not know that I was in!”

“This gets us nowhere!”

“Then for heaven’s sake drop it!”

“I can’t drop it!” cried poor Larry. “I hate a thief!”

“And I hate a policeman!” retorted Phillida.

Every word they said to each other made matters worse. Nevertheless there were moments of reconciliation; inexplicable, unreasonable reconciliations, when, in the midst of their bitterest words, their eyes would

confess to each other and beseech mercy; whereupon the quarrel would abruptly break down.

At such a moment Phillida pleaded softly: "Ah, don't talk about it! I'm so tired of fighting you! I asked you not to talk about it. Nothing can come of it!"

And Larry, deeply moved by her eyes, murmured: "God knows I don't want to talk about it! Talk is nothing. Give me your hand. Let me hold you close against me, and I'll not ask for explanations!"

"No! No! No!" she whispered, pushing him away. "That's impossible!"

Larry recognised by intuition that this was not a repulse but a cry of renunciation, and the uselessness of it maddened him. If she wanted him to take her in his arms! . . . "What kind of a woman are you?" he cried. (His voice was never raised above a sharp whisper.) "You turn soft eyes on me, and make your voice tremble! Then you push me away. There is no honesty in you at all!"

Phillida was no tame woman. She retorted as angry as he: "If you were not so stupid and self-satisfied you would understand that I am in a box . . . in a box. And I can act no differently."

"I don't know what you expect of a man," said Larry sulkily.

The silences were more painful, if that were possible, than the taunts.

After a while Larry said with a great air of unconcern: "Answer me one question plainly, and I'll drop it. . . . Do you . . . do you like me a little?"

"No!" she said quickly and breathlessly. She fell back in her seat as if she were exhausted, and put a hand over her eyes.

"Oh, well," said Larry, attempting to carry it off with a sneer, "then I know where I am."

But when he looked at her presently, he saw tears stealing down under her hand. He looked at the bright drops, stupefied. Phillida, the plucky one, who had fought him with such spirit all these hours, *crying*! The sight caused him a shock of pain as if a dagger with a curly blade had been pushed into his breast. Yet he was angry still.

"Yes, cry now!" he said, with curling lip. "Isn't that like a woman!"

She turned her head so that he could not see any more tears, but he guessed that they were falling still. He could not hold out against them. He darted little angry glances at her, and ground his teeth. "Ahh!" he said, scowling ferociously. "Ahh . . . !"

Then suddenly he broke down, and the wild, confused, unpremeditated words came tumbling out: "Don't! Don't! I can't stand it! Oh, I'm sorry!"

You hurt me so I didn't know what I was saying. If you can always tell, you must know how it is with me. It's not square if you know me inside and out, and you won't let me know you! . . . I *am* thick-headed, and you can do what you like with me! . . . Oh, my God! I love you! From the very first moment! Like a man out of his wits! I don't know the rights of this. But I've been in hell, that's clear! . . . I know there's nothing crooked in you. I just tried to make out there was. It's true I hounded you. I was driven to it. I've been in a maze. Ah, forget that now! I love you! I love you! I'd cut off my hand to serve you. You're like a glimpse of heaven to me. I know I have no right to look up to you . . . I haven't the words to get out what I feel! . . ."

"Ah! Stop! Stop!" whispered Phillida, with a crooked smile, and heavenly, soft eyes. "You have plenty of words! . . . If you love me as you say—yes, I knew it already, but let me be! Ah, let me be! For to-night anyway. I'm so tired! I can't stand any more."

"Can't I even touch you?" whispered Larry, humbly.

By way of answering that she slipped her arm through his and pressed it hard against her side. That was answer enough for Larry. So they rode the rest of the way, without speaking any more, Larry, with adoring, bent head; the policeman and his prisoner.

It was past one when they arrived in the Terminal. The last of the night trains had departed, and the vast spaces of the great building were empty. The handful of sleepy passengers straggled across the concourse, and scattered to their several beds. Larry and Phillida obtained a taxicab.

"Police headquarters, Mulberry Street," said Larry to the driver.

He had had an interval of blessed peace, but with the speaking of those words it was shattered. An agitation took possession of him, that increased with every yard that brought them nearer to their destination. He struggled with it in silence, not wishing to distress her further—her hand lay in his; but as they passed a street lamp the light flashed in his face, and Phillida read the hard agony there.

"What's the matter?" she asked, startled.

"In a minute I'll have to hand you over," he groaned. "And you'll be locked up . . . locked up! And through me! . . . And me walking around outside. Free, my God! Where could I go? Where could I find rest? It'll drive me out of my senses!"

"Hush! Hush!" she said. "The situation is not of your making. You have only done what you had to do."

“No!” he said. “That’s only how I bluffed myself. I brought it about. If it hadn’t been for me it would have been dropped and forgotten!”

“But it’s no such great matter as that,” she said. “I have no dread of the cell. According to my own ideas I’ve done no wrong. My mind is at rest.”

“I can’t stand it!” groaned Larry.

She turned in her seat; her arms went swiftly about his neck, and down she drew his head until their lips pressed together. He drifted away into forgetfulness.

She dropped back with a sigh. “Will that help you to bear it?” she whispered.

“Oh, Phillida! . . . Phillida . . . !”

“I love you with all my heart!” she whispered. “You’re a man! So real! So brave and strong and simple. I can’t help myself. I’ve got to love you!”

“But I’m not all that,” whispered Larry humbly. “I’m a dunderhead. You’re always laughing at me!”

“That’s why I love you,” she said, laughing then, deep in her throat, as women do.

“Why did you push me away,” said Larry reproachfully. “Think of the hours we wasted in the train.”

“I was afraid!”

“Afraid?”

“Don’t you understand? I couldn’t have given in to you . . . without telling you everything.”

“Tell me now!” whispered Larry swiftly. “Quick, we’re almost there! Give me some ease!”

“You see! . . . Isn’t it enough that I love you?”

“Tell me! Tell me!”

“No! No! No!”

The cab stopped in front of Headquarters. Larry stuck his head out to tell the man to drive on, and come back later. But Phillida thrust the door out of his hand, and pushing past him, ran up the steps of the building. Larry had no choice but to follow.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIG BOSSES

LARRY'S detail to the Detective Bureau ended automatically with the delivery of his prisoner. Early next morning he was making his way to his own station house, clad once more in the blue coat and brass buttons. Years seemed to have passed over his head in the last three days. He was greatly dreading the ordeal of facing his comrades. A square bunch, he liked them well; that was just the trouble. They would naturally expect him to pick things up with them just where they had been dropped.

How could he? He was a changed man. Moreover his nerves were all on edge. He had not slept the night through. His eyes were bloodshot and strained with watching. And a single thought went on hammering in his head until he was nearly out of his mind with it . . . Phillida in a cell! . . . Phillida in a cell . . . !

The morning papers were full of the story. Larry had merely glanced over the headlines with a sick feeling. Probably the public was not especially interested in the case, but every policeman on the force felt a deep satisfaction that the prestige of "the finest" had been brilliantly restored by one of their number. Larry anticipating the welcome that awaited him from his own mates, shivered at it.

And indeed, something like a cheer greeted him as he entered the station house. There were no outsiders present. The bluecoats crowded up to shake his hand and clap him on the back. They quickly led him into the common room where the reserves wait during their hours on duty, and closed the door. They regarded him as theirs.

"Good boy, Larry! . . . You turned the trick, old fella! . . . You put this precinct on the map all right . . . You were there with the come-back for the old force! . . ."

"Tell us the story!" was the general cry.

"Nothing to tell," mumbled Larry.

"Go on! You wasn't always the modest violet. This is something new!"

"I hadn't ought to talk until the case comes to trial," objected Larry.

A general laugh greeted such excessive delicacy. "It's only amongst ourselves!"

"Besides, it's all in the papers anyway," said another.

"It was Headquarters gave it out," said Larry sorely. "The newspaper lads got nothing out of me."

"Sure, they gave it out! Do you suppose they'd suppress it after the way it was published all over how the girl spit in our eye?"

"Well, if you read the papers what more do you want?"

"The inside dope, old bean!"

"Is it true she's a lulu, a peach, a Ziegfeld star?"

"You bet!" answered another voice. "I seen her in the station here. A little queen!"

"Did she put up a fight? Don't see no scratches on your rosy cheeks."

"Go on! She fell for handsome Larry, all right!"

"Honest, did she try to make up to you?"

"What did you talk about coming home on the train?"

There are limits to every man's patience, and Larry was not the most patient of men. He finally exploded. "Shut up, you fellows. I'm not talking, understand? That's final!"

They saw that there was something more than a joke in this, and fell silent. They drew away from Larry somewhat, looking at him queerly, and exchanging meaning glances with each other. He could see that there would be a great klatsch over this as soon as he was out of hearing . . . "Oh, well," he thought, "they'll soon know."

Later, alone with Matt McArdle, Larry did not feel so prickly. Matt and he were of the same age, and had joined the force together. There was an attachment between them all the stronger in that it had never been, and never could be acknowledged in words. Matt did not question Larry.

"Gee! I envy you, old fel'! Pounding the pavement seems like pretty slow work after fluffing around like you been. Very likely you won't have to go back to it now."

Larry had the impulse to open his heart to Matt, but it was difficult to speak of these things in cold blood. "You've got nothing to envy me for," he muttered. "I've made a prime fool of myself, if you want to know."

Matt stared. "After you brought her in and all! After you took her single-handed against them all!"

“Hell!” said Larry morosely. “You don’t want to believe all you read in the papers.”

Honest Matt regarded his friend as if he thought him slightly demented.

“I’m in a jam!” said Larry, with extreme bitterness. “Any way you look at it; jammed! I can’t see anything clear. All I know is, it’s wrong! wrong! The whole business, I mean. What goes down with everybody? Nothing but foolishness and lies! . . . If a fellow could only get a fresh clean start! Digging in the earth ought to be honest work anyway!”

“Only a woman could turn a man upside down like this,” said young Matt sagely.

Larry did not reject the suggestion. It was a comfort to talk around the subject with his friend. “Have you ever been knocked absolutely endwise?” he asked. “Bowled over; floored; beaten down?”

Matt shook his head. “My time is yet to come,” he said simply.

“Well, when it comes I won’t be envying you,” said Larry.

Matt could not help but understand then. His lips formed themselves in a noiseless whistle. “What are you going to do?” he asked with a touch of awe.

Larry, foreseeing expostulations and arguments, could not bring himself to tell his friend of the resolve he had taken. “I don’t know,” he said evasively.

In the course of the morning the station house was visited by no less a personage than the great Inspector Durdan, chief of the Detective Bureau. Larry had not seen him at Headquarters the night before. The Inspector went into conference with Larry’s Captain, and Larry was presently sent for.

The Inspector rose at his entrance, and offered him a cordial hand. “Good work, Harker!” he said. “It’s a pleasure to be able to congratulate a young officer on such a neat job.”

Under the circumstances this had a horrible irony for Larry. He tried to turn it off by saying: “The two men got away from me.”

The Inspector probably attributed his peculiar manner to a young man’s natural diffidence. “It was a physical impossibility to bring them all in,” he said, with a wave of the hand.

“Have the men been caught?” Larry asked with an eagerness he could not conceal.

“No,” said the Inspector. “They’ve slipped through Shane’s fingers once, and are likely to do so again. Evidently fellows of a high degree of cunning . . . A thankless job,” he went on dryly. “I think we’ll leave it to Shane.”

Especially as there's no charge against the men. We got nothing out of the girl that would incriminate them. She's a hard one! In three hours we got nothing out of her that we didn't know already."

Three hours! Larry pictured those three hours. His face got red; a mist swam before his eyes; his collar choked him. Then he went pale.

The Inspector did not remark these physical manifestations. "Let them go, I say," he went on. "What we wanted was the girl who brought the whole force into disrepute. And we've got her. And we've got enough to jail her on too, let her be as stubborn and mum as she chooses."

Larry clenched his teeth, and held himself in.

"As for yourself, Harker," the Inspector went on, "you've proved your mettle as a detective. You're pretty young for the job, but we need some of all kinds, and it's a fault you'll grow out of. The Commissioner himself spoke about you. I have an order in my pocket for your permanent transfer to the Detective Bureau."

He paused to receive the confused and grateful thanks that he expected. But Larry was not feeling like that. He had a difficult task ahead of him, and the right words would not present themselves. It was no joke for a lad like him to set himself up in opposition to the big bosses. But it had to be gone through with. It was the first necessary step towards recovering his peace of mind.

"Well?" said the Inspector, surprised by his silence.

Still the right words did not come, and Larry obeyed dumb instinct more eloquent than words. He unpinned the nickel badge on his breast, and laid it on the Captain's desk.

"What's this for?" both men cried out in astonishment.

"I want to get out, sir," Larry said simply.

"What! Leave the force! What's the matter with you?" cried Captain Craigin, who was somewhat hot-tempered.

"I'm not fitted to be a patrolman, or a detective either," said Larry.

"What! After the Inspector has just told you you had proved yourself. What foolishness has got into you?"

"I have proved nothing, sir," said Larry steadily. "I kept falling down all the time. In the end it was just a bit of luck."

"Well, we judge by results," said the Inspector dryly. "At any rate you showed doggedness."

"Doggedness gets you in wrong as often as not," said Larry bitterly.

“Come now, give me a plain reason if you have one,” said the Inspector. “Why do you want to get out?”

“I don’t like running down crooks and bringing them in,” said Larry bluntly.

The Inspector resented the slur at his profession which was dear to him, and his face turned hard. “Ha! you feel yourself too good for the job!”

“You get me wrong, sir,” said Larry, anxious not to offend. “There’s nothing the matter with the force. I like the men, and I respect the officials. But . . . but . . . you can get plenty to take my place.”

Inspector and Captain exchanged a look. Like Matt they were prepared to believe that Larry was a little off his chump. Throwing up such rosy prospects!

“I’m curious about this sympathy for crooks,” said the Inspector sarcastically.

Larry, feeling the approach of danger, turned wary.

“Or for one particular crook maybe . . .”

Larry set his jaw and looked straight ahead.

Captain Craigin burst out with: “Do you mean to say you’ve let this Kenley woman come around you?”

An honest indignation surged up in Larry. Thus to be badgered after all he had been through! “I brought her in!” he said. “You said I did my work all right. What more do you expect of a man?”

“I expect him to keep his hands clean!” shouted the Captain. “I don’t expect him to get tangled up with the first woman thief he’s sent after!”

Larry flushed darkly—then suddenly he felt able to laugh. A blessed feeling of assurance came to him. Larry was developing under stress. “All right, sir,” he said good-humouredly. “If you prefer it that way. I no longer felt fit to be a policeman, so the square thing seemed to be to give up my badge.”

The choleric Captain, suspecting that his leg was being pulled, merely glared at him.

The Inspector was a wiser man. Larry by the very look of him, his inches and his straight gaze, was a man to delight a commander’s heart, and he was loth to let him go. “Sure, that was the right thing to do,” he said, good-humoured himself. “And if you want to go, we’re not going to ask you to stay. Too many applicants . . . But sometimes young fellows have foolish impulses. You’ve done a good bit of work. Too bad to spoil it, and spoil all your prospects on an impulse. Look here, I want two men to go out to

'Frisco on a job. You'll be gone two weeks. See the country. Get fresh ideas. How about it?"

Larry could not stand out against a friendly manner. He blushed with gratification. "I can't take it, sir. But I sure am obliged to you. I've had a good time here. I don't want any hard feelings when I go. I've got to go. It's no impulse. It's just one of those things you can't help."

The Inspector lost interest in Larry. He rose. "Sorry," he said. "I've spent too much time on this matter. The rest lies between you and your Captain."

There followed a very bad half hour for Larry.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE VISITORS' ROOM

THAT afternoon Larry walked the streets with a certain ease at his breast. True his difficulties were still all ahead of him; he did not minimise them; but he was no longer divided against himself. That is what brings a man down. He could face things out now. He owed allegiance but in one direction. He was free to devote himself to the single purpose of getting Phillida out of her cell. He was on his way to see her.

Theoretically, prisoners awaiting trial are supposed to have a keeper within hearing of all interviews save those with counsel, but in a crowded city prison this is not always practicable. There is a big visitors' room with benches around the walls. On these benches the prisoners and their friends sit side by side. A number of keepers patrol the room, keeping a sharp watch for gifts passing, but there can be no pretence of hearing what is said.

Larry's person was not known at the prison. He was in plain clothes again. To obviate the danger of gossip, he gave an assumed name at the gate. In the course of their stormy interview Larry and his Captain had found themselves in agreement on one point; that it would be better for the present to keep from the newspapers the fact that the "hero" of the Kenley case had resigned from the force. Larry was shown into the visitors' room.

Larry's own troubles had engendered in him an unwonted softness of heart towards others. Since the late complete reversal of his point of view, he was all on the side of the prisoners. Poor devils! you never knew! He looked about at them and at their friends with a strong fellow-feeling. It was surprising when you saw a number of them together, what a decent looking lot they were. Much like any other crowd. Perhaps the out and out bad eggs didn't have visitors.

There were two groups in particular that held his attention. Opposite him a good-looking young sailor with his girl-wife and their baby. The young couple were pressed close together on the bench; the carefully dressed babe sat in his mother's lap, and his father bent down to play with him. The sight caught at the breast. Of course good looks are no warranty of good behaviour, but whatever it was the young fellow may have done, certainly none but the purest feelings showed in his face now.

Farther along there was a mother visiting her young son. Not at all the conventional picture of the broken-hearted, grey-haired, sweet-faced, etc., etc. This mother was smiling cheerfully at her son, and he at her; each putting a good face on a bad matter to keep up the other's spirits. The old lady had brought, of all things, a camera, and the lad was carefully explaining to her how to use it.

It was a noteworthy fact that all around the room while there were plenty of tears falling, there were no *reproaches* to be seen. Parents, husbands, wives, children and pals, they were all absolutely *with* the prisoners in whatever trouble they had got themselves into. Observing this, Larry said to himself with a feeling of surprise: ". . . Gee! Folks are decent to each other!"

He sat there coolly enough, feeling better able to cope with things than he had for some days past. But when he beheld Phillida being brought towards him, pale, but with her chin up, and the suggestion of a smile hovering about her lips, a sudden storm of emotion blew him clean off his foundation. He was seized and shaken by his feelings until there was no sense left in him; he was just a great yearning.

She gave him her hand with an enchanting smile. "I was hoping it might be you," she whispered, "but I scarcely dared believe they would let you come."

Larry was incapable of speaking.

They sat down on the bench, pressing close together like that other couple across the way, their clasped hands hidden between them. Phillida, like a true woman, sought about for something to say that would tide over the first difficult moments.

"They let me see the papers this morning. Weren't they funny about us?"

"Oh, Phillida," groaned Larry, "seeing you here, I can't . . . I can't . . ."

As in many another case in the room, it was the prisoner who played the part of comforter. "It's not nearly as bad as you think," said Phillida. "This day has passed as quickly as other days. I've been sleeping ever since morning."

"But last night," whispered Larry. "They told me . . . they put you through the third degree. Good God! I know what that is! And after all you'd been through before . . ."

"It wasn't like you see it on the stage," said Phillida, smiling. "Nobody hurt me . . . It was very tiresome. I was nearly dead with sleep . . . But they didn't get anything out of me!"

Larry squeezed her hand hard. This meant: You can tell me now!

Phillida murmured: "Ah! it's good to have you so close!"

"Then you *do* love me?" he whispered, fixing her with his hungry blue eyes.

"Did you doubt it?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes," he said humbly. "When I thought it over . . . it seemed impossible that you could . . ."

"How are the mighty fallen!" murmured Phillida.

He laughed.

"How long will they let you stay, dear?"

"Ah! Say that again! . . . Half an hour, I think. I've got a lot to tell you . . . but I'm short of breath . . . When I'm so close to you I can't think!"

"Move away, then."

"No! No!"

"You dear! . . . But I must hear what you've got to say."

"I'll tell you. After all it's a simple thing. I've left the police."

"Larry!"

"You said you hated a policeman."

"I just meant the idea of it."

"Well, I hate the idea too, now. So I've chucked it."

"How you always manage to surprise me!" she said. "Serves me right for telling myself I knew you . . . Well, I'm glad. It was inevitable. That would never have satisfied you . . . What are you going to do?"

The question hurt him a little. "What do you suppose I'm going to do? . . . Going to get you out first. Then we'll see."

She turned away her head, and constraint fell between them like a curtain.

"Is that all you've got to say to it?" asked Larry.

No answer from Phillida. She understood very well what he was after.

"Are you going to make me beg for it?" Larry murmured sorely. "A man has his pride."

"Ah! Must we go all through that again!" she whispered painfully.

"Again? Everything is changed now, isn't it?"

"I love you!" she whispered.

"When people love they don't keep things back, do they? You have everything there is of me, and you give me just a little piece of yourself in return. What kind of love is that? You don't trust me!"

“Dear, *dear* Larry,” she whispered. “It’s not my secret.”

This made him angry. “Then it’s *his* secret. Do you think I’m going to stand for that?”

“You couldn’t be jealous of a man like that!”

“I could be jealous of your sacrificing yourself for him; of your going to jail to serve him. The fact that’s he’s no good only makes it worse . . .”

“I am not going to jail to serve him!” cried Phillida indignantly. “You are miles from the truth!”

“You can put me right!”

She miserably shook her head.

He bent his head close to hers, and held her hard. “This is the real thing between you and me, isn’t it?” he whispered. “We’re plighted. We’re going to be married some day, aren’t we? With me it’s until death!”

“And me,” she whispered.

“Then don’t you owe me a little something, too? God knows I am not much! But you have taken me. Haven’t I a right . . .”

“Do you mean you would not want to marry a convicted felon?” she whispered sharply.

“I do *not* mean that,” he whispered, mad with the pain she caused him. “What is it to me what label they stick on you? I can wait for you, too, if I have to. I only want to know! How do you expect me to lie down in my bed and get up with a secret like this between us? How can I go about a man’s business with *that* on my mind!”

“It is you who have no trust!” she whispered.

“You ask too much of flesh and blood!”

“You hurt me so!”

“Well, I’m not enjoying myself.”

She drew her hand out of his.

That cut all the ground from under his feet. “Ah, don’t . . . don’t take yourself from me,” he whispered, searching in her face, and groping for her hand, careless of who might see.

She held it from him. “I must make myself hard,” she said. “You force it on me. I have been over this in my own mind—oh! so many times! Until my brain reeled. I cannot think about it any more. There is only one course possible for me. And that is to keep my mouth shut. I’m going to hold to it without thinking or listening. Nothing can change me.”

Larry drew back. "This is nothing but dumb obstinacy," he said sullenly. "I can be obstinate, too."

Phillida would not look at him. Her face was like a mask. She had set her lips as if for good. Larry watched her, grinding his teeth. If it was a test of strength she wanted, all right.

It was stifling hot in the room. There was a smell of disinfectant and varnish. The keepers patrolled up and down, eyeing their charges sharply. From all around the walls came the sound of whispering, and now and then a suppressed sniffing. No doubt many another poignant little drama was being acted out there in undertones.

Finally Larry got the better of mere animal stubbornness. He spoke again, and the deeps of his nature yielded up an unaccustomed eloquence. "You wring my heart with your sweetness," he whispered. "I am killed with wanting you . . . But what a poor creature I would be, if I gave in to you, and came crawling to your feet! I love you too proudly for that. I can still love you and be a man. We've got to be equals or nothing. I will not stand for this secrecy."

One of Phillida's hands went to her breast. Her face gave no sign whatever. "If that's all you've got to say . . . please go . . . quickly," she whispered.

Larry stood up with a jerk. "I'm going! . . . But it's only fair to warn you I don't mean to let this thing drop. If you won't tell me, by God! I'll find out for myself!"

He lingered for a moment, longing to see her relent. But she got to her feet, and avoiding his glance, turned towards her keeper. Larry strode out of the prison.

CHAPTER XVI

VARIOUS LEADS

NOTWITHSTANDING the care of Larry's Captain to withhold the news, somebody at the station house talked indiscreetly. In the next morning's papers it was published that Officer Harker, "the young hero of the Kenley case," had resigned from the force. It made a piquant item. No reason for Larry's act was given; whoever had talked, his indiscretion stopped short of that; and as yet the reporters had not succeeded in finding Larry himself. Upon reading the item, Larry precipitately packed his belongings and changed his boarding-house.

In his new room he sat himself down to consider the whole situation. It was a new exercise for Larry to think a thing through. The dunderhead was developing fast. He was fairly well composed in his mind. There was a fire burning in him, but he clamped down the safety valve, and made it work. He had an all-absorbing aim; he had something to do; that kept him from flying off the handle.

He did not disguise from himself that his prospects of success were far from rosy. Phillida's cool assurance suggested that her secret was well hidden. Moreover Larry no longer had any official standing as an investigator. This was a serious handicap. Perhaps Shane would help him; the old fox had seemed friendly. But Shane himself could not lay hands on the elusive Englishman, and what chance would Larry, the novice, have of doing so? However the fire burned steadily in Larry. . . . *I will find him*, he said to himself. His private resources consisted of some hundreds of dollars, his savings.

He had several lines to work upon, such as they were. There was the taxicab driver who had been hired by Mr. Felix to rescue Phillida from the police. He might be persuaded to lead Larry to his employer. Then there was Phillida's friend, Doreen Innes. It was almost certain that Doreen was closely implicated in the mystery; but whether she was or no, Larry knew that she was in possession of the truth. Failing Mr. Felix, he must find Doreen.

There were those drafts that Doreen and her husband had received from England. Since they came from England, it was possible that they might

have something to do with the case. They might be traced. Doreen might have returned to her former boarding-house, or some word have come from her. Larry made up his mind to proceed first to the house on Thirty-sixth Street. It was not far from his own place.

That peculiar-looking woman, Miss Corkerell, received him with a wide display of pale gums. She was wearing another homemade dress of the violent shade of red that she affected because "it gave her colour." An assiduous reader of the newspapers, Miss Corkerell was well up in the details of the Kenley case. When Larry told her that he had resigned from the force in order to devote himself to Phillida's interest, the worthy soul was prepared to embrace him on the spot. Like all sentimental spinsters she had a predisposition in favour of the accused.

"Always the lady!" she said of Phillida. "Kept herself to herself, but not what you'd call stuck-up neither. Me and her was like sisters. You never saw a fellow get fresh with Miss Kenley. At least not twice over. She could crumble them up with one look. I never could do that myself, being so tender-hearted, but it does me good to see it in another girl. If there's anything I like it's to see a girl with a proper pride in her sex put the creatures in their places. Of course I mean these good-for-nothing fresh guys, not a serious-minded gentleman like yourself. Nobody can tell me there was anything crooked about Miss Kenley. She wouldn't have nothing to do with men!"

Miss Corkerell's reasoning was rather bewildering, but her heart was in the right place, and Larry warmed towards her.

She drowned him in oceans of talk out of which he was unable to fish a single minnow of information. Since Doreen had departed from her house, presumably for a sanitarium, no word had been received from her. No letters had come for her; nobody had called to enquire. Miss Corkerell understood that she had driven to Grand Central station, but from Grand Central you can depart for any quarter of America except due south.

Larry went back to the drafts from England received by the Inneses, some of which Miss Corkerell had cashed for them at her bank. Persistent questioning established the fact that these had been bank drafts; that is to say orders drawn by a bank in London upon a bank in New York. Such drafts may be obtained by anybody who goes into a bank with the cash in his hand, and nothing may be traced through them. Miss Corkerell said that the Inneses had never received any letters from England during their stay in her house.

Meanwhile it ever became more difficult to keep Miss Corkerell's mind fixed on Doreen or Phillida. She had probably never before found herself an object of interest to so good-looking a young man as Larry, and it quite carried her off her feet. She sighed, she simpered, she grinned with a truly horrifying display of gums: she ogled him with sidelong glances of her pale eyes. Larry became extremely uncomfortable. It would have been funny had it been some other man who was the object of her attentions. His virginal blushes only charmed her the more. Finally she asked him to stay to lunch.

"I was just sitting down to my simple midday meal. Of course a girl in my position can not be too careful. Not a soul in the house at this moment but our two selves! But I'm sure you're too much of a gentleman to take advantage of my situation."

Larry pleaded urgent business and finally somehow found himself upon the sidewalk again in great relief.

He quickly put Miss Corkerell out of his mind. Walking along he cogitated. The only approach to Doreen lay through Phillida herself. Phillida was undoubtedly writing to Doreen in order to keep up her ailing friend's spirits. The astute Phillida would never post the letters within the prison, but would send them out by a friend. One of the girls of the Spotted Pup probably. Dared he go to the Spotted Pup again? There was a chance that they might not be on to him yet. No photograph of Larry had been published; and there had been nothing in the papers about his first visit to the Bohemian restaurant, or his trip to Barnstaple. It was worth trying.

But first he meant to look up the taxi driver, and afterwards call on Shane.

When Larry got to the Amsterdam the man he was looking for was not to be seen in the cab rank. Larry hung about for a while, and in the end had the satisfaction of seeing his man drive up and take his place at the end of the line. He was a young fellow of Larry's own age, with a lively blue eye, and the hard, wary, humorous look common to his adventurous trade. Upon last seeing this man Larry had been in a blind rage, but now he felt kindly towards him. In his way the fellow had helped Phillida.

When Larry stepped up to his cab notwithstanding the plain clothes, the chauffeur instantly recognised him, and his wary look became intensified. He had had a lot of trouble with the police, and didn't know what might be in the wind now.

"Can you take a fare from me?" asked Larry, "or must you wait your turn in line?"

“If you insist on having me I can take you on,” said the chauffeur, with a grin. “Where do you want to go?”

“Drive to some lunch room where we can sit down. I want to talk to you private.”

“More friendly this morning, eh?” said the chauffeur.

“Yep. I’m off the force. Maybe you read it in the papers.”

“Are you Harker?”

“The same.”

“I read it. Get in.”

Seated one on each side of a little marble-topped table, the two covertly sized each other up as young men do. One of those curious intimations that sometimes pass back and forth between humans impelled them towards friendliness—but they were not giving anything away of course.

Larry found it difficult to open the matter. “You understand I’m on my own in this,” he said highly self-conscious. “This is a little investigation I’m making for my own satisfaction.”

“I hear you say it,” said the other guardedly.

“You say you’ve been reading the papers,” Larry went on; “you know then that I went after the girl and brought her in two days ago. That was my job . . . But I couldn’t stand to see her railroaded. So I got off the force. I’m working for her now.”

The chauffeur nodded. “What do you want of me?” he asked.

“I want to find the fellow who hired you to give the girl a lift.”

The other looked dubious and wary.

“I know the guy!” Larry went on. “Tall, English stiff, about forty-five years old, looks younger. Regular swell. English Johnny style. Grey eyes set close together. Sort of lordly air. ‘Yes, my good man,’ and all that.”

The chauffeur grinned appreciatively, but said nothing.

“If it wasn’t him, it was his side partner,” Larry continued. “Fellow about our age. Five foot eight, weight one sixty. Plump face; fresh colour like a girl; little straw-colored moustache. Also English.”

“You seem to know your men,” said the other dryly. “What do you expect to prove? If you want me to work with you give me the inside dope.”

“I don’t know it,” muttered Larry.

“Won’t the girl tell you?”

“No,” said Larry, flushing darkly.

His confession recommended him to the other man. Even a chauffeur may have a romantic streak concealed about him. "Suppose it was just as you say," he said in friendly manner. "How could I put you next to the guys? I wouldn't know who they were, just being picked up on my stand by one of them? They wouldn't come around me afterwards, once they paid me."

Larry could not deny the reasonableness of this. "Well, I realise that," he said, disappointed. "If I can't find them, will you go on the stand and testify when the girl comes up for trial?"

"What good would that do?"

"Just this. If you would testify that the man she's accused of robbing was willing to go to any lengths afterwards to get her off, it would weaken the case against her, see?"

"I see your point," said the chauffeur warily. "But you've just told me you don't know what's behind it all. In such a case it seems healthier to me to keep out of it. When in doubt lie low. That's my motto. A chauffeur couldn't have no other. I got to have some reason for acting."

"You saw the girl that day," ventured Larry.

The other young man's eyes brightened. "You bet I saw her! A corker! My God! what nerve for a girl! When she made her getaway in the crowd, she smiled at me over her shoulder, cool as you please, like she was out for an afternoon's shopping. I ain't likely to forget *her!*"

"Well . . . there's your reason," mumbled Larry. "I tell you they're bent on railroading her."

Larry's eyes were bent on the table. The chauffeur was regarding him with a curious mixture of sympathy and derision.

Larry did not see that he was half won. "I take it the Englishman offered you so much for turning the trick," he went on. "And a further sum later if you kept your mouth shut when questioned by the police. Which he subsequently paid. Well, you've fulfilled your contract with him. You owe him nothing further . . . As for me, I didn't offer you anything, but . . ."

"Can that, fellow!" said the chauffeur quickly. "If this is your own private affair, why you're just a young fellow like myself, I wouldn't take anything off you."

"I thought you wouldn't," said Larry.

"I'm with you," said the chauffeur suddenly. "Can't break me, I guess. I'm no chiny ornament. Whenever the trial comes up call on me."

They shook hands on it.

Larry, applying at the offices of the Shane Detective Agency, received a new impression of his erstwhile adversary's power and authority. It was the largest establishment of its kind in town. There was a whole suite of rooms with clerks, stenographers, office boys without number. It was not such a simple matter to win to the great man's presence; Larry had to write his name on a piece of paper, and interview a secretary before he was passed in. He made his way to the corner room feeling rather abashed.

Shane himself, leaning back in a swivel chair and turning the inevitable cigar between his lips, was unchanged. He greeted Larry heartily.

"Just got back," he said.

"You did not catch them!" said Larry.

Shane took the frayed cigar out of his mouth, and gazed at it before replying. "No," he said.

"How could you have missed them?" said Larry. "I gave you the license number of the car they escaped in. They only had a few minutes' start. And with your high-powered car . . ."

"Oh, I could have taken them," said Shane coolly. "But I was called off."

"Called off?" said Larry, staring hard.

"There was no charge against the Englishman. My clients considered that it wasn't worth the expense."

"There was some other reason," said Larry slowly.

"Mine not to reason why; mine but to do or die," quoted Shane jocosely. ". . . What's this I hear about your leaving the force?"

It was not until later that Larry realised how neatly Shane changed the subject in order to divert an awkward question. At the moment Larry fell for it.

"It's a fact," he said gloomily.

"Have you come to me for a job?"

"Well, I have, and I haven't," said Larry. "You can help me if you will."

"Shoot, my lad."

"I got out of the force so that I could get to the bottom of the case. There's a powerful interest determined to railroad the girl."

"Um!" said Shane, looking at his cigar.

"In order to give me some standing as an investigator," Larry went on, "I thought maybe you'd take me on without pay, and furnish me with credentials so that I'd be in a position to insist on information."

“I’m sorry, lad,” said Shane kindly, “but my clients, the Hotelmen’s Association, have called me off. My biggest clients as it happens, but that doesn’t cut any ice. Under the circumstances I could hardly lend you my name to follow up the case, could I?”

“Oh, I get you,” said Larry bitterly. “The Hotelmen’s Association has been fixed.”

“Well, I wouldn’t exactly say that,” said Shane mildly.

“I’ll find my man in spite of them,” said Larry, turning to go.

“Wait a minute,” said Shane, with a friendly air. “I’m glad you came in. I think you’ve got the stuff in you. I like you. I’m going to try to prevent you from acting foolishly, though being a lad of spirit, you probably won’t thank me for it.”

“What are you getting at?” said Larry suspiciously.

“I take it this case is a complete mystery to you,” said Shane.

“It is,” said Larry sorely.

“The obvious explanation has not occurred to you?”

“No explanation has occurred to me.”

“To begin with, are you willing to concede that Phillida Kenley did break into the Englishman’s room at the Colebrook?”

“I concede that.”

“Good. Next, why did she do it? A nice girl like that and obviously not a professional thief.”

Larry was grateful for these admissions, but he could supply no answer to Shane’s question.

Shane proceeded to answer it himself. “Suppose the so-called Mr. Felix was a man of wealth and high position . . .”

“I know that he is,” put in Larry.

“Oh, do you?” said Shane dryly. “It’s more than I know. I’m only supposing.”

“Go on,” said Larry.

“Suppose the girl knew something discreditable about him and had an intention of blackmailing him . . .”

“That’s a lie!” Larry burst out hotly.

“Just for the sake of argument. Just for the sake of argument,” Shane said soothingly. “It would provide her with a motive, wouldn’t it? Supposing, I mean, that she was after documentary evidence to support what she already knew about him. . . . Well she didn’t get anything; that we know.

But suppose that the mere attempt threw a nasty scare into the man, who, I agree with you, is one of the meanest specimens that England ever sent to our shores—you can't blame England for that. That would explain, wouldn't it, why he turned about and worked his damndest to get her off? He would be afraid to have the case come into court. But you stepped in and scattered his apples. I'm not surprised he wanted to shoot you. You locked the girl up in the Tombs and matters have passed out of his hands. But suppose he's paying her well to keep her mouth shut. It would appear that she's doing that very thing. Very likely she figures it's worth it, even at the cost of a short sentence to satisfy the injured feelings of the police force."

There was a cool sureness about this, a devilish plausibility that drove Larry frantic. He couldn't refute it; he could only rage. To protest his belief in Phillida's goodness would, he knew, only cause Shane to smile in the maddening way of an older man. Moreover he had a horrid suspicion that Shane was only putting the case in hypothetical form in order to save his feelings. What did Shane *know*? Supposing Phillida were not on the square . . . ? But Larry could go no farther than that in his mind. That meant the end of all things for him.

"It sounds well!" he cried, jumping up. "But it's a lie just the same, and I'll prove it . . . At any rate it's not the whole truth!"

Shane patted his shoulder. "You're a good lad," he said, "and your feelings are a credit to you. But for your own sake, don't let them carry you away. Listen to me. I'm old and cooled down. I don't know who this Englishman is, and I don't know what it is that the girl knows against him. I don't give a damn either. But I do know that the situation is just about what I have laid out to you."

"I'll satisfy myself as to that," said Larry.

Shane thrust out his hand. "All right, my lad. Don't do anything foolish. Come see me again."

CHAPTER XVII

THE IDENTITY OF MR. FELIX

WHEN LARRY got out of Shane's office and had time to think things over coolly, it became evident to him that Shane, friendly though he undoubtedly was, had not been completely candid. Shane in his astute way had diverted Larry from asking certain obvious questions. Something remained unexplained. Larry had left Shane hot on the very heels of the Englishmen. How could he have been "called off" as he said, when Mr. Felix was practically in his hands? Some particular thing had happened, and Larry resolved to find out what that thing was.

The car that had rescued the two Englishmen from the train had carried a New Jersey license. Larry crossed the river to Jersey City, and in the local office of the Commissioner consulted the state list of motor-cars. From it he learned that the car he was interested in was owned by one John Carver of Mount Elder.

Mount Elder was a town in Southern New Jersey not fifty miles from Atlantic City. The train service was inconvenient, and Larry, whose impatience could not brook an hour's delay, parted with some of his precious dollars for the hire of a car. By four o'clock of the same day he was in Mount Elder. John Carver proved to be a well-known citizen of the place; the first person Larry asked pointed out his hay and feed store.

Within the store Larry had no difficulty in picking out the bearded man who had driven the grey car that day, and to whose head Mr. Felix had pressed a gun.

"Can I have a few minutes' private talk with you?" asked Larry.

The honest store-keeper with a wondering glance, led Larry out into the sun in front of his establishment.

Larry wasted no time in beating around the bush. "Two days ago you were driving south on the road that passes through the town of Cardwell when something happened . . ."

"Well, what of it?" said the other, with a bothered look.

"This is what happened," said Larry. "Two men jumped off a train that was pulling out of Cardwell. You happened to be passing in the road, and

you slowed up, I suppose, to see what was the matter. The two men jumped on the running-board of your car, and one of them put a gun to your head.”

“Who are you,” asked the store-keeper guardedly, “a newspaper reporter?”

“Private detective,” said Larry.

“What do you want of me?”

“Who were those two men?”

“I can’t tell you, friend. I never saw them before or since.”

“Well, you can tell me what became of them, anyway.”

Carver considered a moment, scratching his head. Then with a toss of his hand he said: “I’ve got nothing to conceal. Nobody pledged me to silence. I guess if you’d felt a cold rim of steel pressed to your temple, you’d have done the same as me.”

“Sure!” said Larry. “No blame attaches to you.”

“They forced me to drive them at top speed about five or six miles south on the main road. Then they ordered me to turn off on a side road leading in a westerly direction. This was a rough road and I warned them I had a bad tire, but they made me put her to it just the same, and in a couple of miles I blew the tire to hell. While I was changing the rim they seen a big car coming, and telling me they’d come back and kill me if I split on them, they took to cover. The big car come up and stopped—one of those Mackinaw cars it was, seventy horse power, a hum-dinger . . .”

“Yes, yes, I know it,” said Larry; “go on!”

“There was two big men in it beside the driver, and I reckoned I was safe enough with them, so I pointed out the way the other two had gone. In a little while they came back leading them . . .”

An involuntary exclamation escaped Larry. Here was the missing fact he was in search of!

“. . . And may be that high and mighty Englishman didn’t look cheap! Did my heart good to see it! Well the big man who had him by the collar handed me a card. On it was printed William B. Shane. He’s the big detective, you know, so I thought it was all right. He drove away with them. That’s all I know. I looked in the papers every day, but there wasn’t anything about it. What’s it all about anyhow?”

“I’m not permitted to say anything yet,” said Larry prudently. “You keep your eye on the papers, and it’ll all come out.”

“I bet it’s a deep case!” said the Jerseyman innocently.

“It’s deep all right,” said Larry dryly.

“The Mackinaw car carried an Atlantic City hire tag,” Carver volunteered.

“I know it,” said Larry. “I’m going on there now.”

Taking the road again, Larry chewed over the surprising fact he had learned. Anger smouldered in him. The obvious explanation, as Shane himself might have said, was that Shane had accepted a bribe of the Englishman to set him free. But notwithstanding his anger, Larry rejected that explanation. Shane was too big a man, had too much at stake to descend to any such business. Moreover, though Shane had fooled Larry and outplayed him more than once, Larry’s intuition told him that the man was square.

Once again in the shore resort, Larry’s only possible course was clearly indicated. Shane had been accompanied by Klein, the hotel detective; Klein was accessible through Maud, the waitress at the Sunset restaurant. Larry therefore, having put up his car, made his way to the Sunset. He was not without some trepidation, for he had treated Maud very badly on his previous visit. But the girl was crazy about him, he told himself; he ought to be able to bring her ’round. He had no scruples against using Maud’s weakness for himself in furthering his own ends. Wouldn’t do her any permanent harm, he told himself.

It was half-past five, that is to say just before the evening rush at the Sunset was due to commence. When Maud saw Larry coming in she blushed under her plentiful rouge. Her brassy assurance failed her for the moment; she didn’t know how to treat him. Larry smiled at her ingratiatingly. She decided to ignore him. He sat down at one of her tables.

She presently came and stood beside him, silently awaiting his order with an air of towering majesty that caused Larry to chuckle in his throat.

“Aw, come off, Maud!” he murmured.

She continued to stand like the Statue of Liberty, only with a tray instead of a torch. Larry gravely ordered coffee and crullers. She presently brought it, unrelenting.

“How’s things, Maud?” he asked cheerfully.

She could no longer contain herself. “You have a nerve coming back here!” she said.

“Only came to see you,” said Larry unblushingly.

“Huh, likely! I wonder at the face of you! Making out to be a simple young fellow on your holiday, and you all the time a New York police

officer! Getting me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Klein, and then taking advantage of him like that . . . What are you laughing at?"

"I'm laughing at the idea of anybody taking advantage of Klein. That hard-boiled guy!"

"Well, it's true. You ought to be ashamed of yourself laughing. I can tell you he's properly sore about it."

"Do you care?" asked Larry, smiling.

Maud struggled to resist the smile, but her face began to break up. "I despise you!" she said. But her eyes belied it.

"I can make you smile," said Larry impudently. "What's Klein to us? Let's you and I be friends."

"Huh! a fat lot you care about *my* friendship!" said Maud bitterly. But she was softened. Her eyes dwelt on him.

"Is Klein coming here to dinner to-night?" asked Larry.

"I suppose so. Why?"

"Get him to take you out later, will you?"

Maud looked startled. "What for?"

"I'll tell you my side of the story," said Larry, "and you'll see that I've got something to be sore about, too. Klein and I were after the same people. I captured one and took her to New York. Shane and Klein nabbed the other two, and then set them free again. They were rightfully my prisoners. They had no call to set them free."

"What's that got to do with Klein taking me out?"

"I want you to find out from Klein what happened that night," said Larry. "Who were those two men, and for what reason did they let them go?"

"*You* want *me* to find out!" said Maud, with a toss of her straw-coloured coiffure. "I like that!"

"But you're so clever, Maudie. You can do what you like with a man. Specially Klein, the bonehead! Haven't I seen you twist him right round your pinkie!"

"Just like you think you're twisting me round yours now!"

"Not you, Maud. You're too clever. You know men."

"Sure, I could get it out of him if I wanted to. But why should I? What is there in it for me?"

"Just to oblige a friend."

“Huh! I had a sample of your friendship all right. Two dates you broke with me.”

“Maud, I ain’t myself when I got a serious case on my hands. I can’t do a thing I like until I get it cleared up.”

“I won’t promise nothing.”

“I know I can depend on you. My mind will be easy.”

“Klein would near kill me if he found out.”

“Don’t tell me you’re afraid of that big stiff.”

“Afraid nothing! . . . Well . . . when’ll I see you?” she added, suddenly giving in to his influence, and entreating him with her eyes.

Larry avoided the eyes. “Good girl!” he said carelessly. “Klein doesn’t come here to breakfast, does he?”

“No.”

“I’ll be in early then.”

That date Larry kept with Maud. Indeed he was at the Sunset within five minutes of its opening for business next morning. There was no other customer in the place, and having brought him his breakfast, Maud was free to sit down opposite him and give herself up to the doubtful pleasure of gazing at his fresh morning face and bright hair. Maud was not really deceived by Larry; in her heart she knew she was on the way to making a fool of herself about him—but she rather enjoyed doing so.

Larry saw at once that Maud had something to tell him, but he concealed his eagerness to hear it. He had adopted certain maxims in dealing with the sex, the first of which was: Never let anything on! The idea being when you let anything on, it simply made them aggravating. So he merely remarked on the goodness of the coffee.

Maud said resentfully: “I went out with Klein last night.”

“Oh, did you?” said Larry, with an air of surprise.

“Ahh! you’d like to make out now that it’s nothing to you!” said Maud. “. . . I’ve a good mind not to tell you what he told me.”

Larry had no fear of the outcome. “That’s up to you,” he said, taking a generous bite of buttered roll.

“I hate you!” said Maud.

Larry grinned.

“If I tell you, you’ll just beat it out of town again,” she went on.

“I will if my case requires it,” said Larry.

“And I’ll never lay eyes on you again.”

“You can’t lose me, chile,” said Larry. “Soon as I’m free, I’m coming back to enjoy myself.”

“Yes, you will!” she said bitterly.

Nevertheless she told him, as he knew she would. “Shane and Klein brought the two Englishmen back to Atlantic City,” she began. “In fact they took them to the Association offices just across the street here. It happened that Roger W. Scudder, the big boss of the Hotelmen’s Association, was in town, and Shane telephoned him to come around. When the principal Englishman saw Scudder, he asked to talk with him privately. Shane and Klein were not present at their talk, but afterwards Scudder told them in a general way what had taken place. The Englishman did not tell Scudder his right name, but he convinced him that he was a big and important man in his own country, and that the girl in the case was trying to blackmail him . . .”

“I heard that before,” interrupted Larry bitterly. “It’s all lies!”

“What do you care?” said Maud, staring.

Larry realised how narrowly he had escaped betraying himself. “Go on,” he said quickly. “You’re all right, Maud. There’s not many girls could report so straight a tale.”

“Huh!” said Maud—nevertheless she went on. “Well, anyway, Scudder believed it, and he told Shane to let the men go.”

“Fixed, by Gad!” said Larry.

“It wouldn’t be a question of money passing,” Maud pointed out, “for Scudder is worth millions. But these big men just naturally hang together.”

“They hang together all right,” said Larry bitterly. “Go on.”

“Scudder is the big boss, and they had no choice but to let the men go, Klein told me.”

“Did he know what became of them after that?” Larry asked eagerly.

“Say, your heart is set on this case, ain’t it?” said Maud suspiciously.

“No more on this case than any other,” said Larry. “Go on, tell me.”

“You deserve to get on,” said Maud dryly.

“You don’t know any more.”

“Sure, I know more . . . The Englishman was in a terrible rush to get back to N’Yawk. The last direct train had gone, so he hired a car at Dundy’s Garage. A fellow named Buckler drove it. Klein knows Buckler, and yesterday out of curiosity he asked Buckler where he’d taken him and what

there was in it. Buckler said the Englishman gave him fifty dollars for the trip, and little enough . . .”

“Never mind that,” said Larry. “Where did he put him down?”

“At the Weehawken Ferry, this side. Wouldn’t let Buckler carry him across.”

“Sure!” said Larry bitterly. “Trust him to cover his tracks! Then I’m just exactly where I was when I started!”

But it appeared that Maud had another piece of information. “Seems the two of them were getting ready to sail for abroad,” she remarked.

“How did Buckler learn that if they were trying to cover their tracks?”

“By accident. When the young English fellow put his hand in his pocket for his wallet to pay Buckler, he pulled out an envelope with the wallet. A couple of bright-coloured labels fell out of the envelope. Buckler picked them up, and handed them back. Cunard Line, Saloon Baggage, was printed on them, and the name of the ship had been written in: *Mauretania*.”

A groan of disappointment broke from Larry. “The *Mauretania* sailed at noon yesterday!”

Some hours later Larry entered the famous offices which, with their ship’s decorations, their sea-faring pictures, were subtly designed to fire the land-lubber with the desire of taking a voyage. Larry was feeling very insignificant in the big and busy world of affairs. A young fellow quite on his own, without any organisation to back him up, how was he to insist on getting what he wanted? He half expected to be laughed at for his pains.

He tackled one of the minor clerks first, and asked for a copy of the sailing list of the *Mauretania*, which was given him. He did not get any information from it, nor had he expected to. Among the notabilities who had sailed the day before, appeared the names of more than one “Lord,” but which was *his* lord, he had no means of telling. Moreover it was extremely unlikely that Mr. Felix had booked under his rightful name and title. The young clerk who gave him the list looked like an agreeable fellow, and Larry determined to confide in him partly.

“Look here,” he said, “I’m a private detective . . .”

The young man appeared interested at once.

“I have reason to believe that the man I have been trailing got away on the *Mauretania* yesterday. Of course I don’t know what name he sailed under, but I can furnish a description of him. Who should I go to for information?”

“Go to Mr. Berkeley,” was the prompt reply. “He’s the man in charge of the *Mauretania* bookings. On sailing day it’s his job to be on the dock, and check up the passengers as they go aboard.”

This was better than Larry expected. Much encouraged, he sought out Mr. Berkeley. This was a much more formidable gentleman. Not exactly a great man himself, he was nevertheless accustomed to dealing with the great, and shone with a sort of reflected greatness. Larry, putting on a bold front, gave him the same formula: “I am a private detective,” etc. Mr. Berkeley was not impressed. He looked for credentials of some sort. Finally he asked Larry point blank:

“Whom do you represent?”

“My instructions are not to reveal that at the moment,” replied Larry boldly.

Mr. Berkeley shrugged. “Then how do I know that you’re not wasting my time? There are so many self-constituted detectives nowadays.”

Larry, feeling rather desperate, attempted a last bluff. “Of course, if you do not wish to give me the information,” he said with an air of unconcern, “I’ll just have to report it to my principal. I can only ask you.”

“Oh, well,” said Mr. Berkeley, “ask me what you want to know and I’ll answer you if I may properly do so.”

“Did a man answering to this description sail on the *Mauretania* yesterday? Englishman, age about forty-five, tall, slender, well set-up. Blonde hair streaked with grey; thin in front. Grey eyes set close together. A man of position and authority. Has the habit of ordering folks about.”

“My dear man,” said Mr. Berkeley, with a scornful smile, “there were twenty men sailing on the *Mauretania* yesterday, who would answer generally to that description.”

“Wait a minute,” Larry went on. “I can give you more. I have reason to believe that this man was accompanied by a younger man, a sort of employé or servant. The second man is under thirty years old, stocky build, full face, fresh colour, rather a starey expression.”

“That doesn’t suggest anything to me,” said Mr. Berkeley. “I’m afraid . . .”

“I’ve heard the younger man address his master as ‘My Lord,’” said Larry, “so I suppose he’s a titled man.”

“Lord Canford was aboard,” said Mr. Berkeley, “but he’s an old man. And Viscount Corfe is a mere lad . . .”

“My man would not be likely to register under his own name—whatever that is,” said Larry. “I suppose you’re pretty well acquainted with the nobility. Did you have a lord aboard who was travelling under an assumed name?”

Mr. Berkeley smiled at his simplicity—then he glanced at Larry sharply, and a guarded look crept into his face. Larry guessed that he had turned up something.

“Ever notice your man’s hands?” asked Mr. Berkeley.

“Sure!” said Larry. “Long, slender, elegant hands. He wore a seal ring containing a green stone specked with red.”

“Um,” said the discreet Mr. Berkeley.

“You know him!” cried Larry.

“Whatever I know I’ll keep it to myself until you satisfy me you have a right to know it too . . . Do you mean to tell me that this gentleman is suspected of a crime?”

“Not exactly of a crime,” said Larry guardedly. “But only of acting suspiciously.”

Mr. Berkeley suddenly burst out laughing. “Oh, this is rich! rich!” he cried. “This is too good to keep! You’re an amateur detective, I guess. Why, the gentleman you refer to is one of the greatest men in England. There’s no secrecy about his movements. He went aboard under an assumed name merely to avoid the reporters. Very natural under the circumstances.”

“But who is he?” cried Larry.

“Well, since he’s gone I see no reason why I shouldn’t tell you. It’s the new Earl of Hampshire.”

Larry looked at the other man, slightly dazed. “The circumstances, you say,” he stammered. “What circumstances?”

“The Earl is taking the body of his cousin, the late Earl, back to England.”

“The late Earl?”

“Yes. He died in New York recently. I understand that he had been living in this country for some years incognito.”

Larry struggled to understand. “But . . . but if this one, the new Earl, as you say, if he’s just come into the title, how is he so soon one of the greatest men in England?”

“Oh, for years as Mr. Alastair Savile-Down he’s been a well-known figure. Very wealthy man; interested in many companies. Since his accession to the title he has received an offer by cable of the chairmanship

of the Bloomsbury, Joint-Stock and Leveson's Bank, one of the greatest financial plums in England."

Larry felt a good deal like a non-swimmer getting out of his depth.

"Tell me what it is you suspected him of," said Mr. Berkeley, with ill-concealed merriment.

"If there's nothing in it," said Larry prudently, "I'd better keep it to myself."

"Oh, if you must," said Mr. Berkeley, with a shrug. "It would make a good story."

"Much obliged to you for your information," said Larry. Turning abruptly, he all but fled from the building.

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILLIDA'S HAND IS FORCED

NOW that he was in possession of the astonishing fact, Larry scarcely knew what to do with it. It only tended to bear out Shane's theory that Phillida was a common blackmailer, and the weight at Larry's breast became heavier and heavier. He still struggled against it; there *must* be some other explanation he told himself. But how was he to set about obtaining it? A trip to England was out of the question. Supposing he took the next ship and got the Englishman by the throat and shook the truth out of him—Phillida's trial would have come and gone before he could get back to New York.

Larry walked the steaming pavements oblivious to his direction. In his confusion and distress his thoughts turned irresistibly to Phillida herself. If he could only reassure his breast by a sight of that high look of hers which forbade any suspicion of meanness in connection with her. Or if he could sit beside her again, holding her hand tight, assured that they loved each other, and forgetting the ugly circumstances that divided them.

The desire to be with her became an intolerable ache. He had vowed to himself that he would not return to the prison until he had discovered the whole truth, or until Phillida sent for him, but in spite of himself, his legs began to carry him in that direction. Reaching City Hall Park, a covert glance at the clock told him that he had just time for a brief interview before visiting hours were over, and he quickened his steps. Up to the very door of the prison he kept denying to himself that he was going there at all.

At the door the inward struggle recommenced. Here he was crawling back in the very way he had told her he would never do. She might be all right; he would not yet concede that she had done any wrong; but she was *acting* wrongly, and if he gave in to her it would confirm her in her wrongness, and matters would never come straight between them. He walked on past the door to give himself more time to think it out.

He went to the corner and came back again, still no nearer a decision. As he approached the door a second time a familiar figure emerged, the sight of which gave his thoughts a sharp turn. It was Tina, the elvish little girl he had danced with at the Spotted Pup. She had been visiting Phillida of course.

Perhaps from her he could learn something. His eyes flew to her hands. But they were empty. She was not bringing any letters out.

He approached her with his heart in his mouth. If she identified him as Harker he was prepared to be flayed by her scorn. He put on the wooden expression with which he instinctively defended himself against women, and raised his hat.

“Hello!” said Tina, her face breaking up into her own impudent grin—the pretty little monkey! “I never expected to see you again!”

A thankful breath escaped Larry. She did not know him! “Just out of jail?” he asked facetiously.

“Sure. Shop-lifting. Golly! it’s good to see the well-known sky again! . . . What are *you* doing in this bad neighbourhood?”

“My regular beat,” said Larry glibly. “I work in Park Row.”

He turned with her, and they walked up-town.

“You’re a nice one!” she said. “Leaving me flat at Tim Dorlon’s that night.”

“Nice one yourself!” retorted Larry. “You took me there and shook me, while you went off with another man. I got sore and went home.”

“I wish I could believe you!” she said derisively. “You’re an old hand!”

“Old hand at what?”

“At the game of con. You’re altogether too good-looking. You shouldn’t be let loose.”

“Annex me then,” said Larry.

In this wise they chaffed each other for the space of a block or two. Finally Larry felt it safe to say with an offhand air:

“On the level, what were you doing in the hoosegow? I’m curious.”

“Visiting a friend,” said Tina, in her thoughtless fashion.

“You should be more careful whom you associate with,” said Larry facetiously.

“I only wish I were half as good as the girl behind the bars,” said Tina. “Do you remember that night we were talking about Phillida Kenley? It’s her. If you read the papers, you must have seen that she was finally taken and brought back.”

“I noticed something about it,” said Larry.

“I visit her every afternoon,” Tina went on. “I have been deputed to do so by the other girls, because my name has never been connected with hers

in the papers. Her intimate friends are dogged by the police and the reporters.”

“What are the rights of that case anyhow?” asked Larry carelessly.

“I don’t know,” said Tina. “Phil has never told me anything, and I wouldn’t question her, because it would look as if I doubted her. She’s absolutely the finest girl I ever knew, and that’s enough for me.”

Larry was disappointed in this reply, but his heart was grateful to the loyal little friend. “You’re a good sort!” he said impulsively.

Tina glanced at him through her lashes. “Nice man!” she said softly. “If you’d only be natural oftener! . . . You think you’ve got to keep your guard up against us, don’t you? Perpetual sparring-match. Oh, it’s fun, but you never get anywhere.”

Larry, who had no intention of letting down his guard before any woman in the world save one, made haste to turn it off by saying: “A man does well to keep up his guard against you!”

They came to a subway entrance and paused. Tina said: “I guess you didn’t care much for the Spotted Pup. You’ve never been back since.”

“I did like it,” protested Larry. “I’ve been out of town.”

“Got anything on for to-night?” she asked, with a highly indifferent air.

Larry doubted his ability to keep up the rattle for an entire evening. Besides there was nothing to be gained from it. “Yes, I have,” he said with a regretful air. “Something I can’t get out of.”

“We women work you to death, don’t we?” she said, with a laugh. “I suppose you have a time keeping us separate.”

“You get me wrong,” said Larry.

“Do you see any green in my eye, old dear?”

She waited, evidently expecting him to make a date for another meeting, but it seemed to Larry that accidental meetings would be safer for the present. So he merely said: “I’ll turn up at the Spotted Pup in a night or two, on the level.”

A shade of disappointment crossed her expressive little face. “Well, I’ll be waiting for you with my ears pinned back and my hair in a braid,” she said airily, and dived into the subway.

The next day was Friday. At the same hour of the afternoon Larry was hanging about the entrance of the prison on Centre Street. The instant Tina emerged he realised that she had been warned against him. Her eyes flew

here and there, looking for him and not wanting to find him. When they spotted him, she hesitated and changed colour. No doubt she had told Phillida of their encounter the day before, and the disclosure had come that way. She recovered herself almost immediately and came towards him with her usual smile.

“Hello!” said Larry. “I was hoping you’d be coming out about this time.”

“Always Johnny-on-the-spot!” she retorted with her charming derisive grin, but a little breathlessly. Clearly she was frightened.

They turned up-town together as before. The impulsive Tina was but an indifferent dissembler. She was very nervous, and she could not keep the shake out of her voice. Her fright gave Larry cause for thought. There was no reason why she should be frightened by the mere meeting with ex-officer Harker. On the contrary the adventurous little monkey might be supposed to enjoy it. There must be some special reason for it. Larry suspected that she had on her the very letter he was so keen to have a glimpse of, and his heart began to beat. As he had always played a part with Tina his face showed her no change.

“You’re a regular Tombs angel,” he said.

“Not much of an angel, me,” said Tina, with one of her pretty monkey faces. “It’s not my graft.”

“What is your graft?”

“Bottle-washer at the Spotted Pup.”

During a silence, Larry sized her up out of the tail of his eye. She was carrying nothing but a tiny coin purse, too small to conceal a letter. The simple slip of a dress she had on suggested no obvious places of concealment, but Larry knew, of course, that women had their own hiding-places.

Tina could not bear silences. “You said you’d been away,” she said, with rather a panicky air. “Where were you?”

“Oh, just a business trip,” answered Larry at random. “Up to Boston.” He had never been to Boston in his life.

“Don’t you love Boston?”

“Scarcely noticed it. Too busy.”

“Didn’t you go to see the Sargent murals in the Public Library?”

“What are they?”

“Barbarian!”

“I don’t care. You said you liked me that way.”

“Oh, I *like* you. But you’re impossible!”

It was a piquant situation; each well aware of what was passing in the other's mind, and each sedulously making believe that nothing was changed since the day before. When they came to the subway entrance they paused as before.

"I'm free for the rest of the day," remarked Larry.

"Sorry, I'm not," said Tina dryly.

"Where away?" asked Larry.

"I like your cheek!"

"Oh, of course, if you have secrets to conceal . . ."

"That hasn't got anything to do with your cheek in asking . . . If you must know, the girls at the Spotted Pup are short of help and I promised to help with the dinner to-night."

This was obviously said on the spur of the moment and Larry thought: She's seeking safety among her friends. He said: "Can't I help, too?"

"Mercy! Do you think they'd let a man inside their kitchen?"

"Well, I'll take you to the door, anyway."

"I suppose I can't prevent you," she said, making a face.

In the clattering subway train it was not possible to do much in the way of repartee. Larry's eyes wandered over Tina's person, speculating on where the letter was hidden, while Tina bit her lip, and her little hands trembled. All the while both were making believe there was nothing the matter. Through the streets between the Astor Place station and Sheridan Square they kept up the rattle incessantly.

"When you're not washing bottles are you an artist like the rest of them?"

"Yes, I design the labels for lobster cans."

"I've noticed they're highly coloured."

"Oh, I know a lobster when I see one."

And so on. And so on. Larry was filled with a reluctant admiration for his little companion. She was scared, but she was game.

At the corner just before reaching the Spotted Pup there was a letter box. Tina glanced at it involuntarily as they passed, and Larry's hawk eye did not fail to mark that glance.

At the door of the restaurant Larry asked: "Can't I wait inside till dinner's ready?"

Tina was obviously relieved by the nearness of succour. "Two hours?" she asked mockingly. "No, really you can't," she added firmly. "It would

queer me with the girls. You may not think so, but running an eating-house is a serious job.”

“Well, I’ll be back at six,” said Larry, raising his hat.

Larry turned the corner where the letter box stood, and came to a stop. He shrewdly suspected that Tina would not know a moment’s peace until she got that letter posted. This was the nearest box. At any rate it was worth waiting a while to see.

On the corner there was a confectionary store with a show window on each side of the angle. Looking obliquely through the two windows, Larry commanded the view of a few yards along the pavement in the direction of the Spotted Pup without exposing himself unduly. If Tina did come back he would at least have time to step back out of sight. Here he waited, affecting to study the dainties set forth in the show window; Scotch kisses, Vienna cups, Creole pralines, divine divinity, etc., etc.

Even before he could see her, Larry was warned of the approach of Tina by a double patter of quick feet. She brought along one of the other girls for protection. Tina had a letter or letters in her hand. Within half a dozen yards of the corner, the two girls in their nervousness broke into a run. Larry ran too.

The three of them collided violently in front of the letter box. The letters—there were two of them, flew out of Tina’s hand. The two girls were dazed by the suddenness of the impact. Larry pounced on the letters where they fell. The first was addressed to Phillida’s mother in Barnstaple; the second—there was no need for Larry to copy out that address:

Mrs. Doreen Innes,
Elbow Creek Sanitarium
Silver City,
New Mexico

The two girls stood there helplessly. Tears had sprung into Tina’s eyes. A passer-by or two stopped to gape. Larry raised his hat.

“So sorry,” he said, with a hard smile. “Awfully clumsy of me.” He indicated the letter box. “May I?”

No sign from the two.

Larry posted the letters.

Tina then began to abuse him tremulously. “You brute! . . . Oh, you brute . . . !”

The other girl—it was Arline Teague, pulled at her arm. “Hush! Hush!” she whispered. “That does no good now. Come away. We must let her know.”

They started back, both weeping. Larry felt a good deal like the brute she had called him, but he was filled with a savage exultation, too. After all they had not been able to balk his will, the whole parcel of girls. He looked around for a taxicab.

He gave the address of his boarding-house. He never hesitated as to his course of action. On the way he stopped the cab at a Broadway ticket-office, and enquired about trains. There was one at six which carried cars for the Southwest. It was useless for him to write or telegraph to Doreen; he must go in person. He had been advised that Phillida’s trial would come up in about ten days. Time enough to go and come, with a day or two to spare. Very likely they would telegraph to Doreen to put her on her guard against him. But if he got hold of her, she would have to speak.

In his room Larry packed a bag, and counted his money. He told his landlady he would be away for a week, and set off for the station, dawdling along the streets to kill time. His breast was strangely uneasy; an instinct whispered to him that he was doing the wrong thing; that it was dangerous to go counter to Phillida’s wishes in this manner. But he would not listen to it; he could not listen. No other course of action was possible to a man in his state of mind.

He bought a ticket, and loafed about the great concourse until the sign was put up for his train. As he approached the gates, he perceived Tina waiting there, scanning all who passed through. He hardened himself, and kept on. If she wanted to make a scene, all right, he was prepared to see it through.

When the girl caught sight of him she came running. All her pretty derisive ways were forgotten, her anger too. Her face was pale, her glance direct and sombre with anxiety. Larry set his face like stone. He did not intend to be interfered with.

“I’m so glad . . . so glad!” she breathed thankfully. “They wouldn’t let me see Phillida. I sent her in a note. She sent this back . . . for you, if I could find you!”

Larry took it with a fast beating heart. It was very brief, a mere scrawl:

“MY DEAR, MY DEAR:

If you get this, come to me before you take any action. I have no pride left. I beg it of you. I have obtained permission for you to

see me for a few minutes, if you come any time before lights out to-night.”

“PHILLIDA.”

A great gush of joy burst up in Larry’s breast. He had the feeling that the note had saved him from making a fatal mistake. There was a singing inside him. She had sent for him! He was released from his vow. She had sacrificed her pride, dear, generous heart! He was going to see her, *see* her! What else in the world mattered?

Naturally he did not intend to let Tina read all this in his face, and it remained perfectly wooden. The girl’s eyes were fastened on it in suspense.

“If you care for her,” she murmured, “how can you hurt her so?”

Larry scowled at her in quick resentment. What was it to her how he felt towards Phillida, or Phillida towards him? “I’ll go down to the prison,” he said with a great air of magnanimity—while the heart was bounding in his breast.

Tina did not mind his manner. A long breath of relief escaped her. She said nothing.

She accompanied Larry to the cab-stand, and heard him give the order to drive to the City prison. With a firm shake of the head she refused to go with him.

“I’ve done all I can now,” she said.

In the prison Larry was conducted up many stairs, and down a long, stone-paved corridor to the door of Phillida’s cell. The entire front of the cell was formed of thick iron bars, the walls were of smoothed stone. Most dreadful was the suggestion that the inmates were always by night or day *on exhibition*. To actually see Phillida behind those bars produced an emotional crisis in Larry, though he was prepared for the sight. His breast was intolerably wrenched, and a madness broke loose in his brain, a lust to throw down the wicked place, stone upon stone.

At the first sound of his steps Phillida had sprung up, wild with eagerness, and was gripping the bars and pressing her face between, as in the pictures one had so often seen. Phillida’s face, and her magical eyes! The sight turned him sick at heart.

At the sight of him a radiance of joy showed in her eyes. “Larry! . . . Thank God!” she murmured.

She thrust her hands through the bars. Larry seized them, and pressed them hard against his cheek. He was quite incapable of speaking. The keeper lounged against the wall of the corridor, and picked his teeth with a great air of indifference. Perhaps it masked a secret compassion. Who knows?

When they found their tongues Phillida whispered: "Larry, what were you going to do?"

"I was going out to Silver City," he muttered doggedly, feeling deeply ashamed, without in the least knowing why he should feel ashamed.

"Oh, Larry! If I had not been able to stop you! . . . Doreen knows nothing of all this. She doesn't know I am locked up. She's just at the fork of the roads; life in one direction, death in the other. If you had blurted out the truth to her, what chance would she have had? She would have rushed right back to New York. It would have killed her."

It always irritated Larry to have Doreen's feeble state of health brought up. "I couldn't have acted any differently," he muttered doggedly. "If I had done nothing, I would have gone out of my mind."

"Can't you trust me?" whispered Phillida. "This is my very last appeal!"

"Trust you for what?" he said. "See you go to States prison? This is bad enough. That would kill me. Doreen's got to take her chance with the rest of us. Tell me the truth and maybe I can find a way."

"There is no way but the one I have chosen," said Phillida wearily. "I've been over it in my mind often enough."

"But States prison . . . !" said Larry.

"It would not be for long. It would do me no real harm . . ."

"How about me? . . . Do you think I could sit quiet while you are there? I'll never forget this, never! . . . You're mine! mine! I will not let them take you from me! The very thought of it makes me see red. I'd do something desperate. . . ."

"Larry! . . . Larry! . . . Larry! Quiet, my dear! You're such a boy!"

"I don't know what I am. But I know how much I can stand. These locks and bars . . . Do you know what they're saying? They're saying you're just a common blackmailer. They're saying that you've got something on the Earl of Hampshire, and he's paying you to keep your mouth shut!"

Phillida snatched her hands free, and retreated into her cell. "How . . . how did you learn his name?" she gasped.

"I told you I'd find out, and I did find out," said Larry doggedly.

"Have you seen him?"

"No. He got away too quick."

“Is his name generally known?” she asked, breathless with apprehension.

“Nobody knows it but me.”

She quieted down. “Well . . . in a way it’s true,” she said.

“Phillida!” he whispered in a voice sharp with pain. “I threw it back in their faces. . . . I staked everything on you!”

“And do you feel that you’ve lost?” she asked, with her chin up. “Even supposing I am technically, a blackmailer, does it make any difference to you?”

“I couldn’t help loving you,” he groaned, “if that’s what you mean. But why can’t you let me love you with a quiet breast?”

This simple speech went direct to Phillida’s heart. Her hands came swiftly back through the bars to comfort him. “Ah, my dear! my dear!” she whispered. “Forgive me! I torment you because you are strong and able to bear it. It must be either you or Doreen. She has nobody but me!”

Doreen again! She stuck in Larry’s crop. “Healthy people have got to be considered too,” he said, scowling. “It’s not right that two healthy people should be destroyed for the sake of a sick one.”

“We won’t be destroyed,” said Phillida. “It’s only for a little while. . . .”

“Ah, don’t begin that again,” said Larry. “I can only stand so much. There’s the trial to come. I could not sit silent in court and let them convict you. I’ll have to tell what I know.”

“Is that your last word?” she asked. But she did not draw away from him.

“My last word,” he said. “It’s just as well to have it understood.”

Phillida sighed, and clung to him closer. Evidently she had come to a decision. “Then I’ll have to tell you the whole story,” she said. “. . . I don’t know what you’ll do. I can only pray that you won’t fail me . . . If you fail me, I suppose I’ll love you still. But it would be a spoilt love. There could never anything come of it!”

The keeper stirred and cleared his throat.

“Quick!” said Larry. “They only gave me ten minutes.”

“It’s a long story,” she objected, “and you must hear the whole of it. I cannot risk the danger of a misunderstanding; I’ll write it out in my cell to-night, and mail it to you.”

“Time’s up, Miss,” said the keeper.

Phillida pressed her face between the bars. “Kiss me,” she whispered. “It doesn’t matter about him. . . . Ah, my dear, I love you so! . . . When you

read my letter stand by me!”

Larry could not speak. He went away blindly.

CHAPTER XIX

PHILLIDA'S STORY

“I CAME TO NEW YORK six years ago to study art. I was seventeen years old; shy, self-willed, full of notions; a difficult girl. Nobody could tell me anything. I only learned things by butting my head against them. Most people look back, or make believe to look back on their childhood as the happiest period of their life. Not me. I was wretched until I began to find myself. Most of all I longed for friends, but I was too self-conscious to make friends. When I most wished to give myself, something forced me to draw back. So, of course, other girls considered me supercilious, cold and uninteresting.

“I tell you all this so you may judge of the effect that Doreen Forbes had on me. But I cannot possibly make you realise what *she* was like in those days. A sort of sprite not quite mortal; full of unexpectedness and charm; Mustard-seed was the name we had for her. As spontaneous and gay as a bird. When I think of the change in her it makes me rage at life, which seems bound to destroy the delicate and lovely spirits, leaving only the tough ones to survive.

“Doreen picked me up and took possession of me. I should never have had the courage to make overtures to her. My first friend and my dearest! In her I found my release. We were exact opposites, you see. She was in the clouds while I grovelled. I wonder if it is possible for a man to understand what we were to each other. Young men become firm friends, I know, but it seems different. They never appear to care much for each other. Or if they do they hide it.

“We both attended the Art Students' League. Both of us had to get along on starvation allowances, but we didn't mind that. Life was one grand lark. Life would have been a lark for anybody with Doreen. We shared a barn of an attic on Fourteenth Street, cooked for ourselves, and stalled off the rent collector until we owed him so much he couldn't afford to put us out. Doreen and I made a grand combination. She supplied the gaiety and zest, and I the motive power. She is really older than I, but I was the shock absorber. She was my child as well as my friend, and on that account I loved her even more than she loved me.

“All the love I had for her did not enable me to prevent her from making a ghastly mess of her life. She met the man we knew as Aleck Innes at a studio party. A man almost double her age who seemed younger. He was of the same general type as his cousin, now the Earl of Hampshire, but a handsomer man with great charm of manner when he chose to exert it. I could appreciate his charm, but I disliked him from the first, he was such a useless cumberer of the earth. He was in receipt of an allowance from England, and he literally did nothing but eat and sleep and kill time until it was time to eat and sleep again. This seemed dreadful to me, there is so much to do with life. When I saw what was likely to happen my dislike of him became hatred. This destroyed what influence I had left with Doreen.

“With his aristocratic air, his white teeth and his careless good humour, he dazzled my poor Doreen. Little by little I began to see that his seeming good humour was no more than callousness. Through and through he was corrupt. After one attempt to open Doreen’s eyes, which almost turned her into my enemy, I was forced to keep my mouth shut and look on while she destroyed herself. I cannot go into detail about this time. To make a long story short, they went off one day and got married.

“It was not long before she began to realise the nature of her mistake. I almost lost her entirely then, because she could not confess it to me, who had warned her. There could be no confidences between us, nevertheless we clung to each other in a pitiful sort of way, and made pretences. She never told me anything, but I could see for myself, of course, and deduce. Once when I could not bear it any longer, I urged her to leave him. She merely shook her head. The pain of forcing the truth out into the open between us was so great that for weeks after that I did not see her. So, of course, I never dared speak again.

“The worst of a man like that is, he is a continuous drain upon whoever has to live with him. Aleck simply existed on Doreen’s vitality, and quickly used it up. I had to see my friend progressively lose all her zest in life and her fairylike gaiety. Aleck hated me like poison, and I could not go to their place. But sometimes, not often, Doreen would come to me, white-faced and mute, and while my heart was breaking, I would make out not to notice anything, while I tried to replenish her failing vitality from my own.

“Aleck had two hundred dollars a month from England, which ought to have been enough to keep them comfortably—to us poor art students it seemed like a fortune; but most of it went to supply his private vices. He drank too much, and he took drugs, but it was a long time before I learned this. They were always in money difficulties; always owing a board bill, and continually being put to humiliating shifts to move from one place to

another, without having their effects seized. It was Doreen, of course, who was forced to do the ugly contriving.

“This has been going on for four years, remember. Fortunately they never had a child. Aleck did not positively ill-treat her, but physical cruelty would have been easier to bear than the spiritual humiliations that I suspected she suffered at his hands. Not *knowing* anything, I was driven wild by what I suspected. But always I had to keep my mouth shut. Yet in his way Aleck loved Doreen. But the love of a creature like that is a curse.

“Recently Aleck began to show tubercular symptoms. He aged all at once and lost the last vestiges of his ‘charm.’ A loathsome sight! During the last few months he failed very quickly. While they were living at Miss Corkerell’s he was forced to take to his bed. It was then that his craving for drugs could no longer be hidden. Doreen could not always procure what he required, and he would have wild fits of raving.

“It was Miss Corkerell who told me this—and other things that I already suspected. A kind soul! Anybody else would have put them out. They were in her debt over a hundred dollars at the end. The climax to the horror was reached when I discovered by unmistakable signs that my Doreen had become infected with tuberculosis. I will not dwell on what I felt.

“One day in a lucid interval Aleck, in a fit of contrition, told Doreen that he had always deceived her as to his real name. He was born Aleck Savile-Down he said, and since the death of his uncle, the Fifth Earl, three years ago, he had been rightfully the Earl of Hampshire. He had never laid claim to the honours, he said, because years before he had signed over his interest in the estates to his cousin Alastair Savile-Down, the next in succession, and he had not the wherewithal to support the title.

“The situation is a complicated one, and I am not sure that I can make it clear to you. Briefly, it appears that Aleck, having got himself hopelessly involved with money lenders in his wild youth, went to Alastair for assistance. Alastair, in order to save the estates for himself and his children, had forced Aleck to sign over his interest in them, in return for an annuity to be paid during Aleck’s lifetime. That was where the two hundred dollars a month came from. Aleck further bound himself *never to marry*. That was one reason, perhaps, why he had never claimed the title.

“Alastair, Aleck said, was a cold and prudent Shylock, the reverse of himself. Alastair had always been well-to-do, and when the Hampshire estates came into his possession three years ago, he used them as a basis upon which to found a great fortune. He has become one of the financial powers of England.

“I put this down here in its proper place in my story, but I did not learn it until some time later. When Doreen heard it from her husband, she immediately, in her innocence and simplicity, wrote to Alastair Savile-Down, without letting her husband know. She told him that his cousin Aleck was sick in New York and likely to die. She received no answer to her letter. One can imagine the cunning Alastair’s dismay upon learning that Aleck had a wife, and possibly a son as well, who would cut him out of the title. The title was dearer to Alastair than all his wealth. It is an old and honourable title, by the way, though it has not been honoured in its recent holders.

“Alastair did not answer Doreen’s letter, but he must have taken the first ship to New York, and no doubt he thoroughly investigated the situation of Aleck and his wife, before he made himself known.

“On a day which would be some three weeks after Doreen had written her letter, while she was out of the boarding-house (Alastair, of course, had it watched) somebody called up Aleck on the phone. Aleck was in bed, but he was not absolutely helpless; he was able to go to the phone. Miss Corkerell who listened, was not able to make anything out of the one-sided conversation that ensued. Most of the talking was done by the person on the other end. As a result of that conversation, Aleck dressed himself and slipped out of the house unobserved. One can easily guess the promises of unlimited drugs, etc., that were held out to him if he would abandon his wife.

“Aleck called Doreen up some hours later, and coolly told her not to bother; that he was all right and she’d never see him again. When she asked for particulars, he merely hung up the receiver. It was then that Doreen in her distress and anxiety, came to me with the whole story. She had not connected Aleck’s disappearance with her letter to Alastair, but I did. I could not feel any grief at the loss of the miserable Aleck, but it made me furiously indignant that Doreen, sick and penniless as she was, had been left absolutely flat by that precious pair.

“I went to the office of the British consul, but was unable to learn anything there beyond the fact that Mr. Alastair Savile-Down was a great man in his own country. They had no information of his having come to America. However, I didn’t suppose that he would be publishing the fact broadcast. Three days later I went back again, and on this visit I learned the surprising fact that the Earl of Hampshire had died in New York the day before, and that Mr. Alastair Savile-Down, his cousin and successor, had applied to the consul for a permit to take the body back to England. Alastair had given his address as the Hotel Madagascar.

“Doreen immediately went to the Madagascar to interview Alastair Savile-Down, or the new Earl, as he now was. I accompanied her to the hotel, but waited down-stairs, since it was really none of my business. But I wish I had gone up with her. You have seen the man; you know what he is. When he saw that in my poor Doreen he had only a helpless, gentle, broken girl to deal with, he undertook to repudiate her altogether. He denied ever having received a letter from her. He claimed that he had picked up his cousin by accident, sick in the street. He denied all knowledge of Aleck’s ever having been married. He showed her the agreement by which Aleck had bound himself not to marry, and undertook to tell Doreen that this would invalidate a marriage, had any taken place. Which is ridiculous. He told her that even if she were Aleck’s wife, which he did not believe, under the law of England she had not a shadow of a claim on the Hampshire estates. This may be true; I don’t know. He invited her to prove that she was Aleck Savile-Down’s wife. This was manifestly impossible for her to do, since she had married him under an assumed name, and had no proof except what Aleck had told her, and Aleck’s lips were now sealed forever.

“There is no doubt in my mind but that Alastair hastened Aleck’s end, whether by drugs or otherwise. The latter’s death came too pat to his cousin’s designs to be natural. This would explain Alastair’s extreme terror later. But it is not part of my story, nor am I a public prosecutor. It would be useless to try to bring the crime home to Alastair. There were no witnesses you may be sure, and Aleck was too far gone anyway.

“My poor Doreen returned to me from that interview absolutely crushed in spirit. When I learned what had taken place, I just about flew off the handle. I was sick with rage. I could have killed that devilish cold-blooded Englishman, and felt that I was doing a righteous act. But that wouldn’t have helped Doreen any. I tried to see him at the Madagascar, but he kept out of my way. He had an obsequious parasite as a sort of body-guard. You have seen him too. That night he changed his hotel.

“I succeeded in tracing him to the Colebrook where he registered as Mr. Felix. I did not attempt to see him there, as I was convinced it would be useless. When I discovered that he had left his satellite at the Madagascar, I formed another plan, a desperate plan. No doubt it was foolish, but I am afraid I would do the same thing over again. I did not say a word to Doreen of what I was going to do.

“You must take all the circumstances into account before you judge me. Doreen had lately been to a clinic, where she had been told that the only chance of saving her life lay in the dry climate of Arizona or New Mexico. *But she must go at once.* She had no money. I had no money, nor any way of

obtaining any. On the other hand there was the rich Englishman who had founded his fortune on her husband's estates, and who had repudiated her simply because he saw his way clear to saving the few hundred dollars necessary to restore her to life. It was not a situation in which one could be cold-blooded or prudent. You are not cold-blooded, my dear. Do not condemn me!

"Furthermore we had no *time* for prudent measures. The man was returning to England by the first fast ship. Ignorant as I was of the law, I suspected that Doreen would never be able to prove in court that she was the wife of Aleck Savile-Down. I have since learned that I was right. Furthermore, even if she could prove it, it is a fact that under the law of England she has no claim on the estates. What was there for us to do but to take the law into our own hands?

"I determined to rifle the Earl's dispatch-box which Doreen had described to me. In it I was pretty sure that I would find papers which would bear out her claim. I knew that the original agreement between Alastair and Aleck was there, and I hoped that Doreen's letter to Alastair might be there also. If she had only kept a copy of it! But of course in her innocence it never occurred to her to do so.

"I went to the Colebrook and engaged a room for myself. I had previously learned that the Englishman was on the third floor, and I chose a room as near as I could get to his. In fact only two doors separated us. As up to this time he had not seen me, it was not necessary for me to disguise myself in any way. It was easy enough to watch his comings and goings in the hotel, but I was much discouraged by the discovery that there was a maid on duty all day in the corridor outside our rooms.

"However I went to a locksmith near by, and making up a story, induced him to give me a piece of wax to take an impression of a key. Then by pretending that I had mistaken the number of my room, I obtained the key to Lord Hampshire's room at the desk, and got an impression of it. The locksmith made me a key, and then I watched and waited for an opportunity to use it.

"The presence of the maid in the corridor balked me, but she went off at night. Even then I was afraid to go into the man's room, because I didn't know at what moment he might return. He did come in at ten o'clock having dined out somewhere, and after changing from his evening clothes to an ordinary suit, he went out again. The change of clothes suggested that he would be gone some time, and I realised I would not be likely to get a better opportunity. I went up-stairs. It required more resolution than any act of my whole life. I was nearly paralysed with terror. Nevertheless I went in.

“Before I had found what I wanted, the Englishman came back. Perhaps he had forgotten something; I don’t know. It was a rotten piece of luck. When I heard his key in the lock I nearly died. I switched off the light. He opened the door. When he put out his hand towards the switch I knocked it away. I suppose he didn’t know whether he had a man or a woman to deal with. In a sudden panic he ran to the window and shouted for help.

“But as I attempted to get out of the door, he saw that it was only a woman, and seized me. I broke away, and started down the stairs. At the foot of the first flight I ran into your arms—you know what happened after that. The Englishman quickly recovered from his panic, and putting two and two together came to the conclusion that I was not a common thief. In that he showed more perspicacity than you. He came around to the station house and helped to get me off.

“What you do not know is, that my plan was successful after all, though I did not get the dispatch-box. His Lordship received a nasty fright. I suspect that the dispatch-box contained a rich prize for a blackmailer. When he discovered that Doreen had friends who were ready to fight for her, he quickly changed his tone. In the meantime, I must tell you, the news of his accession to the title had reached England, and he had received an offer by cable of the chairmanship of a great English bank, a very high honour. This played directly into our hands, for at that juncture any newspaper story which showed him up in a bad light would have ruined him.

“Early next morning he came around to Doreen’s boarding-house. By great good luck I happened to be with her, as you know. This time I did the talking. We quickly came to terms. Provided his name was not published in connection with the affair, the Earl agreed to pay Doreen’s debt to her landlady, and her fare to New Mexico. He further agreed to continue paying her the sum her husband had been receiving of him; i. e., two hundred dollars a month. It was the exact sum she required, and we jumped at the chance. It was nothing to us that the Earl still denied her just claim, and affected to be offering it in charity.

“Only a few minutes after he had left us, you arrested me for the second time, and the fat was in the fire again. His lordship was much more scared than I was. I fully intended to keep my mouth shut whatever happened, but he did not believe that my resolve to do so would be proof against a trial for felony. In the courthouse his hanger-on, the one you heard called Glanville, approached me, gave me a sum of money, and told me that when I was taken out of the building a taxicab would be running slowly up and down in the street below with the door open, if I had nerve enough to make a break for

liberty. Of course I had nerve enough. Liberty was sweet, and I had nothing to lose by the attempt. I got safe away as you know.

“Glanville had given me an address to communicate with. I went to Atlantic City because it was the first place I thought of, and I supposed that I would be safe amongst the crowds there. I took a room in an humble lodging house, and telegraphed to the address I had been given for further instructions. While I was awaiting an answer you came up with me, and followed me into the picture house, and I had to run for it again. I couldn't leave Atlantic City because I was expecting the Earl there. I needed more money. But I changed to the biggest hotel in town, and adopted a disguise which I thought would baffle you. I telegraphed my new address and room number to the Earl, who replied that he would be there at three-thirty the same afternoon. You know how that worked out.

“That is the whole story. Doreen is in a sanatorium in New Mexico. I have received a report on her case. In a year, barring accidents, she may expect to be discharged cured and whole. But any interruption of the treatment, any shock, would almost certainly be fatal. The money for her is being paid through agents in New York. The moment that the Earl of Hampshire's name is published in connection with this case it will stop. As I have already pointed out, neither Doreen nor I have any money, nor any way of getting it. In the courts she would not have a leg to stand on. So there you are.

“You are a man, my dear, and must act according to your convictions. I am a woman and can only act according to the promptings of my heart. I am not going over again all the reasons I have already urged on you. You demanded that the facts be put before you, and now they are. You will do what seems right to you. But I must tell you that if any harm comes to Doreen as a result of the action you take, though I might love you still to my sorrow, it would erect a bar between us that nothing could ever overcome. I write it coldly, but I am not cold—only tired, so tired of struggling against one I love.”

“PHILLIDA.”

CHAPTER XX

THE TRIAL

THE days that remained before Phillida's trial were days of acute torment for Larry. He went to bed with it at night, and got up with it in the morning, the endless, grinding round in his brain from which there was no issue. He vacillated continually between the two courses of action that were open to him: to speak or to let matters take their course. His reason was convinced that it would be wiser not to speak, but his heart rebelled. How could he sit by and allow the brave, generous, wrong-headed Phillida to be held up as a felon in men's eyes? to be sent to prison? He was well aware that his speaking might not save her from prison—the legal eye could hardly be expected to see the matter in the same light as the lover's; that was not it; it was being prevented from ranging himself alongside the one he loved that hurt him so. He doubted if he could bear that hurt when it came to the final test.

The very day arrived without his having been able to formulate a course of action beyond "wait and see." After all she might be acquitted, though there was nothing likely to bring that about beyond his prayers. If, as seemed inevitable, she were convicted and sentenced . . . he could not think beyond that. What was the use of deciding what he would do when he was at the mercy of his feelings? The event would have to decide for him.

Prudence urged him to keep out of the courtroom except during the time that he was required to give evidence—but he was not strong enough to do so. Among the first to arrive, he stayed right through, and missed not a word that was spoken. Much of it was a torture to him, but it would have been a worse torture to be outside, and not know what was happening.

The case was heard in General Sessions, Part Three. It was a stifling August day, one of those days that seem to sap the marrow of men. The proceedings dragged wearily. Excepting Larry and the little knot of the prisoner's friends across the room from him, nobody seemed to care greatly which way it went. The prisoner herself appeared to be entirely unconcerned. The jury with handkerchiefs stuffed inside their collars, and palm leaf fans in their hands, listened apathetically. Some of them had a struggle to keep awake after lunch. The judge—but he did not seem human so much as a mere abstraction of Justice perched up on the bench in his silk

gown. The opposing counsel contended in the time-honoured way, but it was too hot for them to put much ginger into it. The benches were only half full. While the prisoner's attempted escape had caused a mild sensation in its day, so many things had happened since, the public had forgotten.

Larry was an important witness for the prosecution. He had long foreseen this ordeal, and nerved himself to go through with it by adopting an absolutely wooden attitude on the stand. He answered the prosecutor's questions briefly and exactly, and volunteered not a word beyond. For some reason this is considered an admirable attitude in a witness, though it is not at all favourable to the disclosure of the truth. When he concluded the prosecutor thanked Larry. Larry threw him a glance that disconcerted the attorney. Thank me for nothing! it said.

The prisoner thanked Larry too, with a warm and speaking glance of her dark eyes. Thanked him for having refrained from defending her! Such was the queer, twisted, heart-breaking situation. Larry for the most part kept his eyes averted from her. That he could not stand. All the while he was testifying her girl friends glared at him unremittingly, but his lip curled in scorn at them. They had the easy part, advertising themselves as her friends; he wore a mask and broke his heart for her.

Larry's cross-examination was merely perfunctory. Evidently prisoner's counsel had been instructed not to put certain obvious questions to him. Phillida's attorney was an able young fellow, but he was fatally handicapped by the mystery in which his client insisted on enveloping her actions and her motives. He did the best he could for her.

In addition to Larry, the locksmith and the various hotel people testified against Phillida. Between them they established the fact that Phillida had had a false key made with which she had entered "Mr. Felix's" room. There was no attempt by the other side to refute this. Indeed, when Phillida took the stand in her own defense, she caused a mild sensation by frankly avowing that she had entered the Englishman's room. She did so, she explained, for the purpose of obtaining something which she believed she had a right to.

Further than that she refused to go. The prosecutor, cross-examining her, failed to draw out any explanation or amplification of her original statement. But it was obvious that he was not overanxious to do so. He felt that her statement as it stood was the best possible aid to his case. He contented himself by framing questions cunningly devised to incriminate Phillida with the jury: questions that he knew when he put them, she would refuse to answer. Larry regarded the sneering lawyer with murder in his heart.

The judge himself endeavoured to elicit some explanation from Phillida of the curious defence she had offered, but without any better success than the lawyer. His Honour was clearly irritated by her obduracy. No doubt he would have committed her for contempt, had she not already been on trial for a graver offence.

Phillida's counsel called a number of character witnesses on her behalf, and this ended the taking of testimony.

The court took a recess for luncheon, during which time Larry walked around and around the balcony that encircled the great well of the Criminal Courts like a man in a state of suspended consciousness. A score of times he returned to the door of Part Three only to find that it was not yet time for his ordeal to recommence. They could dawdle over their meal while Phillida's fate hung in the balance!

When His Honour took his seat again, the assistant-district-attorney arose to address the jury. His remarks were conceived wholly within the spirit of the bad convention that governs our criminal courts; i. e., an appeal to passion instead of to reason. To see the ambitious young man all in the way of business, working himself up to a frenzy of hatred and scorn against the proud and composed Phillida, and endeavouring by every art to infect the stolid jurymen with his own hateful passions, enraged and sickened Larry. He sat through it with his eyes down, gripping his seat.

Counsel for the prisoner followed. His appeal was addressed no less to the emotions, but it was to the gentler emotions of compassion, and of reverence for women. Larry soothed, drank in every word greedily. He privately resolved to make the speaker a handsome present. Phillida's lawyer made the most of his one strong point, which was that the man who was supposed to be Phillida's victim had not only refused to appear against her, but had actively assisted her to escape. The perspiring jury appeared to be as little moved by one appeal as by the other.

The prosecutor then spoke briefly in rebuttal, pointing out that if "Mr. Felix" had yielded to a sentimental plea, it was no reason why they, the jury, should do so: that in fact it was their duty to sternly disregard sentimental pleas. That women and men were alike before the law when they transgressed it, etc., etc.

The last word was had by prisoner's counsel who made an impassioned appeal to the chivalry of the jury to give the prisoner the benefit of the very large doubt which had arisen in the case.

His Honour then prepared to address the jury. Larry anxiously searched his face for some signs of human compassion. There were none. To the

overworked judge it was all in the day's work. Larry saw merely a withered little man with a weary, languid expression, and a jealous sense of his own dignity. His voice, carefully cultivated to betray no human feeling, was like that of a justice machine. But he was human in spite of himself, and his voice showed an involuntary irritation induced no doubt by the heat and the bad air of the courtroom.

He said: "Gentlemen of the Jury: An attempt by no means uncommon in criminal cases, has been made in this case to envelope the indisputable facts in an atmosphere of romantic mystery. Many irrelevant suggestions have been made, and side issues raised. There is no place for mystery in a court of law, gentlemen. Both sides are given the fullest opportunity to bring forth the facts; and if instead of facts a mystery is offered you, you will draw your own deductions therefrom.

"It is your duty to disentangle the facts of this case. Your sole concern is with the facts as brought forth on the witness stand. They are after all quite simple. The prisoner is charged with having procured a false key, by means of which she entered the room of a guest in the Hotel Colebrook during his absence. These facts are not disputed by the defence. Yet the prisoner pleaded not guilty. An attempt to explain the apparent inconsistency was made by her statement on the stand that she entered the man's room for the purpose of obtaining something that was rightfully hers. But she refused to state in answer to questions from counsel or from the bench, what that something was, or to explain any of the circumstances surrounding it. You will draw your own conclusions from this. I must point out to you that should you decide the prisoner was speaking the truth concerning her motive in entering the man's room, her method of recovering her property was nevertheless unlawful. If every one attempted to redress his private grievances in this manner, what would happen to society?

"The prisoner, having been arrested and arraigned before a magistrate in the customary manner, was remanded for trial. On her way to the City Prison she escaped from the custody of the police. It has been suggested that she escaped with the aid of the very man whom she is accused of having attempted to rob. But there is no proof of this before you, and even if there were, the incident is not germane to this case. Entirely too much has been made of it by counsel on both sides. For on the other hand I must remind you that the prisoner is not on trial here for having escaped from the police. They have the option of bringing another charge against her should they wish to do so. I therefore suggest to you that you disregard the incident of her escape altogether, except in so far as it may bear in your minds upon the question of her guilt of the offence with which she here stands charged.

“Prisoner’s counsel has emphasised the fact that the supposed victim of the attempted robbery has never appeared as a complainant against the prisoner. I would point out to you that the case of the People is not necessarily invalidated by the fact. It is a popular misconception that the victim of a robbery is the only sufferer thereby. Robbery is an offence against society at large. If the proof of a robbery or an attempted robbery is otherwise forthcoming, the failure of the victim to appear is not significant. In the case before you, the hotel management which owes protection to its guests, was clearly an injured party.

“Several persons of undoubted probity have been called to testify to the previous good character of the prisoner. This is proper evidence, and the law takes cognisance of its value. But I must point out to you that such evidence has no bearing upon the facts of this case. You should not allow yourselves to be influenced by such testimony in regard to facts which may otherwise have been proved to your satisfaction. The prisoner is either guilty or not guilty. That is the sole question for you to determine. Should you be satisfied that she is guilty, and so render your verdict, it then becomes the province of the court to take these various considerations into account when sentencing her.”

There was a good deal more, couched in the same vein. As Larry listened his amazement and anger grew. For in spite of the elaborate phraseology in which it was involved, in spite of the prudent hedging, it seemed to him that the judge’s charge constituted a direct recommendation to the jury to convict. The blood rushed to his head. Was this justice? he asked himself. If it was, he was off it for the rest of his life. If this impostor, this solemn liar, was a lawgiver he’d be a crook! . . . Thus the hot tide of Larry’s thoughts bore him away.

His burning eyes searched the faces of the jurymen for some sign that they indignantly rejected the judge’s suggestions. But there was nothing of the sort to be seen there. The dull, worthy men, small tradesmen or artisans or clerks, all twelve of them were listening to the judge with their mouths open, visibly much more impressed by his dry legal style than they had been by all the passionate eloquence of opposing counsel. They glanced at each other in agreement, and all but nodded their heads in affirmation. “They’re going to do what he tells them!” thought Larry, groaning in spirit. “The fools! The fools! Oh, God, what a farce!”

When the judge finished speaking, the jury was invited to retire to their deliberations. But they made no move to do so. Instead, moved by a common impulse, they put their heads together. There was whispering and sage nodding of heads.

A moment of electrical tension was created in the courtroom. Most of the spectators were not interested in the case and this moment, this thrill was what they had come for. It is the most dramatic of all situations. No play on the stage can match it, for it is real. Even the judge to whom it was a daily affair, fussed among his papers nervously; the clerk of the court took off his glasses and wiped them; opposing counsel smiled self-consciously, and whispered to their associates. Of them all only the strange prisoner *was* at her ease. Her hands were loosely clasped in her lap, and her gaze was bent through the upper part of one of the tall windows at the sky.

Every eye in the room was fixed on her. Her friends, white-faced and tense, pressed their handkerchiefs to their mouths. Her lover clenched his teeth, and dug his nails into his palms. This moment, the most dreadful in Larry's life, was always associated in his mind with the smell of hot varnish.

The foreman of the jury signified to the clerk of the court that he was ready to return a verdict. The clerk whispered to His Honour, who graciously signified his readiness to receive it. There was an agonizing moment while His Honour searched for his glasses which had become mislaid. Why he needed his glasses to listen with, nobody could have told. He found them under his papers, and, putting them on, looked at the jury over the tops of the lenses.

The gawky, mild-faced foreman who looked like a carpenter of the old school, cleared his throat and said:

“Your Honour, we find the prisoner guilty as charged, and respectfully recommend her to the mercy of the court.”

The varnished, wainscotted courtroom whirled around Larry's head. Something broke inside him. He was no longer conscious of what he was doing.

“Sit down, sir!” cried a court attendant sharply, and started towards him.

Larry paid no attention to the court attendant, but the prisoner turned her head quickly, and bent a deep, mournful, imploring glance at Larry. All the forces of her soul she gathered up into that mute appeal. And Larry answered it. He sat down. He had made his choice at last. He chose to do what Phillida wished.

Presently through the fog of pain that obscured his senses, he became aware that the proceedings were going forward. Prisoner's counsel had requested a stay of execution which the judge had curtly denied.

“There is no need of that,” said His Honour, “in view of the decision I have come to.” He paused to give his subsequent words greater impressiveness. “Up to this time you appear to have been a young woman of

excellent character,” he continued, addressing the prisoner. “I have been not a little impressed by the testimony in favour of your industrious habits, and the talent you possess, though perhaps your profession is not one which tends to stability of character. I regard this unfortunate act of yours as an aberration. Whatever may have been the reasons which led you into it, I am inclined to think that it is not likely to be repeated. You are hardly the sort of woman who becomes a professional law-breaker. Moreover I feel that you have already been sufficiently impressed with the folly of the course you took in this instance . . .”

(Words! Words! Words! Would the mouthing hypocrite never have done!)

“I have therefore decided to order you released under suspended sentence.”

A murmur of approval went about the room, instantly silenced by a rap of the judge’s gavel.

For a moment or two the significance of his concluding words did not reach Larry’s understanding. Suspended sentence. Suspended sentence. Merely words. Then a joyous white beam of light pierced the fog. *Released!* There was no ambiguity about that word! Released! Released! Larry’s feelings towards the judge underwent a startling transformation. The little man elevated on his bench now seemed to be enveloped in an aura of goodness and wisdom.

. . . A corker! a corker! He was wise enough to see through all the dust the lawyers kicked up. He lets them blow up their balloons all they want, and then neatly punctures them at the end. He saw what was behind this case without being told. What a man he is! You can trust our judges. I wonder if he would let me take him by the hand? . . .

A great peace entered Larry’s soul. He had his heart’s desire—Phillida had hers too. Everything was all right.

The prisoner was surrounded by her friends. Larry stole out of the courtroom. He knew that his time would come later.

CHAPTER XXI

CONCLUSION

PHILLIDA walked around the room, stroking all the objects with a curious affectionateness. She and Larry were alone in the attic studio on South Washington Square that Phillida shared with Arline and Cynthia.

"It's worth while going to jail just to get out again," she said. "Everybody ought to go to jail once in their lives."

"Oh, if it was a regular thing there wouldn't be any thrill in it," said Larry.

Phillida went to the high window, and leaned her elbows on the sill. "The sky is like a turquoise bowl," she murmured; "the dingy old trees are washed with gold; the people on the park benches sit like gods."

Larry joined her at the window, and flung an arm about her shoulders. "Sort of shop-worn gods if you ask me," he said, in his matter-of-fact way.

"You'll have to go now," said Phillida. "I've got to dress. You can wait for me down in the Square."

"Where are we going?" asked Larry dreamily.

"To the Spotted Pup. The girls are giving a little party for us. They're going to hang out a sign: 'Closed to the public for one night only.' Just a small party; Arline, Cynthia, Tina and a few others."

"Lord! Tina will be laying for me!" said Larry.

"Oh, she's prepared to forgive you. Everything that happened before this moment is to be buried . . . It was a great disappointment to Tina when she learned that I had first call on you. Her heart was set on a policeman."

"Maybe I can furnish her with one. There's my pal, Matt McArdle."

"Can you get hold of him for to-night?"

"No, poor devil, he'll be on duty . . . Only going to be girls there?" Larry added a little anxiously.

"Oh, there'll be men enough to go around."

"What sort of men?" asked Larry dubiously, "artists?"

"Artists and scribblers and so on," said Phillida, smiling. "Don't you like artists?"

“I never knew any men artists. Girl artists are all right.” This with a sidelong look and a hug. “But somehow it don’t seem quite natural for a man.”

Phillida laughed a peal.

“What are you laughing at?”

“At you. Do you mind?”

“I don’t mind anything now.”

“I’ve got to laugh at you,” said Phillida. “But you’re absolutely the way I want you to be. You must never change the least bit. You’re so blessedly real!”

“I’m pretty thick,” said Larry deprecatingly.

“I love your thickness,” she said, squeezing his arm. “It’s exactly what I need. Something to hang on to. Something to hold me down.”

“Then you don’t mind my not being artistic?”

“No! No! Foolish one! Your feeling about artists is right. There *is* something slightly unreal about us—something unreal about me.”

“I don’t notice it.” Another hug.

“I live in my imagination. I need you to convince me of my own identity.”

“That’s too finedrawn for me.”

“Does it matter?”

“Not a damn!”

Phillida’s head fell back on his shoulder. They lost themselves.

“I will always be talking,” she murmured in his embrace. “It doesn’t matter whether you listen.”

He finally released her. “Well, to-night’s provided for,” he said with a curious diffidence. “What are we going to do to-morrow?”

“I must get to work,” said Phillida, wickedly misunderstanding him. “All this time wasted!”

“I must get to work too,” said Larry. “And I haven’t got any work to start on . . . But that isn’t what I meant?”

“What did you mean?”

“Could we get married to-morrow?” he suggested with an absurd air of indifference.

“Why, yes,” said Phillida, matching his tone, “I’m quite looking forward to it.”

Her sly mimicry set Larry off. Larry did not see the funny side of things as quickly as she did, but when he laughed his laughter came out of the very middle of him, and the walls trembled.

“I love to hear you!” murmured Phillida.

“But it’s a serious situation that faces us,” said Larry. “I’ve spent all my money, and I haven’t got a job.”

“Ah, let’s not be serious yet. We’ll live like the sparrows.”

Larry pressed her close, and his eyes brooded over her with a lover’s insatiable hunger. “I have you—and I haven’t got you,” he murmured. “However close I hold you, somehow you escape. There will always be a pain in it, no matter how happy I am!”

“Now who’s drawing fine points?” she whispered, smiling.

Larry came down to earth. “Marriage isn’t going to be a bed of roses for you and me,” he said quaintly. “I can see that.”

“Of course it isn’t,” said Phillida, laughing. “It never is. But I’m surprised to hear you say so . . . Why isn’t it?”

“I’ve got to get accustomed to a lot of new ideas,” he said, with a sigh. “You live in a world strange to me.”

“Ah, you dear!” she said warmly. “I don’t expect you to give up your world for me. Why can’t you go on living in your world, and I in mine? We can meet on the borders and exchange experiences. It will be good for both of us. I don’t believe married people ought to swallow each other whole. Let’s make it a fifty-fifty deal. I’ll give you half my notions in exchange for half of yours. That will make a wide meeting-ground where we can play together. . . . To begin with, in marrying me do you expect to get just a housekeeper? I warn you I’m a second-rate one. Look at this place!”

“No!” said Larry. “You must go on with your work. Let the housekeeping get itself done. They all say you’re so talented. I don’t understand your work, but I’m proud of it. I will understand it some day.”

“Ah, then we’re really going to be happy,” murmured Phillida. “I was prepared to marry you, whatever you said. But we’re going to be happy! If you will give my mind free play. Let me talk myself out, and do not take me too seriously. We have so much to give each other . . . I have a lot of ideas as to how a rational marriage ought to be conducted which I will air to you a little at a time. If they’re too strong for you, I’ll put them away in mothballs. Ah! with you and my work too, what a full life I shall have!”

“I love to hear you talk!” said Larry simply.

Phillida pealed with laughter again. “You’re already taking me at my word!” she said ruefully.

“I don’t get you,” said Larry.

She refused to explain. “I’ve already given too much away,” she said.

“Do you realise that you’re marrying a convicted burglar?” she asked.

“Oh, well, you’re willing to take a policeman.”

“Well, I promise never to commit another burglary.”

“And I promise to do no more policing.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Officer!* by Hulbert Footner]