

**THE  
MURDER  
OF A  
BAD MAN**

**HULBERT  
FOOTNER**

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HULBERT FOOTNER

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THE MURDER OF A BAD MAN

SCARRED JUNGLE

THE MYSTERY OF THE FOLDED PAPER

EASY TO KILL

DEAD MAN'S HAT

THE RING OF EYES

MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY

DANGEROUS CARGO

THE WHIP-POOR-WILL MYSTERY

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*Harper & Brothers*  
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# The Murder of a Bad Man

*By*

HULBERT FOOTNER



*PUBLISHERS*

HARPER & BROTHERS

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# THE MURDER OF A BAD MAN

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UPON graduating from the Harvard Law School, Jack Comerford went down to Washington to talk things over with his father. The family home was in Pittsburgh, but six months before, the elder Comerford had resigned the presidency of the Ohio River National to take a job as special assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury, with a view to suppressing the illegal liquor traffic after the repeal of Prohibition.

There was a much better understanding between the two than is usually the case with a well-to-do father and his only son. Jack senior looked over his offspring with satisfaction. The boy appeared to have escaped the absurdities of Harvard. A handsome, well-set-up young fellow with a steady eye; any father might have been proud of him.

“How do you like it down here?” asked Jack junior.

“So-so,” replied his father somewhat grimly. “They gave me about the hardest job there was. Well, I felt that it was up to me to do a little something in the way of public service. I’ve just made a report to the Secretary that has gained me quite a bit of notice. The traffic is pretty well put down. In another six months I’ll be able to go back to the bank.”

“Good boy!” said Jack.

“How about you?” asked his father. “You’ve got your last sheepskin. I suppose you’re ready to knuckle down now. Twenty-five years old; it’s high time.”

Jack grinned a little ruefully. “We thought we had to knuckle down pretty hard in law school.”

His father waved this aside as unimportant. “You’ll be admitted to the bar immediately. There’s a job waiting for you in the office of Broadus and Hanrahan, General Counsel to the Ohio River National. You should stay with them for a year—two years if it seems advisable. After they have put

you over the legal jumps, we'll give you an assistant-secretaryship in the bank. For years I have wanted one officer with legal training.

"Your promotion will be rapid, because I want to retire and get into public affairs permanently, and it's taken for granted that you are to succeed me at the bank, just as I succeeded my father. There's been a Comerford at the head of the Ohio River National since it was founded. Things are getting more and more strenuous, and you'll have to work like a dog, I reckon. Thank God! you look as if you could take it."

Jack's face registered little enthusiasm as this programme was unrolled, and his father observing it, broke off to ask: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You have always known that this was the plan. You never made any objection to it before."

"I'm not objecting, only . . ."

"Only what?"

"I wish I could see a little life before I stick my head through the collar."

"Sure! that's natural. Take six months off. Travel."

"That's not what I want, Dad. Tourists don't see life."

"What do you want?"

"I want to get into things. I want action. I want excitement . . . It seems to me that a young man is entitled to it. If I had one good bout of excitement I'd be satisfied to go into the bank and stay there. If I don't have it, all my life I'll feel as if I'd been cheated."

Jack senior looked at him in a startled way, as if it had suddenly occurred to him that he himself might have been cheated. "Have you anything in mind?" he asked.

"Yes. But I don't know how you'll take it."

"Spill it, son."

"Why don't you give me a job here in the department?"

"My God! this is such dirty work son! Necessary work, but dirty."

"All right. Somebody's got to do it. Better let me do it for awhile, than to condemn some other fellow to dirty work for a lifetime."

Jack senior tapped his desk with a pencil. "And dangerous," he murmured under his breath.

"That's what I'm asking for," said Jack.

His father went into a study. Searching his face, Jack to a certain extent was able to read his thoughts. Jack said bluntly: "Tell me the truth, Dad:



aren't you at this very moment looking for a man to do a piece of work that is both dangerous and dirty?"

Jack senior looked up, startled again. "What makes you say that?"

"Your face suggested it."

"I'm always looking for a man."

"But just now you have a special piece of work in view."

"Well, yes," admitted his father, grinning. "You're too sharp!"

"Tell me about it," said Jack. "That doesn't commit you to anything."

"Well, after repeal we made it so hot for the old-line bootleggers that they had to fold up. Many of them, I know, were caught with large stocks of valuable imported liquors on hand, but I have never been able to seize it. Now I am told that a certain man has bought up all this liquor, and is preparing to distribute it. If my information is correct, he has liquor stored all over the country."

"Do you know his name?"

"Sure. It's Mack Shenton. Poses as a sport and a man about town in New York. Is often called the best-known man on Broadway. I am as sure that he's the man I want as I am of my own name. But I have no evidence. And my agents tell me that he's so clever, and covers his operations so well that it's impossible to get evidence against him."

"Maybe he's got the agents fixed," suggested Jack.

"It is quite possible. You can't trust anybody when liquor comes into the situation."

"You could trust me, Dad."

"Certainly, I could trust you. But what's that got . . ."

"Give me the job of bringing this man to book."

Jack senior regarded his son with doubt and alarm.

"I am the very man for it!" Jack went on eagerly. "I have no connection with the department. I don't look like a treasury agent. I'm completely unknown in New York liquor circles. I look like just what I am, a Harvard graduate. If I put on old clothes and a hangdog expression, I'd look like a Harvard man gone to the bad. Such a one ought to be valuable to Shenton in his business. Let it be my job to get next to him, to persuade him to hire me. I'll steer clear of all other treasury agents, and report direct to you. You can pay my expenses out of your own pocket . . ."

"Wait a minute!" said his father dryly. "You're not hired yet."

"What have you got against it?" demanded Jack.

“This is one of the most astute criminals in the country; and you’re only just out of college.”

“Law school,” Jack pointed out. “It’s all in my favour. I’m not as green as I look. All your experienced agents have failed. Try a college graduate. . . . Seriously, Dad, all I have to do is to get next to the man. No especial cleverness is required for that. If I make good with him, all right. If I don’t, no harm done.”

“How would you proceed?”

“Well, I suppose you know plenty about this guy?”

“Oh yes, I have men watching him. He seems to be able to elude them whenever he wants, still their reports tell me a good deal.”

“Well, first of all I’ll study their reports. Then I’ll have to wait until a real opportunity to brace him presents itself. You may have to be a little patient.”

Jack senior grinned, seeing himself being manœuvred into a position where he could not refuse the job to his son. He did not greatly care. The idea was beginning to appeal to him. In his heart of hearts he would have liked to take the assignment himself. He searched among some memoranda on his desk.

“There’s a store of liquor in the cellar of a ruinous old mansion at Drum Point, Maryland,” he said. “The house is occupied by poor whites who obviously are not the owners of the liquor. It is believed to belong to Mack Shenton simply because it is fine pre-war stuff, landed from a vessel in the Chesapeake Bay a year ago.”

“What would be the disposition of this liquor in the ordinary course?” asked Jack.

“I think there’s a raid scheduled for some night next week.”

“Why don’t you have a hint conveyed to Shenton that the treasury agents are smelling around his liquor. Then if he makes a move to transfer it to a safer place, we might have a chance to get next to him.”

Jack senior made a memo. “Good! I’ll do that!”

After some more talk, Jack put the question to him point blank: “Do I get the job, Dad?”

“Yes. We’ll try it out.”

They shook hands on it.

“If this Shenton owns all the liquor he is credited with,” the older man went on, “he must have a list of it written down, and the places where it is stored. Pay no attention to his operations in disposing of the stuff, the

regular agents will take care of that, but make this list your objective. When I have that I have him stopped.”

“O.K. Dad. As soon as I get a lead from your reports that will help me to get in touch with him I’ll do a disappearing act, and you won’t see or hear from me again until I bring you that list. . . .”

“Not hear from you?” asked his father with some anxiety.

“No news is good news,” said Jack, grinning. “If I get next to Shenton, it would be too risky to try to communicate with you.”

“You must have somebody you could go to in an emergency.”

“Well, there’s my pal Phil Brinsley. Phil would be tickled to have a hand in this.”

“What name will you work under? I must have that in case news of you is reported by my agents.”

“I’ll call myself Lyn Dixon. Short and easy to remember.”

His father made a note of it.

“I must dope up a criminal past to impress Shenton with,” Jack went on. “Let me see . . . I’ve got it! Remember the young guy who held up grandfather on the street in Pittsburgh last winter and took his wallet? Arrested on the following day, but made a sensational getaway from the court room. I’ll be that guy. No photograph of him was ever published. In age and build and colouring he was about the same as me. Dirk Evers was the name he gave the police.”

Old Jack rubbed his chin. “I never suspected that you had so much ingenuity,” he said dryly.

“You don’t know the half of it, Dad.”

“I can’t have you getting mixed up in any shooting affairs,” said his father, scowling.

Jack swallowed the desire to laugh. “I’ll sidestep that sort of thing,” he said with a straight face.

Jack senior arose and paced the room agitatedly. “Good God! What if one of my agents was to arrest you!”

Jack junior followed him up. “It’s all right, Dad, if we face it out in the beginning.”

“I’d have to wash my hands of you!”

“Sure you would! And I could take it!”

Jack senior clapped his junior on the shoulder. “Son, I give you this job because, well, it’s something that I have missed. But it’s not easy. For God’s

sake, take care of yourself, boy.”

“Don’t worry, Dad. I’m good at that, really.”

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WHEN Mack Shenton walked down Broadway, in the short stretch between the Winter Garden and Times Square, he would be greeted by a hundred men more or less. It was a point of pride with Mack that everybody knew him, and nobody knew anything about him. He grinned upon hearing the fables that were passed along concerning his love affairs, his wealth, his power; it was music in his ears when men murmured enviously: "Gee! you're a lucky guy, Mack!" "Luck nothing!" he would retort. "I enjoy life because I got a good appetite and no conscience."

Prohibition had made him. Having acquired his first stake through a couple of phony contracts for war supplies, he had started lending money to men who wanted to underwrite cargoes of liquor lying off the twelve-mile limit. Thus he shared in the profits without taking any risk. Sooner or later his clients found themselves in Atlanta, but Mack went on growing richer. He always appeared in these transactions as an agent for others. Meanwhile his money, his good looks and his style gave him the entree everywhere.

The swift coming of repeal threw his clients into a panic. Most of them were caught with great stocks of contraband liquor that they didn't know what to do with. Mack, still acting as "agent" for unnamed principals, bought it up for a song, and stored it all over the East. When the size of the new taxes became known, it appeared that the illicit liquor business was in for a new period of prosperity, and the value of Mack's holdings doubled and quadrupled.

He rented a modest office in the Foster Building, though he never acknowledged that it was his. "Acme Agency" was lettered on the door, and Nell Cottar was the "Manager." The one or two who were in the know were surprised to discover that the elegant Mack would employ a homely girl for his right-hand man, but Mack himself was fond of saying that he wished he

knew where he could put his hand on a dozen like Nell. Nell knew more about his affairs than anyone else, but that wasn't saying much.

Nell's eyes brightened when he came in and Mack marked it with satisfaction. Nell was certainly an ugly woman. She had a face as long as a horse's, a gruff voice and clumsy mannerisms like a man. The more money she spent on her clothes, the uglier she looked. With Mack it was all to the good. She cherished a passion for him that would never alter because it was a helpless passion. He could do what he liked with her. To be sure, she often gave him the rough side of her tongue, but he rather enjoyed that, because as long as she was bitter he knew he had her.

Mack said: "Before we can go any further we got to decide who's to run the New York plant."

"I told Frank Keesing to come in this morning," said Nell. "You've talked to him. What about him?"

"Seems all right," said Mack indifferently. "It's a responsible job and I got to be careful."

"He's just out of prison. He's got a family to support. He's crazy for work."

"That cuts no ice with me," said Mack coolly.

"Well, he's an able man. He's the kind who does better when he's working for somebody else. He's loyal. That's why he went to prison."

"Pooh, loyalty!" sneered Mack. "I am better satisfied when my employees are *afraid* of me."

A kind of spasm passed over Nell's plain face. "What a cold-blooded devil you are!" she murmured.

"Sure, that's understood," he said, grinning. "Have you been able to dig up anything against this fellow Keesing?"

"Yes. He's wanted by the State of Illinois. Unexpired sentence. Apparently it was overlooked when he was released from Atlanta, but it could always be brought up against him."

"Good! Then we'll hire him."

Later when Keesing came in, Mack said tersely: "I've put your application before my principal, and he has authorised me to hire you. Two hundred a week."

Keesing was a slender white-faced man in his thirties who looked as if he had been through hell. He had thin reddish hair like fur, that refused to lie smooth. He flushed red at Mack's announcement and became pale again. "When do I start?" he asked quietly.

“Now. Your Company will be known as the Peerless Restaurant Supply; you’re president of it.” Mack glanced at Keesing’s well-brushed shiny blue suit. “Nell will advance you a week’s salary. . . . You’ll have to watch your step on account of that unexpired sentence in Illinois.”

Keesing gave Mack a glance of sharp terror that caused the latter to grin dryly. The man was his! “Your first job is to hire a small building in the wholesale district for a warehouse,” Mack went on, “and an experienced commission man to handle fruit and vegetables. No liquor is to be kept in this building; and your commission man don’t have to know anything about the liquor. You’ll also need a big panel truck to make deliveries. You can give the Exchange National Bank for a reference.”

Keesing had recovered himself. His face now wore a mask like Mack’s. “O.K.,” he said.

“Later on we’ll discuss a selling campaign. As I see it, Kate Whiteley is the key to the situation.”

Keesing was shaken out of his impassivity. “Kate Whiteley! My God! Boss.”

“Do you know her personally?”

“No.”

“Well, you’ve read all about her. Her restaurant, A l’Aigle d’Or on Fifty-Fifth Street, is the big sensation of the season. In reality Kate’s only the hostess there. She has no capital, but she has a genius for publicity. Her adventures during prohibition have made her the darling of the public. Even her year in prison is an asset.”

“And her wise-cracks,” put in Keesing.

“Sure! All the best cracks are credited to her, whether she made ’em or not. She’s just been elected vice-president in the new Restaurant-Keeper’s Association. Now we’ve got to get Kate for our first customer, and get some kind of a testimonial from her to show the other buyers.”

“Right.”

“Kate is canny. She’s the most conspicuous woman on Broadway, but nothing is known about her private life. That’s your job, see? I want to get something on her. She must have some reason for keeping so quiet. Go up to her place to-night. Find out where she lives when she’s home, and all about her family circumstances, see? When you get it, call me up at my house no matter what the time is.”

“My God! You couldn’t touch Kate Whiteley, Boss!”

Mack showed his teeth. “Don’t tell me what I can do!”

Keesing cringed. "Right, Boss."

"Hop to it now. Keep in touch with me during the day through Nell."

Something after one o'clock that night Mack Shenton entered A l'Aigle d'Or accompanied by Harry Entlein. Entlein was an ex-college man who had been cast off by his family. Mack carried him around as a sort of stooge. He had chosen an hour when the crowd would be starting to thin out, so that he could have a talk with Kate Whiteley. He noted with satisfaction that his arrival created a visible excitement among the doormen, bell-boys and coat-room girls. All knew him. People coming out of the place whispered to their companions, and called attention to him. Well, it was something to have made your mark on the big town.

He went upstairs with his self-effacing companion. A l'Aigle d'Or was one of the first of the big resorts to be completed after repeal. Built for permanency, it was as beautiful and costly as an opera house. The mysterious gentlemen who were backing Kate Whiteley believed that the public was tired of severe modern effects, and had gone in lavishly for gold. There was a double tier of gold boxes surrounding the dancing floor, and a soaring golden roof. Plenty of room for dancing. In New York the greatest luxury is space.

The head waiter, who was a star in his own line, received Mack with the right blend of camaraderie and respect, and conducted him to a small table over-looking the dancing floor. More whispering and staring at the other tables. Mack did not ask for Kate. That would have been to show his hand. He knew she would come.

And she did. Though she no longer performed, her appearance was the signal for a great burst of applause. Her admirers pounded on the tables, and chanted "We want Kate! We want Kate!" She came sweeping down the floor with laughter; blonde, sparkling and almost slim-looking in crisp black taffeta with diamonds at her throat and wrists. Three handsome young men were in attendance.

"Well, Mack Shenton!" she cried. "You old Casanova! What crooked business brings you here?"

All her hearers laughed, including Mack. It was just Kate's line. He fondled her hand. "Same Kate!" he said. "You know how to flatter a respectable man."

"Respectable my eye!" she retorted. "You're no sheep in wolf's clothing!"



"I feel wolfish when I look at you, Kate. Good enough to eat!"

"Go on! Do I look like Little Red Riding Hood?"

"Sit down for a while," he pleaded.

"All right, old-timer! . . . Trot along, children."

The three young men faded; likewise Harry Entlein, murmuring something about having to see a man. Kate sat down. Mack undertook to order champagne.

"Not for me," she said. "Lemon and seltzer is my poison."

"Bad for business," suggested Mack.

"All drinks cost the same here. Saves figuring. . . . The joy water is no treat to me. My idea of a big time would be slippers and a glass of milk before the fire."

Mack studied her without appearing to. She held her own well, but after all she was getting on; older than himself. Forty-eight. At a distance of two feet you could see the tired lines around her eyes. She would have to be satisfied with being a great popular figure now. Men wouldn't get crazy about her any more. He should take his cue from that.

"Kate, there is nobody like you!" he said with a simple air.

She pulled down one of her lower lids. "See any green there?"

"I mean it."

"On the level, Mack, what brought you here to-night?"

"Nothing in particular."

"You never do anything without having a particular reason for doing it."

"You'll only laugh at me. I had a sudden yen to see you."

Kate did laugh incredulously, but he saw that she was pleased none the less. As a public character himself, Mack appreciated the cash value of Kate's gay laugh. But he didn't believe that it was honest. He didn't believe that anybody was honest.

"A man gets so fed up with Broadway," Mack went on. "And Broadway women. The way they make up to you would almost turn your stomach. Always figuring on what they can get out of it. You were never like that, Kate. You're the only square woman I know. You're like a breath of country air."

She made a good-humoured face at him.

He leaned towards her and lowered his voice. "And so beautiful. I swear you are more beautiful to-day than the first time I saw you."

She laughed still, but he saw by her softened eyes that she greatly wanted to believe that he meant it. A woman could always be fooled. “Don’t you sometimes long to get away from it all?” he murmured. “And lead a more natural life? Lord! what a satisfaction it would be to turn over a few spadefuls of earth, after all this fuff!”

She refused to commit herself. “Mack, you could charm the shellac off a carved monkey!” she said, grinning.

But she was softened. They talked on in low voices. After all they had known each other for fifteen years, a long time on Broadway. Mack was thinking: to look deep into their eyes and make your voice shake a little works just as well as ever. Women are fools!

By degrees he brought the talk around to business. It appeared that Kate was not altogether happy in her present situation.

“Oh, I’m making money,” she said, “but it’s a hellish responsibility. I can’t forget for a moment that this gilded den cost a million dollars. It cramps my style. I was happier in the old days when we folded up at the first sign of trouble, and slapped up some cheap decorations in a new loft.”

“You gave the enforcement officers a grand run for their money,” said Mack.

“They were my friends even when they ran me in.”

“Remember the time they raided your place on Forty-Seventh Street—what did you call it? The Sans Souci?—and chased you over the roofs in a red velvet gown? You came to an open scuttle and dropped through, landing on a young man who was sleeping in bed. That story made you the darling of New York.”

“Scandalous goings-on!” murmured Kate.

“Then there was that time in the Little Trianon when you pulled the lever that dumped your stock of liquor in the pit, but the prohibition officers were already in the pit and they got it on their heads.”

“Ah, that was the time they had the goods on me,” said Kate with a shiver.

“You went to Atlanta for a year, but it didn’t do you any harm with your public. They mobbed you when you came back.”

“Well, those days are over now.”

“Funny thing,” said Mack carelessly, “but as it happens, they’re not over. A young fellow I know is just starting in a big way. He’s got a tremendous stock of imported liquors of the best brands. Much of it pre-war stock.”

Kate betrayed no particular interest. “Where did he get it?”

“Bought it up from the bootleggers after repeal. They got cold feet and let it go for nothing.”

“Well, it’s nothing in my life now.”

“It would cut your liquor bill in half,” said Mack.

She looked at him queerly. “Was that what brought you round?”

“Lord, no!” said Mack. “I’ve got no stake in it. Just a young fellow asked me to introduce him to one or two. His stuff is all right. I sampled it. Pre-war. Unobtainable at any price now.”

“I’m not in the market,” said Kate. “Not with a million-dollar plant at stake.”

“It would be safe enough as far as that goes,” said Mack offhandedly. “The young fellow is dopping out a plan of operations to suit the changed conditions.”

“How could he get the stuff to me?”

“He’s going to operate under cover of a commission business. The stuff would be delivered along with the lettuces and oranges, and the boxes of smoked fish. All properly stamped with government stamps, of course. He’s got a new scheme for billing it, too. Bills will be made out on facsimiles of the billheads of the regular agents for the different brands, and charged to you at the same prices that they charge. You simply deduct fifty per cent. when you pay. Thus, if the licence commissioners got nosey, you always have the bills to show.”

“And I could also show the bills to my financial backers and pocket the difference,” said Kate dryly.

Mack darted a sharp look at her. He didn’t like this tone in a woman. “That’s up to you,” he said, shrugging.

“As a matter-of-fact, they’re not interested in my bills,” said Kate. “All I have to do is to show a profit.”

“You could increase it twenty-five per cent.”

All the sparkle had gone out of Kate. Her glance at Mack was almost sullen. Shows her age now, he thought. “Tempting,” she said with curling lip, “but on the whole, no!”

Mack raised his shoulders. “Never would have thought of it,” he said, “if you hadn’t mentioned that you found life slow nowadays.”

“Even so, no! In the old days I broke the law without giving it a thought, because it was an unpopular law, and the public was with me. All that is changed. There is a rough sense of justice in the public. We wanted repeal and we got it. Now they expect us to play fair.”

Mack never pushed a situation too far. He made his face as open as a clean sheet of paper. "You're absolutely right!" he cried heartily. "I'm glad to hear you put yourself on record."

She was no longer fooled, but continued to regard him with a slight cynical smile. Damn the woman! he thought, I'll get her yet! He tried to bring the old confidential and friendly tone into their talk, but Kate's disillusioned eye defeated him. Presently the entrance of a party of prominent politicians a little the worse for wear gave her an excuse to leave him.

When Mack went out it pleased him to find Frank Keesing in irreproachable evening dress and accompanied by a good-looking woman, sitting at a table near the entrance where he could overlook all who came and went. No sign of recognition passed between them.

At eleven o'clock next morning Mack was awakened by the ringing of the telephone at the head of his bed. It was Keesing.

"Sorry to keep you waiting all night, Boss, but it was so late when K. W. got home that I had to put off making inquiries until this morning. She lives at 16 Ashbourne Street, Bronxville. Lives in an elegant house in the choicest part of the town, and drives a Bentley-Dart car. She don't own the house and the car. Is paying for them out of her earnings. Employs two maids and a chauffeur. Is known as Mrs. Aymery up here, and accounts for her late hours by giving out that she is employed in a responsible position by the *New York Times*.

"Family consists of a daughter, Muriel Aymery, aged twenty-three, graduate of Vassar. I haven't seen her yet. Is said to be a beautiful girl. Serious-minded. Is all taken up with philanthropy and travels with that kind of crowd. Helps to run the Forsyth Street Child Welfare Settlement."

Mack grinned, hearing this. So the profits of A l'Aigle d'Or went to the dirty brats of the poor! Life was full of such amusing turns! He said: "Good work, Keesing! You can return to town now, and get about your other business. I'll be at the office about three."

"Right, Boss!"

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MACK dressed with care and took the train to Bronxville because it was quicker than driving. With his pale-grey Borsalino, white-edged vest and malacca stick, he strolled through the leafy streets of the superior suburb, the picture of a good-humoured idler. Mack cultivated a continental air that he knew would be very effective in Suburbia.

Ashbourne proved to be a short street on the edge of town with rolling fields and woods beyond. It had only a dozen houses on each side of the way, all built in smart plain styles of architecture, set amongst wide green lawns and tasteful planting. Each was served by a short private drive. The street ended at the elaborate gates of one of the larger estates of the neighbourhood. Number sixteen was Dutch colonial, painted white, with low eaves and an enormous chimney. Mack cocked a humorous eye at the bedroom windows and passed on. When he came back he turned in.

To the trim maid who answered the door he said: "Is Mrs. Aymery in?"

"Please step in, sir. I'll see. What name, please?"

"Mr. Shenton."

The big living-room was charming. Not too much in it; a good picture or two, some well-chosen pieces of antique furniture, modern easy-chairs; mellow-toned rugs. Mack, approving it, wondered where Kate had acquired so much taste. She had been before the public since she was a child. Perhaps it was due to daughter's influence. He looked around for a picture of daughter. No photographs were displayed.

He grinned when he heard the rapid feet on the stairs. Kate's wide-eyed look of astonishment and fright was as good as a dram. Thus he got square with her.

"Mack! How . . . how did you find me out here?" she stammered.

“Pure accident!” he said laughing. “Or rather, a whole series of accidents. I came out to lunch with some friends on Poplar Street. Such a lovely day, I walked. Strayed into Ashbourne Street by mistake. Imagine my surprise when I looked up at a window and saw your face. You could have knocked me down with a feather.”

She didn’t believe this rigmarole, nor did he expect her to. That was the fun of it. “How did you get hold of my name?” she murmured.

“Fished for it until the maid gave it to me.”

“It is my right name.”

“Kate Aymery?”

“Yes.”

There was a silence. There was nothing about Kate now to suggest the darling of the night clubs. In the intimate house-gown with loose sleeves bordered with marabou, no make-up on her face, she was frankly the middle-aged matron of the better class. An entirely different person. And she appeared to have changed her character with her clothes. No wise-cracks here, but a sensitive, reticent look that went with the room. Mack was enjoying every moment.

“Why are you so secret about it all?”

“Well, I like to keep the two lives separate. I have always done so.”

“What a story this would make on Broadway!”

“Must you tell it?”

“Certainly not. I’m no gossip. I get more fun out of keeping things to myself.”

She looked at him steadily. Yes, for a price! that look said. Mack read it perfectly.

They stood there, Mack willing her to invite him to sit, and Kate steadily resisting him. Finally she said:

“Won’t you be late for your luncheon?”

“Plenty of time! One gets a warmer welcome by being a little late.”

“Who are your friends in Poplar Street?”

“The Wilkenses.”

“I don’t know them.”

Mack had made up his mind not to leave until he saw the daughter. He listened attentively. Vague sounds from above suggested that there was another person in the house. He said:

“Aren’t you going to ask me to sit down?”

With a sort of despairing gesture, she waved her hand toward a chair. She closed the door into the hall, and Mack grinned inwardly. From the sounds he guessed that the person upstairs was getting ready to go out. Kate sat down in silence. The shock had been so unexpected that she could not carry off the situation with a woman's usual aplomb.

Mack had plenty of gall for both of them. "You've got a swell place here, Kate."

"Think so?"

"Just the sort of thing that I would expect you to fix up for yourself."

No answer.

"Are you married—if it's a fair question?"

"I'm a widow."

"Any children?"

"One." She was listening with strained ears.

"Girl or boy?"

"A daughter."

"Fancy that! You're a deep one, Kate. Living a double life all these years. I suppose your friends up here don't know . . ."

Kate roused herself. "Please go, Mack," she said simply. "You call yourself my friend. I hope you are. If you are, you will go. I make no pretences with you. I throw myself on your mercy. If you stay here you will destroy all that I have been so painfully building up for years past."

Mack made believe to be sore. "Do you mean I'm not good enough to meet your private friends?"

She threw up her hands helplessly. He heard a light quick step on the stairs. The door was thrown open, and the girl stood there.

"Mother! . . . Oh, sorry! I didn't know you weren't alone."

She was lovely. Blonde like Kate, but more beautiful than Kate had ever been. Her blue eyes were darker, graver. She had the assurance and the exquisite finish of the daughters of the rich. A woman who would fight a man. Modern and unafraid. Mack was taken by surprise. He had supposed that philanthropists always pulled long faces and talked through their noses. His pulses bounded. Not in years had he been so roused. It was grand to feel that he could be roused again. He took in every detail of her sports outfit from the narrow well-shod feet to the casual little hat.

She came in smiling with the confidence of one who shared her mother's life, and Kate had no recourse but to introduce them. "Mr. Shenton . . . my daughter Muriel," she murmured with stiff lips.

The girl was frankly interested in him. Why shouldn't she be? Mack asked himself. There are not many of my sort around the Settlements.

"Are you a neighbour of ours?" she asked.

"No, indeed," he said smiling.

"Mr. Shenton is an old friend," put in Kate. She sat there like one waiting for a fatal blow to fall.

"Your mother and I haven't seen each other since . . ." he hesitated for the sheer pleasure of tormenting Kate. "Indeed, I can't remember how long it is."

Kate glanced into his face with a crazy hope. Was he not going to betray her after all? His smile did not reassure her. She saw that he was merely playing with her, and was capable of lightheartedly crushing her at any moment. She lowered her eyes.

"How did you find us?" asked the girl.

"A mutual friend gave me your address."

"I hope we'll see more of you now."

"If you don't it won't be my fault."

"Are you going to stay to lunch?"

"I can't to-day."

"I'm glad of that because I have to go out. Ask him for some other day, Mother . . . Or perhaps you have a large family of your own and all sorts of interests," she added, turning back to Mack.

"Free as air," he said.

"How nice!" she exclaimed with her frank, laughing glance.

The blood hummed pleasantly in Mack's ears. You beauty! he thought. I shall enjoy you if it's my last act on earth! It was necessary for him to learn if Kate had deceived her daughter respecting her life, and how far. He felt his way along.

"Do you know, you're a complete surprise to me. Years ago when I knew your mother, she never told me she was married, let alone that she had a daughter."

"Why, that was travelling under false pretences," said Muriel with an affectionate glance at Kate.

Kate sat in dumb misery with a stiff smile fixed on her lips.

"Well, I suppose she thought it wasn't necessary in business," said Mack.



The girl fell into his little trap. "So you and mother were associated in business. Are you in the newspaper business too?"

Kate put up a hand to shield her face from the light.

Mack exulted. I have her! He said: "I used to be. Now I'm one of those despicable creatures they call a capitalist."

"Capitalists are nice to have for friends," said Muriel.

Kate's crushed air tempted Mack to prod her a little further. He said carelessly: "A few years back I heard that you were in Atlanta, Kate."

Her frozen lips merely shaped the word "Yes."

Mack turned to Muriel. "Did you accompany your mother to Atlanta?"

"No. I was at school in Switzerland while mother was working in the South."

"Nice town, Atlanta."

Muriel, with her delightful, confident manner, asked: "Do you have any trouble in spending your income, Mr. Capitalist?"

"Muriel!" Kate protested faintly.

"Mother thinks I have no shame," the girl said laughing, "and I haven't where my kids are concerned. I'm interested in child welfare, you know. They need everything. And I'm not going to let a capitalist get away, without putting their case before him."

Mack rubbed his upper lip. This was rich comedy. "Well, we'll see what can be done," he said.

"I'm going to hold you to that. Can I come to see you at your office?"

"What does mother say?" asked Mack, grinning at Kate.

"Mother, can't I go to see Mr. Shenton at his office?"

"We'll talk that over later, dear," murmured Kate.

Muriel laughed at Mack. "I'll bring her round. . . . And now I've got to run. Good-bye Capitalist!" She kissed her mother and disappeared. The front door slammed.

Kate arose jerkily and flung up her hands. She looked like an old woman then. "Well, I'm beaten!" she cried with extreme bitterness. "What's your price? What have I got to do?"

"I think you know," said Mack grinning.

"Buy from you, I suppose."

"From my friend," Mack gently corrected her. "And give him a letter recommending him to the other members of your association."

"All right. On two conditions."

“Name them.”

“The stuff must be exactly as represented.”

“You can depend upon that. I wouldn’t back him unless I had satisfied myself of it.”

“You must not come to this house again. You must not approach my daughter in any manner whatsoever.”

“That’s understood,” said Mack.

“I’m not asking you for any pledges,” said Kate. “From you they would be worthless. If you break your agreement, I’ll know it right away. And I’ll tell Muriel the whole truth whatever it may cost me.”

Mack continued to grin. She’ll never tell the girl about Atlanta, he thought. “O.K.,” he said. “I’ll see you at your shop to-night, and we can discuss the details.”

He left the house twirling the malacca stick. Good morning’s work! He felt twenty years younger. How pleasantly the sun shone through the leaves. Not such a bad old world after all!

His thoughts pursued a complacent round. Soon as I get Kate sewed up, I’ll go after the girl. It will be easy to persuade her to deceive her mother in an innocent sort of way. Kate will never know until it’s too late. Philanthropy! My God! That girl is starving for life! And I’m the one to feed it to her! What a girl! Beauty, breeding and fire in her veins! I’m in luck!

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MACK saw Kate in her private office before A l’Aigle d’Or filled up for the evening. Kate’s office and the dressing-rooms of the performers were in a narrow wing of the building which extended through to Fifty-Fourth Street and had its own entrance there. Various details were discussed, and Mack was provided with a “testimonial” that would make it easy for his man to obtain orders elsewhere.

Afterwards Mack went up the little stairway that communicated with the main supper-room and dance floor. But it was still early; there were only a few present, and he passed through the room and down the main stairway to the bar, where he found many acquaintances.

After awhile Val Fearon came in. Val was a treasury agent, a hold-over from prohibition days. There had always been a good working arrangement between Val and Mack. Val was pretty familiar with Mack’s operations but had never been able, or had never wanted to dig up direct evidence against him. On the other hand, Mack had found Val useful when he wanted to get rid of an associate who had become unpleasant or unprofitable. In Broadway parlance, Mack and Val were “good friends.”

Val was a trimly-built middle-sized man with a deceitfully infantile expression; premature grey hair. He drew Mack away from the crowd at the bar. “Well, how’s tricks, Mack? What you doing, nowadays?”

“Living off my income,” said Mack grinning.

“Yes you are! I’ve had a tip that you’re edging back into the old game.”

“Nothing to it, Val.”

“Well, as an old friend I just wanted to drop a word of warning in your ear. The whole set-up is changed, Mack. All bets are off. The bootlegger hasn’t got a friend in the world nowadays.”

“Are you telling me? I wouldn’t touch the business with a ten-foot pole.”

“A tip came into the Washington office yesterday that there was a store of liquor in an old house at Drum Point, Maryland.”

“What makes you think I might be interested?”

“Because it was such good liquor. Twenty-year-old Scotch and the like.”

“Well, if the Department is on to it, it’s too late to do anything.”

“Not at all. It’ll take three or four days yet for a raid to get under way.”

“Well, much obliged, Val, but I’m not interested. What the hell did you hear about me? And from whom?”

“Can’t tell you now, Mack. I got other business here to-night.”

“Let’s get together some time.”

“Sure.”

“The New Blanchard at noon on Thursday?”

“I’ll be there.”

Mack went back upstairs with a little frown between his eyes. A leak already? Must be one of the guys he had bought liquor from, who was sore now because the price had gone up. Or perhaps Val was only bluffing. The way Val brought it up suggested that he was after a rake-off. Well, if there was no protection he’d be damned if he’d pay for protection. No use worrying about it until he found out how much Val knew. Meanwhile he’d look after that liquor at Drum Point.

Mack chose a table at the far end of the room a little out of the way. The door leading to the stairway and the Fifty-Fourth Street entrance was at his left hand. Thus he could keep tab on Kate as she passed in and out.

The place was well filled now, and more coming every moment. The stage had been rolled out over the dancing floor, and the first show was going on. Same old bare-skin stuff; Mack wasn’t interested. His glance roved over the house, estimating what the night’s takings would amount to. A profitable racket in A l’Aigle d’Or. Kate probably got a salary and a ten per cent. cut.

Each of the golden boxes in the double tier was set with a table. Mack’s eyes travelled from one to another. Always useful to know who was going with who. Broadway was his village, and he was as keenly interested in its gossip as any village wife. They’ll all be wondering why Mack Shenton is sitting alone to-night, he thought. Not a woman among ’em but would give something pretty to be seen here with me.

The show came to an end, the stage rolled back and general dancing began. Mack watched the couples with a cynical half-smile. Always the same. Young ones having a real good time, and old ones trying to make out

that they were. Problem: how could a woman in a tight girdle and slippers that cramped her feet get any fun out of dancing?

His attention was attracted by a tall young fellow with hair like a raven's wing, and glittering dark eyes. Strong and slender, he overtopped every man on the floor and danced with an infernal abandon, whirling his girl in the corners until she closed her eyes dizzily. His evening clothes had been made by a master tailor; his shirt front was decorated with three fine pearls.

Something about him drew Mack strongly. When he danced close, Mack saw that his eyes were not black as had appeared, but had strange yellow irises. These bold yellow eyes set close together, and the thin lips pushed out a little like a beak, gave him the look of a bird of prey. Other men meeting the glance of his glittering eyes, instinctively steered away. He wasn't more than twenty years old.

Just like what I used to be, thought Mack. Doesn't give a damn!

When the music stopped, the young man returned to a table immediately across the floor from where Mack was sitting. His companion was a little blonde girl, light and pretty as a figure by Boucher. She was completely infatuated with her boy-friend and didn't care who saw it. He made believe to treat her with disdain. They were drinking champagne. The young man peeled a bill off a big roll and tossed it to the cigarette girl.

"Bet he never worked for that," thought Mack, grinning inwardly. "Just like me! Got a grand appetite for pleasure and the cash to satisfy it too!"

The young man didn't talk much. He found it sufficient to sit and let his girl adore him. All around the floor other women were languishing at him; trying to attract his attention. To-night the world is his! thought Mack.

Presently he saw Val Fearon making his way through the aisle between the two lines of tables across the room. There was nothing of the government agent in Val's appearance. He was as much at home in A l'Aigle d'Or as he would have been in the lowest dive. His eyes were fixed on the table where the young fellow sat, and Mack's gaze became tense with interest. Was the young man Val's business there that night?

Val stopped beside the table with a hard-boiled grin, and said something. His jerk of the head towards the door was significant. Come with me! The girl's eyes widened with terror. The young man seemed disposed to obey Val. He got up.

Then it happened. Swifter than the eye could follow the young man pulled a gun, pressed it against Val's belly and fired. Val slumped across the table, knocking plates and glasses to the floor. His arms hung down limply. The fool! to be caught by the kid like that! thought Mack.

The pistol shot was followed by a deathly silence. Then it seemed as if every woman in the place started screaming at once. The girl slipped to the floor in a faint. The young man, ignoring her, started for the entrance, gun in hand, head sunk between his shoulders, eyes glaring. Nobody dared approach him. He'll make it! Mack thought exultingly. The women stopped screaming.

But one determined man stole out from under the boxes behind the killer. A dozen women screamed a warning to the youth. He turned around. The other had already flung himself forward. He caught the killer around the waist and bore him to the floor. The gun was discharged harmlessly. In another moment a dozen men had got into it. Ah! give him a chance! Give him a chance! Mack muttered involuntarily.

They had not got the young man down. He succeeded in regaining his feet and the whole group of them swayed back and forth across the dance floor, stamping and cursing. Frightened faces peered over the rail of the boxes all around, ready to duck if any more shooting started. From the stage the orchestra stared down open-mouthed.

The young man tore himself free of his would-be captors, leaving half his clothes in their hands, a savage figure with his jetty hair all touselled and blood running down his face. He got a second gun out, and his assailants drew together, afraid to approach him. He backed away, crouching, pointing the gun. He was within a dozen paces of Mack. Mack was leaning back in his chair, smoking a cigar, surveying the scene with a grin, mindful of the character he had to keep up. He idly scribbled his telephone number on the table-cloth.

The young killer glanced over his shoulder. Mack caught his eye, and directed it to the little door beside the stage. To one so hard-pressed, the hint was sufficient. The young man sprang towards the door. The group charged after him shouting. As he passed Mack's table, Mack's finger indicated the number. The killer got it. Two other knots of men stood between him and safety. He leaped clean over a table, avoiding them both, flung himself against the door, and slammed it after him. Mack rubbed out the figures on the table-cloth.

Many men pursued the fugitive, shouting to keep their courage up. But he was safe now. They presently came straggling back. From in front of the house police in uniform and in plain clothes streamed in, just a little too late. Val Fearon was picked up and laid on the floor. He was dead. Won't keep that date with me Thursday, thought Mack with inward satisfaction. By God! what a dandy kid! He ought to be working for me!

Mack sat on at the table, surveying the confused scene with his cynical half-smile. Inspector Dick Williams approached him.

“A bad business, Mack!”

“Horrible, Dick.”

“You saw it all?”

“All that there was to see. Val undertook to arrest the guy, and he smoked him. I can’t understand how an old hand like Val let himself be caught napping.”

“Sure. But who would start shooting in a place like this except a crazy killer?”

“Who is he?”

“Snake Wyatt. Agent for the narcotic ring and a big operator on his own account.”

“My God! They get younger and younger.”

“You said it, Mack. Pretty soon the babes in the cradle will be peddling snow.”

A few hours later when Mack was undressing in his bedroom the phone rang. The voice, a man’s, was unfamiliar to him. It conveyed an impression of breathlessness and terror. “Is this Mack Shenton?”

“Who are you?”

“You don’t know me, Mack. I’m the fellow who got in a little trouble at A l’Aigle d’Or to-night. Remember?”

Mack grinned into the receiver. A little trouble! “Well, what about it?”

“You helped me. You showed me where the door was.”

It pleased Mack to play with him a little. “Don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“Didn’t you give me your telephone number?”

“That’s news to me.”

A wheedling note came into the voice. “For God’s sake don’t let me down, Mack! I’m up against it. There’s a general alarm out for me. All the bridges and ferries are watched. I can’t get out of town. And my clothes are torn. Can’t buy others this time of night. They’ll pick me up any minute.”

“Where are you?”

“I won’t tell you that.”

“Well, what did you call me for?”

“I was hoping you’d give me a leg-up . . .”

“Are you any place where you can get a taxi?”

“Sure.”

“Then come to my house, number —— East 36th Street. Don’t bring the cab to the door. It’s a private house in a quiet block. No cop in sight. The door will be open. Come right in.”

The voice on the wire hesitated. “You wouldn’t hand me over, Mack?”

Mack grinned. “You’ll have to chance that, kid. . . . However, I might say that I can always use a nervy lad in my business.”

The voice gladdened. “O.K.! I’ll be right over.”

A few minutes later he ran into the house like a hunted creature. “Left the cab around the corner,” he panted.

Mack turned away from the living-room window where he had been watching to make sure that Snake was not followed. “All right,” he said coolly. “Make yourself at home. They’ll never think to look for you here.”

Snake straightened up and threw off fear. “Thanks, Boss,” he said, grinning. One of the sleeves of his evening coat had been torn out, and a polished muscular shoulder gleamed through the torn shirt.

“How you feel?” asked Mack curiously.

“O.K.,” replied Snake as if surprised at such a question.

“They tell me you’re a dope-seller. Do you take the stuff yourself?”

“Nah! I don’t need it.”

“All right. Just wanted to let you know I don’t employ snow-birds.”



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AT NOON next day Mack and Snake were breakfasting alone in the little house east of Murray Hill. Entlein and Mitchell did not live in the house but came and went on Mack's errands. Things were going well. Frank Keesing had proved to be a fool for work. Already the warehouse had been leased and was being stocked with fruit and vegetables; a smart delivery truck had been purchased; deliveries would soon be under way.

Outside, Mack's house showed a plain, old-fashioned brown-stone front, one of a long row, blocked at each end by an apartment hotel. Inside, no flashy stuff, everything of the choicest. . . . He liked fine china, silver, linen and such things. His house was kept by a middle-aged couple, Emil and Lena Sanner. They weren't much to look at, but Lena was a cook in a thousand, and as Mack knew enough to send them both to the chair, he was well served.

The dining-room had a row of casement windows looking out on the typical back-yard. It was divided from the living-room in front by a pair of folding doors which were kept locked. Handsome tapestries masked the doors on both sides.

Snake, having enjoyed a good sleep and a laugh over the newspaper stories describing the search for himself, looked sleek and fit. His yellow eyes were full of sleepy content. When there was nothing doing, Snake became as indifferent as a cat. Mack was getting extraordinarily fond of him. Such a feeling was new to him, and he indulged it luxuriously. Might be my own son! he thought.

"How old are you, Snake?"

"I do' know. About nineteen."

Mack cast back in his mind for twenty years but found no recollection of a woman with yellow eyes. "Where were you born?"

“Cheese, Mack, ask me something easy. Somewhere around Manhattan, I guess.”

“Haven’t you got any folks?”

“No. My mother died when I was a little kid. My father put me with his sister, who lived in a hick town up-state, and that’s the last I ever saw of him. My aunt cussed him out good and proper for dumping me down on her. It didn’t suit me there. I was a bad kid. I got sent to the reformatory. When I come out I went with a guy who followed the carnivals, selling diamond jewellery. I was his come-on. Later I set up for myself, and from that I got into the dope racket and big money and came back to New York. . . . You can’t keep a good man down!” he concluded with a conceited grin.

“Is Wyatt your right name?”

“Cheese, Mack! I travelled under so many names I don’t rightly remember.”

Mack was forced to abandon his investigations into Snake’s paternity. Emil Sanner, heavy, grey and soured, was in and out of the room. He put some letters before Mack. Mack received all mail under assumed names at several private letter-box agencies. He said to Emil:

“Order the car around. When it gets here, call Mitchell into the house. I’ll be back for lunch to-morrow.”

“O.K., Boss.”

When they were alone together, Mack asked Snake:

“How would you like to take a little trip?”

“I’d have to get a disguise before I could go out.”

“I’ll dress you up in my chauffeur’s uniform and cap. If you were driving my Mackinac with me inside, nobody would look at you twice.”

“Where to, Boss?”

“Down to Maryland. My principal has got a stock of valuable imported liquor stored in an old mansion on Chesapeake Bay that needs looking after.”

Snake grinned at “principal.” Mack didn’t mind.

“I’ll order a couple of trucks to go down there and get it to-night. We’ll arrive ahead of them, and I’ll send you in to make sure the stuff’s still there, and pay the fellow for storing it.”

“O.K., Boss.”

They set out at one o’clock. Each man was armed with a brace of automatics, and there were two extra guns in the side pockets of the car. “You never know when you may run into trouble on the road,” said Mack.

Although the whole police force was on the alert to seize the killer of the treasury agent, as Mack had foretold, the policeman in the Holland Tunnel never looked at the trim chauffeur driving the handsome car.

At six o'clock they paused in Baltimore for a leisurely meal in the grill-room of the best hotel. Mack didn't want to arrive at their destination until after darkness had set in. When they had finished supper, Mack sat himself down in the lobby with cigar and newspaper, while Snake went to the garage to have the car filled up.

He returned bringing a young fellow with him. "Boss," he said, "this guy wants to know if you'll give him a lift down Travis County way. He's heard of a job down at Absalom's Island, and the last bus has gone."

Mack turned wary. He didn't approve of making up to strangers when you were on business, but to refuse the young man bluntly would be to show his hand. "We're only going to King's Green," he said.

"Absalom's is only twenty miles further," said the young man. "I can easily get a lift from King's Green. Or I can walk from there."

Mack chewed his cigar and looked him over. Good-looking fellow. Twenty-six or thereabouts. A hard guy. Educated. Down on his luck. Had an air of "take me or leave me and be damned to you" that was in his favour. Mack liked the reckless look in his eye. Suggested that he was in bad. Mack still required a couple of hard young guys.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Lyn Dixon."

"Why do you go out in the sticks looking for work?"

"The cities are flat," muttered the young man.

"What sort of job is it?"

"Filling station."

"You look as if you were accustomed to something better."

"Got to take anything now."

"How did you happen to meet up with this guy?" Mack asked Snake.

"Seems the county people patronise the garage where I had the car, and he was hanging around on the chance of finding somebody who was driving home to-night."

"Sure, we'll give him a ride as far as King's Green," said Mack, "and glad to help him out."

"Much obliged," said the young man offhandedly.

When they got into the car Mack made Lyn ride on the rear seat with him; “for company,” he said. During the sixty-mile drive he aimed to draw him out. He produced a flask to aid in lubricating his tongue. Lyn answered his questions tersely, but without hesitation.

Had been a student at Harvard, but his father died during the junior year, and he had to go to work. 1929 was a bad year to be thrown on the world. No, Dixon wasn’t his right name. He didn’t care to mention that. Had tried everything pretty much. Finally got tired of asking for white-collar jobs, hat in hand, and being turned down, so went for a labourer. Got along all right until he fell foul of the Union. They wouldn’t give him a card, and wouldn’t let him take a job without a card. Beat him up whenever he tried to work. Near starved then.

“Starved!” cried Mack. “By God! I wouldn’t starve for them.”

“Well, I didn’t,” said Lyn dryly. “That’s six months ago, and I’m still here.”

“What did you do?”

“I stole.”

“Good boy!” cried Mack. “Just what I would have done.”

“It’s all right as long as they don’t get you.”

“Did they get you?”

“No, but they come so close I got a whiff of the prison stink.”

“Tell us about it.”

“Well, last winter I was down and out. I hadn’t eaten all day. I had no place to sleep. I was walking along a fashionable street with grand houses set back, and expensive cars rolling up and down and it made me sore. I happened to look down on the ground under a street light and there I saw a broken twig that was shaped something like an automatic, see? That put the idea in my head.

“I picked it up and waited around. Pretty soon a fat old guy came walking along. One of those guys so fat he blows when he walks and gives at the knees. Wasn’t anybody else near at the time. I presented my twig at him, and his hands went up before I ever said a word. Cheese! I never knew it was so easy. All I had to do was slip my hand inside his coat and take his wallet. I told him I’d come back and blow him to hell, if he let a peep out of him before five minutes was up, and then beat it. . . .”

“Where was this?” asked Mack.

“Pittsburgh. There was fifty dollars in the wallet. In the paper next morning I read that he had a bigger roll somewheres else, besides a diamond

on his finger and another in his shirt front. I was sore. They made a hell of a stink in the newspapers, because it seems I'd picked on one of the most prominent men in town. Name of Anderson, President of the Chamber of Commerce and God knows what else."

"I had no sooner read all this," Lyn continued, "than I was nabbed. The old guy identified me at the police station. That was when I smelled the prison. You will hardly believe it, but when I was being led with a file of prisoners from the jail into court, I saw an opening, and I beat it. A chance in a thousand! I got clean away. It was a terrible slap in the eye to the police. I can never go back to that town again."

"What name did they take you under?" said Mack.

"Dick Evers."

Mack was delighted with the story. He made a mental note: Anderson, President of Chamber of Commerce, Pittsburgh; held up last winter; write to Pittsburgh and verify it. He said: "Well, I reckon a crook that works on his own is always taken. It's only when guys organise together that they can't be touched."

"Reckon so," Lyn agreed. "I never met up with any others."

When they reached King's Green, Snake took Lyn into the hotel to buy him a sandwich, while Mack went to a telephone booth to call up the old mansion at Drum Point whither he was bound. When he got the tenant on the wire, and stated his errand, he received a disagreeable surprise. The man laughed strangely.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Mack.

"You're too late, Mister."

"What do you mean, too late?"

"The Federal officers are here now."

"What!"

"Right here in my yard this minute, loading your liquor on two big government trucks."

Mack cursed softly and fervently. For once the lumbering treasury department had got a move on. A hundred thousand dollars worth of liquor.

"How about me?" complained the voice at the other end. "This means a prison sentence for me. And I'm a family man."

Mack ignored that. "How many men?" he asked sharply.

"Four here now. There were seven came. The other three have already started up-county near an hour ago in a blue Roberval car. The trucks are about ready to leave now."

Mack hesitated, scowling, chewing his knuckle. Finally he said: "I'm speaking from King's Green. How do I get to your place?"

"Come on down the State Road. Fourteen miles south of King's Green you'll find a dirt road branching off to the left. There's a sign for Drum Point. I'm at the end of that road. Seven miles. It's a bad road but you can get through all right."

"Bad for the trucks then!" said Mack eagerly.

"Sure. They can only crawl along. It'll take them near an hour to make the State Road from here."

Mack began to grin. "Is it a lonely road?"

"Hell, yes! Ain't but two houses in all the seven miles."

"O.K. I'll be seeing you later. I'll make it all right with you."

Mack came out of the booth studying. Snake and Lyn were sitting at a table in front of the soda-fountain. With two men it was an impossibility; with three it might be pulled off. Mack looked at Lyn hard. He had a hunch that this was the sort of fellow he wanted, and he believed in following his hunches. Anyhow if he was wrong, it would be easy to drop him later. Leaning over the table, he spoke softly to Lyn.

"How about working for me, fellow? Hundred a week. That's better than a filling station."

Lyn took it coolly. "What at?" he asked.

Mack fixed him with a powerful glance. "Whatever you're told, see?"

Lyn shrugged in acquiescence.

"This is the job for to-night," Mack went on. "I own a valuable lot of liquor at Drum Point, see? I've just had word over the phone that the treasury men have seized it and are bringing it up the county in two trucks. They have to pass over a lonely stretch of road below here. Two trucks; four men. I propose that we three take the trucks away from them."

Snake's yellow eyes glittered. "Boy! that's the stuff!" he murmured.

Lyn grinned in an attractive fashion. "Suits me all right," he said quietly. "But I've got no gun."

"Hell! we've got a whole arsenal!" said Mack. "Come on! There's no time to lose."

In the village store alongside the hotel, Mack bought a twist of thin, strong clothes-line. As they were getting into their car, an old blue Roberval drove up in front of the hotel, and three men got out, looking for food.

"There are three of them," said Mack, grinning. "They were too hungry to wait for the trucks. This meal is going to cost them dear."

The State road was well paved; Snake opened her up wide and they made the Drum Point road in a little more than quarter of an hour. It was a sparsely settled country, and they met few cars. After leaving the State road they saw nobody.

“Drive slow now,” warned Mack. “Everything depends on picking out the right spot to give ’em a surprise.”

The whole way led through a dense second-growth forest. About half a mile from the State road Mack found what he wanted, and they stopped. A wood road branched off to the right. On the left there was a ditch, and beyond it an ancient snake fence made of chestnut rails. Mack made Snake back the car into the wood road with its headlights shining across on the rail fence. Then the three of them started to pull down the rails and build a barricade across the road. Just beyond where they worked, there was a sharp bend in the road. Thus the trucks would not be able to see the barricade until they were upon it. Mack rubbed dirt on the licence plates of his car.

In about half an hour they heard the trucks coming, a good way off, and turned off the lights of their car. The car itself was well hidden amongst the trees. The two extra guns had been handed to Lyn. All three of them tied handkerchiefs over the lower part of their faces.

“Helps to throw a scare into them,” said Snake, grinning.

“Listen boys,” said Mack. “Shoot over their heads if necessary, but don’t plug a treasury agent. Raises too much of a stink. ’Tain’t worth it.”

“O.K., Boss.”

“Travelling as slow as they are, the two trucks will be right on top of each other. You two take the first truck, one on each side of the road. I’ll cover the two men on the second truck, and make them keep their seats until you have the first two tied up.”

“Cheese! hi-jacking the treasury agents!” chuckled Snake. “This’ll make a story. This’ll make us famous.”

Mack was amused by Snake’s childish vanity. He said: “You better cut out this craze for publicity, kid, or it’ll land you in a hot seat.”

As for Lyn, he said nothing at all. Mack, taking note of the firmly closed lips and bright eyes with almost a look of fun in them, thought: This kid is a good plucked one. I made no mistake.

It was very still in the woods. At a little distance a mocking-bird was singing his careless song; breaking it off; twittering; resuming it again. Slowly the trucks approached, bumping over the rutty road. Mack and Snake drew back amongst the trees on the right; Lyn dropped in the dry ditch on the other side. A glow of light began to diffuse itself among the trees; then

vibrating shafts of light appeared shining down the road around the bend. A tense moment.

The twin headlights of the first truck rounded the bend; the second was close behind it. The lights picked up the barricade of rails and the truck stopped suddenly. The second driver, who couldn't see the rails, shouted: "What's the matter?"

Nobody answered him. He didn't require any answer, for the three men had already stepped into view with pointing guns. "Stick 'em up!" they barked. "We got you dead to rights!"

Mack, covering the driver's seat of the second truck, couldn't see what was happening in front. He heard a sharp exclamation: "Drop it!" followed by a shot and breaking glass. There was a confused struggle, a thudding blow; a fall on the earth; Snake's resonant young voice with laughter in it, crying: "Get down out of that!"

So far so good.

Mack had two men to watch. As they were protected in front by the windshield, he was forced to cover them from the side. The man farthest from him shrank back out of sight behind his companion at the wheel.

There was a gun in a holster hanging on the dash just in front of the hidden man. A hand reached forward and snatched the gun. Mack sent a bullet through the cab a few inches in front of their faces, but the second fellow, covered by the man at the wheel, hung on to the gun. Suddenly he dropped to the ground on the other side of the truck, and took to his heels in the dark. Mack, cursing, had to let him go. The sound of his steps ceased before he had run far. The driver of the truck sat helplessly under his wheel, hands raised.

After what seemed like an endless time, Snake and Lyn came back to Mack's aid. "We got our two tied up," said Snake.

The driver was then forced to descend from the truck. They tied him like his fellows with lengths of clothes-line, and flung him to one side.

"Where's number four?" asked Lyn.

"Hiding, not far," said Mack. "He's got a gun. We got to get him. There's only one road, and if he gives an alarm they can block it before we get clear."

Lyn grinned in a hard fashion.

"You two watch these men," he whispered, "and I'll find him. Don't expose yourselves in the light."



“He ran back about twenty-five yards,” said Mack. “Then I couldn’t hear him any more.”

Lyn crept away in the dark. This lad’s got the stuff in him! thought Mack. He and Snake took cover behind the trees. The three trussed-up bodies lay alongside the road. One man was cursing under his breath; twisting impotently at his bonds. The engines of the two trucks were idling quietly.

“What happened on the first truck?” whispered Mack.

“The fellow beside the driver took a shot at Lyn, and dropped to the ground. Lyn jumped him, and beat him down.”

“Damn good man!”

“Aah! he ain’t so much!” sneered Snake.

Mack grinned. You could always get the kid’s goat by praising another.

Suddenly, not far away, they heard Lyn’s quiet voice saying: “You might as well give up. I got you covered.”

A curse and shot answered him, followed by a crazy scrambling in the leaves and undergrowth—then silence. Mack, unable to bear the suspense, began to creep softly in the direction of the sounds.

Making a detour among the trees, he approached the road below, crouching and watching. Gradually he made out a vague figure on the other side that moved forward an inch at a time. Grasping his gun, he watched it, unable to act because he couldn’t tell which man it was.

Suddenly from the other side of him came a shot, and a bullet ploughed into the earth nearby. Mack flattened himself thinking: Leave it to the boys! Leave it to the boys! Lyn came springing across the road. “Stay where you are!” he commanded. “You only confuse me.” Mack was well content to obey.

Lyn dashed away. More shots were exchanged, then a long silence while the two stalked each other in the dark. In the end Lyn sprang on his man like a panther, and Mack heard a furious struggle amongst the leaves and breaking twigs. “I’ve got him! I’ve got him!” Lyn sang out. “Bring the ropes, men!”

They dragged the fourth man back to the trucks and tied him up. Four husky, well-fed government men, shamed and glowering. Mack laughed to see them. In the glow of the headlights he saw that blood was dripping from Lyn’s hand. “God damn it! that spoils everything!” he cried. “Each one of us is needed to drive a car.”

“It’s only a scratch,” said Lyn coolly. “Tie it up for me and I can drive as well as any of you.”

Lyn threw off his coat. A bullet had gone through the sleeve, inflicting a flesh wound in his forearm. Mack bound it with a handkerchief.

“Each of you fellows take a truck,” he said. “I’m going on ahead in the car to telephone my own trucks to wait for us somewhere along the road before morning. If I find the treasury men waiting in King’s Green for these babies, I’ll come back and warn you and we’ll find a way around them. Otherwise you can drive straight ahead until you come on me, waiting.”

Snake started to grab up handfuls of dirt and leaves and to stuff it in the mouths of the bound men. They cursed and spat helplessly while he roared with laughter.

Lyn’s head settled ominously between his shoulders. “Stop that!” he growled.

“Aah! what is it to you?” snarled Snake.

“They’re decent fellows. I’m not going to see them fouled.”

“Try and stop me!”

Mack, angered by the criticism of Snake, turned on Lyn. “Lay off the kid,” he commanded harshly. “If anybody in this crowd needs to be called down, I’ll do it, see?”

Lyn shut his mouth firmly.

That didn’t suit Mack either. The fellow was too uppish. “Who the hell do you think you are?” he demanded. “To teach us manners?”

Lyn said nothing. Snake had stopped tormenting the men.

“Here, help me move these guys apart so they can’t help each other with their teeth,” Mack went on. “They’ll free themselves soon enough.”

When the helpless government agents were dragged about, they glared at their captors and gritted their teeth. To have said anything would only have been to provoke a blow in the face. Afterwards Mack climbed in the car and started away. The trucks followed more slowly.

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**B**ACK in New York next day, Mack, Snake and Lyn amused themselves reading the accounts of the great Maryland hold-up as developed in subsequent editions of the newspapers. Coming right on top of the report from the Treasury Department to the President that the illicit liquor business was under control, the affair created an immense sensation. Government agents having seized a stock of contraband liquor, had been hi-jacked and robbed on the road. It exceeded the most daring exploits of the bad old Prohibition days.

As the killing of Val Fearon also kept a place on the front page, young Snake almost burst with gratified vanity. "There never was a guy before me made it twice in the same edition!" he cried.

In the morning the government trucks had been found hidden in a patch of woods alongside the York Road, north of Baltimore, but the liquor itself had vanished into thin air. Snake, with his customary high spirits, had punctured the tyres of the trucks and smashed the carburetors. This act of vandalism seemed to anger the authorities almost as much as the loss of the liquor. Arrests were promised within twenty-four hours. Safe in Mack's little house below Murray Hill, the readers grinned.

The three agents who had driven on and left the trucks were summarily fired. The four on the trucks, having succeeded in liberating themselves after a couple of hours, had had to walk three miles in order to give an alarm. They claimed that they had been attacked by a band of ten masked desperadoes. This made Snake a little sore, and he wanted to sit down and write to the newspapers giving the true version. Mack restrained him.

All the treasury agents had to show for their raid was the unfortunate poor white who rented the old manor house. Sore at being left to his fate, he gave the authorities the name and address of the man in New York with whom he had corresponded. The address was found to be a little stationery

store where letter-boxes were hired out. The trail ended there. Mack's first act on returning had been to warn Emil Sanner to keep away from that store. Mack could always take another name for his correspondence and hire a letter-box somewhere else.

Mack had sent the liquor to a warehouse that he controlled in Lancaster, Pa. He had these caches distributed at strategic points all over the Eastern part of the country. None of his agents was acquainted with any of the others. With so many small stocks and the ownership carefully hidden, it made little difference to Mack if the government did stumble on one occasionally.

Retiring to his own room, and locking the door, Mack glanced over the inventory with a smile. Old Scotch whiskies of the finest brands, such liquor retailed for eight or ten dollars a bottle in New York. The seat of a plain wooden chair in the bedroom concealed a cunningly-fitted false bottom, and it was in this receptacle that Mack kept all his inventories. Turning the chair upside down, he took them out, and added the Lancaster list to the thick sheaf. He thumbed them over with satisfaction. These papers were the key to his business. They represented liquor worth upwards of two millions which hadn't cost him a twentieth of that sum. Nobody in the world shared the secret of their hiding-place.

Nell Cottar came to the house with Keesing's requisition for liquor. Keesing would soon be getting fairly well-known around town, and it was considered inadvisable for him and Mack to meet any more. Orders were already pouring in. Neither Keesing nor Nell knew where the liquor came from. They requisitioned it, and it was delivered.

When Nell arrived the men were eating a meal which might have been called either breakfast or lunch. She sat down with them, and looked over the new pals with her wise eyes which gave nothing away. She had a cold in her nose, Mack observed, which made her look uglier than ever. There was no formality at this table. Snake saw a chance to have a little fun and took it.

"That's a swell hat you're wearing, Nell."

Nell grinned, and glanced uneasily at Mack. She knew that Snake was getting at her. The hat looked like hell. All her hats did. "Glad you like it," she said.

"Suits you to a T," said Snake. "Where did you buy it?"

"At the rummage sale at our church," snapped Nell, trying to shut him up by going him one better.

"I don't believe it," said Snake. "You're too modest. It come from Klein's basement."

“Well, it suits me.”

“Didn’t I say it did? . . . Turn your head sideways, Nell, so I can get the profile.”

“Go to hell!” said Nell.

Snake got up and moved around the table, making believe to study the hat from every angle. “You always ought to keep this side turned to the camera, Nell. You’d look like Garbo if your face was a different shape. Cheese! you’re a beautiful girl!”

Nell joined in the laughter with a humiliated expression. She was winking to keep back the tears. Mack was enjoying the scene. He could read her perfectly. Had he not been present Nell would have given the kid better than she had got. It was being made fun of in Mack’s presence that wounded her, and Mack’s laughing at her.

You could trust that young devil to search out a person’s weakest point. “Reckon you got all dressed up this morning to catch the boss’s eye,” said Snake to Nell. “It’s no use, darling. He’s got a girl down in Baltimore. Cheese! what a dizzy blonde. You ought to see her!”

And so on. And so on. Nell’s eyes burned. It was good fun for Mack.

Later, when he was going over the requisitions with Nell, he asked casually: “What do you think of the new chums?”

“Lyn’s all right,” she said. “I like a man who can keep his mouth shut.”

“How about the kid?”

“He’s got too much mouth,” said Nell dryly. “It’s dangerous in our business.”

“You ought to see him in action,” said Mack. “A kid in a thousand! Not afraid of the devil himself.”

“You’re foolish about him,” said Nell. “You better look out or he’ll ruin us all.”

Mack laughed. Nell was jealous of anybody who came close to him.

That night Mack announced that Lyn was to be his chauffeur. Where a woman was concerned, Mack had decided privately that Snake was too damned attractive. No use taking chances. He dressed himself up to the nines in tails and topper and they set off after an early dinner; destination Bronxville. Mack still had a waistline and he knew he looked his best in evening dress. He bought orchids on the way.

Luck was with him. Muriel was at home, and, it appeared, a little bored. In her simple black dinner dress she was lovelier than in the day-time. The soft material by contrast made her white skin look as luminous as alabaster. The sight of her sent the blood to Mack's head. Not in years had any woman been able to make him feel like this. He silently addressed her: Beauty! Beauty! you're going to be mine!

At this hour, of course, Kate was at work. Mack made believe to be surprised to find her away from home. "I had forgotten that she was on a morning paper." From Muriel's invidious expression, he guessed that Kate had warned the girl against him. But Muriel had not lost interest in him. No harm if she considered him a little dangerous. This girl would not be easily scared.

Muriel pinned the corsage in the hollow of her shoulder, saying: "I would rather have had the money for my kids." Mack kissed her hand. "So continental!" she laughed. "Do women really like that sort of thing?"

"Your skin is more delicate than orchid petals!" he murmured.

"Fancy that, Hedda!"

(Mack thought: Make fun all you like, my girl! You're only a woman.)

He adopted an indulgent, fatherly air towards her. Indeed he made her out to be so young in his talk, that the girl was piqued.

"I'm out of school," she said.

"I cannot believe that Kate Aymery has a really grown-up daughter."

"I am twenty-three."

"That doesn't seem much to an old fellow like me."

"You, old? Not with those eyes!"

Mack thought: Philanthropy has kept this girl for me! She's not wise to men.

It was hard to resist her peachiness. In spite of himself, he kept drawing closer. Finally he took the slender hand between his. She drew it away, reminding him that he was going too fast. Mustn't scare her.

"Tell me about yourself," she said. "What do you do?"

"Oh, I amuse myself," he answered, laughing. "I'm no pattern for the young. I break all the rules of health and good behaviour and only feel better for it. I stay up all night and sleep by day. I can't remember when I did a day's work, yet I am always growing richer."

"Richer?" she exclaimed. "All the other men are complaining of hard times."

"There are always ways of mastering the times."

“How can you make money in times like these?”

“I have a stake in twenty companies. Mostly connected with amusements. Theatres, night clubs, restaurants, amusement parks.”

“In other words,” she said dryly, “you are everything that I have taught myself to hate; an idler who makes money by purveying to idlers!” She smiled. “Yet close to, you don’t seem so terrible.”

“When are you coming to see me?” asked Mack.

“I don’t have to come. You’re here. How much are you going to give me for my kids?”

Mack took out his check-book. “Money is pretty tight at the moment,” he said, “but one must do something. How about five hundred?”

Muriel flushed with pleasure. “Oh, you kind, kind man!” she answered.

Mack handed over the cheque. “The profits of an idler,” he said.

“Now you’re laughing at me. I don’t care. I never got a donation so easily.”

“Your eyes speak for you.”

“Do men still say such things to women?”

Mack thought: Yes, and women still fall for them. Aloud he said: “But seriously, there have always been poor people. We’ve got to do what we can for them, of course, but I don’t see why I can’t enjoy myself too.”

“Certainly, if you’re able to. I’m not, when my kids have to do without things.”

They disputed the question back and forth. Mack quite enjoyed the duel. Muriel’s heart had been softened by the donation. Moreover, he saw that her railing against luxury was only a defence mechanism. As a result of working for others and denying her own youth, she was powerfully attracted by everything that Mack stood for.

“Have you ever been to a night club?” he asked her.

“No,” she said indignantly.

“Maybe you’ve never had a chance,” he suggested wickedly.

“Certainly I’ve had chances. I hate the places!”

“But why?”

“Boys I know have told me that it costs twenty-five dollars or more to take a girl to one of those places.”

“Oh, quite,” said Mack offhand. “Just the same, you’re shooting in the dark, if you don’t know what you’re shooting at. One should experience everything.”

He described some of the night clubs that he knew, including A l'Aigle d'Or, in seductive terms. Muriel's lip curled. But she listened attentively.

"At the moment, one of the smartest places is Star-Top over on the palisades," said Mack. "Jack Fieldman, who is a friend of mine, has managed to create a really European atmosphere. His place has elegance."

"Scandalously expensive, I suppose," said Muriel.

Mack shrugged. "Expensive? I suppose so. It has to be to keep it select."

He appeared to be struck by a sudden happy thought. "I say! Let's go over and take a look at it to-night!"

Muriel, startled, snatched at the first excuse that offered. "Oh! I'm not dressed!"

"Just as you are," said Mack, "you would be the best-looking woman present!" And he meant it.

"Away over to New Jersey!"

Mack glanced at his watch. "Just a little after ten. If we go by the George Washington Bridge it won't take forty minutes. We can have a look at the place, dance one dance, and be back by midnight."

Then her real reason came out. "What would mother say?"

"But, my dear, as long as you're with me!" Mack remonstrated. "I'm old enough to be your father!"

She was sorely tempted. "If we went—just for a look at the place—you mustn't tell mother that you took me."

Mack exulted inwardly. I have her! He said carelessly: "Just as you say!"

Suddenly an imp of mischief lighted up Muriel's eyes. "I'm longing to see such a place just for once," she said. "I might as well take the chance. Just wait till I get my wrap."

When she was out of the room Mack studied his face in the mirror over the fireplace. I don't look anywhere near my age, he thought with satisfaction. By God! she makes me feel like a boy again!

When they were out of the house, Lyn slipped from under the wheel of the car, touched his cap and opened the door. One might have thought he had never been anything but a chauffeur. Muriel's eyes skated over him, but he looked at her. And having looked, a kind of stricken expression appeared in his eyes. Mack was not displeased. Let him see what the boss's taste in women is, he thought.

During the drive Muriel remained in her corner of the seat. After one attempt to draw her closer to him, Mack let her alone. She won't be so stand-offish coming home, he thought. He had a picture of her coming



home, terrified perhaps, weeping—but clinging to him, that made him catch his breath. She won't tell her mother anything then, he thought, grinning in the dark.

Muriel was young enough to be charmed by the luxury of Star-Top; the broad atrium with its silvery fountain and shifting coloured lights; the servants in livery; the famous black glass dancing floor. Not a vast place, and only comfortably filled, it conveyed an atmosphere of royal privilege.

“And just think,” murmured Muriel guiltily, “men are standing in the bread-lines.”

Mack let it pass.

Jack Fieldman's place was merely an extension of Broadway, and Mack was as well-known there as across the river. The servants greeted him by name; the maitre d'hotel bowed almost to the floor; and presently the great Jack himself came running to shake Mack's hand and be presented to Muriel.

Mack watched Muriel to get the effect of all this attention on her.

“Mercy! I feel like the Queen of Sheba going out with Solomon!” she whispered ironically.

Jack conducted them to a table facing the centre of the dancing floor. As Muriel sat down, Mack whispered to Jack: “We'll want a private room, later.”

“Certainly, Mack!” Jack glanced at Muriel. “You're in luck, my boy!”

When Mack sat down he said to Muriel: “I'm going to give you a drink of my own invention. It's called a nonpareil.”

“That might be anything.”

“Oh, it's as mild as milk.”

On a page of his note-book he wrote out *two* recipes, one for Muriel, one for himself. She was gazing out over the floor, and didn't notice that there were two. Mack tore out the page and handed it to the waiter. It appeared that Mack was acquainted with the head bar-tender. “Give that to Charlie and tell him who it's for,” he said.

The drinks came; a creamy, fragrant mixture in tall slender glasses. Both looked the same, but the waiter was careful to distinguish which was for the lady, which for the gentleman. Muriel sipped hers experimentally.

“Um! delicious!” she said. “But it's terribly strong!”

“Nonsense!” said Mack carelessly. “I chose it specially for you. You could take three or four without feeling it.”

They danced. Mack, feeling exalted, outdid himself. “How beautifully you dance!” murmured Muriel in her frank way. “You do everything well! You are an accomplished gentleman!”

“Now we must go!” she said very reluctantly when the music stopped.

“Finish your drink first.”

After a few more sips, Muriel’s tongue began to be unloosed. “What a lovely place, Mack! And how sweet of you to bring me here! It’s like . . . it’s like the Arabian Nights! I’m seeing life for the first time. How silly I was to think that it was wicked to have a good time!”

“Sure!” said Mack. “That’s old witch-burning stuff.”

“What a nice man you are! I’m not surprised that everybody is so crazy about you. After all, I’m grown-up. You’re like a magician, Mack, who goes about making everybody happy. . . .”

Mack grinned and wagged his hand deprecatingly.

Jack’s famous platinum bar was visible through arched openings at the rear of the dancing floor. Happening to glance in that direction, Mack saw that Lyn in his chauffeur’s uniform had come in, and was coolly sipping a drink, while he looked over the crowd in the main room.

Mack scowled. That was what you got for hiring a broken-down gentleman. Couldn’t keep his place. And, of course, the management wouldn’t say anything because he was Mack Shenton’s chauffeur. Excusing himself, Mack went back, and quietly called him down. Lyn said calmly: “Sorry, Boss,” tossed off the rest of his drink and went out. Too damn cool for Mack’s taste.

Meanwhile Muriel’s glass seemed to empty itself. She scarcely noticed when it was taken away, and a full one put in its place. She had forgotten that they were leaving immediately.

“Why don’t they play again? I’m crazy to dance. My feet just won’t keep still. I wish they’d play the Blue Danube. I want to waltz.”

“You have only to command,” said Mack. He called their waiter and said: “Mack Shenton’s compliments to the leader of the orchestra. And ask him if he’ll play the Blue Danube waltzes.”

“Miracles will never cease,” murmured Muriel.

He watched her, thinking: She’ll get sleepy directly. His blood hummed in anticipation.

“Funny, isn’t it, when you’re happy,” Muriel went on, “how clear everything becomes in your mind? All your doubts and fears disappear. You feel strong enough to tackle the world single-handed.” Even while she

innocently boasted, the bright head began to droop. “What *was* in that drink, Mack? I must be weak-minded. I can’t take it. Better not dance right away. . . .”

The night was warm, and all the openings stood wide. At a moment between dances, when the room was comparatively quiet, there was a startling crash from in front of the building, and the sound of furious voices.

Muriel paled a little. “What is happening outside?” she murmured.

Mack silently cursed the accident that had broken the spell he was weaving. He laughed carelessly. “In the old days everybody would be making a sprint for the windows,” he said. “But they can’t raid us now. Whoever it is, let them fight it out.”

The racket outside continued. It was evidently a real fight. The gilded customers around the dance floor became silent and uneasy. Some of the men went out to see. Jack Fieldman came in, trying not to look as if he were in a hurry, smiling deprecatingly from side to side. “Nothing at all! Nothing at all!” he said to the customers. “Just two chauffeurs fighting!” He looked at his orchestra leader, who gave the signal to start a dance tune.

Jack came to Mack’s table. “So sorry to trouble you, Mack, but your chauffeur has got himself into a mix-up. If you’d say a word to him!”

Mack got up. He laughed with well-bred ease—though his teeth were clenched. “I’ll soon settle that! . . . So sorry,” he said to Muriel. “I’ll be right back.”

When Mack and Fieldman reached the little esplanade where the cars parked, the combatants had been separated. Four men were holding the white-faced, bright-eyed Lyn, who hadn’t a mark on him. On the running-board of a car nearby sat a crushed chauffeur holding the back of his head. He had lost his cap; one eye was puffing up; his hand, when he took it down, showed bloody. A window of his car was broken.

Mack dropped his easy air when he left the ladies. “Fighting?” he demanded angrily. “What the hell does this mean?”

“I’m sorry, Boss,” said Lyn, without giving an inch, “but this guy started abusing you in a way I couldn’t stomach. He asks me who I worked for, and when I told him, he started in. A dirty crook, he calls you; a double-crosser; a skunk who used men and then got them railroaded to prison! I had to paste him!”

“It’s a lie! It’s a lie!” whined the man on the running-board. “I never said a word against you, Boss! He attacked me without reason! When he hit me my head went through the window. Oh! I’m all cut.”

“Likely story!” said Lyn indignantly.

Mack's feelings were very much mixed. His heart warmed towards the man who had fought to uphold his good name, but God! what a fool to repeat the fellow's epithets with fifty men standing around. These epithets bit deep, they stung Mack damnably. He had to laugh it off, of course. He laughed heartily.

"Good God! is that all? Why, everybody knows Mack Shenton. You shouldn't pay any attention to such lies. The same sort of stuff is spread by envious men against anybody who becomes a little prominent."

It appeared that there were no witnesses to the original attack. At any rate, the atmosphere of hearty good-humour that Mack brought into the situation soon smoothed things over. The owner of the damaged car was present. Mack squared him handsomely for the broken window and the chauffeur's broken head. The latter was sent away to find a doctor. The guests returned to the dancing floor.

Mack took Lyn aside, and delivered a few forcible truths on the folly of making a scene in public. Lyn appeared to take it contritely. But noticing that the young man's ardent gaze was fixed on something in the rear, Mack looked around, and he saw that Muriel was standing on the steps. This put a new aspect on the affair. Had she been there from the beginning? Had she heard the ugly names that had been put to him? He churned with rage and doubt. Maybe this hot-head Lyn had been moved by a desire to show off before the girl. By God! he should be given a job where he'd never see her again!

Since Muriel was looking at him, Mack had to be bland and easy. He coolly sent Lyn to the car, and escorted the girl back to their table. No reference was made to what had happened. The subject was too explosive. Inside, everybody was dancing as usual.

"Let's go home," said Muriel nervously.

"Directly," said Mack smiling. "Let things quiet down a little. It would look too silly if we allowed a trifle like this to drive us away."

He ordered another round of drinks, and exerted himself to charm her with humorous talk. Inside he was raging. Fate was against him to-night. That thick-headed chauffeur! A job out in the sticks was what he needed.

Happening to glance towards the door, Mack was brought up with a jerk. For an instant he had the nightmare feeling of falling through space. Kate Whiteley was coming in. Kate, in all her war-paint, dizzy blue satin and ermine to-night, with diamonds galore. There was a man with her, but Mack ignored him. He didn't figure.

A truly hellish rage frothed up in Mack then. What damned chance had brought Kate here? It was no chance. Kate never left her shop during business hours. Somebody had betrayed him. He felt the veins in his temples swelling, and fought hard to get a grip on himself. He had to keep command of the situation. He addressed Muriel with a light laugh.

“Don’t look around. It appears that we’re in for it. Here comes your mother!”

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MURIEL did look around. She gazed at Kate with perfect blankness. She did not recognize her mother until the latter smiled in a stiff and beseeching manner.

“Mother!” Muriel whispered incredulously.

Mack, taking note of Kate’s smile, began to feel a little surer of himself. She don’t get over so good in her gaudy finery, he thought. I’ve got her scared!

He was on his feet when she reached the table. “Well, this is a surprise!”

“It’s mutual,” said Kate. Her gaze was fixed imploringly on her daughter. The girl’s eyes were full of horror.

“What on earth brought you here?” asked Mack.

“An assignment from my paper,” said Kate. “Feature story for the Sunday edition.”

“I didn’t know you *wrote* for the paper,” murmured Muriel.

Kate’s attempt to laugh lightly was not a success. “In our business we have to be prepared for anything.”

The girl was relentless. “Where did you get those clothes?”

“Hired, my dear.”

“Well, do sit down,” said Mack, grinning.

Kate brought up her young man to be introduced. This was farcical. Tense as they were, nobody paid the slightest attention to him. However, he knew his cue. After having been introduced, he excused himself, and was not seen again. Kate sat down as if her strength had suddenly failed her.

Mack felt that he was getting the situation in hand. Time to put on the screws a little. He said good-humouredly: “On the level, Kate, what *are* you doing here? The assignment yarn won’t hold water.”

Kate gave him a deep and steady glance which didn't bother him a little bit. "Let's not go into that," she said.

Muriel spoke up. "But I want to know. . . . In such clothes!"

Kate answered her indirectly. "My dear, I warned you against this man. Don't you owe *me* some explanation?"

"I'm old enough to judge for myself," said Muriel sullenly.

Mack smiled behind his hand. Things were going his way!

"Don't force me to go into particulars," pleaded Kate. "Come home with me, dear."

The words were badly chosen. Muriel flushed cherry red with mortification. To be treated like a child! She suspected that Mack was laughing at her. She made no answer.

"Explanations will have to be made," said Kate, "but let it be in private—not here!"

"Surely," put in Mack good-humouredly, "if aspersions are to be made on my character I'm entitled to be present."

"Naturally," said Muriel.

"Don't go against me, dear," said Kate wistfully. "After all, I'm your mother."

"I don't recognise my mother in that vulgar outfit," said Muriel at the point of tears. "Are you trying to look like an actress?"

Mack had to put up his hand quickly to hide the smile.

"Will you come?" whispered Kate.

"No!"

Kate raised her hands and let them fall, wearily. "Then I must speak out," she said. "I'll tell you how I came to be here. . . . This man is a blackleg, a *rich* blackleg! He's the sort of man who hires others to do his dirty work while he sits safe at home. His employees go to prison while he collects the profits. He is even suspected of sending them to prison when they got in his way. . . ."

Mack listened to this with a smile, but with an ugly anxiety dragging at him. If Muriel had heard the charges outside, it would come with corroborative force. He would have given something pretty to know how much Muriel had heard outside. She was staring stonily at her mother. Her face gave nothing away.

"The other day when he came to our house," Kate continued, "I made an agreement with him. He promised me that he would never try to approach you. Knowing him as I did, I doubted if he'd keep it, and I hired a private

detective to watch the house during the hours when I was obliged to be away. This man was hidden behind the shrubbery to-night. He heard Mack Shenton tell his chauffeur to drive to Jack Fieldman's. The detective telephoned me, and I came here."

Mack brought his teeth together. So she had over-reached him!

However, Muriel was still angry. "Why those clothes?" she wanted to know.

"Yes, tell her," put in Mack, expecting to hear some new lie.

"That must come out now with the rest," said Kate. "This is my working uniform, dear—or one of them."

"Working uniform!"

Kate made marks on the table-cloth with a fork. Too late, Mack saw the queer expression that a woman's face assumes when she is going to tell the dreadful truth. He stiffened with rage. Kate said quietly:

"I have deceived you about the business that supports us both. I don't work for a newspaper. I never have. I run an establishment like this, a night club. It's called A l'Aigle d'Or. I don't own it. I'm what they call the hostess there."

"A night club!" gasped Muriel.

"It's a respectable business."

"Now it is," put in Mack meaningly.

Kate's tired eyes flashed at him. "Don't be afraid," she said, "I'm not going to leave anything out. . . . During all the years of prohibition, of course, it was *not* a respectable business. I was continually harried by the police. My exploits in escaping conviction made me famous. I'm supposed to be a very popular figure, but I don't suppose you care about that. And you're right. Such popularity is worth nothing! . . ."

Muriel broke in on her mother with a low, shaking voice. "And all these years when you were making believe to take me into your confidence, to make me your pal as you said, it was just a lie . . . a lie!"

Kate's head went down, "Ah! you're cruel!" she murmured. "It was only because I wanted to keep you away from that life. I wanted to save you from what I had been through! . . ." She raised her head doggedly. "But never mind me. It's this man I'm concerned with now. . . . He is grinning. Do you know why he's grinning? It's because he's saving the choicest bit of all to tell you about me. Well, I'll tell you myself. . . ."

"Is there *more*?" gasped Muriel.



“Yes. . . . Once the police caught me fairly. I was sent to prison. Yes. . . . During that year when you thought I was working in Atlanta.”

“Oh, my God!” whispered Muriel, staring. “A convict!”

Mack looked around at the neighbouring tables anxiously. All right so far. Their voices had been kept down. Nobody had caught on to anything.

Muriel suddenly rose and caught up her wrap.

“Where are you going?” whispered Kate sharply.

“To the Settlement.”

“Ah, not like this! Not like this!”

“Don’t try to stop me!” the girl said in a strangled voice. “I must be alone!”

“Muriel! for God’s sake, don’t leave me! You’re all I have!”

The girl started out with her chin up, lips tightly compressed. Kate followed her, smiling stiffly. Both were trying to keep up appearances—not too successfully. Mack had risen politely to let them go. All hell was raging inside him. Above everything else he dreaded the hurt to his reputation. What would people say?

After waiting a moment, he strolled out casually, nodding to his acquaintances here and there; stopping at one table to exchange a word or two. Rage was tearing at his vitals. How much had these people seen? Or guessed? What stories would be set in circulation next day?

In the atrium he ran into Jack Fieldman. “I say, old man, send a memo of what I owe you to Claridge’s, will you? My ladies have been called back to town.” Jack appeared to be friendly and sympathetic. God damn it! does he know that I’ve been turned down? thought Mack. Is he giving me the laugh behind his smug face!

Mack got the number of the Child Welfare Settlement from a telephone book, and called his car. The women had gone, of course. Lyn’s face was smooth and bland. God! I’ll have to keep him with me now! thought Mack. He knows too much to set him loose, talking. I’ll have to keep him—or kill him! He gave Lyn the address.

“Get there before the taxi that just left, if you value your job!”

“Down-town,” said Lyn. “I can make it quicker by Hudson County Boulevard and through the Holland Tunnel.”

“All right. Step on it!”

Mack flung himself into the back of his car. With nobody looking at him, he could at least vent his rage in vitriolic cursing. The drive was like a long

nightmare. At intervals he roused himself to tell Lyn to drive faster. Hudson County Boulevard was empty, and the cops could be seen a long way off.

Back in Manhattan, the Settlement House proved to be a trim new building in a sordid street, that showed no other sign of improvement. Muriel was getting out of a taxi as they drove up. She was alone. She had no money, and Mack found her asking the driver to wait until she could borrow some in the house.

“Leave me!” she said angrily when she saw Mack. “I want no help from you!”

However, Mack thrust a bill in her taxi-driver’s hand, and with a jerk of the head, ordered him to beat it. The fellow put his car into gear, grinning. Mack ground his teeth together. Does he know me, too?

Mack and Muriel made for the door of the house simultaneously. Mack beat her to it, preventing her from pressing the bell. “Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” he said breathlessly. There were still people passing up and down this poor street. He had to be careful not to attract attention. His own chauffeur was watching and listening; that couldn’t be helped.

“What do you want?” Muriel asked coldly.

Slim and lovely in her black silken sheath, bright-haired, scornful, she was so maddeningly attractive that Mack’s senses reeled. Snatched away just as she was about to fall into his arms! He scarcely knew what he was doing. The one clear notion in his mind was, that he must catch her on the rebound from Kate. His own voice sounded strange in his ears.

“You need a friend! Kate has failed you. Take me. I’m rich. That’s the one true thing she said about me. I can give you security. I can give you anything in the world that you want!”

“Is this an offer of marriage?” asked Muriel in amazement.

“Yes! Yes! On your own terms!” he said eagerly.

“Then here’s my answer. What’s between my mother and me is none of your business. My eyes are open to you anyhow. You are horrible to me! I wouldn’t marry you if you were the last man on earth!”

Mack dropped down a couple of steps, gaping at her.

At that moment another taxi drew up, and Kate precipitated herself through the door. “Wait!” she said to the driver. Running to the steps, she murmured: “Muriel! Muriel, my dear!”

Mack drew a little further away to watch what would come of this. He felt numb as if he had received a physical blow. Kate ignored him. Running up the steps to her daughter’s side, she said simply:

“My dear! . . . My dear!” And went on saying it: “My dear!” And then: “Nobody in the world will ever love you like I do, foolish as I am!” That was all.

Mack saw it happening before his eyes, yet stared stupidly, unable to take it in. The frozen girl melted. “Oh, Mother!” she cried. “I’m sorry for what I said! . . . I want to go home!”

Flinging an arm around the girl, Kate steered her to the waiting cab. Mack blinked his eyes rapidly. When he opened them fully, they were no longer there. There was a blankness. He found Lyn leading him towards his own car.

“God damn you! take your hands off me!” he snarled.

He climbed in unaided. What followed was spotty, with grey blanks between. The car moved rapidly through the streets. Then he realised that it had come to a stop. It was before the old-fashioned brown-stone stoop of his own house. The stoop had a heavy iron balustrade, painted brown and sanded to make it look like stone. Lyn came to help him, but drew back, seeing the look in his eye.

Lyn followed him into the house, letting the car stand in front. Mack made directly for the dining-room. On the sideboard stood a whole row of heavy cut-glass decanters holding different liquors. Mack poured out nearly a tumblerful of neat spirits and drank it off. Christ! how deliciously the stuff burned his gullet! It released something. His pent-up rage blazed like fired gasoline. Snatching up the decanter, he sent it crashing through the mirror at the back of the sideboard. That was what he wanted! To smash something! He roared with laughter.

Turning, he saw Lyn watching him from across the room, white-faced and wary. All his rage fixed on this object. The trouble had started with him. The damned fool to shout out such things before listeners! Young, keen; what they called clean-cut! God! how he hated him! Whipping around as swift as a snake, he snatched up a second decanter and sent it hurtling at Lyn’s head. Lyn side-stepped and the bottle shattered against the wall, leaving a wide brown smear. Mack reached for another bottle. When he looked again Lyn was not there. He poured out a drink.

He was plunged all over into fire then. With a thrust of his foot, he overturned a dining-table. Snatching up a chair, he brought it crashing through the door of his china closet; blow after blow until not one of his prized glasses remained whole. He could hear himself shouting: “Make a job of it! Make a complete job!”

As in a dream, faces appeared in the doorway and faded out again. Emil Sanner and his wife, terrified; the smooth, dark comeliness of Snake, grinning. "Drink with me!" he shouted to the latter—but he was gone. With preternatural sharpness of hearing, Mack heard the front door close softly. A moment later the car drove away. "Ah! you rats! To hell with you!" he yelled.

As he smashed and tore his way through the front room, Lyn reappeared in the doorway to the hall. Mack suddenly quieted. So he had come back for more! Well, he should have it! God! how he hated that quiet face! Thought so well of himself! Mack's hand stole to his hip, then came away again. Shooting was too quick. He wanted to hurt him. He wanted to make him suffer as he was suffering. He sidled towards the figure in the doorway. Lyn stood his ground.

"Aren't you afraid of me?" Mack sneered.

"No."

With a yell of rage, he flung himself on Lyn. He met more resistance than he expected. Lyn stood up like a wall. But he got him down at last. They rolled on the floor. With the fire that raged through his veins, Mack felt the strength of ten. Nothing that lived could resist him. One by one he would break this fellow's ribs. They were alone in the house.

Then Mack felt a sharp sting in his forearm. He knew what it was. "By God! you've doped me!" he yelled. At the same moment Lyn, with an unexpected movement, tore himself free. In an instant he was on his feet, and the lights went out. Mack heard him spring for the stairs.

Mack, cursing, groped for the switch, found it. Lyn had almost reached the landing. Mack fired; the bullet went wild; Lyn turned the corner. Mack leaped after him; his feet scarcely touched the stairs. Lyn ran into the front hall room, his room, slammed the door and locked it.

When Mack reached the door, he could hear Lyn pushing his bureau against it. Mack emptied his gun through the door, and flung the weapon from him, snarling. He rattled the door. A strong door, not to be burst in by ordinary means . . . axe . . . cellar! Mack ran downstairs again.

He seemed to float on wings. A sense of invincible power possessed him. He reached the cellar, or found himself there without any sense of effort, found the axe in his hand, and started back. On the second flight something happened. Leaden weights began to attach themselves to his feet—heavier and heavier. He could no longer lift them. He found himself lying on the stairs. He lost the axe. It banged down to the bottom; he began to slip after it; he knew nothing more.

★ VIII ★

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LYN, listening behind the door of his room, heard the axe clatter down the stairs; heard Mack's body thud down from step to step—then silence. After waiting a few moments, he cautiously ventured out, and looked over the rail. Mack was sprawling limply on his face near the bottom of the stairs. One of his legs had caught in the banisters, arresting his slide. Lyn let out a breath of relief. A near thing, that!

Snake, Emil and Lena had run out when Mack first went wild, and Lyn was now alone in the house with him. What a chance! But he had no notion how long the effect of the drug would last—it was Snake who had given him the loaded needle to use on Mack; and he dared not leave him to start a search.

He dragged Mack up from step to step, a difficult business, and into his own room in the front of the house. Here he undressed him and put him in his bed. Mack's limpness scared him—Lyn didn't know what drug was in the needle; but his heart was beating all right, and when he was laid on his back he breathed stertorously. There was plenty of life in him.

Then, glancing at Mack every second, Lyn searched the room. It was horribly risky, because the unconscious man was likely to come back at any moment. Lyn was not afraid of Mack, but afraid that he might be discovered, and be forced to beat it out of the house with his job undone.

Eyes and fingers working with the speed of shuttles, he searched through the drawers of the dressing-table and the chiffonier; through the two closets that opened off the room, and in the various bags stowed in the closets. No good. There was nothing to be found but Mack's luxurious personal effects; enough haberdashery to outfit four ordinary men; no papers of any description.

Lyn went out, locking the door on Mack. After what had happened this would appear the natural thing to do. He ran downstairs. Now the danger

was that the other members of the household might return and catch him. He turned the key in the front door trusting to think up some lie that would satisfy them.

Mack had a little office at the back of the first floor, adjoining the dining-room. He had spared this room when he went on the rampage. This would be the likeliest place to keep lists or inventories, but Lyn was baffled from the start. The drawers of the big flat-topped desk were locked; the safe was locked.

Lyn saw how the top of the desk itself might be unscrewed and lifted off, but he had no time to start anything like that now. Nor could he break anything open at this juncture. He must wait and watch Mack until he learned where he kept his lists, and then go after them. He must obtain the combination of the safe.

Intent as he was on his search, Lyn was aware from moment to moment of a sort of humming in his blood. Something had happened to him this night, and he would never be just the same as before. A woman's face kept rising before his eyes, beautiful—but that wasn't what got him. It was her own particular expression, brave, honest and sweet-tempered, that spoke to his heart. He felt as if he had been looking for that woman always, and that, now that he had found her, his life for the first time had meaning.

In the end, Snake *et al.* did not come to the front door, but prudently telephoned. Lyn allowed a moment or two to pass before he answered the call, so that they would not know he was in the office. Snake said:

“Who is this?”

“Lyn.”

“Huh!” said Snake. It was evident from his tone that he was not too well pleased to find Lyn master of the situation. “What's doing?”

“All quiet on the Thirty-sixth Street front. The dope worked all right. He passed out and I put him to bed.”

“What you doing?”

“Going to bed myself.”

“We'll be right home.”

Lyn took a look around the office to make sure that it appeared exactly as it had before, unlocked the front door and ran upstairs. He unlocked Mack's door and changed the key to the inside. Mack was no longer breathing so loudly. Apparently the effect of the drug was passing, but he was still in a deep sleep. Lyn went into his own room and removed his coat and vest.

When he heard them come in, he went down, grinning. He greatly wanted to make good with the people in the house. Not much you could do with Snake, though. However Lyn might conceal his hand, Snake just naturally hated him. They were designed to hate each other. And Snake was doubly sore, because Lyn had played the star part to-night.

Lyn gave them a humorous account of the final scene with Mack. Emil and Lena were grateful; they felt that he had saved the house and everybody in it. Snake sneered, and made believe not to listen to the story.

“God damn! I’m hungry,” he said, striding back to the wrecked dining-room. “Fetch me something to eat, old woman.”

The three looked after him and looked at each other. “Some day that lad will get his,” said Lyn softly. The other two nodded vigorously.

When Emil and Lena had left him, Lyn, glancing through the glass of the front door, saw that the big Mackinac had been left standing in front of the house. He went upstairs after his coat, so that he could drive it to the garage across Third Avenue.

He could give himself up now to thinking about the girl who seemed to have come into his life to stay. There was a heavy load of anxiety on his chest. Mack Shenton will never rest until he has paid them off, he thought. Both mother and daughter. He won’t spare them because they are women. He’ll stop at nothing. It’s lucky that I’m in a position where I can watch him and warn them of what he’s up to.

I can’t approach them openly and above board, Lyn thought gloomily. Not until my job here is done. They look on me as just a servant, and I can’t say a word. I reckon Kate Whiteley would like to give me a fiver for the service I did her, and let it go at that. This thought caused him to grit his teeth. And when I am able to present myself under my own name, maybe it will be too late. Hundreds of men must have fallen for that girl. Very likely she’s won already.

When he got in the car he noticed another car across the street a little in the rear of him, with a man sitting at the wheel, watching. When Lyn moved forward, the other moved after him, and Lyn turned wary. Where does this guy come in on the situation? he asked himself. Is he after Mack Shenton or after me? Lyn changed his gun from his hip-pocket to the side pocket of his coat.

Having put up the car, Lyn came out into the street watchfully. The fellow was sitting there in his car, and Lyn got his first real look at him. A good-looking, well-dressed fellow, a year or two younger than himself, he

was grinning in a friendly manner. Lyn thought: If he's a crook, he doesn't look it!

"Hey, fellow!" called the young man in the car. "Half a moment!"

Lyn approached the open window with his hand in his pocket.

"You're the guy that drives for Mack Shenton, aren't you?"

"What is it to you?" asked Lyn.

"Hell, you don't have to stick a chip on your shoulder to me, fellow. I mean you well. I've got a note for you, that's all."

Lyn's heart jumped. From who? He put out his hand, and the envelope was thrust into it. The young man engaged his gears and moved on.

"My name is Dick Harper," he said. "Hope we meet again."

Lyn tore open the envelope. The note inside had neither salutation nor signature. It read:

The one to whom you did a service to-night would like to thank you in person. We are staying at the Hotel Vandermeer, and will be there all morning. You know my name, but I don't know yours.

Lyn's gloom blew away like a fog in a fresh breeze. He walked home on air. It was from the mother, of course. Perhaps the girl wasn't so ready to thank him for a service. But the note implied that she was with her mother. He would see her. He could scarcely believe in his good luck.

He debated with himself how to work it. Mack would certainly not get up until late. He'd slip out of the house early. Mack had told him to buy a good suit for himself. That should be his alibi.

Lyn bought the suit before he went to the Vandermeer, and wore it. Fortunately he had the sort of figure that graces a ready-made suit without the necessity of alterations. At the hotel desk he wrote on a card: "The one you sent a message to last night," and enclosed it in an envelope. Presently he was told that he was to go upstairs.

Muriel opened the door to him, and he saw that she was alone in the sitting-room of the suite. His heart began to pound, and all his wits deserted him. He could only stand just within the door looking at her as if he would never get his fill of looking. However, she appeared to be confused, too, and that helped. She was lovelier than he thought; more winning, more human.

"We didn't expect you so early," she said a little shakily. "Mother isn't up yet."

"I'm sorry if I came too soon," he said.



“Oh no!” she protested with the frankness that was so much a part of her. “I was hoping you’d get here before Kate appeared.”

“Why?”

“I wanted to have a good look at you first myself.”

“It’s hardly worth it,” said Lyn.

She didn’t say anything to that; only smiled. “Mother said,” she went on, “that it was you who telephoned her last night that I was with Mack Shenton. How did you know that Kate Whiteley was my mother? I didn’t know it then.”

“It was just some gossip that I picked up around Mack Shenton’s house.”

“You acted promptly.”

“You take it well,” he said. “I was afraid that perhaps you wouldn’t want to see me again.”

She looked away. “No! It’s just the other way around. What must you be thinking of me!”

“I don’t think I’d better tell you—yet,” said Lyn, venturing to grin.

She ignored that. “I was such a fool!” she murmured.

“No,” he said quickly. “Anybody might be deceived by Mack Shenton. He puts up such a wonderful front.”

“I was deceived,” she said honestly.

“What does it matter? You know what he is now.”

“You talk so differently from what I expected,” she murmured.

“You mean, strange for a chauffeur?” said Lyn with a crooked grin.

She did not answer directly. “If you know what Mack Shenton is, why do you go on working for him?” she asked.

“Well, it’s a job,” said Lyn evasively.

“What’s your name?”

“I’m known as Lyn Dixon.”

She was hurt by the answer. “Can’t you tell me your real name?”

He shook his head.

“There are other jobs,” she said suggestively.

Lyn hated himself because he couldn’t be as frank as she was. “Not many nowadays.”

They still stood facing each other in the room. It was impossible for them to be at ease, to relax. There was too much unexplained, unspoken.

The mere sight of her, wistful, friendly, a little hurt, made Lyn ache with the desire to tell her everything.

“You don’t look nor speak like a chauffeur,” she remarked.

He was grateful for that. “Thanks,” he said.

She waited for him to say more. When he did not, she turned away sorely. “Of course, if you want to make a mystery of yourself . . .”

“Couldn’t you trust me for a little while without asking me any questions?” he begged.

She turned back warmly. “How can I help but trust you after last night?”

There was something else he greatly wanted to say—before Kate came. “Will you . . . will you let me see you again?”

“Yes,” she murmured. “You can always find me at the Child Welfare Settlement.”

“I may not be able to come,” he said. “I am watched. But I could telephone sometimes.”

“I’d like you to,” she said simply.

Kate breezed in from the bedroom. “So there you are!” she cried. “Let me have a good look at you. Man, I shall be grateful to you as long as I live.”

“It was nothing,” said Lyn.

“Nothing! Believe me it’s something nowadays to find a young man who is willing to risk his job for the sake of decency.”

Lyn thought: I risked more than my job last night when I telephoned you. He said nothing.

“I want to do something substantial for you,” Kate went on. “Wait till I fetch my pocketbook.”

Lyn flinched. This was what he had been afraid of. He scarcely knew what to say.

Muriel spoke up for him. “Mother, no!” she protested.

“Hey?” said Kate, turning around in surprise.

The girl was as much embarrassed as Lyn was. “Don’t you see,” she said blushing, “he’s not the sort of man that one offers money to.”

“Well!” said Kate, staring at Lyn. “Then what’s he working as a chauffeur for?”

“Well . . . circumstances,” said Muriel vaguely.

Kate put her own interpretation on it. “Down on his luck?” she said sympathetically. “Well, I’ll give him a better job than chauffeur.”

"I'm much obliged," said Lyn, "but . . ."

"I don't mean a menial job," said Kate. "I've got two hundred employees at A l'Aigle d'Or. All sorts of jobs. You're a good-looking fellow, you speak well, you'd be an ornament to my shop. Can you dance?"

Lyn looked at Muriel. How I'd like to dance with you! he thought. He said: "After a fashion."

"Well, you could be taught," said Kate. "Come around to-night. Have you got evening clothes?"

Lyn liked her friendly, blunt outspokenness. "Yes," he said, smiling.

"They probably look like hell," said Kate, "but that can be fixed up."

"I can't accept your offer," said Lyn, "much as I would like to."

"Why not?" demanded Kate, staring.

"Well . . . I have to stick to my present job."

"You are satisfied with being a chauffeur?"

Lyn said nothing.

"You know that Mack Shenton is a crook. If you insist on sticking to him what must I think? Are you in with him? Are you a crook, too?"

Lyn had to take it. To have partly explained, to have hinted at the truth would have been more dangerous than telling the whole thing. He had to play fair with his father. So he kept his mouth shut.

Kate turned away from him. "Well, I'm disappointed in you," she said sorely.

There was an unhappy silence all around.

Kate faced him again. "Answer me one question," she demanded. "If you're satisfied with things the way they are . . ."

"But I'm not," interrupted Lyn.

"Ah, don't talk in riddles. I like a man who can speak out. . . . If you're satisfied, what made you act the way you did last night?"

Lyn couldn't answer that either. He looked at Muriel.

Kate was sharp. "Oh, I see!" she said quickly. "It was my daughter's fine eyes. . . . Well, I can't say that I blame you. But you must see that my daughter can't have anything to do with an associate of crooks."

"I understand that," said Lyn stolidly.

"If I can't give you money," Kate burst out, "and you won't leave the gang you're with, why in God's name did you come here?"

"I see now that it was foolish," muttered Lyn.

“Oh, no!” murmured Muriel involuntarily.

“Be quiet!” snapped Kate. “We’ve done all we can for him!”

She flounced back into the bedroom. Muriel let Lyn out. He said:

“Could you trust me for a little while?”

“I could trust you for a long while,” she answered. “Call me up as you said you would.”

She offered him her hand, and he pressed it. “You have made a new man of me,” he murmured. “I can go through with anything now.”

Something in the way he said it caused her eyes to widen in fear. “You’re in danger!” she whispered. “I knew it!”

A great surge of gratitude welled up in Lyn. She understood how things were without having been told a word! He said nothing.

“Wait!” she said breathlessly. She ran back into the room, and pulling open a drawer, took out a brand-new automatic of the latest type. A big gun; a thirty-eight. Thrusting it into Lyn’s hands, she whispered: “Take this. To protect yourself. I only bought it a couple of weeks ago. For my mother.”

Lyn pressed it back on her. “She needs it more than ever now.”

“But I can get another in the same place where I got that,” she insisted. “I would like to feel that I had done something for you.”

“I have a gun,” said Lyn, showing it. “Though I like right well to have something you had owned even for a couple of weeks.”

“Then change with me and we’ll each have something!”

The exchange was made.

Oh, you blessed darling! thought Lyn, letting his eyes say what was forbidden to his tongue.

She gave him her eyes freely. Their hands clasped. From the room behind came Kate’s querulous voice:

“Muriel! what are you standing there whispering about?”

“Coming, Mother!”

“My name is Jack,” Lyn whispered.

She gave his hand a final squeeze, and shut the door.

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MACK came to to find himself lying in his own bed, clad in pajamas. He felt rotten. Everything in the room was in order; his evening clothes neatly folded on a chair; windows raised a few inches; squares of sunshine showing through the lowered blinds; the sounds of a quiet street below.

As recollection returned, a chasm seemed to yawn at his feet. He averted his gaze from it. Once or twice before in his life he had gone berserk, and he was well aware of the danger. But it was easier to blame somebody else. He thought of Kate Whiteley, not with rage now but with a deadly determination. I'll get her for this! And by God! I'll have the girl too! Mack reached for his phone, and calling up his bank, stopped payment on the check he had given to Muriel Aymery the night before.

It was not in Mack to feel thankful because he found himself safe in his bed. Of Lyn he thought: Damned college boy! He's made his getaway now. God knows what stories he is spreading about me. He's got to be stopped!

He rang the bell that hung down from the head of his bed, and presently old Emil appeared, snuffy, sour and wary. He wasn't giving anything away.

"What time is it?" asked Mack.

"Twelve o'clock."

"Who's in the house?"

"Lena; Snake; Lyn."

"Oh, Lyn is here," said Mack, grinning. "Send him up."

Lyn came in wearing a neat business suit that Mack had ordered him to buy the day before. He knew how to buy clothes. In it he could have passed in any society, Mack saw. The clear pallor of health was in his cheeks; his eye-balls were as white as milk, and Mack experienced a fresh twinge of hatred. Lyn did not appear to be at all afraid of him.

"So you gave me the needle last night," Mack began, quietly enough.

“Sure.”

“You damned young upstart!”

“If I hadn’t,” interrupted Lyn, “you would have waked up in the psychopathic ward. That would have been a nice story in the papers.”

For once in his life Mack was silenced. He changed his line of attack. “Where did you get the needle and the dope?”

“Borrowed it from Snake.”

“H’m! Where did *they* go last night?”

“They beat it in the car when you went wild. Came back after things quieted down.”

“When did they come back?”

“Oh, a couple of hours later.”

Mack thought: He was alone in the house for a couple of hours. What was he doing?

Lyn waited calmly for more questions. Mack approached the matter obliquely. “What about last night?” he asked suddenly.

Lyn looked at him in surprise. “Well, what about it?”

“Like your job here?”

Lyn surprised Mack by grinning like a schoolboy.

“Sure!” he said. “There’s always something happening around you. What would I do in a regular job after this?”

Mack’s suspicions were lulled. He thought: I reckon I’m a kind of hero to him. Naturally, if he’s a hard guy, he wouldn’t think any less of me for smashing things. Well, as long as he’s for me, I can use him. He said:

“If you want to stay around me, you’ve got to keep a close mouth. Both inside the house and out.”

“I’m no talker,” said Lyn. “You ought to have seen that.”

“What did you tell them in the house here about last night?”

“I told them nothing. And it wasn’t for the lack of being questioned either.”

Mack allowed a wheedling tone to come into his voice. “Well, that’s all right, Lyn. I got to have a young fellow close to me that I can trust. Naturally anybody close to me is going to learn all about my private affairs. If you ever let anything out, I’ll know it, and it’s the pavement for yours.”

“I understand that, Boss.”

When Lyn had left him, Mack, in order to make sure, locked the door and hastened to the chair which concealed his vital papers. The inventories

were intact. Afterwards he dressed and went downstairs. He found everything in ruins just as he had left it the night before.

“Why the hell hasn’t this been cleaned up?” he shouted.

Emil scowled in his surly way, and shut his mouth. Lena was shaking with fright. Snake grinned cruelly, enjoying the situation. Lyn spoke up dryly:

“They were afraid to clean up until you had seen it. They thought you might have forgotten what you did, and accuse them of selling your glasses.”

Mack thought: God damn it! every time this kid opens his mouth he riles me! However, he laughed heartily. “Gosh! I was on a regular bender last night!”

Everybody laughed then; Emil and Lena with extravagant relief. “You were, Boss! You sure were!”

“Clean it up!” said Mack. “I’ll buy what is necessary.”

While the cleaning was going on, Nell came. Mack saw by her tightly-compressed lips that he was in for something disagreeable. She looked at the wreckage, and drew her own conclusions without saying anything. Mack took her into the little office alongside the dining-room, and shut the door.

“How’s business?” he asked.

“Keesing is starting to make deliveries to-day. A lot more orders have come in. Here’s his list.”

“Well, if business is good, what the hell is biting you?”

“This.” She handed him a slip bearing several lines of typewriting that she had taken from her pocketbook.

He read:

They are saying that the best-known man on Broadway met his Waterloo last night. Everybody knows how he mows the ladies down. His latest fancy happens to be the lovely daughter of the best-known woman. Fact! He took her over to Jack Fieldman’s and mamma turned up just in the nick of time to rescue her ewe-lamb from worse than death! All Broadway is laughing.

Mack drew a long breath to steady himself. “Where did you get this?”

“Bert Gabbitt, the columnist on the *Planet* tabloid, brought it in.”

“Where did he get it?”

“Well, you know what Bert is. He *said* that his boss had bought it personally from some woman who was at Fieldman’s, and paid five hundred

dollars for it. Bert said he wanted to explain to a good friend like you, why he was obliged to run it in his column to-night.”

“What did you do?”

“Paid him five hundred to kill it.”

“You should have told him what to do with it,” said Mack. “It’s all a lie.”

Nell’s lip curled bitterly. “Why try that on with me? I know it’s true.”

“How do you know it?”

“Because Keesing had just told me that Kate Whiteley cancelled her orders, and told him to keep away from her place.”

Mack had expected this, but it was none the less unpleasant for that. “Ah, we don’t need her now,” he said indifferently.

“I’m not so sure,” said Nell. “Jim Anspach, who buys for Rulon Brothers, told Keesing that a meeting of the Restaurant-Keepers’ Association had been called for Tuesday night, and that Kate was going to address it. She is aiming to put us out of business altogether.”

Mack’s hands closed on the arms of his chair until the knuckles whitened. He smiled for Nell’s benefit. “I’ll take care of her.”

Nell’s lips were working bitterly. Finally it came blurting out: “Of all the women in the world, why did you have to pick on Kate Whiteley’s daughter?”

“Because she pleased my fancy,” said Mack, grinning like a death’s head. “Is that answer enough?”

“You will ruin yourself. And the rest of us with you!”

Mack’s rage suddenly burst all bonds. “Shut up!” he roared. “And get out of here!”

Nell, with a scared glance, beat it. Mack sat on alone in his office, struggling with the insanity that was mastering him again. He gripped the arms of his chair and a dew of sweat sprang out on his face. There must be no more outbreaks. This thing had to be thought through coldly.

By degrees he got his grip. What put him beside himself was the fact that a footling woman dared to pit herself against him. A woman! She must be stepped on, rubbed out, obliterated before he could ever know peace again. Passion and prudence joined in urging it. Once Kate Whiteley were removed, all the members of her damned association would fall in line like sheep. He hadn’t expected to use terroristic methods in this campaign, but after all it was the only way. How the restaurateurs would shiver when Kate Whiteley disappeared! . . . and the girl! If her natural protector were removed, the way would be clear to her.



He began to dope out ways and means. Thank God! he had a perfect instrument to his hand for this purpose. He called to Snake.

The young fellow came in with his cat-like tread, smiling with sleepy arrogance. Already at nineteen, a sneer was beginning to fix in his handsome face. Mack's brow cleared as he looked him over. This kid had no feelings to spoil his aim. As hard right through as a lump of glass. The perfect human animal.

"Close the door," said Mack. "Sit down. Have a cigar. You're the only person in this damned house that don't rile me!"

Snake accepted this tribute as no more than his due. He slid down on the small of his back, and stretched out his long legs. This laziness made an attractive contrast with his steely swiftness when roused. "Cheese, Boss! I'm sick of hanging round the house," he said. "I want to go and see a girl."

"They've still got your girl in the House of Detention," said Mack.

"Ah, she ain't the only girl I know."

"Well, that's all right. I got an important job that'll take you out of the house."

"Shoot!"

Mack led up to it with offhand and euphemistic allusions. Nothing was said right out. When Snake perceived his drift, he protested lazily.

"Cheese, Boss! 'Tain't but three days since I smoked that guy in the night club. Give it time to clear!"

"Are your nerves troubling you?"

Snake stretched out a steady hand. "Nerves, nothing! The cops are still too hot on my trail."

"We'll dope out a cop-proof disguise for you. That's Emil's specialty."

"Why me?"

"You're the only one I can bank on."

"Give Hahvahd a chance to prove his nerve."

"He hasn't got the guts for this job," said Mack coolly. "I'm not going to tell him anything about it. I don't trust him that far."

"Cheese! I hate that guy!" muttered Snake. "He's too nice for me to stomach. If you were giving me the job of rubbing him out, I'd take it gladly."

Mack felt as if he could make a real pal of this kid. However, he said prudently:

“You can’t liquidate a man just to satisfy your personal feelings. The one I have in mind is out to ruin us, to stop our business. We got no choice.”

Presently Mack allowed it to slip out that the proposed victim was a woman. Snake was mildly surprised.

“A skirt?”

“Why not?” demanded Mack.

Snake laughed. “Sure, why not, since women got the vote?”

When he heard the name of the woman, he whistled through his teeth. “Cheese! this’ll raise a bigger stink than the treasury agent!”

“Not necessarily,” said Mack. “She lives out of town, and that’s where I want the job pulled off. She’s known up there as Mrs. Aymery. Nobody but her daughter knows that Mrs. Aymery and Kate Whiteley are one and the same, and daughter isn’t likely to spread the story in the newspapers. Broadway may never know what happened to Kate Whiteley. It will work for me either way.

“We got to turn this trick before Tuesday night,” Mack went on. “That gives us three days to study the plant and lay our pipes. Everything has got to be worked out to the last detail. Can’t risk a slip-up anywhere. You can have whatever help you need, of course. Emil will make you up, and you can go up to Bronxville this afternoon to look over the ground.”

“What do I personally get out of this, Boss?”

“You can name it yourself, kid.”

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TWO days passed. The business of the Peerless Restaurant Supply increased by leaps and bounds in spite of the defection of Kate Whiteley. As far as Mack could tell, she had made no move as yet to queer him with his other customers. She was waiting for the meeting on Tuesday.

Little by little Mack was creating an elaborate set-up for the distribution of his liquor. He had the kind of mind that was at home in making complicated plans, but he hated doing the actual work. Nevertheless, since he trusted nobody, all the liaison work between his different departments had to be carried out by himself.

There was (A) the office of the Acme Agency presided over by Nell Cottar. Mack rarely visited it, but kept in close touch with Nell over the telephone. (B) was the warehouse of the Peerless Restaurant Supply on Washington Street. Here a perfectly legitimate business in fruits and vegetables was carried on, open to inspection at all times. Not a bottle of liquor ever entered or left the place. (C) was a big commercial garage on West Fifty-third Street near the river. In addition to the ordinary business of a garage, it was connected with (D) an apparently empty and boarded-up warehouse facing on the next street. The warehouse served as a storage-place for liquor, and contained the printing presses for making billheads, labels and forged government stamps. (E), (F), (G), etc., etc., were used in Mack's mind to denote his various storage places for liquor throughout different states.

The trucks that brought liquor into New York ran into the garage and unloaded. The stuff was carried through a tunnel into the warehouse, where it was rebottled (if necessary), labelled, stamped with government stamps, and packed in the right containers. The smart trucks of the Peerless Restaurant Supply, while out on their rounds, ran into the garage to pick up their liquor, and delivered it along with the fruit and vegetables.

Mack issued his orders to the various storage units through the mail. Slower than telegraph or personal messenger, but safer. Uncle Sam does a lot in helping to carry on crooked businesses, he thought with a chuckle. He never received mail under his own name or at his home address. Dial telephones were safe too, a grand invention for men like Mack—that is if you did your telephoning outside. Any slip might lead a nosey detective or treasury agent to tap a man's own wire.

He had to spend several hours a day in the little office writing out his letters, orders and requisitions. Twice a day he dressed with care, took a taxi to Times Square and made his usual pilgrimage to Fifty-third Street. Everybody in the know was aware that Mack Shenton walked up and down Broadway between eleven and twelve in the mornings; five and six in the afternoons. Consequently most of his contacts were made there. The pavement of Broadway was Mack Shenton's main office.

On the days following the collision with Kate Whiteley, Mack glanced with especial sharpness in the faces of the passing pedestrians. Was that damnable story being spread around town? Was there mockery or gratified malice or contempt in the eyes of those who knew him? He couldn't see anything of the kind. Just as many men and women as usual greeted him, all of them as keen as ever to get a nod from him in return. After awhile Mack's apprehensions were quieted. It don't matter what people say as long as it's not printed, he told himself.

His feelings towards Lyn remained uncertain. A dozen times a day his judgment told him that he had picked the right man, hard, cool and determined. But it angered him because he couldn't master Lyn; couldn't make him cringe like the others.

On Friday night he gave Lyn the job of negotiating the purchase of a thousand cases of fine French liqueurs that had been offered him by an old bootlegger called Barney Gulick. Benedictine, Chartreuse, Cointreau and the like; stuff that Mack needed badly to round out his line. It was stored in an old warehouse on Madison Street.

Mack, cleverly disguised as a broken-down watchman or janitor, accompanied Lyn in order to make sure that the stuff was as represented; but Lyn ran the show. They ran into trouble when it turned out that Gulick, sore at the price that Mack had forced him to accept, had planned to imprison Lyn and Mack in the warehouse while he tipped off the treasury officials.

Lyn, discovering the plot in time, had cleverly turned the tables on the double-crossers. Not only had he locked them up in their own place, but had actually succeeded in bringing off the liquor, by planting a couple of dummy

trucks in front of the warehouse. While the treasury agents watched the dummy trucks, Lyn ran the liquor out through the back of the house, and through the house that abutted on the rear. To help him he hired a whole club of young East-siders whose meeting he interrupted for the purpose.

It was a clever bit of work—too damn clever! That was the trouble. Mack praised Lyn, and clapped him on the back, but there was no steam in it. He's too big for his shoes, Mack thought. Pretty soon he'll be undertaking to shoulder *me* out of his way! The world ain't big enough to hold him and me. Well, by God! I've got the power and I'll stop him before he goes too far!

Sometime before dawn on Sunday, Snake Wyatt slipped into the house, and when Mack got up at noon he found him waiting to report. They shut themselves up in the little room alongside the dining-room.

Mack let his hand linger on Snake's shoulder. It was good for sore eyes to see the boy. Mack liked everything about him; his hardness, his swagger, his readiness to snarl. He liked him because everybody else in the house hated him. He and I are a pair! Mack thought. We understand each other. This kid is closer to me than anybody I ever knew.

They sat down. The kid looked handsomer than ever in his make-up, Mack thought. His hair was bleached and curled, and John had added little blonde side-burns and a dinky moustache. He was wearing a loud-checked suit and had a gaudy blue silk handkerchief knotted about his throat. In short, the tin-horn sport to the life. Damned good bit of character work, Mack thought.

"Well, what's the good word?" he asked.

"Muriel has gone to live in the Settlement House," said Snake.

"Has she quarrelled with Kate?" Mack asked eagerly.

"Nah! Kate don't want the girl to be up in the country evenings alone. Quarrel nothing! They call each other up four times a day."

Mack shrugged indifferently. "Go on."

"Every night since Thursday, Kate brings a young fellow out from town called Dick Harper. He's a radio singer. He stays the night."

"Anything between them?" asked Mack.

"Nah! It's just for an escort. Kate brought that fellow up, so to speak, and taught him all he knows. He looks on her as a second mother. He's her bodyguard since she had trouble with you the other night."

"How do you know she had trouble with me?" demanded Mack.

"Beulah told me. Beulah's the maid up there."

“So that’s the source of your information?”

Snake grinned wickedly. “Could I have a better one?”

“Go on with your story.”

“Kate’s trying to rent her house furnished and all. Every afternoon agents send people up and she shows them around. She’s going to live in a New York hotel.”

“I’ll get her wherever she goes,” muttered Mack.

“Kate has three servants,” Snake went on. “Maid, cook and chauffeur. Chauffeur works around the garden when he’s not out with the car. Sleeps over the garage, couple of hundred feet back from the main house. Name of Wathen. Oldish man. I kept out of his way.”

“With bodyguard, chauffeur and all, it’s a pretty hard nut to crack, eh?” suggested Mack.

“You ain’t heard the half of it, Boss. There’s a cop patrols Ashbourne Street every half-hour or so all night, and next door to Kate there’s a guy who works or fools around all night. I see him writing at his desk until three, four o’clock. He’s a friend of Kate’s. Every little while he walks around the yard to cool off, like. Last night he come over and sit on Kate’s steps, waiting for her.”

“Losing your nerve?” asked Mack.

“Not so’s you could notice,” said Snake, grinning. “I’m interested in this.”

“Go on.”

“Soon as I see the plant I see the job can’t be pulled off outside. Kate steps directly from the taxi into her front door. It’s an inside job, so I begin laying pipes to worm inside. I buy a little outfit of cheap jewellery in White Plains, and take it around to the kitchen door to show. This was Friday afternoon. The old cook, she makes snoots at me, but the young one, boy! did she fall? It was a landslide, Boss! Bought a string of beads and a necklace off me, and I threw in a ring.”

Mack laughed heartily. Snake related his tale as casually as a boy describing a schoolroom trick. A wonderful kid, Mack thought. He ought to go down in history.

“I guess these house servants don’t get much fun out of life,” Snake went on. “I doubt if any young fellow ever made up to this girl before. It was all new to her. A roll of the old eyes, and a few sweet words whispered too low for cookie to hear, and the trick was turned. I put a charm on her . . .

A pale little Jane! Nothing to her; you owe me something pretty for wasting my time on her, Boss.

“This first afternoon I hadn’t any more than got going good when Kate heard a strange man’s voice in the kitchen, and came out to see. So I had to beat it. But not before I made a date with Beulah to meet me in the lot back of the house after cookie went to bed that night.

“She came, and I continued the romance. Beulah loved me more every minute. Well, naturally, she’d never known a fellow of my calibre before. As cookie and the chauffeur had both gone to bed she took me into the house on tip-toe, and I suggested we go down cellar, where there was no chance of our voices being heard.

“I wanted to have a look at the cellar windows. Later on, when Beulah went up to the kitchen to fetch me a bottle of beer, I unbolted one of the windows. They are never opened, and nobody will notice that the bolt is slipped back until I’m ready to use it.

“I got out of the house between one and two, and after taking a few observations of the cop in that part of town, I fluffed down to the station to see the train come in. It arrives at two thirty-five, and the same taxi brings Kate and Dick Harper home every night. He drives fast and they’re in the house at two-forty. The fact that it all goes by time-table makes it a cinch for me. They are quiet and sleepy by the time they get home, and I figure they don’t lose any time getting to bed.

“Last night I saw Beulah again. Seems the servants go to the movies every Saturday night, but Beulah said she was sick, and stayed home, and Wathen said he’d sit in the kitchen, so she wouldn’t be scared. But after cookie had gone, she sent him away, and when she saw the light go on in his room she came out and fetched me in.

“She’s completely crazy about me now. While cookie was out I got her to show me all over the house, just making out it was simple curiosity. I looked over Kate’s room, and the room where the young fellow sleeps, and found out everything I wanted to know. Well-built stairs; don’t creak under your weight. No keys in the bedroom doors. For that matter Beulah told me that both Kate and the young fellow set their doors open at night.”

“How would the girl know that?” asked Mack.

“Beulah and cookie sleep up on the third floor. And when Beulah comes down in the morning she has orders to close the bedroom doors so the squealing of the vacuum cleaner won’t wake them. . . . So that’s that.” Snake concluded: “To-night being Sunday, the time-table is all changed, but Monday night I’m set to go.”

“What’s the plan?” asked Mack. “Will you conceal yourself in Kate’s room before she gets home, and wait for her?”

“That was my first idea,” said Snake, “but it means too long a wait. Waiting is always risky. You can’t tell what’s going to happen. The house is quiet by three o’clock; it begins to get light at four. Sometime between three and four I can enter the house, do my job, and be out again inside ten minutes.”

“How about your getaway?”

“Open window beside Kate’s bed; porch roof; easy drop to the ground.”

“Screen in the window?”

“Screens haven’t been put in for the season yet.”

“Suppose the young fellow hears you coming upstairs?”

“If he interferes with me I’ll have to pull a double job,” said Snake carelessly.

“If they found them both dead it would look like a crime of passion,” said Mack, grinning.

“Ain’t likely he’ll hear me,” said Snake. “Kate’s room is right at the head of the stairs. He’s in the front of the house, and down a little passage. If you could get me a gun with a silencer, nothing would be known until morning.”

“You can’t put a silencer on an automatic.”

“How about an old-fashioned revolver?”

“Sure, I can furnish that.”

“And if I had a second gun of the same calibre to leave behind me, it would look like suicide. If you want it to look like suicide, we could discharge one shell beforehand.”

Mack thought it over, grinning, rubbing his lip. “Of course, with Dick Harper there, Kate’s identity is bound to become known—unless the girl makes him keep quiet. I can’t foresee just how she’ll act. On the whole, suicide will be safer.”

They went on to discuss the plan at length. Mack said: “The three danger points are the cop in Ashbourne Street, the man next door who don’t go to bed, and the chauffeur sleeping over the garage. You’ll need three helpers to watch them. I’ll give you Keesing, Emil Sanner and Nell. I’ve got a hold over those three, and they’ll obey orders.”

“Who’ll drive the car?” asked Snake.

“Lyn Dixon,” said Mack. “He needn’t know anything about the particulars. Lyn might think his hands were too clean for this sort of job.”



Snake lifted his lip at the mention of Lyn's name. He went on: "About a furlong back of the house there's an old country road. It's abandoned now, and fenced off but we can cut the wire when we enter. The car would take us there and wait for us. Look, I've drawn a map of the vicinity."

They went over the map in detail.

"How about the girl, Beulah?" suggested Mack. "She will suspect something next day."

"Let her suspect," said Snake coolly. "She'll have to keep her mouth shut—for a good reason."

"And the cook?"

"Cookie has only seen me once at the back door. She don't know that I ever came back."

Mack and Snake decided to keep their plans to themselves, until the time came to act. All day Monday Snake was around the house, padding restlessly from room to room, his yellow eyes glittering with suppressed excitement. As night approached, he became more and more "beany" as Mack put it, and ugly quarrels arose between him and the other members of the household. Mack, thinking of the kid's dangerous job that night, had not the heart to call him down.

They had supper late. Afterwards as they sat around the table, Snake became involved with Emil. Emil was the wreck of a magnificent physical specimen, and Snake never let him forget that he was not the man he had been. Snake would say: "Old man, you look dragged down to-night. You need a tonic. They say iron and strychnine is good."

To-night Emil took all this in stolid silence, and Snake adopted more direct measures to enrage him.

"Old man, there's a pair of shoes under my bed. Fetch them down and clean them for me. I'll be wanting them later."

Emil, who was clearing the table, carried his tray out to the dumb-waiter without answering. When he returned Snake said:

"Did you hear what I said about the shoes?"

"I heard you."

"Are you going to get them?"

"No."

"What the hell!" cried Snake. "Aren't you the servant here?"

Emil's little red-rimmed eyes burned with anger. "Not your servant," he said.

"By God! we'll see about that! Go get my shoes!"

"Get them yourself!"

Snake turned to Mack. "Boss, do I have to take that from this broken-down yegg-man?" he cried in real or assumed anger. "Do I or do I not get my shoes cleaned?"

Mack scowled. If the kid got in a tantrum everything would be spoiled. Snake was the prima donna of the show. He had to be smoothed down or there could be no performance. "Clean his shoes," he said curtly to Emil.

Emil favoured Snake with a murderous glance, and stumped out in silence. They heard him go upstairs after the shoes. Snake sat grinning, pluming himself. He felt fine.

Nell Cottar, who lived outside the house, came to supper. Afterwards she was given a boy's outfit to dress herself in. But it turned out there were no shoes to go with it. She had to wear her own shoes. Snake had a lot of fun at her expense.

Nell contrived to get Mack alone for a moment in his office, and asked him plump and plain:

"Where we going to-night, Boss?"

"To Bronxville," answered Mack, grinning.

She got it instantly. "Oh God, Mack, not that! not that!" she stammered, dropping in a chair.

It made Mack sore. "Not what?" he snarled, making out not to understand.

She wouldn't name it. "We've always kept our hands clean!" she wailed. "Selling liquor's not such a crime. And we've done a clean, high-class business! If we start this sort of thing what will become of us? Oh, it doesn't matter what happens to *me*. It's you I'm thinking of, Mack. Where will you end?"

Mack grinned harshly. "You don't have to soil your pretty hands," he said. "You don't even have to see it. Just obey orders and forget the rest."

"It's the influence of that boy," she said somberly. "He makes my blood run cold! He's not human! He's a kind of monster! He can't *feel*! Life in this house is a hell since he came. You're foolish about him Mack! Mark my words, if you can't shake it off, he'll ruin you!"

"A boy of nineteen, influencing me!" said Mack, laughing. "That's good."

"It's true!" she said. "We can all see it."

This angered him. "Be quiet!" he snarled. "I've warned you not to discuss me with others. Obey your orders and keep your mouth shut. That's all you've got to do."

Nell went out with hanging head. As for Mack, it was annoying, but he was not greatly put out. He was certain that Nell would never dare go against his orders.

He and Snake had a final talk in his office and went over the map again. Snake had the map by heart now, and left it behind him.

Afterwards Mack made up an errand for Lyn that would keep him out of the house for an hour, and had the rest into his office to receive their final instructions for the night. When Frank Keesing learned that Snake was to lead the party and to issue all orders, there was another flare-up.

"I'm fifteen years older than Snake," he grumbled.

"Well, Emil is fifty years older," put in Snake wickedly. "So what?"

"You heard him," said Mack to Keesing, scowling. "What of it?"

Keesing struggled to speak coolly and forcibly. "Snake is right. It isn't his age that gripes me. The point is, I'm glad to work for you, Boss, because I'm satisfied you're a bigger man than I am. But it goes hard to take orders from one you can't respect." In spite of himself, Keesing's voice began to shake with rage. "This kid is a fool! Look at him. Anybody can see it! He's got a brain like a peanut! And all blown up with his own self-conceit! He's no leader! And *poisonous*! God! he was well named Snake!"

Snake listened to this, grinning. Mack struck his desk. "Be quiet! Tonight Snake is my deputy. And every order that he gives you comes from me! If you're not satisfied you and I part company here. There's the door!"

Keesing changed colour, and gnawed his lip. Mack saw that he had him. Keesing was thinking of the wife and child that he was able to keep in comfort now, for the first time in years.

"Sorry, Boss," he mumbled, hanging his head. "I'm satisfied."

All evening the bustle of preparation went on. Lyn returned and shortly after twelve they set out. This would give them plenty of time to allow for a flat tire or other set-back. They used a small speedy sedan that had been stolen some weeks before, and passed along from one to another, finally turning up in Mack's garage. Lyn had been told nothing. When he ventured to ask where they were going, Mack said:

"Drive north up First Avenue, and across the Harlem River. Snake will give you further instructions later."

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AFTER they had gone, Mack, who was already dressed in his evening regalia, called a taxi. He wanted to be seen at various places around town in case of eventualities. He was tempted to drop in at A l'Aigle d'Or—not to talk to Kate, but to feed his hatred by looking at her, and gloating over what was going to happen in an hour or two. However, he resisted the temptation. In case Kate Aymery should be identified as Kate Whiteley, and he had been seen at her place, it might set up a dangerous association of ideas in somebody's head.

So he had himself carried to the Elysian Gardens instead. He joined a party of friends there, and became the life of the party. The thick excitement that filled him was stimulating. As time passed, however, his excitement mounted until it was no longer pleasurable. He found difficulty in keeping his mind on the conversation. He drank heavily, but the stuff appeared to have no effect on him whatsoever.

Mack wore a wrist-watch. He worked his wrist a little way out of his cuff, and let his hands lie loosely clasped on the table, so that he could glance at his watch from time to time without appearing to. Mustn't be seen looking at his watch. 12.45: Lyn had been instructed to drive slowly; they would be crossing Harlem River Bridge. In his mind's eye Mack followed them through the Bronx.

1.05: God! how slowly the hands of the watch moved! They ought to be on Bronx River Parkway now. How did the villages go? Williamsbridge, Mount Vernon, Bronxville. 1.35: this was the time they were to arrive in Bronxville. They would have a long wait, but that was better than to risk arriving too late. They had been instructed to drive around slowly until the train was due.

The party at Elysian Gardens broke up at two o'clock, and Mack went on to Joe Greenfield's gambling-house where play kept up all night. He

craved roulette as an antidote to the excitement that was almost suffocating him now. In the gorgeous rooms at Greenfield's he found the usual well-dressed, hard-boiled crowd. Many men and women hailed him. He drifted to the tables with a careless air.

He staked high and won—because he didn't care whether he won or not. Roulette was good, but its pull wasn't strong enough to keep him from glancing at his watch. 2.35: the train was pulling into Bronxville. The two elements of Mack's plot were drawing together. When they fused—ping! In his mind he heard the silenced revolver.

2.45: Kate was at home now, and the others would be stealing up on the house from the rear, watching the windows for the lights to go out. The clicking of the little ivory ball, and the quiet voices of the croupiers supplied a half-heard accompaniment to Mack's burning thoughts. The chips piled up in front of him without his knowing quite how they got there.

3.05, 3.10: Kate was certainly in bed now, but Snake would wait a little while yet. He had plenty of time. 3.25: *now*, he would be letting himself through the cellar window, snaking his long slim body up the stairs; through the bedroom door; towards the woman's bed. Mack held his breath as if he had been actually present at the scene. . . .

A voice broke in on his hearing. "Hey, Mack! are you in a dream? Well, I would be myself if I was winning like that! I'm cleaned out!"

It was a well-dressed English bum who called himself Lord Algernon Wakeham, trying to make a touch. Mack handed him a handful of chips, and looked at his watch again.

3.30: well, it was all over now, for better or worse. A drop to the ground, a swift run to the waiting car. Everything was all right. Everything *must* be all right. There couldn't be any slip-up. It had all been too carefully worked out.

Now came the hardest part of the evening for Mack. He made endless inconclusive calculations as to the time it would take them to drive back to New York. They had been ordered to drive at moderate speed in order to avoid attracting attention. They couldn't do it before four-thirty, more likely four forty-five. Roulette lost all its allure for him, yet he continued to place his chips mechanically. If he went home to wait, that would be worse.

By 4.15 he was completely fed up with Greenfield's. He cashed in and took a taxi home, with a fast-beating heart. And I call myself hard-boiled! he thought. His house showed a completely dark front to the street; naturally, for there was none in it but old Lena, who would be in bed long ago. Lena had not been told what was afoot to-night. Mack let himself in, and was

surprised to see a light burning in his office—at the back of the hall. He had turned it out. Hastening back softly, he found Nell Cottar sitting at his desk with her arms spread upon it, and her face hidden between them.

“Nell!”

She jumped as if he had struck her, and turned a wild, agonised face towards him.

“Everything go all right?” he asked.

Her lips moved, but no sound came out. He perceived that there was more in this than the natural distress of a woman forced to assist at a scene of violence.

“What’s the matter?” he demanded sharply.

Nell pointed to the basement stairs. “Go down . . . go down . . .” she whispered huskily.

Mack, thoroughly alarmed, ran down the stairs. Emil and Lena occupied the front basement room. He heard Lena in there weeping and praying. There was a light in the kitchen at the rear. He ran in, and was aware of Emil, Frank Keesing, Lyn Dixon, standing around helplessly, *and something lying on the floor*. The men parted to let him through, and he saw young Snake lying before him, his graceful limbs negligently disposed as if he had thrown himself down to rest. But there was a neat round hole in his forehead. He was dead.

A grey mist obscured Mack’s vision. He struck the back of his hand violently across his forehead. “What’s this! What’s this!” he cried in a voice that rang queerly in his own ears.

Nobody answered him.

“Who did it?” he shouted.

The three shifted their feet and looked at one another, each waiting for the next man to speak.

“Answer me!” yelled Mack. “Who did it?”

His gaze fastened on Keesing, who stammered: “We don’t just know, Boss.”

“Did it happen inside the house?”

“No. Snake hadn’t gone in yet. He was waiting at the back.”

“Well? Well? Who shot him there? Where did the shot come from?”

“We don’t know, Boss. Snake was alone at the time.”

“Where were the rest of you?”

“Me, I had crawled through the hedge to see what the fellow next door was doing. Nell had gone round to the front gate to look for the cop. Emil was watching the garage.”

“And Lyn?”

“Lyn stayed with the car.”

Rage and pain made Mack’s head reel. “All nicely distributed!” he snarled. “All got an alibi! . . . By Christ! I see it! It was one of you did it! You all hated the kid! It was one of *you*, and whichever one it was, I will kill by inches!”

Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he ran to the door leading to the yard, locked it, and thrust the key in his pocket. He ran through to the front basement door, locked that and took the key. Then upstairs to secure the key to the front door. These were the only ways out of the house. All the windows on the basement floor were barred.

When he ran back into the kitchen, the three men seemed not to have moved. Mack demanded their guns, and they handed them over obediently. Each man returned the gun that Mack had given him earlier. All were automatics of the same make and calibre—thirty-twos. All were fully loaded. “Easy enough to reload,” snarled Mack. He marked each gun with the initials of the man he had taken it from, and dropped them in his pocket. He patted each man’s clothes to make sure he had no other gun.

Then his eyes fell again on the slim body lying there, and sense and reason seemed to forsake him. He had never grieved for anybody before. This pain took him unawares. His pal! the one who understood him! His only friend! If he had let himself go, he could have howled like a dog. But it was in his mind that the murderer was looking at him, and he screwed down the clamps of self-control.

“For God’s sake, why do you leave him lying on the floor?” he snarled. “Do you hate him still? . . . Pick him up and carry him up to the living-room and lay him on the couch.”

Lyn and Keesing each took a shoulder, while Emil went first with the dead man’s feet. They stamped up the narrow stairs, and into the living-room. Mack, watching them with eyes that burned in their sockets, noted that old Emil and Keesing betrayed fear or reluctance to touch the dead boy, while Lyn picked him up in a perfectly matter-of-fact way. But maybe that only means Lyn has better control, he thought.

Mack ordered Emil and Keesing to wait in the dining-room. “I’m going to question you separately,” he said. “Lyn first. God help the one I catch in a

lie! . . . And mark me! If any of you tries to get out of the house, I'll know he's guilty. And I'll catch him if I have to comb the world!"

Keesing and Emil lost no time in getting out of the room. Mack paced the floor, trying to get his grip, watching Lyn out of the corners of his eyes. Lyn was too damned cool. It wasn't natural. It was him that did it, thought Mack. I never did trust him. Lyn was straightening the limbs of the body on the couch. Afterwards he took a drapery from the grand piano and spread it over the boy.

"Shall I cover his face, Boss?" he asked quietly.

"Leave him alone!" said Mack sharply. "You hated him when he was alive!"

"I didn't hate him," said Lyn. "It's true I couldn't get along with him. Nobody could. . . ."

Only me! thought Mack.

". . . But he was nothing to me one way or the other."

"You're glad he's dead!"

"No," said Lyn regretfully. "Seems a shame. Such a young kid!"

Such a young kid! echoed inside Mack. He was wrenched with pain.

When he got better control of himself, he ordered Lyn to stand with his hands above his head, and searched him. Lyn submitted quietly. Mack found only the usual junk on him: pocket-knife, pipe, tobacco pouch, matches, wallet and change. No letters. Nothing incriminating.

"Tell me everything that happened from the time you left here," ordered Mack.

"Snake rode on the front seat with me so he could tell me the way," Lyn began quietly. "The other three were in back."

"What did you and Snake talk about?"

"We didn't talk."

"That ain't natural. All that long drive."

"Well, Snake would say something now and again. I turned it off the best I could. I didn't want to quarrel with him."

"Did you quarrel?"

"No. . . . After we crossed the Harlem River, Snake told me to make for the Bronx River Parkway, and when we got to Bronxville, he told me to turn into the village, and just drive around, which I did. Something after two o'clock, we set Keesing down near the station, and afterwards picked him up again. I understood Keesing to say to Snake that 'they' had come. I didn't



know whom he was referring to. Snake then gave me directions to go down one street and another, and in the end we cut a wire fence and turned in on a dirt road in the outskirts. We switched off our lights when we turned in. And in a certain spot Snake told me to stop.”

“Did you recognise the spot?” asked Mack.

“Why, no,” answered Lyn with a look of surprise. “I never was in Bronxville except the once that I drove you up.”

“Go on!”

“It was a lonely spot, a kind of abandoned road that was there before the town spread out. No houses in sight, but just a couple of lights showing maybe two hundred yards off to the right. We waited a few minutes, because Snake said we were a little early. He described the route I was to take going home. If an alarm was raised, the Parkway wouldn’t be safe, he said. We could abandon the car as soon as we got in town, and take a taxi.”

Mack was stabbed with pain again. It hadn’t worked out that way! “What did you think was up?” he asked sharply.

“Nobody told me, and I didn’t inquire,” said Lyn coolly. “Of course, I knew it wasn’t a church sociable.”

“Go on!”

“The four of them then got out of the car. Snake and I compared watches. They’d be gone half an hour, he said, I was to turn the car around and wait for them. In half an hour I was to start the engine, and let it idle. They went off towards the lighted windows. Pretty soon the lights went out.”

“What then?”

A certain agitation came into Lyn’s cool voice. “In less than half an hour, say fifteen or twenty minutes, I heard a shot from the direction they had gone. I wasn’t prepared for that. It scared me.”

“What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything. Snake had told me to stay with the car. I started the engine and waited. In a minute or two Keesing and Emil came half-running across the field, dragging Snake between them. Nell was a little behind them, crying. They shoved Snake in back, and climbed after him. Nell sat by me, and we drove like hell to get away from there.”

“Any sound of pursuit?”

“No. We came into town by Central Avenue. Of course we couldn’t abandon the car with Snake in it. We drove home. It was just beginning to get light, and we were scared. But the street was quiet, and we took a

chance. We sent Nell in first to open the basement door, and ran Snake in quick. Nobody saw us. I took the car and dropped it in Second Avenue. I left the key in it, hoping that somebody would drive it away before full day. It was just a couple of minutes after I got back to the house when you drove up.”

“Was there any blood in the car?”

“I don’t know. His face was all blood.”

“Did the men tell you what had happened?”

“There was no time. Nell was hysterical coming home. Couldn’t get anything out of her. After I got back here, I asked Emil and Keesing, but they wouldn’t tell me anything.”

Mack turned the full power of his eyes on Lyn. He had seldom met a man who could face it out. “Are you telling me the truth?” he barked.

Lyn spread out his hands. “You’ll have to decide that for yourself, Boss. There’s no more that I can say.”

Mack took a turn, gritting his teeth together. He considered Emil in his mind. Emil was crooked enough, but he was slow-witted, not a ready liar. He certainly ought to be able to drag the truth out of him.

“That’s all I want from you now,” he growled to Lyn. “Send Emil in.”

When he was left alone, Mack went to the sofa and passed his hand over the smooth, cold face of the dead youth. “Might have been my son!” he muttered. He examined the wound. It had been made by a bullet of larger calibre than the thirty-twos he had handed out; probably a thirty-eight. Passing his hand behind Snake’s head, he felt the bullet lodged under the skin.

Emil slouched in with his dogged head thrust forward like an old grey ape’s. Mack thought: This man was curdled with hatred when they set out. Always had a murderous streak in him. He instantly opened up on Emil.

“You and Keesing and Nell rode on the back seat going up. What did you talk about?”

“Nothing,” said Emil.

“You lie! You wouldn’t make that long trip in silence.”

Emil threw him an uneasy glance. “Well, if we did, it was of no account,” he muttered. “I don’t remember anything.”

“You lie! You talked about Snake. You agreed that you’d all be better off if he was out of the way.”

Emil showed his teeth like a terrified animal. “No, Boss! If anything was said, it was only what we always said.”

“You’re lying! It was fixed up between you that you were to fire the shot, and they promised to back you up!”

“No! God knows I had no love for the kid, but I wouldn’t be such a fool as to plug him when we were on a job together! I had plenty of better chances.”

Mack set a trap for him. “Then where is the thirty-eight that was in your room yesterday?”

Emil stared. “I never had no thirty-eight, Boss. Ask Lena.”

It seemed to have the ring of truth, and Mack took another line. “Tell me your version of what happened after you four got out of the car,” he growled. “And remember I’m in a position to check up on you.”

Emil wiped his sweating face with a soiled red handkerchief. “We started across the field,” he said. “We stopped, and Snake told what each one had to do. He waited until then to tell us, so’s Lyn couldn’t hear nothing. Then we went on again, and crossed a hedge. It was a young hedge and we could step over it. We were then in the back premises of the house in question. At first two of the bedroom windows was lighted up, but the lights went out.

“The garage was to the rear of the house, and off to the right. Maybe fifty, sixty yards. It was locked up. There was rooms overhead, and a stairway coming down to a side door. My job was to stand beside that door, and if anything roused the chauffeur and brought him downstairs I was to give him one on the bean with a blackjack as he stepped out the door. So I took up my stand by that door.”

“Were did the others go?”

“They went forward towards the house. It was real dark. I couldn’t see them no more. But I had heard them get their instructions. Nell was to go around the house to the front gate to watch for the cop, and Keesing was to stay with Snake.”

Mack grinned painfully. “So Keesing stayed with Snake.”

“Yes. Snake wanted his help getting through the cellar window.”

“Go on.”

Emil wiped his face again. His breathing was laboured. “I hadn’t been by the garage more than four, five minutes when I heard the ‘ping!’ of Snake’s gun. . . .”

“What!” cried Mack. “Snake fired?”

“Sure. You couldn’t mistake that little ‘ping!’ Right after it come the roar of a regular gun, and the sound of Snake’s fall on the cement. But I didn’t

know it was Snake at first.”

“Did you see the flash of the second shot?”

“Yes. Right in line between me and the back door of the house. Couldn’t tell you how close. Looked like it was fired low down.”

“Any voices?”

“Not a sound, Boss, but the little shot and the loud one.”

“What did you do?”

“Took out my gun and run towards the sound. Found Keesing leaning over Snake. . . .”

Mack grinned again; covered it with his hand.

“. . . Wasn’t no time to lose, because lights went up in the bedrooms, and in the room over the garage. Me and Keesing grabbed hold Snake, and beat it back through the hedge and across the field. Nell come running after us. We wasn’t chased.”

“What did Keesing say?”

“Not a word. We grabbed hold the dead man instinctive. Not a word till we was out of earshot. All the way across the field Keesing was muttering: ‘Oh God! Oh God!’ That’s all I heard him say.”

“You didn’t see anybody else around or hear anybody?”

“Neither sight nor sound, Boss.”

“You and Keesing talked coming home?”

“Sure, Keesing talked the whole way. . . . Well, it would be a strain on a nervous man, driving more than an hour with a stiff leaning against your shoulder. Me, I ain’t got no nerves.”

“What conclusion did you and Keesing come to?”

“We couldn’t come to no conclusion.”

“Did Keesing do it?” Mack suddenly barked at Emil.

“How do I know, Boss? . . . He could have done it. . . . But I don’t think it was him done it.”

“Why don’t you think so?”

“Well . . . Keesing just didn’t act like he done it.”

Mack thought: As I supposed, they’re together in this! He felt that a disclosure was near, but was careful not to let anything appear in his face. He went to the door, and called Keesing. When he entered, Mack sent Emil back into the dining-room. Thus they had no chance to communicate. They did not look at each other.

Keesing's thin reddish hair was standing up, his skin mottled, his hands shaking. Mack, grinning at these evidences of an approaching break-up, probed deep for the man's secret with his eyes. Keesing's eyes bolted wildly.

"You've been drinking!" Mack said sharply.

"I took a drink in the dining-room," stuttered Keesing. "I needed it. God! I needed it!"

"What are you afraid of?" asked Mack with curling lip. "There was no discovery. You are safe here."

"That ride . . . that ride home!"

"Chicken-hearted!"

Keesing, clenching his hands for control, looked down at the floor.

"Begin at the point where you all stepped over the hedge, and tell me what happened. Emil went aside to the garage."

"Not right away," said Keesing.

Mack started inwardly. "Not right away?" he echoed casually.

"No. There was no occasion for Emil to watch the garage until Snake entered the house. Snake wasn't ready to go in yet. The four of us went up near the house, and Nell struck off around to the front. Snake had told her to take a slant up the street to see if the cop was in sight. You could see the cop all the way from where he first turned into Ashbourne Street. If the cop was in sight Nell was to come back and tell us. Snake said he would wait five minutes for her, and then enter the house."

"What were you to do?"

"Snake told me to stay with him. He wanted me to ease him down into the cellar when he went through the window. And I was to wait by the window, in case anything went wrong inside, and he had to come back that way."

"So you were the last to be with him?"

Keesing threw him a terrified glance. "N—no!" he stammered. "Snake told me to go and see what the fellow in the next house was doing, while he was waiting for Nell."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mack. "The house next door, which side is it on?"

"On your left as you face the back of Kate's house."

"That is to say on the other side of the yard from the garage?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

“So I pushed through the shrubbery. . . .”

“Leaving Emil with Snake?”

“Yes. . . . When I got in the next yard, I saw a lighted window in the house, and I could see the fellow inside, writing at his desk. He looked as if he would be good for awhile there, so I came back. As I came out from the shrubbery. . . .” Keesing began to shake and stammer.

“Go on!” barked Mack.

“I heard the ping of Snake’s silencer in front of me, and the bark of an unsilenced gun. . . .”

“Snake’s gun first?”

“Absolutely!”

“Did you see the flash of the second shot?”

“Yes. It was in a line between me and the garage. I couldn’t say exactly how far. . . . I run forward and found Emil bending over Snake. There wasn’t time to ask what had happened—the house was roused; we caught Snake under the arms and ran back through the hedge and across the field. In a minute Nell come running after us.”

Mack paced the room, knitting his brows. He was aware that Keesing was watching him out of the corners of his terrified eyes. Mack thought: So they’re *not* in cahoots. Which one is lying? By the look of him, it’s Keesing. But it don’t seem as if Keesing would have the nerve to do it, and come back and face me after. Emil has the nerve. And there’s a hole in Emil’s story. If Keesing was sent into the next yard, he couldn’t get around to a point between Snake and Emil, where Emil said he saw the flash. Keesing would be on the other side of Snake. . . . Nell can settle it.

He sent Keesing out of the room. “Keep your mouth shut about this to Emil,” he said with a hard grin. “Or that old crook will find a way to turn your words against you!”

Mack called Nell in. She looked terrible. She flinched when she saw the still figure on the couch, and turned her back on it. Seeing this, Mack thought: Break her down, and the truth will come out! Seizing her wrist, he drew her up to the couch. “Look at him!” he commanded, grinning horribly. “He can’t hurt you.”

“No! No!” murmured Nell, straining her head away. “I can’t bear it!”

“Have you never seen a dead man before?”

“Oh, yes. . . . But to die like that. . . . so quick! . . . We took him up there living, and brought him home dead!”

Mack laughed. Pulling up a small chair, he forced Nell into it. "Sit there and look at him! . . . And tell me the truth!"

Nell covered her face with her hands.

"Look at him!" shouted Mack.

Slowly her hands came down. She was completely under Mack's dominion. "Such a beautiful boy!" she murmured like a woman in a trance.

"A little crazy about him, eh?" sneered Mack. "And he scorned you. So you plugged him! Or maybe it was to save me from his evil influence!" Mack got to laughing so he could hardly stop.

"No," said Nell in a dull voice.

"Then who was it killed him?"

"I don't know."

"You lie!"

Nell said nothing.

"Answer my questions!" said Mack harshly. "When the four of you stepped over the hedge at the back, did Emil leave you right away to go to the garage?"

"No. We all went up to the house."

"Well, who was the first one to leave Snake: Emil or Keesing?"

"I don't know. All three of them were together when I left them to go around front."

"Well, who was the first to get back to Snake after the shooting?"

"I don't know. They both had him when I caught up with them."

Mack broke into a furious cursing. It seemed as if they had all combined to drive him crazy. His fury had no effect on the apathetic Nell, and he pulled himself up.

"Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"At the front gate. The cop was not in sight anywhere. I had been waiting there a couple of minutes when I heard the shot behind the house. I was terrified because I knew Snake had a silencer on his gun. I ran as fast as I could. They were gone when I got there. I heard them stumbling across the field. There was a strange man in the yard. Armed, I think. I made a detour and ran after our men. The person must have heard us, but he didn't follow."

"Man or woman?" asked Mack.

"I don't know. Just a shape."

"Would that be the chauffeur?" asked Mack.

"I don't know."

“Was the side door of the garage open?”

“I didn’t notice.”

“How do you know he had a gun?”

“By the way he held his arm.”

“What build of person?”

“Heavy.”

“Did he see you?”

“No. He was looking across the field.”

That was all Mack could get out of Nell. When he was left alone he dropped in a chair, and pressed his head between his hands, thinking the thing through. In his mind he went over all they had told him, comparing and testing each story with every other. Over and over. The net result seemed to point to Emil Sanner as the killer. Mack shouted for him.

When he entered Mack looked him over speculatively. There was still a power of life in the man, old as he was. He would die hard. Mack moistened his lips in anticipation. Emil seeing Mack’s face, opened his mouth stupidly; his skin became a little greyer than before.

“I have caught you out in two lies,” Mack said, lingering pleasantly on his words. “So I draw my own conclusions.”

“I did not lie to you,” said Emil breathlessly.

“You told me you left the other three as soon as you stepped over the hedge. Both Keesing and Nell say that you went up to the house with them.”

“Ah, any man might be mistaken about a little thing like that,” mumbled Emil.

“Sure!” said Mack, grinning. “Especially if it was incriminating. . . . You were the last one to be with Snake.”

“That’s not so, Boss!”

“Keesing was sent to take a look in the next yard.”

“So he says. But I left them two together.”

“All right. Had you heard Snake telling Keesing about the man next door?”

“Not a word, Boss! Not a word at any time!”

“Good!” said Mack, grinning. “Then I have you dead to rights! Keesing never heard a word about the man next door before you started from here. And if Snake didn’t tell him on the way there, *he told him after you had left them together*. And Keesing went over there. And when he came back he



couldn't have got around the yard so as to be between you and Snake. You lied! It was you shot him!"

"No! Before God, it wasn't me!" cried Emil passionately. He strode to the couch and placed his hand on the dead man's breast. "With my hand on his heart, I swear I never harmed him!"

In spite of himself, Mack was impressed. Emil was ignorant enough to be superstitious about an oath of this sort. "Then who shot him?" he barked.

"I don't know," cried Emil. "I ain't charging Keesing with it. Maybe there was somebody else there. Maybe Kate Whiteley had planted somebody there as a guard. There was a couple little outhouses, and bushes and all; plenty of cover for him!"

Mack thought of the stranger Nell had seen. Maybe it wasn't the chauffeur. "Didn't you search the yard when you got there?"

"No."

"Why didn't you?"

"Snake was our leader," said Emil sullenly. "We just done what he told us."

The suggested explanation was more than Mack could bear. Was it Kate Whiteley who had had Snake shot? Was she triumphing over him now? A woman giving him, Mack Shenton, the laugh! He saw red.

"Nobody in the world knew about the plan for to-night but you five and me," he said between his teeth. "And one of you five knew nothing until he got there. If Kate was tipped off about to-night, there is a traitor amongst you! Believe me, I'll find out who it is!" Suddenly his rage escaped control altogether. "Get out! Get out!" he yelled, waving his hands.

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FOR a long time Mack sat alone in the living-room with the dead youth on the couch. The sun came up. When it began to shine in the windows, he got up and pulled down the blinds. Then, reflecting that this would make it look like a house of the dead, he snapped them up again. For Snake there could be no festoon of white flowers and smilax hung on the door; no priest to read prayers over him; nor consecrated ground to receive his body. He must pass from the show of life unnoticed like a light shifted elsewhere.

Later, the sound of somebody moving in the basement roused Mack. Old Lena going about her day's work. He stood up. It was necessary for him to show an unruffled front to the world. Business must be carried on. He left the room, locking the door after him, and pocketing the key.

Nell, sleeping on the couch in his office, started up as he opened the door. "For God's sake, go up to my room and tidy yourself up," he snarled. "You look terrible."

Keesing was spread half over the dining-table asleep. Mack shook him. "You've got a big day before you," he said harshly. "Pull yourself together and go to the office. I want you to send a personal note to every restaurant that has your price-list, informing them that prices are cut in half until further notice."

"In half!" echoed Keesing, opening his eyes wide.

"That's what I said. Have the notes delivered by messenger, and afterwards call up each buyer to make sure that it has reached his hands." Mack showed his teeth. "Then let Kate Whiteley address her meeting to-night, and see how much good it will do her! . . . That meeting's at eight o'clock," he went on. "Arrange to get a report of it. At midnight I want you back in this house."

"O.K., Boss."

When Nell came down, Mack addressed her in his office. "I'll have a lot for you to do to-day. There's an Englishman who passes around town by the name of Lord Algernon Wakeham, a fakir with a good front. I want you to get hold of him quick. He's well-known at Joe Greenfield's and the other gambling joints. Telephone around. As soon as you find him, make an appointment for him to meet me at the New Blanchard. Tell him it means money in his pocket."

Nell made a note of it.

"I want you to get yourself into the Child Welfare Settlement on Forsyth Street," Mack went on. "They're always in need of volunteer helpers. You know how to fix yourself up with the proper references. You can make them a donation if necessary. Offer to teach classes there, or whatever it is they do. Call yourself Miss Western."

Nell understood perfectly what this meant. Her sallow face flushed unwholesomely. "You ask *me* to do this," she murmured.

Mack sickened at her. "Well, are you too good for it?" he snarled.

She said no more.

Keesing, Lyn and Nell sat down to breakfast in the dining-room. Lyn, between his haggard companions, looked as trim as new paint. The sight of each one angered Mack separately. He would not eat, but took Emil downstairs with him. Ordering Lena to wait on the table, he and Emil went on down into the cellar, deep below street level.

Mack's house was an old one which had been through various alterations, but the original uneven brick pavement of the cellar remained. The bricks were laid directly in the earth. Emil switched on a light, and Mack looked around him, frowning. The place had an earthy, gaseous smell. After consideration he said:

"Right in front of the furnace will be the best place. Afterwards you can scrape coal dust over the bricks until they look just like they did before. Take up the bricks here, and dig a grave four feet deep. We'll bury him to-night."

"There'll be some dirt left over, Boss," said Emil indifferently.

"Well, scatter it around the back-yard after dark."

"After a bit the bricks will sink some."

"Well then you can take them up and bring in some additional dirt to put under, can't you?"

"O.K., Boss."

Before noon Nell had succeeded in running down “Lord” Wakeham, and he and Mack were sitting at a table in the bar of the New Blanchard. Wakeham was a stylish-looking Englishman not so young as he made out to be, who laid on his Oxford accent with a trowel. Good Americans usually fell for him.

“Do you know Kate Whiteley?” asked Mack.

“Not personally,” said Wakeham. “One hears a lot about her.”

“Good! Then you’re the man for me. If you can do a little sleuthing.”

“I’m a bally ferret, Mack!”

Mack gave him the particulars of Kate’s name and address in Bronxville. “One of my scouts has reported that there was some trouble up there last night, and I want to know what it was. Kate is trying to rent her house. Get in touch with real-estate agents in Bronxville and have yourself shown over it this afternoon. Better take another name as you’ve made Wakeham pretty notorious around town.”

The Englishman grinned at the compliment.

“I don’t know if Kate will be there,” Mack went on, “it don’t matter, because *she* won’t give out any information. She wants to hire out her servants with the house. That will give you an excuse to talk to them. Particularly the maid they call Beulah. Find out what happened at three o’clock this morning, and what Kate is doing about it. I’d like to look about the place myself before dark, if Kate’s not going to be there. If necessary, call me up. Otherwise meet me here at 5.30.”

“Right!”

After Wakeham had left him, Mack called in two men from Newark who had worked for him on previous occasions. He knew them simply as “Stinger” and “Monk.” They were not the sort that he could bring into the New Blanchard, and he told them to be waiting at the corner of Broadway and Fiftieth Street at five o’clock. A husky pair of strongarm men with battered faces, but very nattily dressed, he wasted no words on them.

“Look, you guys! There’s a fellow called Frank Keesing that I want you to trail until twelve o’clock to-night. He runs the Peerless Restaurant Supply at — Washington Street, and he’s there now, so beat it right down. Probably will be working there late. He has instructions to go to — East Thirty-Sixth Street at midnight. If he goes there, all right, your work is done. But if he shows a disposition to sidestep the engagement, I want you to fetch him to that address, see? and deliver him at the basement door.”

Stinger and Monk grinned understandingly. “O.K., Mack.”

They parted. On his way back down Broadway, Mack looked into the New Blanchard, and found Wakeham waiting for him. The Englishman's report was to the point.

"I had myself shown over the premises, Mack. Top-hole little house, what? Introduced myself as the Honourable James Anstey. The missus was there, so there was no use telephoning you. She was packing her luggage. Said that business was forcing her to move into New York to-night. Hotel Vandermeer. No further information out of her. I told the agent I'd be bringing a friend to view the house to-morrow, meaning you."

"Right!" said Mack.

"Well, naturally, as the prospective master of the house, I interrogated the servants. Chauffeur, cook and housemaid. All visibly upset about something. Chauffeur and cook mum. Housemaid broke down under questioning, and confessed that they were all in a flutter as the result of an attempted burglary last night. Burglars didn't get into the house. Apparently they quarrelled among themselves, and one was shot. His mates carried him away."

"Has it been reported to the police?" asked Mack.

"The girl supposed so. But no police had been to the house."

"Then it hasn't been reported."

"Well, the missus may have thought it would interfere with renting the house."

"Sure! Good work, Algy! I'll go up with you to-morrow morning."

Mack made out to be pleased, but he had gained nothing. Did Kate really believe that it was a common robbery, or was it a convenient story she had made up to keep the servants quiet? The sudden move into New York suggested that she had been badly frightened. But he couldn't be sure.

He went home to dinner. Afterwards he slept for a couple of hours. He lay down and got up again with the same questions hammering at his brain. Had Kate Whiteley put one over on him? Had she planted the man who had killed his boy? Was she even now chuckling and shaking her fat sides in triumph over him? Mack felt as if he would go out of his mind unless he got these questions answered.

He dressed for the evening and went out to a booth to receive a telephone call from Keesing by pre-arrangement. Keesing gave him a report of the address that Kate Whiteley had made to the Restaurant-Keepers' Association. He had got it from one of the members. Kate had said how sorry she was that bootlegging had crept back into their business. Confessed that she had been one of the first offenders, but had now seen the error of her

ways and had cut all that out. Begged her fellow-members to clean up their businesses and keep them clean. And so on.

She had not mentioned either the Peerless Restaurant Supply, Keesing, nor Mack Shenton by name. Her speech had been received with tremendous enthusiasm, but when she circulated an agreement by which the members were to pledge themselves to buy no liquor that did not bear a genuine government stamp, only two or three signed it. The others asked for time to think it over.

Hearing this, Mack smiled grimly. After all, the slash in prices had done its work.

He walked along the street chewing a cigar while the questions hammered in his head. If Kate knew all, why had she spared his name at the meeting? Perhaps he had thrown such a scare into her that she dared not expose him publicly. But in that case, why make a speech at all?

An inner voice whispered to him: Go and see Kate! You can tell by looking in her face how much she knows. If she knows the whole truth about last night, she'll be so astounded at your nerve in coming to her place she won't be able to hide it. Get her talking, and you can certainly tell what's in her mind.

He hailed a taxi, and had himself driven to A l'Aigle d'Or.

The crowd was just arriving from the theatres. Mack, who did not wish Kate to think that he had come specially to the place, but had merely drifted in, went first into the bar downstairs to see whom he could pick up. He found Eric Dommage and Fred Blore there. They had a champagne party above, and had sneaked down for a man's drink, they said.

He went up to the dancing floor with them, and joined their noisy and miscellaneous party. He was vociferously welcomed. Molly Blore, the hostess, talking at the top of her voice, looked all around to make sure everybody was noticing that she had captured Mack Shenton for her party. My popularity doesn't seem to have waned, Mack thought with a wry grin.

He sat down and looked around him. The whole thing suddenly sickened him. All the empty clatter and screaming; the vulgar gilding, the half-naked women, over-rich food and frothing wine! God! what a ghastly bore! Out on that floor he had first seen young Snake dancing on the top of the world. Now Snake would dance no more.

Kate Whiteley, in the course of circulating among her guests, arrived at the Blore's table. Mack had to admit that she looked the part of night-club queen to perfection. She was wearing a purple taffeta dress with a wide-spreading skirt, and all her diamonds. She carried her gay smile without

effort. Dick Harper was with her, a good-looking, smiling young fellow. Mack sized him up keenly. How much did he know?

The usual mad greetings were exchanged. “Fred, you old rascal . . . Molly, *darling!* . . . . Kate! . . . Kate! . . . Kate!” Coming to Mack, in turn, Kate cried out with a glance as open as the sky: “And Mack, the heart-breaker! Oh, be still! be still!” (Patting her ample bosom.)

Mack kissed her hand, thinking: Damn the woman! Her eyes never flickered when she saw me!

As Kate prepared to move on, Mack manoeuvred to be the last to speak to her. “Dance with me,” he murmured.

“I’ve given up dancing with the customers, darling,” she said. “The old feet revolted.”

“Well then, let’s have a drink.”

She looked at him queerly. He couldn’t interpret the look. “Why, sure!” she said. “But I couldn’t carry you off from Molly’s table like this, or the woman would stab me with a table fork! Meet me in ten minutes at the last small table by the wall on this side. I’ll turn down a chair as I pass.”

She *can’t* know about last night, thought Mack. No woman alive could carry it off like that!

But when he joined her a few minutes later he wasn’t so sure. Kate sat with her elbows on the table and her finger-tips together, smiling at him like the cat who swallowed the canary. A world of meaning darkened her eyes—but what the meaning was, he couldn’t determine.

“This is lovely,” he said, sitting. “I hardly thought you’d speak to me after Thursday night.”

“Oh, that’s all over,” she said, waving her hands. “I’m grateful to you for forcing a showdown, now that it’s past. Muriel and I understand each other. I feel as light as air now that I no longer have the horrible secret to guard. I should have told her years ago.”

Is the woman simple-minded? Mack asked himself, or is she cleverer than I am? “Aren’t you afraid that I might go to see her again?” he asked, making his smile a little threatening.

“Go ahead! Go ahead!” cried Kate. “It would do the child a world of good! She leads such a dull life in the Settlement House. . . . She’d get a donation out of you.”

She’s only bluffing, Mack told himself—but Kate’s speech stung. “Well, I will,” he said, smiling still.

"I didn't think *you* would speak to *me* to-night," Kate went on with her artificially brightened eyes dancing.

"Why not?"

"Well, I have been obliged to turn down your young friend Keesing."

"Is that so?" said Mack with an idle air. "Wasn't his liquor any good?"

"Oh, sure! But I decided that it was a mistake to chisel on the government. No more bootleg for mine."

"Well, that's up to Keesing." Anger burned in Mack's throat. She was laughing at him. She thought she had him on the run!

"I moved into town to-night," said Kate brightly.

"Yes? Why?"

"Oh, the Bronxville house was too lonely without Muriel. I can see more of her in town. Muriel was the only excuse for that house."

"A charming house!" said Mack.

"True, but too far removed from things. . . . I had a nasty scare last night."

Mack almost jumped in his chair. Was there no limit to the woman's gall? "What was that?" he asked.

Kate's eyes were fixed on him steadily. "I don't exactly know," she said. "There was a shot in the back-yard, and a lot of men ran away. Robbers, I suppose. . . . Maybe they quarrelled or maybe a pistol went off by mistake. My housemaid went into hysterics. We found blood by the back steps, and the rear hedge was all broken."

She *doesn't* know, he thought. She only had a suspicion, and is trying to read confirmation in my face. Well, nobody can read *my* face. "What a narrow escape!" he said with a solicitous air.

"That's what I thought," said Kate in a voice so dry that he was forced to change his mind again. She knows! he thought. She is only stringing me!

He said casually: "Do you suppose the fellow was killed?"

"I don't know," said Kate. "My chauffeur said it took two of his mates to drag him away."

"I didn't see anything in the evening papers about it."

"Oh, I asked the police not to give it out. I *have* to rent my house, you see."

Lying! thought Mack. "Where was your detective?" he said casually.

"I have no detective. I let him go when Muriel came to town."



“By the way, where did you get him from? I have need of a good man for a little private work.”

Kate’s eyes narrowed for a second before she answered. “Oh, he wasn’t a regular detective,” she said quickly. “Just the chauffeur of a friend of mine that I borrowed for a few nights. You couldn’t get him.”

A tissue of lies! thought Mack. It was her man who shot Snake. “Well, I’m glad you’re out of the house,” he said. “It must be terrible to have a man killed at your door.”

Kate shrugged: “It doesn’t concern me. One might paraphrase scripture and say: He who lives by the gun shall perish by the gun!”

That’s for me! thought Mack. Rage gripped him so shrewdly he could find no answer. He smiled. Kate was looking at him steadily.

Presently she jumped up. “Well, I must patrol my beat!” she cried. “Do go back to Molly’s table, so the woman won’t lay for me. Nice to have seen you. I’m so glad that our friendship has survived these storms. You must drop in often. Bye-bye Casanova!”

She swept away, calling greetings from table to table. Mack stood, gazing after her with a fond smile that covered a raging hell inside. Laughing at me! Laughing at me! She doesn’t dare to come out against me, but she will drop her little hints here and there. He felt a dangerous pressure in his temples.

He did not return to the Blore’s table. He made a circuit all around the floor to avoid it. Smiling, smiling until his face ached; waving his hand gaily to those who greeted him. Just how he got out of the place he couldn’t have told. He flung himself with a groan in the back of a taxi, and gave his address.

They were all there waiting for him. He felt almost kindly towards them now. This was his mob. Evidently Keesing had made no attempt to escape. He had been too hard on Keesing, on all of them. He must bind them to him more closely. He would need every one of them to help him accomplish his revenge.

“There’s nothing more to do to-night,” he said to Nell. “You can go home. I’ll phone you in the morning.”

She stared at him, and her face began to work.

“For God’s sake, there’s nothing to bawl about!” he said irritably. “Go and get some sleep.”

She hastened out of the room.

“Have you finished what I told you to do?” Mack asked Emil sombrely.

“It’s waiting, Boss.”

“All right. I’ll want all you fellows to help me in a couple of minutes.”

As he was about to turn away, his eye fell on Lyn. Emil Sanner was sullen; Keesing jumpy, but Lyn sat there as calm as a year-old child. That kid has nerve, too, thought Mack. He’s not afraid of god or devil. It’s true he’s always riled me, but maybe I do him wrong. Maybe I could make a pal of him. A man has got to have somebody that he can be easy with.

“Lyn,” he said, “come into the office a minute.”

Lyn followed him into the little room with a questioning air.

“Shut the door,” said Mack. “I just wanted to ask you to have a drink with me. Don’t like to drink alone.”

Lyn was surprised. “Sure!” he said, grinning. His infrequent smile was attractive.

Mack took a bottle and two small glasses from the deep bottom drawer of his desk. “I got some thirty-year-old whisky here that I don’t put out on the sideboard,” he said.

He filled the glasses and pushed one of them towards Lyn. Picking up his own glass, he stared at it for a moment. He was thinking of Snake. Suddenly raising it, he said:

“Here’s to justice!”

“Sure, I’ll drink to that!” said Lyn. “To justice!”

They drained their glasses and set them down.

“How you like your job here?” asked Mack.

“I already told you, Boss. All right!”

“After last night?”

Lyn shrugged. “Accidents will happen!”

“What do you think of me as a boss?”

“All right.”

“You’re hellish close-mouthed about it,” grumbled Mack.

“It’s just my way, Boss.”

“Well, I like it outside the house; among strangers. I feel confidence in a man who can keep his mouth shut. But when you’re home here with me . . .”

Lyn looked uncomfortable. “I got the habit of keeping a tight hold on myself, Boss. I can’t let go when I want to.”

Mack took another drink. The good liquor warmed his veins. “I got to keep everything in my own hands,” he complained. “It’s too much responsibility. I want somebody I can share it with, a partner.”

“I hope it will be me,” said Lyn.

“Damn it, how can I make friends with a wooden-faced guy?”

“That’s your fault,” was Lyn’s unexpected reply. “We’re all scared to death of you in this house. You put the fear of God in us with your eye. How can we ease down?”

Mack was delighted with his answer. He filled both glasses. “You’re a good fellow, Lyn! We must get together oftener.” He raised his glass. “To our better acquaintance!”

“To our better acquaintance!” said Lyn.

“Now we got a nasty job to do,” said Mack. “Wait in the dining-room until I call you.”

Mack unlocked the door of the living-room and went in; pulled down the blinds carefully; switched on lights. There was a faint, sweetish smell on the air that made his flesh crawl. First time I ever played undertaker, he thought. When he drew down the cover from the dead youth’s face he saw that a subtle change had taken place. This hardly seemed like Snake any more. Must put him away quick.

He had something to do first. Turning the body on its side, he opened his pen-knife, and making a little incision in the back of the scalp, pried out the bullet that was lodged there. Indispensable evidence!

He couldn’t bear the idea of dropping him in the earth unprotected. With considerable difficulty, he raised the rigid body and thrust the coverlet under him. He didn’t want to call for help with this job. By slow degrees he got him neatly wrapped up. It was a rare piece of antique Chinese embroidery; yellow with an immense green dragon; cost him five hundred smackers at Yamanaka’s. What of it? The best was none too good. The boy had a weakness for high colour. Too bad he couldn’t see his shroud.

Finally Mack called in the three men, and Snake was carried downstairs in the same manner that he had been carried up that morning. Two flights this time, into the close, low cellar lighted by the glare of a naked bulb. The junk around the walls cast strange-shaped shadows. In front of the furnace yawned the grave with piles of earth head and foot that smelled strongly of illuminating gas. The bricks were piled a little further away.

The three men paused beside the grave, and looked inquiringly over their shoulders at Mack.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” he asked sharply.

Lyn, bearing his third of the burden, stepped across the head of the grave, and Emil straddled the foot. The three of them lowered the silken-

wrapped bundle as far as they were able, then dropped it with a thud that struck a knife through Mack. It was a moment or two before he could speak.

“You can go home,” he said harshly to Keesing; and to Lyn: “Go to bed.” To Emil he said: “You’ll have to stay and finish this job.”

Mack stood by the grave looking down into it. Well, good-bye, Snake, he thought. You were the nerviest kid who ever came my way. I shan’t forget you. . . . Anyhow, I know now who did it, and by God! I’ll square your account!

He stepped back, and Emil threw in a shovelful of earth. The soft plop as it fell, caused Mack involuntarily to clap his hands over his ears. He made for the stairs.

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FOR the expedition up to Bronxville next morning, Mack chose to hire a “drive yourself” car, as he did not wish to have any unnecessary witnesses along. He picked up Wakeham at the New Blanchard at nine-thirty, and headed north. Wakeham looked as if Savile Row, Bond Street and Piccadilly had combined to turn him out. Mack approved of him as a companion.

Mack said as they drove along: “I’m not interested in the interior of the house. But I want to question the maid further. Certain things have happened which put the situation in a new light. If the house is closed up, we must find where the maid is. She has seen me, so you’ll have to question her for me.”

The Englishman said thoughtlessly: “Just tell me what it is you’re after, Mack, and I can act more intelligently.”

Mack turned steely. Drawing into the curb and stopping the car, he turned the full power of his eyes upon the gaping Wakeham.

The latter shrivelled under it. “I say, Mack,” he stammered. “I’m sorry! I spoke without thinking. I didn’t mean to intrude on your affairs.”

Mack held him with his eyes. “Let’s have this understood once and for all,” he said levelly. “You’re a well-dressed man and a good-looker. What’s your object in life? To live without working. Very well, I’m in a position to pay you well for various trifling services. But . . .” He paused.

“Indeed, I know it,” stammered Wakeham. “I want to be your man, Mack.”

“Then take a warning,” said Mack. “Never try to go any further into a thing than I indicate to you. And never open your mouth about my business to a living soul!”

“Oh, quite! quite!”

“The moment you blab you are not only useless to me, you become dangerous,” Mack went on in his steady voice. “Well, living the life you do, fluffing from one gambling table to another, who would ever miss you if you disappeared?”

Wakeham was sweating. “I know,” he whispered, wiping his face.

“Perhaps you’d like to get out here and take a taxi back to town.”

“No, I want to work for you, Mack.”

“All right. Don’t forget what I told you.”

Mack engaged his gears, and the car moved ahead again.

They stopped in front of the real-estate office in Bronxville. “Let the agent suppose you’re thinking of taking the house,” said Mack. “Tell him you don’t need to go over it again to-day, but you want to talk further with the servants.”

Wakeham went in. When he returned he said:

“The house is closed up. Mrs. Aymery has taken the chauffeur to New York with her. She has put the two maids in a boarding-house here in Bronxville. I have the address.”

“All right,” said Mack. “We’ll take a room at the hotel; two rooms.”

Two such elegant gentlemen were received at the local inn with deference. They registered under assumed names. “We want a suite just for an hour or two,” said Mack carelessly. “A couple of business appointments.”

A messenger was sent to fetch Beulah to interview the gentleman who was thinking of leasing Mrs. Aymery’s house.

While they waited for her in their suite, Mack said to Wakeham: “What I want to know is, what happened inside the house when the shot was heard. When Beulah first saw her mistress, what did Kate look like, what did she do, what did she say?”

“Right,” said Wakeham, humbly.

“Before you let the girl go, come in to me to find out what further questions I may want you to ask her.” Mack took a little nicked shield from his pocket. “Here, pin this inside your coat.”

“What’s this?” asked Wakeham in great surprise.

“Fake police badge. Make out you’re a police officer and flash it on her. She’s an ignorant little Jane.”

When Beulah was announced, Mack retired into the bedroom of the suite, leaving the door slightly open. Wakeham led up to his questioning with a good deal of skill. He told the girl that his desire to rent Mrs. Aymery’s house was only a bit of camouflage; that in reality he was a

detective, investigating the shooting. He must have shown her his badge then for Mack heard her gasp of dismay. Wakeham assured her that nobody was going to trouble her if she answered his questions truthfully, and kept her mouth shut afterwards.

Finally, he came to the real matter. "I suppose you were in bed when the shot was fired outside the house?"

"Yes."

"Asleep?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I . . . I just couldn't get to sleep, sir."

"What did you do when you heard the shot?"

"I jump up and run in cook's room. I shake her, but she didn't wake. So I run down to the second floor."

"What for?"

"Well, I just wanted to be with somebody."

"Whom did you find on the second floor?"

"Mrs. Aymery and Mr. Harper had run out of their rooms, and was standing at the head of the stairs looking out of the rear window. But you couldn't see a thing outside."

"How did she look?"

"She was scared, sir. She was scared bad."

"What did she say?"

"She said: 'This was no attempted robbery, Dick. He was trying to get me! He was trying to get me!'"

"What did you understand by that?"

"I didn't understand nothing. She was just talking wild."

"Did she say who 'he' was?"

"No, sir. Mr. Harper seemed to know."

"Then what happened?"

"She saw me, and sent me back to bed."

"Did you go?"

"I just went part way up the stairs. But I didn't hear nothing more, sir, because Mrs. Aymery and Mr. Harper went downstairs."

"And in the morning?"

“Before breakfast I seen her out back, looking and looking in the grass. First in the yard, then in the field behind. In the field she picked up something, and when she come in she showed us a black gun she found there.”

“What did she say about it?”

“Said she was going to turn it over to the police.”

“Did she telephone to the police?”

“I didn’t hear her, sir.”

“Did any police come to the house?”

“No, sir.”

Wakeham went on, phrasing his questions in different ways, but that was all he succeeded in getting out of her. Finally he came into the bedroom, and looked at Mack questioningly.

“Let her go,” growled Mack.

So Beulah was dismissed. Mack paced the room scowling. What the girl had said failed to jibe with his theory of the case. It was clear that Kate suspected Mack was behind it; but if she had had a man on guard, and this man had shot Snake, why in God’s name had he thrown away his gun afterwards, and forced Kate to look for it? If I could get my hands on that gun! thought Mack.

The two men presently left the hotel. Mack drove Wakeham to the railway station, and curtly ordered him to take the first train to New York and await further orders. Wakeham had learned his lesson. He said nothing.

Mack went on in the car. After some searching he found the dirt road that meandered across the fields back of Kate’s house. It was an abandoned road, and they had had to cut a wire fence to reach it. There were no tracks to be seen in it except those of one car which had gone in and returned; in short, the car driven by Lyn. It was a pleasant, tree-bordered track, with a prospect of green fields on the left, sweeping down into a shallow valley with graceful elms marking the fence lines. Mack’s eyes merely skated over all this.

He stopped his car a little distance short of the spot where Lyn must have waited, and got out to pursue his investigations on foot.

He had no difficulty in locating the exact spot where the car had drawn up at the side of the road. Between the road and the field stretched a shallow depression in the earth where water was accustomed to gather after rain. The water had dried up but the mud remained, and in the tracks that crossed it back and forth was written a pretty legible account of what had taken place



thirty hours before. Mack smiled grimly when he saw it. Lucky the police hadn't been called in on this case.

He could see where four people had left the car and headed straight for Kate's house. There were Emil's broad and heavy tracks, Keesing's, the average-sized man's foot, and Snake's, longer and more slenderly made. And, of course, the holes made by Nell's heels were easiest of all to follow. Mack studied each track, measured it with a millimeter scale he had brought with him, and put down the measurements in his note-book.

After the four had left the car, Mack saw where Lyn had turned in the road, and backed up to a spot a little farther on. Here also could be read how Emil and Keesing had come running back to the car, dragging the dead man between them, and how Nell had approached from a slightly different direction. The earth was all tramped down where they had stood and boosted the body into the car. All this confirmed the stories they had told.

But Mack discovered an additional set of tracks here that caused his brows to draw together. A man's foot, shorter than Snake's, wearing a shoe made on a straight last. He had left the car, and had returned to it, running. Mack remembered the expensive-looking shoes that Lyn wore, apparently custom-made. So Lyn had lied when he said he stayed with the car. You could not trust any of them! However, if Kate was behind the shooting, Lyn's movements were not of vital importance. Mack put the fact away for future reference.

Mack started across the field, using his eyes as he went. Underfoot there was a rich new growth of green that showed no tracks, but the dead stalks of last year's weeds were sticking up, and it was possible for a good eye to follow the course of the party across the field and back again, by observing where the dead stalks were broken down.

When he reached the young privet hedge that marked the rear boundary of Kate's property, he saw the broken place where Snake's body had been dragged through. On the other side of the hedge the yard was covered with grass; fresh springy turf that would retain no impression longer than an hour or two.

Stepping over the hedge, he looked about him, fixing the lay-out of the place in his mind. Off on his right abutting on the rear line, was the three-car garage, with a little porch across the end where the chauffeur could enjoy the air in the evenings. The door leading to the chauffeur's rooms opened on this porch.

In front of Mack stretched the white-painted house with the kitchen porch near the right-hand end. From the garage a cement walk led to the

kitchen step, and thence along the back of the house, and around the corner towards the front. At the back it was bordered on the outside by a line of rose bushes. At Mack's immediate left were two small outhouses; chicken-house with a small run, and a tool-house.

He advanced to the kitchen step. There had been an attempt to scrub it out, but the marks of blood on the cement were still there. Now if Emil's story was correct, the killer must have fired from some point on or alongside the path from the garage. Laying off the ground in imaginary squares, Mack searched minutely through the short grass, back and forth. He found nothing.

He then tried to see how far he could check up on Keesing's story. Off on his left a high dense growth of shrubbery separated Kate's grounds from the adjoining place. The earth was cultivated around the roots of the shrubbery, and by the tracks in the soft loam Mack quickly established that Keesing had gone through to take a look and had come back again, as he said he had.

The shot, Keesing said, had been fired at the moment he came out of the shrubbery. He had seen the flash in a direct line drawn from where he stood to the garage. Mack followed up that line, laid off the grass with his eye as before, and getting down on his knees, searched it inch by inch. Finally, with a grunt of satisfaction, he pounced on what he was looking for. The copper jacket of an exploded shell. He examined it eagerly; a new type of shell; thirty-eight calibre; fired from a modern self-ejecting pistol.

So Keesing's version was the right one. The killer had been standing in line with Snake and the way they had all come across the field. About fifteen paces from his victim. A pretty good shot in the dark. But doubtless Snake had been outlined against the white house. Snake had seen his assailant, and had shot first. Mack stuck a twig in the ground to mark the spot where he picked up the empty shell.

He returned to the place where Snake's blood stained the cement. Immediately alongside was the cellar window by which Snake had intended to enter. Mack remembered having been told that this window was never used, and that it was probable none in the house would notice that the bolt was drawn back. The sash was of the type that is hung from the top. Mack prodded it with his foot and it swung in.

He grinned and looked around him sharply. This was an unlooked-for opportunity. There was nobody in sight. The houses on either side were screened by their shrubbery, and no windows looked down on Mack. Sticking his head through the window, he saw that the floor was about five feet below. He let himself through it.

Proceeding to the main floor of the house, he found that it had been left just as he had seen it on his two visits. But the shutters were all closed, and already it had the forlorn look of any deserted habitation. After a hasty tour through the big living-room, he went upstairs. Kate's bedroom was at the top, but he left that for the moment, while he fixed the general lay-out of the rooms in his mind.

Down a short corridor was the room where Dick Harper had slept. Mack had it in mind that Dick might have fired the shot which killed Snake, though Beulah's story indicated otherwise. But the girl was obviously unreliable. At any rate, all of Dick's belongings had now been removed from the room. It was as neat and characterless as an hotel bedroom.

On the other side of the house there was a room which, by a dozen graceful touches, Mack recognised as Muriel's. Indeed, the windows and the door having been closed, a faint suggestion of her own particular perfume hung around it still, causing a grinding pain to take Mack. Anything that reminded him of the girl drove him wild. It was the first time since he had come to manhood that Mack had been denied anything he had set his heart on. Well . . . it won't be much longer, he promised himself.

Since Muriel had been out of the house for several days previous to the killing of Snake, there was nothing in her room that threw any light on the matter.

Then Kate's room adjoining. A large framed picture of Muriel, smiling, hung at the foot of the bed. Mack cursed it, and averted his head. Throwing up the windows, he turned the slats of the shutters to give himself light. Everything in the big room spoke of Kate's hurried departure. She had taken a part of her clothes; the rest were piled around on chairs. A trunk stood open waiting to be packed. Bureau drawers were in complete disorder.

Under a pile of lingerie on a chair, Mack's search came to an end. He grinned in hard satisfaction. There lay a wicked-looking automatic of black steel, thirty-eight calibre. He put on his gloves, and carrying it to the window, saw that it bore some faint suggestions of finger-prints. One shell had been discharged from it. Wrapping it in a piece of lingerie, he dropped it in his pocket.

A brand-new gun, he thought. Easier to trace its sale. Now I'll get to the bottom of this.

He let himself out the kitchen door, allowing it to lock after him, and returned to his car.

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LYN, when Mack started out so early in the morning, left the house as soon as he was out of sight, and called up Muriel from a pay station. He found her deeply agitated. It appeared that Kate had not told her the whole story of what had happened at Bronxville until she got down to New York the night before.

“I must see you! I must see you!” insisted Muriel.

Lyn’s heart sank. He wanted to see her bad enough, but not to talk about *that*. “I’ll find a place where we can meet,” he said. “I’ll call you again inside half an hour.”

He hailed a taxi, and drove down to Phil Brinsley’s flat on Irving Place. It was in an immense new building with hundreds of tenants, and one could go in and out without attracting notice. Lyn leaned heavily on Phil. Phil, so to speak, was his second line of defence.

Lyn found him getting ready to go to his office. The sight of the tall, grinning, blue-eyed Phil cheered his heart. After what he had been through it was fine to be assured that there were still good fellows in the world.

Phil smacked him on the back, crying: “By God! I’m glad to see you, old Stove-in-bottom! Each morning I wonder if you’re going to turn up with a whole skin that day. I suppose you think I’m foolish but I worry like hell about you. I wish we could have enlisted in the crime legion together.”

“You wouldn’t last a day,” said Lyn, grinning.

“Why the heck wouldn’t I, as well as you?”

“Your moral indignation would burst out.”

“Ah, go to hell! . . . How are things going?”

“Rotten! I don’t seem to make any progress, and I get drawn in deeper every day. I’ve already committed enough crimes to earn me a life sentence, but Mack Shenton doesn’t trust me yet.”

“You can hardly blame him for that,” said Phil, laughing. “Where is he now?”

“I don’t know. My guess is that he’s gone up to Bronxville. God knows what turn his fury will take if he finds anything up there.”

“Want me to stick around in the Allingham to-day in case you need me?” asked Phil. “My old man will give me the day off. I can write my brief there.”

“Not yet,” said Lyn. “That must be saved for our final play.”

“If Shenton is out of the house why aren’t you searching now?” asked Phil.

“With Emil, Lena and Mitchell, the chauffeur, all watching me?” returned Lyn dryly. “Even if I was alone in the house I could do nothing. I know the inventories are there, because Shenton has to consult them when he makes out his orders. They are either in his bedroom or in his office. I can’t search any further in the bedroom without smashing things up. As for the office, he locks it when he goes out. All I can do is to wait and watch until he gives away his hiding-place. Then I can go after them with an axe if necessary and make my getaway. . . . I have the combination of the safe.”

“How in hell did you get that?”

“By watching him open it, and fixing the numbers in my mind.”

Lyn paced up and down Phil’s long living-room, grinding his teeth on the stem of his pipe. Phil, glancing at him shrewdly, said:

“What is it specially that’s biting you this morning?”

Lyn glanced at him, startled, then scowled out of the window. “Phil, there’s one thing about this business that I haven’t told you,” he muttered.

“What!” cried Phil. “Something in addition to battle, murder and sudden death? What is it?”

“It’s damned hard to get out,” growled Lyn.

“Spill it!”

“Well . . . you can laugh all you want . . . I’m in love.”

Phil didn’t laugh, only grinned widely. “For God’s sake! Didn’t you have enough on your hands?”

“It complicates the situation damnably!” muttered Lyn.

“Are you telling me? . . . I suppose it’s the girl you rescued.”

Lyn nodded dumbly.

“I ought to have foreseen that. . . . Have you seen her again?”

“Once. . . . I call her up whenever I get a chance.”

“Well! I must say you’re a fast worker!”

“Nothing is settled,” said Lyn. “It’s too soon for that. But she’s a brave, generous, frank sort of girl; she doesn’t hide her feelings. She likes me and sticks to it, though appearances are all against me. Everything is all right—or it would be, if I could only pull off this damned job!”

“Why did you feel that you had to tell me this to-day?” asked Phil acutely.

Lyn looked out of the window again. “Well . . . she’s all worked up naturally, about the seeming attempt on her mother’s life, and she says she’s got to see me. I can’t go down to the Settlement House. I’m afraid to meet her in any public place. I was wondering . . .”

Phil didn’t wait for him to finish. “Sure! have her up here. This is the very place.” He searched in the drawer of his desk for a spare key. “You must have a key to the joint so you can take refuge here at any time.”

“Thanks,” said Lyn. “And I’ll give you a key to my rooms at the Allingham in case I have to send you a hurry call to go there.”

“Righto!”

Lyn immediately sat down to telephone. When he left the instrument, he said: “She’ll take a taxi at the door. Be here in ten minutes.”

“Well, I’ll toddle down to the law-mill,” said Phil.

“No! Wait until she comes,” said Lyn self-consciously. “I’m so darn proud of her I want to show her off to you. . . . Besides, I want you to be her friend so that she can call on you at any time if I should be out of reach.”

“Sure, I’ll wait,” said Phil, “if that’s the way you feel about it.”

They hung about the living-room smoking fast and making talk to cover their feelings. When Muriel came in in her green sports suit and jaunty hat, direct, eager and ardent, Phil murmured involuntarily:

“Well I don’t wonder!”

“Muriel,” said Lyn, “this is Phil Brinsley, the best friend I’ve got. I want him to be your friend, too.”

“Well what does he think about that?” asked Muriel smiling.

“I wish I were in his shoes,” said Phil.

She blushed and laughed to distract attention from it.

“Look,” said Phil, “since we’ve been pitched at each other’s heads like this, we’d better start getting acquainted. Will you have dinner with me to-night?”

“Love to,” she said promptly. “It will have to be early because I have evening classes. Call for me at the Settlement at six.”

“I’ll be there with my hair slicked down and my boots greased.”

Phil presently left them. Muriel went to Lyn with her hands out and he took them in his. “Jack,” she said, looking deep in his eyes, “I told you over the phone what happened up in Bronxville early yesterday morning, and you didn’t seem surprised. . . . Do you know anything about it?”

He saw that he would have to answer this question honestly or lose her for ever. “Yes,” he said grimly. “I was there.”

She pulled her hands away. “You were there! . . . with this murder party! What am I to think of that?”

“I hadn’t been told anything beforehand,” he said doggedly. “When I learned what they were up to, I . . . well, I shot the man who had been delegated to get Kate. There wasn’t anything else to do.”

“Shot him!” she gasped. “Is he . . . is he dead?”

Lyn nodded. “Do you shrink from me because I have killed a man?”

Before he knew what was happening, her arms were around his neck. “No! no! no!” she cried passionately. “You did it for us. I ought to have known that it was you who saved us!”

Lyn pressed his lips to hers as in a dream. He felt that this was the right way for it to happen. No words of love; no vows or protestations, but a spontaneous coming together. He forgot everything else in the world. Muriel’s insistent questions came to him from a distance.

“What happened afterwards? . . . What did the others do? . . . How did you get away from them?”

“Ah, give me a moment!” he murmured. “One little moment. I am drowned in love!”

After a moment or two they sat down soberly side by side on the sofa. “I had the luck to catch him alone,” said Lyn. “He shot at me first.”

Muriel squeezed his arm tight. “Oh, Jack!”

“Nobody in the world but you and Phil know that I did it.”

“You must get out of that house!” cried Muriel. “You must! You must!”

“I can’t do that,” he said sombrely.

“Why? Why?”

“I can’t tell you that.”

She drew away from him. “A secret? Already?”

“It’s not my secret, sweetheart. There are things you are forced to keep even from those nearest to you.”

“Is there a woman mixed up in it?” she demanded.

He was enchanted by her spurt of jealousy. “That’s silly,” he said, grinning. “You have only to look at me to see that every bit of me is yours.”

“Not while you have secrets,” she muttered.

He held out his arms but she refused to come back.

“Mack Shenton must be denounced for his attempt on my mother’s life,” she said. “And you’re the only one who’s in a position to do it!”

“Give me a few days,” he pleaded.

“Suppose he makes another attempt?”

“We will guard against that.”

“Evidently you love your secret better than me,” she said.

He shook his head. “I gave my word before I ever saw you. Don’t you see? a man can’t back out of a thing just because circumstances change, and he would like to.”

“No, I don’t see it,” she said sorely.

He drew a long breath for patience. “You make it pretty hard for me!”

“Hard?” she cried. “How about me?” The tears came suddenly, and he gathered her in his arms again. “It’s only because I love you,” she said brokenly. “I know you are in frightful danger every minute in that house. How can I bear it?”

“In two or three days I hope to be free,” he said.

She clung to him.

“Is it all right now?” he whispered.

“With me it is. I can’t help loving you. . . . But what will I tell Kate?”

“Don’t tell her anything . . . yet. Only a person who loved me could have patience.”

“You haven’t told me yet that you love me.”

“Do you doubt it?”

“I’d like to hear you say it.”

He held her very close. “Can’t say it to order, foolish one! It’ll come out when you’re not expecting it.”



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IT WAS approaching six o'clock when Mack got back to New York. He drove straight down to Ike Mandel's pawn shop on the Bowery. Ike did a considerable business in firearms, both legitimate and illegitimate, and Mack had had relations with him for a long time. In other words any weapons required in Mack's business were purchased from Ike, and no questions asked.

Apart from business, firearms were Ike's ruling passion (though he had no occasion to use them himself) and he had made a study of the whole field, with particular attention to the science of ballistics. Ike was solid with the police also—who were presumably unaware of the illicit end of his business, and was often called upon to testify in shooting cases. The very man that Mack required at this juncture.

In the private office back of the shop, Mack found the little pawnbroker examining the workmanship of a piece of antique jewellery that he had taken for a pledge. He bore a grotesque resemblance to a Gothic saint, with a halo of curly grey hair around an otherwise bald poll. But his face was not saintly.

Mack laid the new automatic on the table before him. "Ike," he said, "I've got a case involving a shooting that I want to solve without consulting the police."

"So!" said Ike, putting aside the jewellery. He asked no questions.

"Can you make anything of the finger-prints on this?"

Picking up his magnifying glass, Ike studied the weapon. After a moment he shook his head. "This gun was handled by more than one person. And time has passed. The prints have faded. I can study it further if you want, but nothing will come of it. The prints obliterate each other. . . . One of them was left by a woman's hand, if that's of interest to you."

“Very interesting,” said Mack with a hard grin, “but I already knew it. . . . Let the prints go, and tell me if this bullet was discharged from the gun, and if this is the empty shell it came from.” Mack laid the objects before him.

“I’ll have to shoot the gun a few times,” said Ike. “I have a range in my cellar. Can you give me twenty minutes?”

“Right. I haven’t eaten all day. I’ll go get a bite and come back. . . . And Ike, I’ll want you to trace the sale of this gun.”

“That’ll be easy,” said Ike. “This model of Trevor-Jackson has only been on the market a few weeks. You see the serial number of this one is only 179. It’s a beautiful weapon. I ordered half a dozen for my own stock.”

Mack left the shop. When he returned half an hour later, Ike was ready for him.

“The bullet you left me,” he said, “had been fired from the gun you brought. The indications are that it was the first time that gun had been fired since it left the factory. I can demonstrate it to you.”

“Never mind,” growled Mack. “I’ll take your word for it.”

“And here’s a funny thing,” Ike went on. “That gun was sold over my counter.”

“What the hell . . .” cried Mack, starting up.

“It’s one of the half-dozen I ordered. Numbers 178 and 180 are still on the shelf.”

“Well . . . who bought it?” asked Mack, grinning in anticipation.

“It was my clerk made the sale,” said Ike. “He had gone home when I found it out. . . . As you know,” he went on with a sly grin, “we can only sell a gun to a person who shows a licence to carry it. When a sale is made the buyer’s name, address and licence number are entered in our book. . . .”

“What’s the name?” demanded Mack impatiently.

Ike raised his shoulders. “What does it matter? Jack Johnson or John Doe. A phony sale and a phony name.”

“What date?”

“April 20. Two weeks ago. It’s all entered in the book, but when I called up police headquarters they told me no such licence number had been issued.”

“What do you make of it?” demanded Mack.

“My clerk is grafting,” said Ike dryly. “He would get a bonus for selling this gun. He would put the price of the gun in the cash register, and the

bonus in his pocket. I have telephoned for him. Told him I wanted him to mind the shop so he wouldn't smell a rat. He's on the way."

In a minute or two an unwholesome-looking young man entered the shop; tall, skinny, awkward; with Jewish features of the fore and aft type; pronounced Adam's apple. Ike Mandel's face turned sharp and ugly when he saw the suspected clerk, but his voice dripped honey.

"Ah, Abey! You're a good boy to come so quick when I telephone. This gentleman is a good customer, Abey. We want to ask you a question or two about the Trevor-Jackson 38 that you sold on April 20."

The clerk's face turned greenish with terror. He turned to make a break for the door, but Mack caught his wrist and yanked him back. His Adam's apple worked up and down agonisingly. "I'm an honest boy!" he whined. "I don't know nothing about it! I don't know nothing!"

"Be quiet!" said Mack. "I'm not an officer. No harm will come to you if you tell the truth."

The clerk turned to his master. "Mr. Mandel, I wouldn't graft offen you!" he wailed. "Why you been almost a father to me, Mr. Mandel. I never took a cent belonging to you. I swear it before God!"

"Shut up!" said Mack. "And answer my questions."

The clerk hung his head. "Yes, sir."

"You know what the law is respecting the sale of firearms?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that it's a felony to break it."

Very low. "Yes, sir."

"The person you sold this gun to had no licence because we called up Police Headquarters and found out."

No answer from the clerk.

"You say that you got no bribe, no bonus for selling this gun?"

"Not a cent! I swear it! I swear it!"

"Then what was it that induced you to break the law in this case?"

The clerk's chin was on his breast. He said faintly: "It was a girl bought the gun off me. I kind of fell for her. She was so pretty and all and so nice dressed. She made a friend of me, like. Talked to me like I was as good as herself. And I lose my head, sort of. Ah, I'm only human. I sold her the gun."

"Describe her," said Mack.

The clerk shook his head helplessly. "Pretty as a pitcher, Boss. Blue eyes and golden hair, and dressed so choice like a society girl. Nothing like her ever come into the shop before."

"What kind of a story did she put up?"

"No story, Boss. Just asks for a gun. When I told her she had to have a licence first, she shows me the licence, but wouldn't let me see the name or the number. Said she wanted the gun to protect her mother. . . ."

Mack suddenly showed his teeth.

"Said she was afraid of the publicity. She begged so hard for it I sold her the gun and made a fake entry."

"Does that fit in with what you know already?" asked Ike with a shrewd veiled glance in Mack's face.

"I'll find out," said Mack darkly. ". . . Wait a minute!"

Picking up the telephone, he got the Child Welfare Settlement on the wire and asked for "Miss Western." When he heard Nell's voice, he asked:

"Is a certain party in the house?"

"No. She's just gone out to dinner."

"Alone."

"No. A young man took her."

Mack clenched his teeth. "What young man?"

Nell was speaking close into the receiver. "I don't know his name. I'll try to find it out before I leave."

"Do you know where they've gone?"

"Yes. I overheard part of their talk. He wanted to take her up-town, but she said there wasn't time. They've gone to Loder's restaurant on Grand Street."

"All right."

Mack hung up, and turned to the terrified young Jew. "Come with me for half an hour," he said. "If you do what I want, I'll square you with Ike here."

The clerk looked inquiringly at his master.

"I wouldn't lie to you, Abey," said Ike. "This is not a cop but a good customer. If you can satisfy the customer I'll say no more about this sale."

The clerk followed Mack meekly out of the shop.

A few minutes later they were standing in front of the big, brilliantly-lighted restaurant that serves the most prosperous element of the lower East Side, a famous place in its way. Amongst the dozens of full tables inside, Mack's eyes were instantly attracted as if by a kind of magnetism to the

particular table where Muriel sat. She was smiling at a young man who had his back turned to Mack.

Such a stab of jealousy pierced Mack that for the moment he clean forgot the young Jew beside him. With hot eyes he searched Muriel's face. Smiling at him. What did that smile signify? How far had they gone? Of the man all he could see was that he was young. That was sufficient to madden Mack. God! what a pleasure it would have given him to grind the fellow's young face into a pulp under his heel. And I'll do it! he vowed to himself.

The whining voice of the clerk recalled him in his surroundings. "She's in there, Boss, if that's what you brought me here for. I mean the girl I sold the gun to. That's her by the wall in the green suit and little hat. Sixth table back from the front."

Mack pulled him past the window. "All right," he said thickly. "Get the hell back to Ike. You can tell him that I'm satisfied."

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THE young pair in the restaurant had only reached the soup course; thus they were good for half an hour longer in the place. Mack went into a drug store close by and called up Horgan's. This was a none too scrupulous agency often used by Mack which specialised in trailing persons for any purpose desired. Mack and Joe Horgan the proprietor were bound together by various ties of interest.

"That you, Joe? Have you got a good man in at the moment?"

"One of the best, Mack."

"Here's a job for him." Mack described Muriel and her escort, and where they were to be found. "I want some information about that fellow, Joe. What his name is, where he lives and works, and anything else you can get."

"I'll send my man right down there to pick him up, Mack."

"All right. When he makes a report to you, hold it until I ask for it."

"Right."

Mack started walking west in Grant Street without any clear notion of where he was going. He had to walk off his blinding rage before he could think. Keen and constructive thinking was called for. Keep cool! Keep cool! he adjured himself. Take plenty of time to it. You've got to make a better plan than the one that failed. This one is not going to fail.

At first glance it seemed as if Kate Whiteley couldn't be touched; Broadway's darling and all that. But when you looked into it you could see that it was a pretty precarious position. She had no money. She was heavily in debt. All she had was her popularity. Well, if publicity made her, publicity could unmake her again. The mob liked nothing better than a good excuse to turn and stone one of its favorites. I'll provide the stones, Mack said to himself.

To stop Kate with a bullet would be no satisfaction now. But to drag her down! To drag her down so low that the poorest would be safe in treading on her! Ah! that would hearten me like good liquor! he thought. To make believe to sympathise with her; to offer her a loan of a few dollars. Rich! Rich! And I can bring it about, too! I see my way.

It is not only the satisfying thing to do, but the safest. When she's brought down so low, nobody will give a damn what becomes of her. And when I get tired of tormenting her, I can wipe her out. I can make it appear like suicide. If she had lost everything it would look natural. This time I'll fix it to fire the shot myself. It wouldn't be complete unless I told her first, all that she owed me. And when Kate's out of the way then the girl.

Mack found himself under the elevated railway on the Bowery. Hailing a taxi, he ordered the driver to take him to the New Blanchard on Times Square. His brain was working coolly and sweetly now. Nobody can stop me! he thought, grinning. The first thing he had to have was a man to act for him in this matter. As he drove up-town one name after another suggested itself, but not the right one.

The bar of the New Blanchard was the headquarters of all the big men in the amusement line. Mack knew that he would find twenty friends there, and it was so. He moved from group to group, laughing, talking, accepting a drink or buying one. A glance in the mirror assured him that he had never looked better. Smooth, confident, grinning; the King of Broadway. He was his own man again. No more uncertainty; his course lay ahead of him like a broad river.

While he put on his usual show, Mack was still cudgelling his brains for the name of a man who was as clever as hell, and didn't give a damn. Better if he could find one down on his luck. Such a one couldn't afford to be particular. But in any case he'd dangle a sum in front of him that would buy his soul twice over. I can afford it, he thought.

He was talking with a group of theatrical lawyers and executives when a name was mentioned that made him prick up his ears. Manny Nicodemus!

"Poor devil!" said one. "Completely down and out!"

"Well, it was coming to him," put in another. "The crooked little shyster!"

Mack thought: You're another one! And waited for more.

"Nobody sees Manny any more, since he was disbarred in the Ryland case."

"And he one of the greatest ornaments of Broadway a year ago!"

“A man can go down quick! It’s less than a year ago that there were thirty clients waiting in his office at a time!”

“I know where he is,” said a voice that had not hitherto been heard. “He tried to make a touch off me this week and left his address. He’s living at Greenfield’s Hotel, a crummy little joint up in Harlem. Under the name of Emanuel Grauer.”

Mack grinned in inward satisfaction. He waited until the conversation had passed to other matters, and strolled into the lobby of the hotel to look for a telephone booth.

“This you, Manny?” he asked cheerfully over the wire.

“Who is it speaking?” came back suspiciously.

“Mack Shenton.”

The voice softened and purred. “Well, Mack! Certainly was white of you to call me.”

“Are you free to-night, Manny?”

“Never too busy to see you, Mack. Where will I come?”

“I’ll come to you. I got a little business to put your way, Manny, but I don’t think we ought to be seen around together. Both too well known.”

Manny chuckled.

“You be looking out of the door of your hotel,” Mack went on. “I’ll come up in a taxi; you just get in it, and we’ll talk things over while we drive around.”

The lawyer was a tiny man with a big head and the tallest brow ever seen in Centre Street. It had been very impressive in the court-room. Mack pushed across the glass that separated them from the taxi-driver, gave Manny a fifty-cent cigar and started in.

“It’s a little piece of justice that I want you to do for me, Manny.”

“Oh yes?” said Manny, grinning in anticipation.

Mack had the comfortable feeling that they understood each other before they began. But of course he had to save Manny’s face—also his own. “It starts with the killing of that treasury agent in Kate Whiteley’s place about ten days ago,” he said.

“Some case then!”

“Snake Wyatt pulled it, you remember. Well, I’ve got a confession to make to you, Manny. This is strictly between ourselves. I helped that kid out afterwards.”

“The hell you say!” exclaimed Manny, genuinely surprised.



“Yes. Somebody had given him my name, and he come to my house, see? He was all in. You know how I am, Manny; my sympathies are always with the under-dog. The thought of that poor kid being hunted by the entire police force of New York just got my goat. So I give him a change of clothes and a letter to a friend of mine who operates a marble quarry in North Carolina. And the kid beat it out of town. Well, believe it or not, he hadn’t been working for my friend but three days when a big chunk of marble dropped on him and mashed him flat. That’s why the police never got any trace of him.”

“The hell you say!” said Manny. “Where does justice come in?”

“I’m coming to that. While the kid was in my house he told me that it was Kate Whiteley who had given him the job of smoking the treasury agent.”

“Good God!” cried Manny. “And Kate Whiteley is supposed to be so square!”

“That’s what gripes me,” said Mack. “Operating under false pretences. And I’m going to show her up.”

“What did she do it for?”

“She was paying the agent for protection, and he was always asking for more.”

“Got any evidence?” asked Manny shrewdly.

“No. Only what the kid told me. I know it’s true. He was sore, see? because Kate had failed to plant a car at the back door of the place, and he was almost taken. It’s when a man’s sore that the truth comes out.”

“Sure,” said Manny; “but if you haven’t any evidence?”

Mack had now come to the ticklish point. He glanced at Manny. Manny was looking straight ahead, bland as a child. “That’s what I was counting on you for,” said Mack. “Digging up the evidence.” He said this in a certain tone that Manny could not fail to get.

The little lawyer never batted an eye. “Sure!” he said. “That’s right in my line. But it will cost you a hell of a lot of money, Mack.”

“I’m prepared for that.”

Manny’s eyes glistened. He ran his tongue over his lips. “Have you got any ideas?” he asked.

“Well, there was a girl who was with Snake Wyatt at A l’Aigle d’Or when the agent was shot, remember? She was kept in the House of Detention for a week, and then released, as they had nothing against her. As Snake left town that same night, and was killed three days later, she must be

good and sore, see? Not hearing from him, I mean. And left in the House of Detention and all. She was crazy about the kid. I believe you could get just what we want out of her, Manny, if you go after her right.”

“Sure, sure,” said Manny.

“Treat her nice, see. Give her whatever sum you think is necessary. No! If she’s up against it, get her a nice room, and give her so much per week. That’s safer. Let her have a little luxury, see?”

“But the evidence of a little floozey like that . . .” Manny interrupted.

“Sure, it’s not sufficient,” said Mack, taking him up. “You’ve got to substantiate it. You’ve got to corroborate it at every point. Find somebody who saw the money pass between Kate and Snake. Find others who overheard conversations between Kate and Snake or Kate and Val Fearon. If you can produce any documentary evidence so much the better. I look to you to show me a whole bunch of strong affidavits, Manny.”

“Such affidavits wouldn’t be received in court,” said Manny with a troubled face. “We’d have to produce the witnesses themselves. And there’s always the question, will their stories stand up under cross-examination?”

“No! No!” said Mack, wagging his hand. “You ain’t got the right idea, Manny. We don’t have to go into court with this. As long as we know that Kate Whiteley is guilty, we can punish her without calling in the police.”

A slow grin spread over the lawyer’s face. “What a fellow you are, Mack!”

“Neither into court nor into the newspapers,” said Mack. “We don’t want too much publicity for the case, Manny, but just enough. We want to keep it right in our own hands.”

“Sure, Mack!”

“And what’s more,” Mack went on, “I never want you to appear in this personally. I got wide business interests, Manny. I want you to go on working for me. I can use you here, there, in hundreds of ways. So it’s important that your activities shouldn’t attract any notice, see?”

“I get you.”

“Can you lay your hands on a man who can act for you in this?”

“Sure!” said Manny. “I know a dozen starving young lawyers; clever guys, too. You can depend upon me, Mack, never to show my hand.”

“Good!” said Mack. He thought to himself: Then my hand will be twice hidden!

“What about remuneration, Mack?” asked Manny a little anxiously.

“Name it yourself, Manny,” said Mack with a wide gesture. “Anything in reason.”

“Well, I’m no piker, Mack. And this is a big and important job. Five hundred a week as long as I’m working for you, and a hundred grand down, when this particular job is a success.”

“Have a heart, Manny! I’m not made of money!”

They embarked on a warm discussion, but in the friendliest spirit. Mack and Manny both enjoyed it. Finally they compromised on half the sums first named. Mack believed that this was what Manny had had in his mind from the beginning.

“Well, now that that’s settled,” said Mack, “here’s my idea, roughly, of how we ought to proceed in the matter. Firstly, the story ought to be conveyed in a natural sort of way to, say, half a dozen persons in key positions up and down Broadway. Madge Tolliver the hostess at the Elysee Palace for one; Molly Blore, Grace Jennifer and so on. Better begin with the women. Men will believe the story more readily from a woman than from another man.”

“How about Bert Gabbitt, the columnist on the *Planet* tabloid?”

“No! No!” said Mack. “Don’t approach him in any way. Let him pick up the story himself as it goes the rounds, and run it in his own insinuating way.”

“Right.”

“Secondly,” Mack went on, “when you’ve got your affidavits together let your lawyer guy go to Sam Wellington. He’s the big Gee behind A l’Aigle d’Or. All in the interest of justice, you understand. And put the case before him. Sam has put a million cool into that joint and my idea is he’ll be so crazy to ship Kate before the big scandal breaks that he won’t wait for nothing. But if he should want to see the evidence, show it to him. And if he insists on questioning the witnesses let him. They can go through with that all right if they’re properly coached.”

“Suppose Sam brings in Kate to confront them?”

“Let him,” said Mack. “This will come like a bolt out of the blue to Kate. Well, nobody can put up a good defence against a bolt out of the blue. She can only deny it. She won’t have no counter evidence ready. And Sam can’t afford to risk his million. I know Sam. He’ll fire her so quick she won’t know what hit her.”

“That’s right.”

“Kate will be a big loss to him at that,” Mack went on, “but she’d be a bigger loss if the story broke while she was still in his employ. It will make a lot of talk when she’s fired. That’s the moment when you ought to have some good inside dope ready to feed Bert Gabbitt. But keep away from the big newspapers, and keep your people away from them. The big newspapers won’t touch the story unless they have *prima facie* evidence. It is Bert Gabbitt who will do our trick. You don’t have to pay him nothing neither. Everybody on Broadway reads his column though they make out to slam it. Popular opinion will turn against Kate, and when she loses her public she’s done.”

“Absolutely,” said Manny.

“That’s just a general outline,” said Mack. “We’ll meet every day, and discuss the details. It’s very important for your lawyer guy to have a good story ready to tell to Sam Wellington of how he came by this evidence and all. You and me must go over that together beforehand.”

“Kate will bring up counter evidence later,” suggested Manny dubiously. “How will we meet that, not knowing what she’s going to say?”

“Don’t worry,” said Mack, grinning. “Once I get her down she will never rise again. You can depend on me for that, Manny. . . . So much for that end of the business. But there’s more to be done. Kate owns a house in Bronxville that’s mortgaged for more than its present value. Get somebody to buy the mortgages, see? so that we can foreclose if we want. And make me a list of what she owes to the banks and so on. The damn fool has undertaken to pay off all the debts she made during prohibition days.”

“Mack, you’re a genius!” said Manny solemnly.

Mack accepted the compliment. “I’ll give you what money I have on me,” he said. “Four or five hundred. To-morrow I’ll get the cash together to swing the thing. All transactions between you and me, and between you and your people, must be cash transactions.”

“Naturally,” said Manny.

As soon as Mack got home he called up Joe Horgan from his office. “Well, what’s the report?” he asked.

Joe’s voice was apologetic. “Sorry, Mack. Accidents will happen.”

“What the hell!” growled Mack.

“The man I put on your case was one of the best sleuths in my employ. But . . .”

“Ah! cut the cackle!” snarled Mack. “What happened?”

“The two young people you described to me left Loder’s about twenty minutes after my operative took up his post outside. They didn’t hail a taxi, but walked west on Grant Street, and around through various streets into Christie. Well, in going through these different streets the young fellow got on to the fact that he was being trailed, and he come back and pasted my man. Knocked him out cold. Somebody called an ambulance for him. You ought to see the shiner he’s got now. . . .”

“Not interested,” said Mack. “The next time I give you a job, put some other man on it, see?” He slammed up the receiver.

He then called up Nell Cottar at her flat on Twenty-Third Street. “What did you find out about the fellow who took Muriel out to-night?” he asked.

Nell was apologetic, too. “Not much, Mack. They don’t know each other very well. It was the first time they had been out together. I waited at the Settlement to help with the night classes, and when she came back I got into talk with her. But she was cagey. I couldn’t get anything out of her.”

A breath of fear blew on Mack. “Is she on to you?”

Nell’s voice in great surprise: “Why, how could she be, Mack? That’s impossible. . . .”

Mack cut her short. “Ah, the hell with it!”

He went into the dining-room in a bad temper. He wanted a drink. Lyn Dixon was seated at the table with a newspaper spread before him. He jumped up and put the whisky bottle and a glass before Mack without waiting to be asked. Mack was mollified by this little attention. Not such a bad fellow, Lyn. Perhaps he had been too hard on him. Certainly he had more guts than anybody else in his employ.

“Have one yourself,” he said.

“Thanks,” said Lyn. “Don’t mind if I do.”

Mack tossed off his drink and dropped in an easy-chair by the window. In this position the gun he had been carrying around since morning irked him; he drew it from his hip-pocket and flipped it on the table.

“Gosh! what a peach of a gun!” said Lyn. “Can I look at it?”

“Sure,” said Mack indifferently.

Lyn picked it up. “A Trevor-Jackson,” he said. “I never saw one of this type.”

“It’s just out,” said Mack dryly.

“Looks as if it had never been fired,” said Lyn. “But the magazine is only half full.”

“It’s been fired all right,” said Mack dryly. He had a sudden impulse to see how Lyn would take the news. “That’s the gun that shot Snake,” he said.

Lyn’s eyes widened. “Good God!” he exclaimed. “Who fired it?”

Mack’s friendly impulse was chilled by caution. Lyn was too damn noseey. “I’ve told you before that it was unhealthy to ask me questions,” he snarled.

“My mistake,” said Lyn quickly. “I thought you were starting to tell me about it. Naturally, I’m interested.”

Mack let it go at that.

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MACK never got up before eleven or twelve o'clock, and Lyn risked leaving the house early next morning in order to call up Muriel. Mack would not give him a latch-key, consequently whenever he went out he had to advertise his return by ringing the bell.

When he got Muriel on the wire, it appeared that she wanted to see him. "All right," he said joyfully. "Come to Phil's place."

She arrived at the Irving Place house almost as he did. The sight of her changed the world for Lyn; the joy in her face made him humble. She feels the same as I do! he thought, scarcely daring to believe it. Phil had not yet left for the office. He was nursing a sore hand.

"I put out a knuckle last night when I soaked that spy," he said.

Lyn had to be told all about that incident.

"So Shenton was having you followed," he said, scowling. "It's damned dangerous for us to meet here together. I don't know that he has any reason to doubt me yet. But it wouldn't take much to start something in that suspicious mind."

Muriel's hand stole to Lyn's and pressed it. "It's hard," she said, "but let's agree not to meet any more unless it is vitally necessary."

"Right," said Lyn. "What's new to-day?"

She answered his question with another. "What did you do with the gun I gave you?"

Lyn looked at her in surprise, for the question of that gun was in his mind too.

"After I used it as I told you," he said, "I threw it away in the field back of your house. I had to get rid of it quick, before the others caught up with me. I knew that Shenton would be suspicious, and would search us all."

“You threw it away,” said Muriel, taking up the tale, “and later that morning Mother went searching in the field to see if the gang had left any clues behind them and she found it.”

“Did she recognise it?” asked Lyn.

“No. One gun looks like another to her. She had never even noticed that I had substituted your gun for the one I gave her originally.”

“Well, go on,” said Lyn. “This gun has passed through many hands.”

“What do you mean?”

“Finish your story first.”

“She carried it into the house with some vague idea that the criminals might be traced through it. When she came down to New York that night she left it in the house. Yesterday afternoon she went up to Bronxville to do some more packing, and the gun was gone.”

“And last night Mack Shenton brought it home with him,” said Lyn.

“What!” cried Muriel. “You’re sure!”

“I had it in my hands. I looked at the serial number. Moreover, he told me that it was the gun which had shot Snake.”

“How did he get hold of it?”

“Went into the house after it, I suppose. I suspected that he had gone up to Bronxville yesterday.”

“But mother said all the doors and windows were intact.”

“I heard some talk of a cellar window that night,” said Lyn. “Suggest to her that she had better look at the cellar windows next time she goes up.”

“How does this affect us?” put in Phil.

“Just this way,” said Lyn seriously, “if Mack found the gun in Kate’s house he must believe either that Kate shot Snake or had it done. He’s never the man to let it rest at that. You can be sure that he’s plotting his revenge right now.”

“Oh, Lyn, you *must* denounce him,” said Muriel imploringly.

“It’s not as simple as that,” said Lyn gloomily. “First let me see if I can’t make him believe that somebody else shot Snake.”

“How can you do that?”

“I’ve got an idea,” said Lyn slowly. “Let me dope it out. . . . Where’s your car, Phil?”

“Left it up in Westchester Tuesday to be overhauled.”

“Could you go up and get it late to-night, if I asked you to?”

“Sure!”



“Well, I’ll let you hear from me during the day.”

Phil presently left them to go to the office.

“You must go back too,” said Muriel anxiously. “Shenton may become suspicious if he finds that you’re out of the house.”

Lyn’s heart melted when he looked at her. “I’m out of the house now,” he said longingly. “And five minutes can’t make any difference one way or the other. I’ve got to have five minutes’ grace.”

Muriel couldn’t resist such a plea.

The five minutes, inevitably, was somewhat prolonged, and Mack Shenton was downstairs when Lyn got back.

“Where the hell have you been?” he demanded.

“Out to buy a packet of cigarettes,” said Lyn, showing them.

“Took you a hell of a long time.”

“I got to have air, Boss,” said Lyn deprecatingly. “A man goes stale when he’s shut up all day.”

Mack appeared to be satisfied. “Go down and help Keesing to-day,” he said carelessly. “He’s short-handed.” Mack grinned in a manner that made Lyn anxious. “I’ll soon have plenty of other work for you.”

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THAT night Mack got home early for him, because he knew that Nell Cottar had brought him a pile of work during the day that only he could do. He felt fine. Manny Nicodemus had taken hold of his job with a will, and things were moving fast. In two or three days they would be ready to strike. Mack licked his lips at the thought.

He found Lyn in the dining-room and had a drink with him, then another and a third. He warmed towards Lyn. A nice fellow to have around, because he knew when to talk and when to keep his mouth shut. Mack expanded and began to talk about his early days as a ragged kid on the streets of New York. Since he was ten years old he had been on his own.

“And look at me now!” he said, rapping his glass on the table. “I made something of myself. I made good. I’m the best-known man on Broadway. I’m respected and feared.”

“You sure are, Boss,” murmured Lyn.

“I’ve made money,” Mack went on. “I got better than a million put out here, there, in a hundred different grafts. They pay me big, too. You get big returns in the amusement business if you’re cagey.”

Lyn refilled his glass.

“Besides my money I own more liquor than any man in the world,” Mack continued. “It’s worth a couple of million at bootleg prices. I got it stowed in twenty, thirty, forty different places. And if the government does nose out a cache once in a while I scarcely feel it.”

“Must be a hell of a job to keep it all straight,” suggested Lyn.

“I don’t mind if there’s money in it.”

“How can you keep all that in your head?”

“I don’t try to. It’s all down in my inventories.”

There was a silence. Mack thought: Any other damn fool would ask me where they are, but he's got too much sense.

"What would happen if you got sick?" asked Lyn. "The business would stop."

"Time enough to worry when I get sick."

"Or if you kicked out?"

"When I kick out I'll have no further interest in the liquor or in any other damn thing."

"Well, you're a man who can stand alone," said Lyn. "There isn't many."

While they talked together the telephone rang in the office. It was Lena's job to answer it, and they heard her puffing up the basement stairs. Mack good-naturedly unlocked the office door to save her another flight.

As the liquor mounted to Mack's head he felt more and more disinclined for clerical work. The excitement that filled him demanded more excitement. He wanted to go to Joe Greenfield's and play high. He began to dally with the idea of training Lyn to be his clerk.

"Sometimes I think I'd like to have a partner," he said. "But who could I trust? Who could I trust?"

Lyn preserved a modest silence.

"You're a good fellow, Lyn," Mack went on. "You're the only God damn person around me that's got any sense. You and me ought to work together closer. You stick to me Lyn, and you won't suffer."

"That's what I aim to do," said Lyn.

Lena came in. There was a look of fear in her face. "Boss . . . maybe you better talk to this man," she faltered.

"Who is it?"

"He wouldn't tell me."

"What the hell! You know I never talk to anybody on the 'phone that I don't know."

"Well . . . he said . . . he said he wanted to talk to you about Snake Wyatt."

"What!" cried Mack. Fear struck through him, too. Who could there be outside his house who knew that Snake Wyatt had been his man? However, confidence quickly returned. They can't touch me! he thought scornfully. "All right," he said. "I'll talk to him."

Closing the door of the office after him, he picked up the receiver. "Hello! Who's this?" he demanded roughly.

“Never mind that now,” a voice answered. “I want to talk to you about Snake Wyatt.”

Mack could not identify the voice. It was a gruff voice with a youngish ring, and as cool as you please. Mack said: “I don’t get you. Who do you want to talk to?”

“Mack Shenton.”

“I don’t know him.”

A mocking laugh came over the wire. “Well, if you’re not Mack Shenton, you’ll do until he comes along.”

Mack shifted his ground. “Snake Wyatt, did you say?” he asked, matching the other’s derisive tone. “You mean the guy who smoked the Treasury agent in A l’Aigle d’Or last week? He’s nothing to me. Have they caught him?”

“They will never catch him now, Mack! And you know it! . . . Of course, if you’re not interested, I’m wasting my time. . . .”

“Oh, well, as long as I’m here,” said Mack. “You’ve got me guessing. Shoot!”

Again the teasing laugh. “I thought so! . . . Here’s the point, Mack. I figured you’d be pretty sore when Snake was rubbed out on Monday night. Well, I don’t want anybody else to suffer for it. So I called you up to tell you it was me did it.”

Mack burst into furious uncontrollable cursing. He clapped a hand over the receiver. This was suicidal! . . . not knowing who was at the other end of the wire. But some seconds passed before he could get a grip on himself. When he took his hand down he was still breathing hard. He heard the careless laugh, and saw red again.

“What kind of a fool do you think I am?” Mack said hoarsely, “to believe a story like this over the ’phone? It’s nothing to me anyhow. You make me laugh.”

“You haven’t heard the story yet,” returned the maddeningly unconcerned voice. “Hear it, and then laugh—if you can!”

Mack could not trust himself to speak.

“Snake Wyatt was a skunk,” the voice went on. “You would have found that out if you’d known him longer. He shot down a pal of mine a month ago, and I’ve been laying for him, see? I lost him for a couple of days after the killing of the Treasury agent, but I picked him up through a Jane that he knew. She told me you had given him a hide-out. He had telephoned her.

“After a search I located your house, and I watched it. The windows in front were always dark, so I got through the apartment hotel a couple of doors east, and walked the fences to your yard. There I could look through the kitchen windows, and by standing on the fence I could see into the dining-room, and into your office when you forgot to pull down the blinds.

“On Monday night I was listening to you and Snake talking in your office. The window was open. You were plotting some kind of a job up in Bronxville for that night, but I couldn’t quite get who it was you were after. By walking a few feet out on the fence dividing your yard from the next, I could get an oblique slant into your office. You and Snake were studying a map. Later on, this map blew to the floor without your noticing. You and Snake went out of the room, closing the door, and I sneaked through the window and pinched the map. Snake had drawn it himself. It showed me where he was going that night.

“I drove up to Bronxville. I located Ashbourne Street that was marked on Snake’s map, and found the deserted road that ran along behind it. Snake was to drive in from the east, so I come in from the west and parked short of where he was going to stop. I got there a couple of hours before he came with his crowd. I was laying for him. I followed them across the field and watched my chance. They left Snake alone by the house and I got him. He fired at me first, but he missed and I didn’t, and that’s that.”

Mack carefully controlled his voice. “I don’t know why you’re telling all this to me,” he said. “It’s a good story, but I don’t believe a word of it.”

“All right,” said the careless voice. “If you were interested, you could still find my tracks up there. I threw my gun away in the field back of the house. Reckon that’s there too. I got that gun in a funny way. I was in Kate Whiteley’s place watching Snake the night the Treasury agent was smoked. I was the first to get after him when he beat it out back. But I’d left my gun home and I was afraid to follow him into the street. Kate was standing at the door of her office in back, and she shoved a gun in my hand when I hesitated. I never gave it back to her. Well, a gun is always useful. . . . My work is done here now. I’ll be on my way.”

“Wait a minute!” said Mack sharply. “Who was this guy you said Snake put out of the way a month ago?”

There was a click over the wire and the circuit closed.

Mack jiggled the hook furiously. “Wait a minute! Wait a minute!”

Dead wire.

His impulse was to tear the instrument from its cord and smash it to the ground. He stood up trembling with the effort to control himself. The man in

the next room mustn't hear anything. It was a hoax anyhow. Some of Kate Whiteley's funny work. It must be a hoax! And yet! . . . How in hell could Kate Whiteley know that it was Snake who had been shot? This threatened all his plans. It must be investigated to the bottom.

When he went back into the dining-room he had his voice under control, but it seemed to him that Lyn looked at him strangely. Must be giving something away in his face.

"Go to bed," Mack said curtly. "I'm going out."

He went to Greenfield's to kill time until he could act in the matter. Impossible to sleep. At two o'clock he came home and dressed himself in day clothes. He left the house again, and picking up a taxi in Lexington Avenue, ordered the driver to take him to the Bronx. It was the quietest hour of the night in the city; they sped for miles between the ranks of dark-windowed houses, no life to be seen anywhere except for the prowling cats.

In Bronx Borough he paid off his cab, and after waiting a few minutes, engaged another to take him to Mount Vernon. In this place he found a local cab to carry him the last stage of the journey. In such manner he guarded against the danger that his movements might be traced next day.

As he calculated, the day was breaking when he got to Bronxville. Dismissing his last cab at the railway station, he set off for the abandoned road on foot. He had in mind the danger that the telephone call might have been a trick to lure him into an ambush, and when he entered the old road he kept a hand on his gun. He felt pretty well able to take care of himself by daylight. The road was bordered by trees, but there was no undergrowth; very little cover for a party of assassins. He saw nobody.

In the cool, sweet air of early morning he passed on by the spot where Lyn Dixon had turned the car around. No rain had fallen, and all the tracks looked as fresh as when he had first found them. Off across the field stood Kate's white house, shuttered and empty.

A couple of hundred yards farther, there was a bend in the dirt road. Just beyond it Mack was brought up all standing by the sight of other automobile tracks in the earth. A car had come from the west, turned around and stopped here. Mack stared at the tracks with burning eyes. It looked as if the fellow's story was at least partly true.

He examined the tracks with close attention. This car he saw had been shod with four fairly new tires that had left sharp impressions. They were only four and a half inch tires, indicating that the car was a small one, and of a model several years old.

In this spot there was no mud alongside the road to bear testimony. However, in the road itself, Mack could see where the driver had walked around it; had set off across the field, and had come back again. There was only one kind of footprint. He was alone, or his companions had remained in the car. Mack measured the print carefully. It was that of a man wearing a 9c shoe or thereabouts. A fairly big fellow. His shoes had been made on a shapely last. Well, all the crooks nowadays dress like millionaires! Mack thought bitterly.

As soon as he had stepped out of the road the man's footprints were lost in the grass. No possibility of following him farther in that direction.

In the field on the other side of the road, Mack saw a piece of paper that had blown over. Upon retrieving it, he found that it was the rough map of the vicinity that Snake had made. For a long time Mack stared, scowling, at the schoolboyish scrawls and figures. He could scarcely doubt now that what he had heard over the telephone was true.

He went on along the road, following the double track of the car that had come this way and gone back. He hoped to find a house at the point where it had entered the old road. Anybody who had seen the man might be able to furnish a clue.

In a quarter of a mile or so he came to another bend which cut off the view ahead. Upon rounding it, he stopped with a jerk. There lay the car in front of him.

A glance showed what had happened. At this point the abandoned road descended a steep little hill between cut-banks. The incline was badly washed by the rains, and the car on its return had slid sideways into the bank. The two left-hand wheels were off the ground; the differential-case resting in the mud. The driver of the car, unable to extricate himself and afraid, of course, to ask for help, had been forced to abandon it.

Mack's heart rose—here was a bit of luck!—then fell again. Undoubtedly a stolen car; wouldn't lead to anything. But he noticed that the licence plates had been removed. Why should a thief bother about the licence plates?

He hastened forward to examine the car. A small Powhatan sedan of a four-year-old model, but in unusually good condition for a car of that age. Hadn't been run much. Mack glanced at the speedometer. 11,000 miles. Looked as if it had been in the hands of the same careful owner since it was first purchased. It had recently been repainted a bottle green with a scarlet line. A scar in the paint revealed that the original colour was black. Not hard to trace such a car; but what good would that do him if it had been stolen?

However, there was always the chance that the car might *not* have been stolen. The driver's care to remove the licence plates suggested that he was afraid it might be traced. He had known, of course, when he telephoned, that Mack was bound to find the car. He had nerve, Mack thought. Maybe he had had too much nerve this time.

He searched the car inside and out. In sliding into the bank, the windshield had struck a projecting root and smashed. Pieces of glass lay on the floor. Mack found two suggestive bits of evidence. The first and most important was under the broken glass. It was a carved red stone, a carnelian, oval in form, that had fallen or had been knocked from a man's seal ring. A crest was engraved in it representing a gryphon's head surmounted by seven stars. Nowadays a crook sports the family coat-of-arms, thought Mack with a wry grin.

He found the second thing amidst the confusion of tools and parts in the compartment under the front seat. It was a garage receipt for a cash purchase of five gallons of gas. It bore the imprint of a garage on Irving Place, but no car-owner's name. From its condition it had evidently been kicking around in the tool box for a long time, and for that reason Mack did not attach much importance to it. But he put it carefully away in his wallet. Finally he lifted the hood and took down the serial number of the engine.



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HE CONTINUED along the road, now following the footprints of the man who had been forced to abandon his car. In a few hundred yards, the old dirt road was bisected by one of the new highways of the neighbourhood. Cars were running up and down. The old road had been fenced off with wire, but the driver of the Powhatan had cut it, just as Lyn had cut it at the other end. On the way out he had spliced the cut ends together with pieces of wire cut from other parts of the fence. There was no house in the vicinity.

Mack climbed the fence. The footprints ended, of course, at the concrete. He paused to figure out what the fellow would have done at this point. He had to get back to New York; there were no trains at four in the morning; he would try to hire a car. Well, the village of Bronxville lay a half-mile or so to the right; the street lights would attract him; he must have gone that way.

Mack stopped at the first garage in the village to make inquiries, and engaged a car and driver there. He had himself driven from garage to garage, and asked in each place if anybody had tried to hire a car early Tuesday morning to be driven to New York, or to some place where a taxi could be procured. No results. In one place they told him a party had roused them up Monday morning; in another, a man had got a car only a few hours before. No early customers on Tuesday.

About nine o'clock he realised that he was sinking with hunger, and dismissing his car, entered a restaurant. Here he sat, unconscious of what he was eating, going over and over the situation, piecing his bits of evidence together, and amongst all the different possibilities, adopting this, rejecting that.

As a result of his cogitation, he decided to go back to the scene of the killing before returning to New York. He was not satisfied that he had sufficiently investigated the movements of the killer, before and after the act.

Somewhere in the yard of the house or in the field, he might have left a bit of evidence that would help to establish his identity.

Leaving the restaurant, Mack walked through the bowery streets of Bronxville. At the southerly edge of the village, making sure that nobody was observing him at the moment, he turned in through the cut fence.

It was something under a quarter of a mile to the point behind Kate Whiteley's house. As he rounded the old tree-bordered track, he was greatly surprised to discover the figure of a woman a hundred yards ahead. A slender, graceful figure in a bright coat, standing to one side of the road, looking down at something. Her back was turned to Mack.

His impulse was to retreat until she had gone. But his curiosity was aroused. The girl was standing at the spot where Lyn had stopped his car that night. Could she have any interest in the footprints there? Better find out. In any case, it would seem perfectly natural for a gentleman to be taking a stroll through the leafy lane on a spring morning. Mack kept on.

In a moment or two she turned around, and he saw that it was Muriel Aymery. Instantly his pulses began to throb in a way that surprised him. He wanted to turn back then, but it was too late. She had seen him. He had to brazen it out. As soon as she saw who it was, she would give him a dirty look and go back to the house.

Not at all. She smiled broadly and waited for him to come up. There was enough of Kate Whiteley in her for that. In her yellow coat and wide hat she looked more springlike than the fields. There was a sweetness, a sparkle in her, that threatened to throw him off his base altogether. He hated her for upsetting him like this. All right! All right! he thought, my time is coming!

"Well, upon my word!" she cried. "What are you doing here? This is like one of those incredible meetings that occur in a dream!"

What maddened Mack was that she was not in the least afraid of him. Somehow she must be made to feel his power. He sparred for time. "I might ask the same of you?" he said, grinning. "What are you doing here?"

"That's my mother's house over there," said Muriel.

"I thought you had forsaken it."

"Mother has rented it," she said, "and we came up this morning to pack the last of our things and get it ready for the tenants. Nothing strange about that."

"Do you pack in the fields?"

"Oh, I wasn't wanted for the moment. I was curious about that affair on Monday night. This is the first time I've been up since. The men came from

this side, and I wandered down to have a look.” She pointed to the tracks in the mud. “See! What an army to rob one poor widow. There was a woman in it, too. I can’t understand it.”

“Very likely they thought Kate Whiteley kept all her diamonds in the house,” said Mack carelessly.

“That’s what mother supposes.”

Lying now! thought Mack. “What do *you*, think?” he asked.

She parried the question with another. “What possible reason could they have had except robbery?”

Mack shrugged. “Of course, Kate leads such a public life,” he suggested, “you can’t tell who may have it in for her.”

He wanted to anger the girl, but she only looked at him mockingly. “You haven’t answered my first question yet,” she said. “What brought you so far from Broadway?”

“The same thing that brought you to this spot. Kate told me about this affair a couple of nights ago, and I’ve been puzzling over it. I came up to look over the ground.”

“Friendly of you!”

The dryness of her tone caused Mack to become hot under the collar. Giving him the laugh! He covered his feelings by saying lightly: “I often make these expeditions into the country in spring.”

“I never should have suspected it.”

“Well, one keeps such things dark on Broadway.”

When she looked away, he studied her sharply. There was something new in her face; an uplift, an inner brightness. Mack was familiar with that look in the faces of women. Had some man come into her life? The young fellow he had seen in Loder’s? The thought was as bitter as poison. No man is going to get her but me, he told himself.

He turned on what he called the sentimental tap. “You’re right, this meeting is providential! Ever since our blow-up last week, I’ve been wondering how I could get to see you.”

“Oh, everything is changed now,” she said.

“How changed?” he asked quickly.

“Well . . . no harm came of it. Mother and I are on an honest basis as a result.”

This was obviously not what she had started to say. “Kate was so excited that night,” he said deprecatingly. “I hope you didn’t believe all the terrible things she said about me.”

"I made allowance for maternal anxiety," Muriel said demurely.

"You must admit that I never posed before you as a model of virtue."

"I should have laughed at you if you had. I don't like models of virtue. . . . You must forgive me for the rude things I said. It was silly to get so heated up."

Mack would much rather have seen her blazing with anger than cool and provoking as she was. An angry woman was three-quarters won. "I hope we three can be friends now," he said.

"That would be nice," she said with the same marked dryness.

Mack thought: Kate has told her her suspicions of me. All right. Let her know the worst about me. A woman can be mastered through fear.

Muriel said: "But we're forgetting the evidence. What do you make of all these tracks in the mud?"

"I was here earlier this morning," said Mack. "Some of those tracks you see are mine. I took careful measurements of the others. I'm going to put the business before the Police Commissioner in New York. He's a friend of mine. This gang certainly came from New York, and the New York police ought to look into it."

"Why don't you come to the house and talk it over with Mother?"

"Oh, she's busy now," said Mack. "I can see her any time at A l'Aigle d'Or."

He could not be sure whether she was playing with him or not. Surely no young girl could have such assurance. Perhaps it was mere childishness in her. While she gave him part of her attention he could see that all her senses were open to the Spring morning. When a bird sang she quickly turned her head; her eyes brooded over the fields; her nostrils expanded with the morning freshness; a slight colour came and went in her cheeks. She was a part of the Spring, of everything that was young and lovely; and she infuriated him because he could not impose himself upon her.

All this had to be hidden. He said: "Well, it's lucky the gang quarrelled amongst themselves before they got into the house."

"Quarrelled?" said Muriel. "There was no quarrel. Just a shot without warning, and two men dragging a dead man across the fields."

"A dead man?" said Mack sharply. "How did you know he was dead?"

"Wasn't he dead?" she slyly parried.

"I don't know."

"Well, dead or dying?"

"What do you make of this?" he asked.

“It seems as if it must have been somebody outside his gang that was lying in wait for him.”

All Mack’s faculties leaped to attention. Did she know anything? Or was this just a chance hit in the dark? “What reason have you for saying that?”

Muriel looked across the fields. “No particular reason. One reads in the newspapers about the feuds that exist between such gangs. Perhaps it is a good thing. It keeps down their numbers. I can’t help but feel that this killing was in revenge for some previous killing.”

Rage began to surge up in Mack. This was no chance hit. She *knew!* . . . But how could she know? What further ramifications were there to this plot that he had not yet opened up? “Tell me what you know!” he harshly demanded.

“But I know nothing,” she said, opening her eyes.

“With whom have you talked about this case?”

“Nobody! Just speculating in my own mind.”

Mack’s rage found vent. “By God, you *do* know!” he said thickly. “And you’re going to tell me before you leave here!” All seemed suddenly clear to him. Force was what this girl needed. What was there to prevent him from seizing her and stopping her cries? Muriel stared at him.

Then he saw Kate coming. Kate was running across the field at a surprising speed, for her weight and age, her draperies flying. Her face was wildly agitated. She held one of her hands behind her. Mack forced a smile.

“Muriel!” gasped Kate. “What are you doing here with this man?”

“Why . . . Mother!” exclaimed the astonished girl.

“I told you what he was! . . . I told you!”

“I didn’t come down here to meet him if that’s what you think,” said Muriel. “It was a chance meeting.”

Kate’s face was white and blazing. She had absolutely forgotten herself. “Then he followed us up here,” she said. “He is still spying on us. He doesn’t mean to let us escape! . . . Go back to the house!”

“But, Mother!” protested the girl.

“Don’t argue with me! Go back to the house! I’ll deal with Shenton.”

The girl started for the house with her chin up. She hated to be treated like a child.

Mack smiled, though a chorus of devils was shrieking in his brain: Kill the woman! Kill the woman! “Wait a minute!” he said.

“Go quickly!” cried Kate. She brought her hand into view and presented a gun at Mack’s breast.

Mack started back, and put a hand on the gun in his pocket.

“Yours is in your pocket, but mine’s in my hand,” said Kate, showing her teeth.

“Would you shoot me!” muttered Mack.

“Oh, God! it would be a good deed!” she groaned. “A good deed!”

Some moments passed while they watched each other. Meanwhile the girl was drawing away. Mack tried to parley.

“What kind of a way is this to act?”

“The only way with a man like you!”

“Why can’t we discuss the matter reasonably?”

“There’s nothing to discuss.”

“You are out of your mind.”

“I have reason to be.”

“What have you got against me?”

“Plenty.”

Kate stole a swift glance over her shoulder and saw Muriel was fifty or sixty yards away. She began to back away, keeping Mack covered with the gun.

“You would miss me from that distance,” he said, grinning. “And I wouldn’t miss.”

“Maybe not,” she said sombrely. “I don’t care what happens to me if the girl is safe. . . . And you wouldn’t get far before they caught you. Murder in the open is not in your line.”

She had him. He was forced to let her go.

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MACK got home in the early afternoon and spent several hours at his desk. His blood was hot to be out on the trail, but business had to go on. After he had stowed away his inventories, he called Emil Sanner up to his room and they went into consultation on the subject of a disguise.

When Mack issued from the house an hour later, it was in the guise of an aristocratic gentleman of the old school, somewhat failing in health, probably heart. His skin was haggard and greyish, and the eyes behind the gold pince-nez were rimmed with red. Hair and eyebrows were grey, likewise his carefully trained moustache and neat Vandyke. His beautifully made clothes were of a cut that was fashionable twenty-five years ago. Mack's closest friend would not have recognised him.

After posting his letters, he took a taxi to Tierney's garage on Irving Place. A high-toned sort of garage amidst the discreet dwellings and apartment houses of that neighbourhood. Tierney himself was on the desk, a matter-of-fact, prosperous Irishman, continually rolling a cigar from side to side of his mouth. Mack addressed him in the measured phrases suitable to his present character.

"How do you do, sir. I am Colonel Wentworth of Montclair. I was greatly astonished this morning when walking over my estate to discover an automobile, mired and abandoned in one of my farm roads. Of course I could turn it over to the police forthwith, but I have a taste for investigation, and I thought I would try first to find the owner."

The stolid Irishman stared at the speaker. Evidently this was a type new to him.

"I came to you," Mack added, "because in the car I found this receipt for gasoline purchased at your establishment."

Tierney readily acknowledged the yellow slip. "Sure, this is one of ours," he said. "But I see by the number on it that it's six months old or

more. The fellow who made it out no longer works here. And being a cash sale and all, I'm afraid I can't help you, Colonel. How about the licence tags on the car?"

"They have been removed."

"Well, you'll have to go to the police, sir."

"Do you sell a great quantity of gasoline, Mr. Tierney?"

"We sell only to customers who store their cars with us. In this neighbourhood we're not allowed pumps on the street."

"Then the chances are that the man who bought this gasoline kept his car with you?"

"Yes, sir. Or did at that time."

"It's a Powhatan sedan of a model four or five years old. . . ."

"My God, Colonel, there are thousands of Powhatans."

"I know, but there are unusual features about this one. It has recently been painted dark green with a red stripe."

"An old Powhatan painted green," said Tierney, thoughtfully rubbing his chin. "That is unusual. The stock colour was black in those days." He suddenly clapped his thigh. "By God, Colonel, we have just such a car here now! Young Phil Brinsley's car. Dark green with a red stripe and all. Why, we had the painting job done for him couple months ago."

Mack smiled.

Tierney glanced at a sort of chart on the wall over his head. "It's out now."

"I know it's out," said Mack dryly.

"Do you know the young fellow?" asked Tierney.

"Never heard of him. . . . I suppose you would know of it if the car had been stolen from him?"

"Sure I would know of it."

Tierney called his floor man forward. This man said: "Mr. Brinsley took his car out Monday evening. Said he was going to a ball in Westchester County. Ain't seen him nor the car since."

Mack grinned behind his hand. To a ball! He said: "What sort of looking man is he?"

"A tall blonde fellow, dandy-looking—used to be a football star," said Tierney.

This was hardly what Mack expected. "A football star?"



“Sure! His father is Jeremiah Brinsley, the big corporation lawyer. Away up in G. The young fellow has his own private apartment.”

“Where?”

“I can show it to you, Colonel.” Tierney stepped from his tiny office to the pavement. “In yonder big house, corner of Nineteenth Street.”

“Well, thank you very much, Mr. Tierney,” said Mack. “I will communicate with the young man.”

He strolled up the street in a dignified manner, while Tierney returned to his office.

Mack was puzzled. If the car had not been stolen, how could it be that the son of a prominent citizen had a blood feud with Snake Wyatt? Something funny here.

He went into a drug store and called up Emil Sanner from a booth. “Emil,” he said, “dress yourself in good plain clothes like a gentleman’s servant, and come down and meet me in Eighteenth Street between Third and Irving Place. Bring a bunch of skeleton keys suitable for opening apartment house doors. Carry them in a neat satchel. And bring a pacifier.”

“Okay, Boss.”

They met in due course. Mack sent Emil into the drug store to telephone Police Headquarters. “Give a phony name and address,” he said, “and ask if there is a report that a Powhatan sedan bearing this serial number has been stolen within the past few days.”

Emil, upon rejoining him, said that no such car had been reported stolen. Mack felt that he was on the right track.

They strolled up past the big apartment house. Mack noted from a sign displayed outside the renting office, that it was one of the newer type containing a dozen or more two-room apartments to the floor. The main entrance was on Irving Place, and around the corner there was a gate leading to a service entrance. He sent Emil in here to pick up what he could.

Half an hour later, Emil overtook him as he strolled around the railings of Gramercy Park. “Brinsley’s apartment is 12M. It’s in the back of the building,” he reported. “He works in his father’s office. Big lawyer downtown. An easy-going fellow, nothing high-hat about him, is well liked around the house.”

Mack scowled and debated with himself. This was hardly the character of a killer. And yet! . . . his car had certainly not been stolen from him, and he, Mack, was bound to see the thing through now.

“While I was standing talking to the janitor in the areaway,” Emil went on, “Brinsley went by in the street, and the janitor pointed him out to me. Good-looking fellow, tall and light-complected. Comes home from the office this time every day, the janitor said.”

“So he’s in there now,” said Mack. “We’ll go back. We’ve got to watch the house until he comes out again. I’m going in there for a look around.”

They struck down Irving Place again. In quarter of an hour Emil called Mack’s attention to a tall figure issuing from the apartment house. “There he goes, Boss.” They followed him a couple of blocks down Irving Place until he turned into a tea-room restaurant.

“Gone in to have his dinner,” said Mack. “You’ve got thirty minutes or so to get into his flat. Go in by the main entrance this time. In that kind of a house you don’t have to send up your name. Take the elevator to the twelfth floor, or better still to the eleventh, and walk up a flight. Don’t get caught when you’re trying your keys.”

Emil grinned. “ ’Tain’t the first time I’ve pulled this trick, Boss.”

“As soon as you’re in give me a signal from a window. I’ll be watching. When I come up I’ll knock three times.”

“Okay, Boss.”

When Mack got Emil’s signal he entered the big apartment house and went directly to the elevators. In a house with so many tenants, people are continually coming and going, and it never occurred to the hall man to question the business of this correct old gentleman. Mack had himself carried to the twelfth floor, and found 12M at the end of the corridor, around a corner from the elevators. All to the good.

In response to his three knocks, Emil Sanner opened the door. “I don’t know how much longer this young fellow will stay out,” said Mack. “You’ll have to stand behind the door, and let him have it when he comes in.”

“Ain’t had no dinner,” grumbled Emil.

“Your dinner will have to wait. . . . Put a chair behind the door if you can’t support your own weight. But mind you hit him before he hollers.”

Emil placed a chair and sat in it, while Mack went on into the apartment. It had a small square foyer opening into a spacious living-room on the left, a bedroom in front. Mack went through the rooms tingling with a hot excitement. Many years had passed by since he had actually taken a hand in a job like this. It made a man’s blood run faster.

The long living-room was attractively furnished in a young man’s style; big easy-chairs upholstered in red leather; Navajo rugs; English sporting

prints on the walls. Evidently the old man had come across handsomely when his son set up housekeeping. This is one of these high-toned guys that has gone into crime out of pure cussedness! thought Mack.

At one end of the living-room there was a pair of panelled doors which upon being thrown open, revealed a kitchenette. Mack, idly searching through Brinsley's housekeeping effects, pulled open a drawer that contained some family silver. He snatched up a fork, grinning delightedly. It bore the family crest: a gryphon's head surmounted by seven stars. This is my man! he thought.

He proceeded into the bedroom, keeping his ears stretched for the tell-tale click of the key in the outer door. Another typical man's room, but this one simple, almost barely furnished. A narrow bed, an old-fashioned mahogany high-boy, a chiffonier, a couple of plain chairs.

Mack had an instinct for searching. His eye picked up the high-boy instantly. The top of it was a little above his head. He ran his fingers along the top and they struck against a couple of objects that he instantly recognised. He took them down, grinning, a pair of New York licence plates for the current year.

From the high-boy he went to the chiffonier. In one of the three little drawers at the top Brinsley kept all his gimcracks and gadgets. Mack turned them over with keen eyes, confident he would find here what he was looking for. Evidently the fellow was a plain damn fool; had no notion of covering his tracks.

He found it; a man's seal ring with the stone missing out of its oval setting. He took the carnelian out of his pocket. It fitted perfectly. Nothing more to look for. His case was complete.

He heard a key turn in the lock.

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MACK went as still as a snake. The outside door opened. Brinsley was softly whistling a gay dance tune. Instantly there followed the dull crack of lead on bone, and the tune was shut off. A body crumpled to the parquet floor; the door slammed shut.

Mack went out into the foyer. Emil was standing looking down indifferently at what he had done. He and Mack each took hold of an arm and dragged the limp body into the living-room.

“He’s a husky young guy,” growled Emil. “I wouldn’t want to tackle him alive.”

“Get something to tie him up and gag him,” ordered Mack. “Towels . . . bathroom.”

“I got tape to close his mouth.”

Emil went to get the towels. Mack looked down at his victim and moistened his lips. He hoped that Emil hadn’t hit him too hard. He wanted Brinsley to come out of it, so that he could tell him a few things. With a sudden fear that the blow might have killed him, Mack dropped to one knee to feel of his head.

At that moment the blue eyes opened. Like an animal or a child, Brinsley came to all of a piece. Before Mack could draw his gun, he sprang up, capsizing Mack on his back. He flung himself upon Mack, and his thumbs closed upon Mack’s windpipe. The blue eyes blazed. No sound escaped him. Mack’s arms and legs thrashed wildly, a small table was overthrown with a crash. He could not throw off the body that held him down, nor free his throat from that horrible pressure. Fiery shapes danced before his eyes.

Emil ran in with the towels in his hands. He flung himself on the struggling men. Locked together, the three fought all over the floor of the living-room. The fire-irons clattered down; one chair after another was

thrown over. Mack thought with an icy fear: Somebody will hear! Somebody will hear!

Suddenly finding himself free, he rolled clear and getting to his knees scrambled to Emil's assistance. Between the two of them they finally forced the young man down on his face and kneeled on him. After a struggle, Emil got his wrists tied behind his back, his ankles lashed together. They turned him over, and while Mack held his jaws together, Emil slapped the pieces of tape across his lips. Even when he found himself attacked by two men, Brinsley had never cried out.

"Cheese! what a wild-cat!" panted Emil.

Mack got up, dusted himself, and put his clothes in order. The blue eyes were still blazing; no fear there. Mack went around closing the windows. He listened at the entrance door. No alarming sounds from the corridor. Thank God! it was a new and well-built house.

The young man began banging his head on the floor. "Pick him up and lay him on the bed," said Mack.

Having done so, they jerked the sheets from under him, and tied him securely to the bedstead. Emil went over all the knots with care.

"He can strain now until he busts a gut," he chuckled.

"You can go now," Mack said to Emil. "I'll take care of this guy. Take a taxi to Times Square, and another to Grand Central. Walk home from Grand Central so that your movements can't be traced. Don't leave the house until you hear from me."

Emil went.

On the bed Brinsley had ceased to struggle. His eyes held Mack's unflinchingly. Mack looked at him and moistened his lips. This was going to be good. No particular hurry. He felt for his cigar case. Finding that the contents had been smashed to pieces, he said:

"Got any cigars?"

He strolled into the living-room to look for them. He found a small humidor on Brinsley's desk, and helping himself, brought his cigar back into the bedroom, cutting the end deliberately; lighting it with care.

"You smoke good ones," he remarked. "Few of the young fellows now are men enough."

Drawing a chair up to the bedside, he dropped into it, savouring the Havana, and letting his overtaxed heart quiet down. "Hereafter whenever I smoke a Corona I'll think of you," he said, grinning. "You've smoked your

last. You'll never crack a bottle again, nor put down a good feed, nor kiss your girl!"

After pausing to let this sink in, Mack went on: "I reckon you don't need to be told who I am. You have found out too late that it ain't safe to fool with Mack Shenton over the telephone or any other way. Or with any man of Mack Shenton's. This is for Snake Wyatt, see? A better man than you! . . . Well, Snake's account with you is more than settled! He died instantly, but you can see it coming!"

It was somewhat disappointing to Mack that he could not bring terror into the blue eyes. Of course Brinsley was only bluffing; he was scared inside all right, but Mack wanted him to show it; he wanted to hear him groaning through his sealed lips. Mack took out his gun and played with it. After a single glance at the weapon, Brinsley's eyes flew back to his face defiantly.

"On second thought I won't shoot you," said Mack. "I've shut all the windows, but a gun makes an ugly sound." He stood up and returned the gun to his pocket. "There are plenty of quieter ways to do it."

Mack went into the living-room. Throwing open the doors of the kitchenette, he searched among Brinsley's housekeeping utensils. There was a meat-knife that he tested with his thumb. Better still, on the top of the refrigerator, an ice-pick. Throwing the knife back in the drawer, he carried the ice-pick into the bedroom and showed it to Brinsley.

"It's got an elegant point on it. They say that a jab through the heart is the worst pain a man can know before he dies."

Brinsley smiled. Mack saw his lips stretch under the tapes and his eyes light up. He was looking at something behind Mack. Before Mack could turn around, the blow fell. Mack never felt it, but he heard it. Everything was blotted out.

Mack came to to find himself lying in the dark on a polished wooden floor. His head was aching consumedly; when he tried to sit up he was nauseated, and had to lie back until the pain ebbed away. Enough light came through the windows of the room for him to see that he was in a vacant apartment. His hat and stick were lying near him.

By degrees he got to his feet. He opened the entrance door a crack and peeped out. He recognised the corridor as one in the Irving Place apartment house. The number on the door was 11F. So they had merely dragged him down a flight of stairs and thrust him in an empty apartment.

When he felt a little stronger he went out into the corridor. He wanted to get out of the building unseen, and decided to try the stairs which were enclosed within a fireproof well. In a building with elevators there is no traffic on the stairs. He went down ten flights to the street level, and one flight more into the basement. He saw the service entrance a little to the right, and got out into the street without meeting anybody.

He crossed the street and looked up at Brinsley's windows. Dark. They had beat it, of course. He went around the corner and entered the apartment house briskly. Mirrors in the lobby informed him that the aristocratic colonel was still presentable. He straightened his tie. A clock informed him that it was 8.45. He asked of the hall man:

"Is my nephew Mr. Brinsley in?"

"No, sir, he's gone away."

"Gone away? Where?"

"I don't know, sir. Took his suitcase when he went out."

"Was anybody with him?"

"No, sir."

"Did he have any visitors about that time?"

"I couldn't say, sir. Mr. Brinsley's friends go right up without telephoning."

"Is there any friend of his who has a key to his apartment?"

"I don't know, sir. That wouldn't be any of my business."

The doorman, attracted by this conversation, came up. "I called a cab for Mr. Brinsley at 7.30."

"Where did you get the cab?"

"From the stand just north of the building, sir."

"Thank you very much," said Mack, and went out swinging his stick. He was aware that the two men were looking after him curiously, but it scarcely mattered. If he entered that building again it would be in a different character.

There were two taxis on the stand outside. Neither driver could give Mack any information, but while he was talking to them, a third drove up. Yes, he had picked up the young light-complected guy at 7.30. Had often driven the young guy. Took him up to the Allingham on East 36th.

Mack stared at him incredulously. The Allingham was just four doors away from his own house. "Well . . . you can take me up there," he said.

The Allingham was a residential hotel which catered to bachelors of both sexes. Mack suddenly recollected that Brinsley had mentioned the place on the telephone. By God! he had a nerve to go back there. Mack went directly to the desk, trusting to his wits to carry it off. There were two clerks on duty. The first said:

“There’s no Brinsley living here, sir. I don’t know the man.”

But the second, overhearing, put in: “That’s the friend of Mr. Cranston on the fourth floor. He has a key to Cranston’s suite, because Cranston is out of town so much.”

Mack pricked up his ears. “Is Mr. Cranston in now?” he asked carelessly.

“No, sir. He’s been out of town for a week or more. But I saw Brinsley coming in about an hour ago.”

“Shall I send up your name, sir?” asked the first clerk, reaching for the phone.

“I can’t stop just now,” said Mack. “I’ll call again later.”

He got out. From a café around the corner in Lexington Avenue he called up a saloon in Newark, where Stinger and Monk, his occasional henchmen, hung out. Monk was there and knew where to put his hand on Stinger.

“Take the tube and come into New York,” said Mack. “Take a taxi from Thirty-third Street Terminal to Brady’s café on Lexington near Thirty-fifth. I’ll meet you there in forty minutes. Look for an old gentleman with whiskers and a cane.”

Mack was known as a liberal employer, and a pleased note came into Monk’s voice. “Okay, Boss.”

Mack’s own house was close at hand, but he did not go there. Though he was still shaky, there was a hot flame in his belly that would not let him rest. While he waited for the strongarm men, he prowled up and down Thirty-sixth Street across the way from the Allingham, watching the door. If Brinsley appeared, who could tell? he might get a chance to end the business then and there. He touched the gun in his pocket. Strangely enough, the men who attacked him had taken nothing from him, neither his money nor his gun. Amateurs! thought Mack.

Brinsley did not appear.

At the appointed time Mack met the two Newark men. They sat themselves down in an alcove off the bar. Monk belonged to the hairy gorilla type. The blonde Stinger made a better appearance. He gave the impression of a thin man from the neck up, and it was only upon looking



close that you saw how thick his arms and legs were, under his clothes. Monk was dumb; Stinger plausible.

Mack wasted no words on them. "There's a young guy that I want liquidated, see?"

Stinger and Monk received it calmly. But when Mack went on to explain who Brinsley was and so forth, they showed some concern. Stinger did the talking.

"Cheese, Boss! The son of a high muckamuck like that! It's unusual. It'll raise a hell of a stink with the police."

"Is it too big a job for you?" sneered Mack.

"Nah! But it will cost more, along of the risk and all. The usual figure is five hundred to each of us. This'll cost you a couple of grand."

"All right," said Mack.

Stinger and Monk exchanged a look. They were sorry they hadn't asked more. "And a hundred apiece down for expenses," said Stinger.

Mack paid it to them on the spot. "Just now this guy is hiding in a friend's apartment in the Allingham. Will probably spend the night there. He's had a scare. You can't mistake him. Six feet tall, blonde hair and blue eyes. I don't mean ordinary blue, but a special blue that you remember. He works for his father in the Equitable Building. You'd better follow him down there in order to make sure you have the right man."

"To be smoked at sight, Boss?"

"At sight. And see that you make a job of it."

"Monk and me is known for it," said Stinger, grinning.

Mack went home. He saw Lyn in the dining-room reading the paper with his feet up, as he passed by into his office. He called up Horgan.

"Joe, I got another job for you, and I want service."

"Mack, I never failed you but the once."

"Once is too many. . . . I want information concerning a young fellow called Cranston who rents a flat in the Allingham. Is said to be out of town a lot. Is an intimate friend of Phil Brinsley, whose father is the big lawyer downtown."

"I'll get right to it, Mack."

Then to Manny Nicodemus.

"Did everything go off according to schedule to-day, Manny?"

“Just like the twentieth century, Mack. On the minute. We’re all set to take action to-morrow.”

“Good work, Manny.”

Mack felt better then. They can’t stop a strong-willed man, he thought, grinning in the mirror. I’ll get them all. He decided to dress and make a night of it; dinner at the Casino; a tour of the gold stream; end up at Greenfield’s.

As he left the room he caught sight of Lyn again and paused. There was no denying that a Harvard-bred chauffeur at the wheel of the big Mackinac lent style to the outfit.

“Get into your chauffeur’s uniform and fetch the car,” he said. “I want you to drive me around to-night.”

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LYN was awakened next morning at nine o'clock by Mack Shenton himself—they hadn't got home until after dawn. Such was the sense of danger in that house that Lyn was instantly all there. He thought that the showdown had come, and half reached for his gun under the pillow. But he held his hand, and it was well; Mack was his usual contemptuous self.

"I want you to go over to my warehouse on West Fifty-third," he said. "They're in a jam. Can't get the stuff out. God! I seem to be surrounded by nitwits and dummies. Go to Nick Hafker. He knows I'm sending you. And take charge. Boot them into action."

Lyn was out of the house in half an hour. This assignment was a bit of luck. Gave him a chance to do some telephoning. Moreover, it was clear that Mack Shenton depended on him more and more. The final confidence would not be much longer delayed.

From a booth he called up Phil Brinsley at his office. Phil's laugh greeted him over the 'phone.

"Hell to pay, old Stove-in-bottom! You ought to see the brace of bloodhounds I got on my trail this morning! Real bad babies!"

Lyn didn't feel gay about this. "Can't you get away from the office for a few days?" he asked anxiously. "You ought to beat it out of town."

"The old man has already given me leave of absence," said Phil. "I haven't told him anything of course. But out of town, nothing! Not when things are just coming to a head. You'll be needing me directly."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"There's a back door out of this suite of which these babies know nothing. I'm going to the Conradi-Windermere to take a room. They can't touch me there. And I'll be well housed and fed, and in telephone communication with my friends. Come and see me some time."

“What name will you register under?”

“Oh, something classy. Ask for Ronald Renfrew.”

“All right. I’ll keep in touch.”

“Take care of yourself, old boy!”

“Same to you!”

Lyn then called up Muriel. How lovely it was to hear her voice become warm and soft when she recognised his voice. “Jack!”

“Any news, darling?”

“Yes!” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “I love you! . . . Maybe that’s no news to you.”

“I could never hear it enough.”

“When am I going to see you?”

Lyn had a terrible yen to see her, but what could he do? “I’ll let you know,” he said. “We’ll have to find a new meeting-place. Shenton is on to the Irving Place house.” That was all he told her of the events of the night before. No use getting her all roiled up. The poor kid had enough on her mind. “I’ll call you up again the first moment I can get by myself.”

A good many hours passed before that came about. Lyn was swallowed up in the secret warehouse, where the bottles were labelled and stamped and packed, cut off from touch with the outside world. Food was brought to him at noon, and eight o’clock had come and gone before he could get things running smoothly, and was able to leave.

On his way home he stopped at the first pay station and called the Settlement House. One of the pleasant women’s voices answered, but it turned sour when Lyn spoke Muriel’s name.

“Miss Aymery is no longer here.”

“What!” cried Lyn.

“I said that Miss Aymery is not connected with the Settlement any more.”

“Since when?”

“What difference does it make? Since this afternoon.”

“What has happened?” gasped Lyn.

“You must excuse me. I do not feel called upon to make explanations over the telephone to a stranger.”

Lyn drew a long breath for patience. “Now wait a minute,” he said. “Miss Aymery as I understand was one of the backers of the Settlement. Some explanation . . .”

"If it was possible to return her money, believe me we wouldn't hesitate," the woman said bitterly. "You can depend upon it we will accept no more from that source."

"Where has she gone?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't she leave a message for any friend that might call up?"

"She left no message. And I'm tired of answering the telephone. Twenty people have called up since she left. Newspaper reporters and others. We don't care for that sort of publicity, and I've got something else to do!" . . . Click! the receiver went up.

Lyn was inclined to laugh. This was incredible like something that might happen in a bad dream. He made haste to call up the Hotel Vandermeer, and asked for Miss Whiteley's suite.

"Miss Whiteley has left," a voice replied wearily.

Lyn turned cold all over. This was no laughing matter. "What is her forwarding address?" he asked.

"She didn't leave any."

"Are you sure?"

The feminine voice gave way to temper. "My God! I ought to be sure! I have to answer fifty calls an hour since she left. The hotel has no information."

Lyn hung up in a daze. He had lost Muriel. The thought caused him an excruciating pain. He had no notion of where to look for her now. And she had no way of calling him up. The only link was broken.

In desperation he called up the Conradi-Windermere. "Mr. Renfrew doesn't answer," he was told.

"Please page him and bring him to the 'phone," said Lyn. "I will call again in ten minutes."

The result of his second call was the same. "Mr. Renfrew is not in the hotel."

A fresh anxiety attacked Lyn. Must be something damned important to tempt Phil out of his refuge. He said: "Please take this message for him. Say that Mr. Comerford called, and ask him not to leave the hotel until I can get in touch with him."

Lyn took a taxi home. The chill at his breast told him that Mack Shenton was behind this. Perhaps he would reveal something.

He found Mack in the dining-room in a grand humour, showing his even white teeth in a hard, exultant grin. "Well, Lyn, you're late!" he cried,

clapping him on the shoulder.

Lyn bent the truth slightly. "I've come direct from the warehouse." He gave Mack a succinct account of his work during the day.

"Good boy! I'm thankful that I've got one man working for me who isn't a complete bone-head! You and me must work closer together."

"I haven't had any dinner," said Lyn.

"You shall have the best the town affords. . . . Here! you've earned a bonus to-day." Mack drew a fat roll from his pocket and peeled off several bills of high denomination.

Newspapers were spread all over the table, and it was not difficult to connect Mack's high spirits with something he had been reading. "What's the news?" asked Lyn idly.

"Nothing of national importance," said Mack, grinning; "but little old Broadway is all het up about Kate Whiteley."

Lyn's heart sunk. Fortunately he had always worn a mask in that house, and it served him now. "What's she been doing?"

"She's got herself fired."

"Fired!" cried Lyn, almost giving himself away.

Mack, however, found his astonishment natural.

"I suppose you thought she owned the place," he said. "Nah! Kate has no money. Fired without notice like a chorus girl."

"Why?"

"Well, there seems to be a good deal of mystery about that," said Mack, with his maddening, triumphant grin. "Here, read the papers."

He shoved the *Sun* towards Lyn. The item was brief.

The owners of A l'Aigle d'Or, the popular night club on Fifty-fifth Street, sent out a notice to the press this morning stating that Miss Kate Whiteley was no longer connected with the establishment. This came as a great surprise to Broadway circles, as Kate Whiteley has been identified with the resort since it first opened; and indeed it is better known as Kate Whiteley's place than by the official designation over the door.

No reason was given for the break. Samuel B. Wellington, President of the A l'Aigle d'Or Holding Corporation, declined to be interviewed on the subject. Miss Whiteley could not be reached.

Beginning with to-night, Miss Whiteley is advertised to appear nightly at the Lido, a rival establishment.

“Awful come-down for Kate,” remarked Mack, grinning. “Amongst night clubs the Lido is only a selling-plater.”

Lyn kept his eyes down. He groaned inwardly. “I’ll have to kill this man! He’s too foul to live!”

The *World-Telegram*, the *Journal*, the *Evening Post*, each carried a similar brief story. “Read Bert Gabbitt in the *Planet* tabloid,” said Mack, pushing that paper towards Lyn. “He seems to have the low-down.”

Lyn read:

Well, my little ones, the biggest piece of news that has crashed against Broadway tympanums in yeahs and yeahs is out to-day. Kate Whiteley, she of the twenty-four carat hair; Kate, the effulgent, the nonpareil, the peerless wisecracker, has parted from A l’Aigle d’Or with a loud snap. I heard the news yesterday, but it was so incredible I hesitated about passing it along. To-day it is out, so that all who run may read.

We of the main stem are still dazed by the blow. To us it has always seemed that Kate *was* A l’Aigle d’Or, and vice versa. There must have been a mighty cause for the rupture. The owners of our most golden resort are wise and conservative men who would not take such a step without due cause. They will not talk, and rumour is busy with her well-known hundred tongues up and down this path to destruction.

It is said that the lovely Kate failed to comprehend that prohibition days are over, and had been trafficking unwisely with a certain treasury agent. In many peoples’ minds the affair is linked to the killing of Val Fearon in A l’Aigle d’Or two weeks ago. So falls another popular idol!

Lyn, keeping his eyes down, thought: This is Mack Shenton’s work. This is what he would do. And oh God! how can you get back at him? How can you refute charges that are made only by innuendo?

Mack clapped Lyn on the back again. “Go out and get yourself a swell feed,” he said, “and come back afterwards. I will want you to drive me around to-night to see if I can’t get to the bottom of this.”

You’re at the bottom of it! thought Lyn.

He went out and telephoned to the Conradi-Windermere. No good. He ate—not in the lavish fashion that Mack had recommended, and telephoned

again. Mr. Renfrew had not returned. Lyn's previous message to him was still undelivered.

Has Mack got him too? Lyn asked himself with a kind of despair.

He telephoned to the Vandermeer again and to the Settlement, only to be rebuffed as before. A new fear made his breast tighten. Perhaps Muriel blamed him partly for what had happened.

Back at home Mack told him that he would be leaving the house at eleven o'clock. When Lyn had dressed himself in the chauffeur's outfit, and got the car, he had twenty minutes to spare. He sped up to the Conradi to ask in person for Phil. Not at home. Lyn left a note for him.

When Mack came out to get in the car he was veritably the glass of fashion and the mould of form. The cruel grin was etched in his face. He had been drinking. As Lyn expected, he was ordered to drive to the Lido, West Fifty-second Street. He had read in an advertisement that Kate Whiteley was to make her first appearance on the floor at midnight. Well, anyhow he knew where Muriel was now. She would never leave her mother at such a moment.

A great crowd was pressing in through the doors of the Lido. When Mack got out he said: "Pick me up here at one o'clock. I shan't want to stay longer." As Lyn started away from the door a car moved out from the kerb just ahead, and he had the luck to get a parking space there. Locking the car, he inquired for the stage door of the Lido. It was through a dwelling house next door to the main entrance.

Lyn told the door-keeper that he had a personal message for Miss Whiteley and was allowed to pass. Inside the house the trend of excitement led him to the star's dressing-room upstairs. Back-stage of the Lido, discipline was lax, and many well-dressed people who had no business there, were crowding the corridor, and pressing into Kate's room. A distracted stage manager threaded his way among them.

Lyn took up his stand outside the door of the star's dressing-room. The sight of a waiting chauffeur is such a usual one that nobody looked at him. The door was as often open as shut. He saw Kate sitting at her mirror; and with a great leap of the heart he saw Muriel too. Kate was in the hands of her maid. In all her regalia, heavily made-up and wearing her professional smile, she looked as she must always have looked at such a moment. But her eyes had a ghastly roll in the painted face. Muriel stood beside the dressing-table with a calm face and her chin up, but Lyn could see that she was terrified by the strange milieu that surrounded her.



About twenty people, mostly women, were crowding around Kate, jabbering at her. Lyn perceived instantly that these were not real friends, but only the kind of ghouls that are always attracted by disaster. While they sympathised with Kate, and offered her encouragement, their eyes were greedily fixed on her face, storing up malicious details to retail, sniggering, to their friends later. It was a horrible exhibition.

The maid came out to get something. As she was returning, Lyn said: "Please tell Miss Whiteley's daughter that the chauffeur is waiting to speak to her."

Presently Muriel came out. Her face was turned to him stonily. "For God's sake don't look at me like that!" whispered Lyn.

"I can't forgive you," she murmured. "If you had done what you ought, this would never have happened. Now it's too late."

Lyn caught up her hand. They were oblivious to their surroundings. Chorus girls dressed in practically nothing were running down the stairs. "But I love you," he whispered urgently. "And you love me. You mustn't let this part us. More than ever we've got to stick together now."

She drew her hand away. "I can't forgive you," she said like an automaton. "Not after what we have been through to-day."

"I only know what I read in the papers," he said.

She made a gesture signifying that that was nothing. "It seems we are going to lose our home too; everything."

"Your home?"

"The mortgage has changed hands. We have been notified that if it is not paid at once it will be foreclosed."

"This is Mack Shenton's work!"

"Why, of course. . . . Other creditors have been pressing their claims. Kate has put up her diamonds to keep them quiet. We have nothing." She made as if to return to the room.

"Wait!" whispered Lyn desperately. "You must let me be your friend at least. I can help you better than anybody."

"That's what I thought once," she said bitterly. "But it turned out that you had your own aims to pursue. Now we have other friends."

"They are not the right sort," said Lyn stubbornly. "Or Kate would never have been allowed to appear in this place."

"She wants to put it up to her public," said Muriel proudly. "They will vindicate her."

“How do you know they will? What’s the public? Just a herd. Anybody can stampede them. Mack Shenton is out there. He’s just waiting for this.”

Muriel’s hands went to her face. “Oh, my God!” she whispered, terrified. “What will we do?”

At that moment the stage manager came bustling through. He rapped on Kate’s door. “Curtain, Miss Whiteley.”

“Too late to do anything,” muttered Lyn.

Kate immediately got up and came out. Her eyes were glassy with excitement now. She never noticed Lyn standing there. “I will win them! I will win them!” she was saying. Lyn turned sick at heart.

Kate and the manager went down the corridor that opened on the stage at the end, while Kate’s self-styled friends passed through a nearer door leading into the supper and dance hall. Muriel turned back into the dressing-room and closed the door. She dared not look at the stage.

Lyn could not show himself in the auditorium. He followed some performers down the corridor, up a few steps and on the stage. Nobody tried to stop him. The stage was crowded. Kate was standing in the first entrance. A good trouper, this was natural to her, and she was calm, arranging the folds of her dress, patting her hair. The scantily-clad girls filled the other entrances. Lyn pressed back against the proscenium wall. He didn’t want to look.

The orchestra started to play one of Kate’s famous old songs, and she walked on with the lazy smile that had charmed millions. A ripple of applause started, swelled louder, was broken by a hiss as venomous as a snake’s. Instantly angry voices were raised to silence the hisser. Louder applause, but also louder hisses and insulting cat-calls.

The orchestra played on, and Kate’s warm, appealing, husky voice rose steadily above the music. A good trouper, but the racket out in the supper-room became a pandemonium, and the insulting voices as always, had the better of it. Fights started, tables were overthrown with crashing glass and crockery. Women screamed; somebody raised a cry for the police. Kate sang on.

Such a scene could have but one ending. An excited fat man with bulging shirt bosom broke through a door on to the stage. He stood in the wings snarling at Kate. “Come off! Come off! Can’t you see you’re done!”

Kate appeared in the entrance with her head down, a hand pressed to her breast. “They turned against me!” she whispered, with a wondering, pitiful air. Lyn raged inwardly at the hard grins of the youthful chorus girls. Were they not human? The fat man made a signal to the orchestra leader, who

immediately led his men into a dance number. The nearly naked girls scampered out on the stage.

Immediately in front of Lyn Kate's knees gave under her. He caught her and picked her up; shoved through the door and down the steps to the corridor. Kate was no light-weight, but he was scarcely conscious of a burden. His idea was to get her out quickly, quickly. He was afraid that Mack Shenton would come around back to offer his condolences. It would be like him!

As he reached the door into the auditorium, Kate's "friends" came pouring through with affected cries of concern. "Oh, the poor darling! . . . What a brutal shame! . . . Carry her into the dressing-room, my man. . . . Here, I have spirits of ammonia. . . . Let me help her. . . . Send for a doctor, somebody."

Lyn glared at them, and kept on through the corridor. He met Muriel, with white face and tragic eyes. "Let's get her out of here," he whispered. "Bring her things. I've got a car."

As they neared the door Kate was conscious. "Put me down," she whispered urgently. "I can walk."

Muriel caught up with them. Between them they helped Kate down the steps and into the car which stood near, while the passers-by stood and gaped. Lyn made haste to start the car and leave them gaping.

Kate and Muriel were in the back seat, the mother with her head on her child's shoulder. Lyn heard her whisper: "I'm done! I'm done. This is the end!"

"Nonsense!" said Muriel steadily. "This was all a framed-up job."

At Muriel's direction Lyn drove them to a big new apartment house on East Twenty-third Street. Lyn helped Kate into the lobby. She did not recognise him.

"Can I come upstairs?" he whispered wistfully to Muriel.

She shook her head stonily. She had not forgiven him.

Lyn watched them sadly into the elevator. He had to go back to the Lido to pick up Mack. But at least he knew where they were now.

Mack was waiting for him at the door when he drove up at one o'clock. He was noticeably drunker, but Mack could carry lightly a load that would have sunk weaker men.

"To the Temple of Chance, Jehu!" he cried facetiously. "Where the click of the spinning ball and the rattle of chips makes the music that I love best!"

Lyn drove him to Greenfield's. When he got out he peeled some more bills off the roll, and thrust them at his chauffeur. "Have a good time, my boy! You've earned it. . . . But mind you're back here at four to pick me up or there'll be hell to pay!"

Lyn drove away wondering at the vagaries of human nature, that gratified hatred could make a man feel generous!

He stopped at the first all-night drug store and went in to telephone. This time Phil's resonant voice answered him over the 'phone. Thank God! Thank God!

"What in hell has happened?" demanded Phil.

"Tell you when I see you. Come down to the Forty-seventh Street entrance of the Conradi and I'll pick you up directly. Boy, I need you bad!"

"Right, partner!"

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AT GREENFIELD'S Mack played high, winning or losing with equal unconcern. The other players marvelled at his sangfroid, and this tickled his vanity pleasantly. What are a few thousands more or less to Mack Shenton? he thought.

He felt an ease of mind such as he had not known for many days past. His plans had worked out perfectly; he had justified himself. Moreover, he told himself, his triumph over Kate Whiteley to-night was merely the first course of a banquet of triumphs. The *pièce de resistance* would be served when he faced Kate without disguise and told her what she owed him. Then he would see to it that the woman troubled him no further.

He drank freely. No danger of his going wild to-night when all was well with him. If I should pass out they'll take care of me here, he assured himself comfortably. And Lyn will carry me home.

It was past five when sleepiness finally overcame the lure of the roulette table. Mack yawned and announced his intention of going home. He found Lyn at the door with the car. Mack was not so drunk but that he looked at him sharply to see if he was sober. Mack had no intention of trusting himself to a drunken driver. Lyn was as cool and wary as usual. Can't even let himself go with money in his pocket, Mack thought, with a feeling of contempt.

The moment he fell back on the rear seat Mack slept deeply. Presently he had a bad dream. It was the usual nightmare feeling of struggling helplessly against overwhelming odds. It passed and he slept again in complete unconsciousness.

Finally an insistent discomfort prodded him into wakefulness. Something was confining him, pressing against him cruelly. He rolled and twisted, but was unable to free himself. For a while sleep and discomfort

struggled for the mastery; he half woke and slept again. Finally a sense that something was very wrong woke him up all over.

Mack found himself tied hand and foot, and with his lips sealed together, presumably with tape. A rug of some kind had been thrown over him so that he could see nothing. He was lying on the vibrating carpeted floor of a car being driven at a moderate speed. Presumably he was still in the city, because the car stopped as if for a traffic light, and went on again. City noises reached his ears; a passing truck; a milk wagon on iron tyres with bottles rattling.

He raised his head tentatively, lifting the rug off the floor, and letting in light. He recognised the taupe upholstery of his own car. He was alone in the rear compartment. By painfully twisting his head he was able to get a glimpse of the driver. The man was alone in front. It was not Lyn, because he had light hair and wore an ordinary soft hat. Mack didn't know him. Lyn, he supposed, had been attacked and thrown out.

In this critical situation Mack did not rage or waste his strength. He became as still as an animal, and his powerful will applied itself. I will free myself! he resolved. I will! I will! He immediately set to work on the thin, strong line that bound his wrists behind him, pressing his arms outward, chafing his hands together until he got a little play. Whenever the car stopped for a light, he fell absolutely still, guessing that the driver would then glance back to see that he was safe.

There was a foot-rest fixed to the floor of the car. When he had loosened the line a little, Mack caught one strand of it on the corner of the rest, and pulled until he almost pulled his hands off his arms. However, he loosed the rope sufficiently to enable him to get a thumb under the strand. The rest was easy. In a minute or two his hands were free.

He felt of his pockets. His money was intact, but his gun had been taken from him, also his keys. This puzzled him. Why his keys? Before starting to untie his feet, he wanted a weapon in case the driver should discover what was happening. He remembered that there were certain spare tools under the rear seat. He got a shoulder under the edge of the seat and softly worked at it, always dropping silently to the bottom of the car when it stopped. The seat gave; he slipped a hand under, and it met a monkey wrench. Mack grinned. His luck had not failed him!

Mack untied the rope that bound his ankles, and lay quietly biding his time. Few sounds reached him from the street, and he judged that they were in a little frequented part of town. An elevated train roared past high overhead. Probably Second Avenue.

They stopped for a light. Mack leaped up all of a piece, flinging off the rug and raising the wrench. He brought it down with all his force on the driver's head. The man slumped forward over the wheel. There was not a moment to be lost. Mack, leaning over, dragged him out of the way, slid into his place under the wheel, and started ahead as the lights changed.

It was Phil Brinsley. A great amazement filled Mack. In God's name, how had his enemy succeeded in turning the tables on him like this?—Now they were turned back again, he thought, grinning. Phil's head lay on Mack's shoulder like that of a sleepy friend.

When he was stopped again by a red light, Mack went through Phil's pockets hastily. He took Phil's gun and recovered his own; he also took some written sheets that he found in Phil's breast pocket, because he saw his own name there. He had no time to read further. His keys were not on Phil. That seemed strange.

The street was Second Avenue. It was nearing six o'clock and the town was waking up. It was necessary for Mack to get rid of the encumbrance of Phil, and quickly too. Moreover, he had a vivid recollection of how suddenly Phil had come to on a former occasion. He turned east out of the avenue, and crossing First, where there was already considerable traffic, kept on to York Avenue, the most easterly street on the island, and headed down-town.

Mack would greatly have relished putting a bullet through Phil's head before chucking him out, but he was afraid to do so, because it was his own car that he was driving, bearing licence plates issued in Mack Shenton's name. Somewhere in the Fifties York Avenue, dipping down, passed between an empty pier on one side and a closed coal yard on the other. There was nobody in sight. Mack slowed down and opening the door, sent Phil's body hurtling out with a hard thrust of his foot. It thudded on the pavement. Mack drove away at full speed and turned the first corner.

When he was satisfied that no one was after him, he drew up at the kerb in order to read the paper he had taken from Phil's pocket. There were several closely written sheets. Mack spread them out and began to read. There was no date, no salutation, no signature at the end.

This is vitally important, Phil. I depend on you to carry it out to the letter. Call up Mack Shenton, telephone Murray Hill ——— and tell him word for word what I write here. Make your voice sound rough like a crook's. Don't let him draw you into answering any questions, but hang up as soon as you're through. This is what you should say:

“I called up to tell you about Snake Wyatt. I figure you were pretty sore when Snake was rubbed out Monday night. Well, I don’t want anybody else to suffer for it. It was me did it. Snake Wyatt was a skunk. You would have found that out if you’d known him longer. He shot down a pal of mine a month ago, and I’ve been laying for him . . .”

Word for word Mack read the talk that had come to him over the telephone that night. He was so completely astonished that he did not get angry immediately. That followed. He read to the end. After the writer had set forth what Brinsley was to say to Mack, he continued:

I enclose the home-made map referred to above, which I picked up in Mack’s office. Get your car and drive to Bronxville. You’ll have a bit of trouble finding the other end of this deserted road that is marked on the map, but I am depending on you. You must go alone. There is nobody that we can trust sufficiently. After getting your telephone message, Shenton will certainly go up there to investigate as soon as it is light. I want him to find the tracks of your car in the proper places, also the map.

Mack, staring at the written sheets like a man demented, suddenly said out loud: “Then that car was planted there *after* the killing!”

And a moment later: “By God! this letter came out of my own house!”

A light broke in his mind. He swiftly looked in the pocket of the car for the book in which Lyn recorded his gasoline purchases. The handwriting was the same.

“And Lyn Dixon wrote it!”

Mack turned stony. Engaging the gears, he sped through the streets as fast as he dared. The whole plot was clear to him now. Lyn had not been attacked. Lyn had his keys. Mack saw everything through a red fog. Luckily there was no traffic yet.

Five minutes later he drew up softly in front of his own house. It presented a blank face to the street, all blinds pulled down. Mack went down the basement steps, and tapped lightly on the window. Presently the blind was pulled away and the tousled grey head of old Lena showed. Mack signed to her to let him in by the basement door.

“I got drunk and lost my keys,” he said to her curtly. “Did Lyn come home?”

“Didn’t hear nobody, Boss.”

“Well, go back to bed.”



The door of the front room closed behind her. Mack went up the basement stairs without making a sound. When he reached the top he grinned suddenly. He was in time. Certain sounds were coming through the door of his office. He stooped and looked through the keyhole. Key on the inside. With infinite patience he turned the handle. Locked, of course. Well, Lyn had to come out this way. He could wait.

Tiptoeing to the front door, he locked it and took the key, then returned to his vigil, grinning. All was safe so far. Lyn was looking in the wrong place! A long time passed. The servants began to move about their work downstairs. There was no rage, no impatience in Mack now. Like an animal, all his faculties concentrated on waiting. He stood beside the door as still as a waxwork—and grinning.

While he stood there he heard the telephone ring inside. The sound was quickly shut off, and Lyn's voice spoke softly: "Hello!" Some communication was made to him and he swore with heartfelt chagrin: "Oh! damn!" A question was asked him, and he answered: "No, I haven't found them. Where are you?" Finally, very reluctantly: "All right, I'll beat it."

Mack's nerves became taut. Lyn was coming out now. The door opened inwards, and Mack stood on the left of it, gun in hand. The key was turned, the handle—but Lyn did not pull it wide. Opened it two inches, saw Mack, and essayed to slam it. Mack thrust his foot in the aperture and held it.

Mack shoved with all his might, and Lyn put forth his strength to hold him. Lyn was the younger, but Mack had thirty pounds advantage in weight. The door gave suddenly and Mack catapulted into the room. Before he could recover himself, he saw Lyn put his hands on the window-sill and thrust with his feet against the casements. They crashed open, and Lyn dropped feet first into the yard. Mack fired at him a second too late.

The room was torn to pieces! the safe stood wide open. With a bellow of rage Mack leaped after Lyn. He was too heavy to vault clear of the window. He hung from the sill and dropped. Lyn had no time to scale the fence. He turned and darted through the kitchen door, slamming it after him. Almost as soon as it slammed, Mack had it open again. He can't escape me! he thought.

They tore through the kitchen, Mack drawing his gun again as he ran. Lena and Emil stood at the door of their room, paralysed with astonishment. Outside the front basement door there was an iron grill; Lyn had no time to get out that way; he turned and leaped up the stairs. He was nimbler than Mack; he gained on him. But he can't get out! he can't get out! Mack thought. "Come on, Emil," he shouted over his shoulder.

Lyn tried the front door and found it locked. He kept on up the main stairs of the house. Trapped like a rat! thought Mack.

Lyn, taking three steps at a time, was around the top of the stairs before Mack reached the bottom. Mack ran upstairs faster than he had ever done in his life before, with Emil, old as he was, only a few steps behind. Lyn ran around the hall above and kept on up the second flight. When Mack reached the second flight, he heard him on the third. "We have him dead to rights!" he cried to Emil.

On the top floor of the house there was a middle room, used for storage only. It had a skylight and a scuttle in the roof. Ordinarily this room was kept locked, but as it turned out, Lyn had seen to that in advance. He ran in, slammed the door, and locked it from within. Mack and Emil put their shoulders to the door, and with a concerted heave, burst it open.

But Lyn had gained a precious half-minute. When they got in the scuttle was open, and Lyn was out. As he went out, he kicked the ladder away, and it lay on the floor.

They put the ladder back in place and ran up, first Mack, then Emil. When Mack came out on the flat roof, he could see nobody. Chimneys and party walls afforded plenty of cover. Off on his right stretched sixteen or eighteen of the little houses one after another, all precisely the same as his own; on his left four or five roofs more, blocked at the end by the towering bulk of the Hotel Allingham. The roof of each house was divided from its neighbour by a brick wall about two feet high with a stone coping. The chimneys, two to each pair of houses, arose from these walls.

"We'll get him," said Mack grimly. "There is no way down from the roofs. He can't get from one roof to another without showing himself. I'll watch from the front; you go to the rear."

Emil saw him first, and called out. Lyn was three roofs away on the right, and still going. He kept under cover of the chimneys as far as possible. They sprang after him.

"He can't go much farther this way," said Mack.

For fifty feet back from the street line the wall of the Allingham abutted upon the dwelling next door. This was a blank wall without windows. Back of that the hotel wall receded to form a court. As he drew close to the hotel, Mack saw with a rage as bitter as gall that there was a stout plank laid from the parapet of the end house cater-cornered to the sill of one of the hotel windows looking on the court. The window was open.

Lyn ran across the plank. Mack, blind with rage, raised his gun to fire. Emil knocked his hand up. "My God, Boss, not here!" he gasped. "There's

no getaway!” Lyn dropped through the open window. The plank was swiftly drawn over. Lyn’s hand appeared waving farewell, and the window was pulled down.

Without a word, Mack turned and ran back again, Emil following. They dropped through the scuttle, and cascaded down the three flights of stairs. Snatching up hats, they ran out. The car was standing at the door. Quick as they were, Lyn and Phil Brinsley were a little quicker. When Mack and Emil came out, the other two were stepping in a taxi at the door of the Allingham.

Mack took the wheel. The taxi had less than a hundred yards start of him. Both cars roared across Third Avenue against the lights, Mack escaping a smash with a trolley car by a hair’s breadth. At Second Avenue the lights were with them. Then through another long block to First. Lyn had a good car and driver; Mack was unable to gain much on him.

“Climb in back,” Mack growled to Emil. “There’s a Thompson under the back seat.”

“Not in the street, Boss!” pleaded Emil. “Not in the open street!”

Mack looked at him and the old man obeyed. Scrambling over the seat, he got out the machine gun and hid it under his coat.

The taxi turned south in First Avenue, with Mack fifty yards behind. This street carried a big traffic at all hours, and just at this time the southward stream was at its heaviest. Both cars were forced to slow down. No use trying to beat the lights here. They were too close together; the street was too well policed. To be stopped even for a moment would end the chase altogether. Mack thought with curling lip: Those two can’t afford to argue with a cop no more than me!

Mack drove like a demon, twisting, turning, taking every inch, indifferent to the curses of other drivers. But traffic was the daily bread of the taxi-driver ahead. He maintained his distance. Often in weaving in and out, they lost him for a space, but they had his number. He could not turn out of First Avenue without their being aware of it.

Thus past Twenty-third Street and on under the elevated railway. Little by little the taxi increased its lead until it was a full block ahead. Presently Mack noticed that the driver had changed his tactics. He was no longer so keen to steal a length on the driver alongside him. He drifted over towards the kerb where the slower cars roll. They overhauled him yard by yard. A man on the sidewalk yelled “Taxi!” and to Mack’s amazement the car stopped for him. They sped past and looked in. There was nobody in the taxi.

“God!” muttered Emil. “They dropped out somewhere when traffic was stopped, and we never seen them!”

Mack pulled into the kerb and stopped. He was perfectly silent. His rage could find no outlet. It went too deep. For a while he felt as if it would kill him. His right hand stroked the rim of the steering wheel automatically. Emil, staring at him sideways, was more terrified by his silence than the wildest outbreak.

“Boss! Boss!” he muttered. “Come to! Be yourself!”

A violent shudder went through Mack, and he became aware of the crowded street again. He started his car, and, when an opportunity presented, turned around and drove back up-town. There was nothing else to do. He never spoke.

When they got back home, Emil edged down the basement stairs, thankful to escape him. Mack went into his office and locked the door. He took the bottle of whisky out of his drawer. In a few minutes there was a timid knock on the door.

“Who is it?” growled Mack.

“Lena, Boss.”

“Get the hell downstairs! I don’t want anything.”

“Please, Boss, Emil said I must tell you. When Lyn fell in the yard his wallet bounced out of his pocket. I picked it up after.”

Mack was suddenly galvanised into action. He flung the door open, and snatching the wallet out of the woman’s hand, slammed the door in her face. Emptying the miscellaneous contents out on his desk, he went over it all with burning eyes. There was a letter which had been folded and refolded to fit a little pocket of the wallet. Mack read:

MY DEAREST,—I am longing to see you, but you mustn’t let that persuade you against your better judgment. I’ll send this to the Allingham. I suppose it is unwise even to write, but I can’t call you up, and it hurts not to have some way of telling you that I love you. Call me up every time that it is safe to do so. I am so anxious about you! It is dreadful to love somebody who lives in danger. You would never have told me, but I could see it in your eyes, and so I told you—or showed you—which is the same thing. I loved you even before I knew that you had saved my mother’s life by killing the man who was on his way to shoot her. I wouldn’t have cared if you *had* been a chauffeur, but my instinct told me you were not. Oh, I love you so much it is like a great ache inside me all the time—but a happy ache! Take care of yourself for my sake!

Mack sat very still. He read the letter again. So it was Lyn who had killed Snake and had been laughing at him, Mack, ever since. So Lyn had won Muriel at sight in his chauffeur's uniform and they had been laughing at him together! By God! there were some things a proud man could not bear! A great burning flame seemed to seize hold of Mack. He leaped up, choking. Something gave way, and he fell back. He lost himself.

This time for good. When he became conscious of his surroundings once more the little room, the big flat-topped desk, the smashed casement, he was somebody else. A different person had entered into his brain and stayed there talking to him. Well, this was a wise guy and cool as ice. Worth listening to.

You stand alone! the voice was saying. Liars, traitors, and false women, the whole world is against you! Show them! Show them! Shoot down whoever stands in your way. Shoot the lovers! Riddle their young bodies! When you see them lying dead and bloody before you, then you can sleep!

He thought of Stinger and Monk. What were they doing? Fooling him too? No matter; he could use them to better advantage now. He had instructed them in the beginning to keep in touch with their hang-out in Newark by 'phone, so he could reach them if necessary. He picked up the telephone. It pleased him to notice how steady his hand was. He called Newark and when he got an answer, said:

"As soon as Stinger or Monk calls up, tell them to drop what they're doing, and go to the café on Lexington Avenue that they know about, and wait there for me."

As Mack sat there his prompter began to dope out a new plan of action. Anyhow, the girl is still in your hands, he suggested—that is, if Nell Cottar has done her part.

Mack reached for the telephone again and got Nell. "Are Kate and the girl there?" he asked.

Nell's voice was strained. "Yes," she said. "—Wait a minute!" Presently her voice resumed. "I just wanted to close the door." Her voice broke then. "Oh, Mack, let them go!" she whispered. "You have punished them enough. It's pitiful! . . ."

"Quiet!" he snarled. "Have they seen anybody this morning?"

"No."

"Or telephoned?"

"No. They're still in the bedroom."

“Don’t let them go out. Work on their fears. Tell them there’s a plot against Kate.”

“I can’t keep them from telephoning if they want.”

“That’s all right, but don’t let anybody into the apartment until I come. You know my ring.” He hung up.

Kate first—then the girl, whispered the inner voice, and Mack grinned.

He went upstairs and shaved; dressed with care. Grinned in satisfaction at the sight of his face in the mirror. Cool as ice, that guy! Returning downstairs, he shouted for Emil.

“Come on up! We’re going out again.”

Emil’s jaw dropped when he looked at him. “Boss,” he stammered, “eat something before you go.”

“To hell with it!” muttered Mack.

“Don’t go out now, Boss!” pleaded Emil. “You look awful! Wait until you cool down, Boss.”

Mack smiled at him. “Are you going to do what I tell you, or shall I begin with you?”

Emil’s head sank between his shoulders. He followed Mack out of the house like a whipped cur. That’s the way to handle them, said the voice to Mack; quietly; quietly; always with a smile.

He drove to Nell Cottar’s little flat on East Twenty-third Street. In the hall of the building they told him that she was out. Mack ran up his eyebrows, and went up anyhow. There was no answer to his ring at her door. He put his finger on the bell and kept it there until she opened the door. Seeing him, she seemed ready to faint with terror, and he knew without being told that he had been bilked again.

He pushed in, closing the door behind him. “Where are they?”

She stared at him with distended eyes, incapable of answering.

“Why didn’t you answer my ring?” he snarled. “You’ve played me false!”

“Mack, you’re not yourself!” she stammered.

“Why didn’t you tell me that there was something between Lyn Dixon and the girl?”

“I didn’t know it until just now!”

“He has taken her away?”

“I could not do anything, Mack. Two men and two women against me! I didn’t even try to stop them.”

“You were on their side!”

“I only made out to be.”

“Where have they gone?”

She did not answer immediately, and he suddenly found he had his hands around her throat, shaking her until her hair came loose. She made no resistance.

It was obvious that she could not answer him while he was choking her, and he flung her violently on a sofa. “Answer me!”

She lay face down, motionless. “I don’t know,” she whispered.

“You lie! You were afraid I’d get it out of you! That’s why you couldn’t face me. Where have they gone?”

She slipped off the sofa; knelt at his feet. “Aw, Mack!” she whimpered, “let them go! It’s a beautiful thing, their feeling for each other. Let them be happy!”

“Let them go!” he shouted. “It was Lyn Dixon who killed Snake! Maybe you knew that too!”

“No, no!”

“By God! I believe you did know it!” He caught her by the hair, and jerked her to her feet. Thrusting his face close into hers, he snarled: “Where have they gone? I’ll get it out of you if I have to tear you to pieces!”

When he released her, she dropped limply on the sofa and covered her face. “To Greenwich, Connecticut,” she whispered. “To get married.”

“What name does he go under?” demanded Mack.

“I don’t know.”

As his flexed fingers drew slowly towards her face, she cried out: “You can hurt me all you want. I can’t tell you! She called him Jack. That’s all I know.”

Mack turned and ran out without waiting for more.

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MACK picked up Stinger and Monk at the meeting-place and kept Emil Sanner with him also. There was no knowing how much assistance he might require on this expedition. He stopped for a moment at his house to instruct Lena not to go to the door nor to answer the telephone until he returned.

They were in Greenwich before eleven o'clock. They had no difficulty in tracing so conspicuous a quartette. Lyn and his party had gone direct to the clerk of the court to apply for a licence to marry. They were informed that, under the laws of Connecticut five days had to elapse before they could be married. So extreme was their disappointment that the clerk had good-naturedly informed them that no period of waiting was required in the state of Maryland, and that the town of Elkton was the Gretna Green of America. They had instantly departed for Elkton, Maryland. They were driving a blue sedan of an air-flow design.

Mack returned to upper Manhattan, crossed the George Washington Bridge, and made his way across New Jersey by the least frequented roads until he struck route 25. He drove like a madman, indifferent to the protests of his passengers, neither stopping nor pausing until he ran the car aboard the Newcastle ferry at five o'clock.

Mack's was the last car to catch the ferry. He jumped out and made his way forward, searching in every car. Not finding the faces he was looking for, he approached a deck-hand.

"Say, fellow, did you happen to notice a young couple in a blue sedan with a New York licence crossing this afternoon. There was another couple with them."

The man looked him over and grinned. "Pretty sweet on each other, eh, mister? Bound for Elkton, I reckon. They all come this way."



Mack silently cursed the humorist, and described the two he was looking for, and their companions.

“Sure, I seen them,” said the deck-hand. “On the three-forty trip from Pennsville. They got more than an hour’s start of you. You’ll never stop them, mister. Don’t take an hour to get hitched in Elkton.”

Mack looked at him, thinking: I would kill you if I wasn’t after bigger game. The man walked away with an uneasy glance over his shoulder.

When Mack returned to his car, his three companions were standing beside it. “Get in,” he said curtly.

“Nothing doing,” said Stinger. The other two were obviously backing him up.

Mack’s hand moved towards his hip. So did Stinger’s. They paused. “I can draw quicker than you, Boss,” said Stinger. “I’m known for it.”

They brought their hands forward. Stinger went on mildly. “Don’t want to have no trouble with you, Boss. If you let Emil or me or Monk drive, we’re your men. But we’re not going to risk our necks for nobody. Cheese! my hair was like to turn white since this morning.”

Mack was forced to submit. For the rest of the way Stinger drove with Monk beside him. Mack and Emil shared the back seat.

It was about six when they rolled into Elkton. Here and there along the principal street in front of the frame cottages they saw enormous signs reading: “Minister.”

“Cheese!” murmured Stinger. “This is one marrying town!”

Another sign informed them where licences were to be procured. The clerk had gone home to supper. Upon finding him they were informed that a licence had been taken out an hour before by the Reverend Melcher for John Comerford and Muriel Aymery. The minister lived at 23 Webster Street.

They drove there. Reverend Melcher answered the door bell with a pleased smile. His face fell when he saw that no lady was included in the party. In answer to Mack’s question he said that Mr. and Mrs. Comerford had just left.

“Where were they going from here?” asked Mack.

“Well, they said they had driven so far they would stay in Elkton all night. The friend, Mr. Brinsley, he went back to New York by train.”

Mack grinned.

The principal hotel of the town stood at the junction of the two business streets, an old-fashioned house on the American plan. Leaving his two strongarm men in the car, Mack and Emil went in to consult the register.

There they were: "Mr. J. Comerford and wife, New York; Room 8. Mrs. Aymery, Room 9."

"I want a room for two men," said Mack. "The best you have."

After some discussion as to the most desirable location, he engaged number 7, and was taken upstairs. This room was over the main entrance of the hotel; there was a little balcony outside it. It had a communicating door with room eight, bolted on both sides, of course. Mack noted with satisfaction that the door opened into eight, and that the bolt was a flimsy affair.

One strong push and in she goes! he thought. Then I'll have them together! And Kate when she runs in! Drop over the balcony after. Car waiting around the corner. It's a cinch!

When the bell-boy had left them, Mack went into the hall and listened at the doors of rooms eight and nine. No sound from within. Very softly he tried the handle of eight. The door opened. Emil was looking over his shoulder. The room was empty. Two little valises stood lovingly side by side on the floor. The door into room 9 stood open. Gone to eat! thought Mack, and closed the door again.

He sent Emil down to the car to fetch up the Thompson under his coat. "Tell the boys," he said, "to run the Mackinac around into the street behind the hotel, and wait there, heading north."

"The boys will fall asleep in the car, Boss," warned Emil.

Mack grinned. "That's all right. When the time comes I'll send you on ahead to wake them up and start the engine. This is a one-man job, and I'm taking it myself."

When Emil left him he went to the window to watch the street through the lace curtains. He had no more than taken up his post there, when he saw Lyn and Muriel coming out of a lunch-room opposite, Kate a step behind them. They started across the road. At that moment Emil came out of the hotel.

Emil and Lyn stopped dead, staring at each other. Lyn's eyes flashed right and saw the Mackinac car that he had once driven. He snatched up Muriel's hand, Kate's, and the three of them ran like deer in the other direction. Emil stared after them stupidly, not knowing how to act in the absence of Mack.

With a bellow of rage Mack ran out of the room and down the stairs. The men in the lobby scrambled out of his way, staring in alarm. He collided with Emil, who was coming to warn him, and dragged him out again. When he got out in the street, they had the Mackinac started. Mack and Emil flung

themselves in it. By this time Lyn and Muriel had gained their car and had turned the corner. They sped after.

As they rounded the corner, they caught a glimpse of the blue sedan turning under a street light two blocks ahead. Another brief glimpse when they reached that corner. Then they lost it. Pausing at a crossing, uncertain which way to turn, a pedestrian told them that a blue sedan had turned into the Wilmington road half a minute before.

Springing into motion again, they left the town behind. It was growing dark now. They roared across the level bottom lands, climbed a hill and swept around a bend on screeching tyres. A long straight piece of road stretched ahead of them, and in it they picked up the tail light of the runabout perhaps half a mile in front.

“Step on her!” growled Mack. “We’ve got the power.”

Stinger was driving. They were upon a new concrete road, and he got her up to 70, 75, 80 without any noise or distress. But the car ahead was flying too. There was no traffic to interfere with either of them. For several miles it was impossible to tell if they were gaining. Then, when the road made a sharp turn, as the runabout sped away to the left, they saw that they had cut its lead in half.

“We’ll overtake them before they make the Dupont Highway,” muttered Mack. “I’ll give them a volley from the Thompson as we run by. When they crash, we can go back and make sure that the job is finished.”

The country was level and unbroken, with fields stretching away on each side of the road; few trees, an occasional group of farm buildings; no villages. One long stretch of road succeeded another, and the highest speed was possible. The Mackinac gained steadily on the smaller car; now a furlong separated them; now only a couple of hundred yards.

They came to a bridge over the railway. The long approach had a dangerous double curve in it, and Stinger was forced to slow down. The blue car gained on them, and Mack cursed his driver. Leaving the bridge, they had another S curve to negotiate, and the sedan passed out of sight. A moment or two later, when they straightened out on the flat, it was gone.

“Stop!” ordered Mack. “There was a side road after we crossed the bridge. They have turned into it.”

They went back and struck into the side road. By its manœuvre the sedan had regained all it had lost. This was an old macadam road with holes in it and many curves so that they could never see far ahead. Stinger showed a disposition to slow down.

“Drive!” shouted Mack. “That — isn’t slacking speed because the road is bad!”

“All right,” said Stinger. “It’s your car.”

He forced the heavy car ahead regardless of obstructions. They leaped and swayed; rounded the curves with screaming tyres. Pretty soon there was an ominous crack under the rear.

“There goes a spring,” said Stinger.

“To hell with it!” growled Mack.

The tail light of the flying sedan came into view again; disappeared around a bend; shone out once more. They were gaining on it fast. The road forked. The runabout took the left fork blindly. The macadam gave place to rutty gravel.

“Where the hell does this road go to?” growled Stinger.

“What difference does it make?” said Mack.

The road forked again. The runabout could make no choice. It took the right fork at a venture. They had come up to within a few hundred yards of it. The gravel road had petered out into a country lane, innocent of any paving.

“This road ends in nothing!” cried Mack, laughing. “They have trapped themselves!”

They flashed between two crumbling brick posts, the entrance to an old estate apparently. The road had dwindled to a track. Suddenly the sedan slowed down, and they saw the reason for it. Dangerous-looking wooden bridge ahead. Lyn had no choice. He gave her the gas, and the sedan leaped across. The rotten planks gave under it, letting the car down on the timbers, where it hung. Instantly the three figures were out of it and running along the road, hand in hand.

The Mackinac ground to a stop just short of the bridge. A shallow stream ran beneath it. Mack jumped out, took a look, and flung himself in again.

“Back up! Back up!” he shouted. “There was a ford here before the bridge. You can drive right across. Quick! before they find cover!”

Stinger drove the Mackinac, swaying and splashing through the stream. As they climbed the farther bank their lights picked up the running trio again. Just ahead of them rose a great, fantastic wooden house with a tower. Somebody’s country mansion of the seventies. The porch had rotted away, the windows were out, shutters lay on the ground or hung by a single hinge. Lyn, Muriel and Kate climbed over the remains of the porch and disappeared through the front door.

“We’ve got them now!” cried Mack.

The voice in his head was advising him crisply what to do; he had only to repeat it to his men. “Stop the car where the lights shine directly on the corner of the house. That shows up two sides. Monk, you watch the back of the house; Stinger, you take the other dark side. Emil stays with the car. I’ll go inside after them.”

Monk and Stinger set off in different directions, keeping out of the rays of the headlights, each with a drawn gun.

Mack continued to Emil: “Get out of the car, so you’ll be all set to give chase if they appear. Lie down beside the car where you can watch the two sides of the house. Put the car key in your pocket, so that if you chase them, they can’t double back and steal the car. If they make a break, get the man first. The women will be helpless without him.”

Emil said in a queer voice: “Boss, I’ve been thinking . . .”

Mack stared at him. “Well, spill it!”

“This young guy’s name is John Comerford. On his bag it was J. C. Jr. Well, John Comerford is the name of the main guy in the Treasury who is putting down the liquor traffic. ’Tain’t likely there would be two John Comerfords each with a son called John. Maybe this young guy was put in our house by the treasury as a spy!”

“You may be right,” said Mack. “What of it?”

“Oh, God, Boss, let him go!” gasped Emil. “The son of a treasury official! Let him go! Let him go!”

Mack grinned. “I hope to God you’re right!” he said. “Do you know what I’ll do? I’ll ship the body in a trunk to the father and pin a card on it reading: ‘With Mack Shenton’s compliments!’”

“God, Boss!” whispered Emil. “This is insanity!”

Mack walked away and left him. He felt fine.

It was a clear, starry night, good visibility. Mack surveyed the old house, figuring out what Lyn would do. His wedding-night was nicely spoiled. He wouldn’t live to see another night! Mack chuckled. The front door had been torn off, and the opening yawned wide. Probably Lyn was just inside, watching. Better chance of taking him from the rear. Mack began to circle the house, keeping well out of the light. A rank growth of weeds covered the grounds; the shrubbery had run wild.

A flimsy ruin! It stank of rot and mildew. The clap-boards were dropping off in patches like a skin disease. Perhaps Lyn would go upstairs. That would be his best bet. If he had cover at the top, one man could hold a

stairway against an army. But a big house like this would have a back stairway somewhere. That's where they would have Lyn! If necessary they could wait until daylight. Plenty of time! Plenty of time! From the look of things nobody ever came near the place. Natives probably thought it haunted.

At the back of the house Mack found Monk lying in the weeds. "Nothing stirring on this side, Boss," he whispered.

The back porch was still in place; a door stood wide. Mack climbed to the end of the porch, and snaked his body along until he could peep over the door-sill. He could then see through the central hall and out through the front door into the pale night. Every part of the hall was exposed to his view except a small space in front of the stairway. It was completely empty.

The ground floor appeared to be divided into four great rooms, each with a door on the hall. Kitchen was in the basement. Right in front of Mack opened a black hole leading down there. The door nearest on his left stood open. He crept to the sill and took a slant inside. Enough light came through the windows to show the room bare and empty.

He crept forward in the hall, keeping close to the stair trunk. The stair rail was missing. Raising himself a little, he peered back and up. There was a window at the top. No silhouettes showed against it. He drew himself further forward, and peeped around the bottom step into the front room on the left. Only half the room came within his range of vision. Nothing in sight; no sound!

The two doors on his right were closed. He dared not risk opening them. As he lay in the hall figuring how he could get a look into those two rooms, he heard the whirr of a starter outside and raised himself in astonishment. What was Emil up to? The engine fired on the first turn, raced a moment, slowed as the clutch engaged.

Forgetting all caution, Mack ran to the front door. The Mackinac, moving swiftly, turned in the half-obliterated driveway in front of him. He saw Emil at the wheel, and three shadowy heads through the rear windows. With a yell of rage Mack emptied his automatic at them. They were going too fast. The shots went wild. He scrambled out over the fallen porch and fell in the weeds.

Mack, Stinger and Monk were forced to walk the four or five miles back to the macadam road. Here a milk-farmer picked them up and carried them into Elkton. In Elkton Mack hired a car and driver to take them to New York.

Stinger and Monk fell asleep on the back seat. Mack felt no desire to sleep. The voice inside his head was busily whispering schemes for getting square, and he listened to it the whole way, grinning to himself. There were plenty of ways of getting square. The only difficulty was to choose the cruelest. Mack noticed that the driver glanced at him from time to time, showing fear. He was pleased by the effect he had on the man.

When they crossed the ferry they were told that the big Mackinac with a driver and three people in the rear had crossed at twelve-thirty, going north. Thus they knew they were on the right track.

At dawn as they ran through the outskirts of Rahway, Mack saw his car parked in a side street. He found it uninjured except for a broken leaf in a rear spring; also the key was in the switch. He paid off the Elkton driver, and he and his two men boarded the Mackinac. Mack addressed Stinger and Monk from the front seat.

“We know that the —— has returned to New York,” he said, grinning. “He thinks it’s the safest place to hide, and so it is ordinarily. But this guy couldn’t hide from me if he flew to the moon. I’ve got a hundred different lines on him. I can lay my hands on him at my pleasure. The women, too. I’m going to get them and I’m going to keep them in my house. You fellows can come and see what I’m going to do to them. It’ll be a treat!”

Stinger and Monk glanced at each other. They see I’m not a man to be trifled with, thought Mack.

He turned the car, and drove along Route 1. Stinger and Monk complained loudly of hunger, and he stopped in front of a diner to let them eat. Mack didn’t want food himself. He had too much to think about. He waited for them, brooding, grinning, listening to that other one who spoke to him with his own voice.

He suddenly realised that his men had been gone for a long time. He got out of the car and crossing the sidewalk looked into the diner. Stinger and Monk were not there. “Where are my friends,” Mack asked the counterman. “The big hairy fellow and the blonde?”

“Oh, them,” was the answer. “They never stopped to eat. Come in the front door and went out the back.”

Mack shrugged and turned away. “God-damned rats!” he muttered. “Let them go!” The voice of his friend . . . or was it his own voice . . . whispered: You stand alone now! Well, show the world!

It was about ten o’clock when he drew up in front of his own house, and running up the steps, let himself in with his key. There was fire in his head . . . or ice. Either way he felt great. He found nobody on the ground floor. He

shouted down the basement steps for Lena. Receiving no answer, he ran down. Empty kitchen; breakfast congealed on a cold stove. Bedroom in front in the wildest disarray. Evidently there had been a hasty departure.

“All rats!” yelled Mack. “God damn them to hell!” It eased him to let his voice out.

When he went back to the parlor floor he heard voices above. His own room. He ran up the stairs drawing his gun. As he rounded to the upper hall, two men stepped out of the bathroom at his back, and seized him. Mack went perfectly quiet because the voice said: “This is not the time to put up a fight. Watch your chance!” They took his gun from him. Two plain businesslike men. One said to the other:

“The gun is empty! He’s coo-coo.”

They ran him along the upper hall to the open door of his room and thrust him through it. A scene of wreck inside; bureau, dressing-table hacked to pieces. Lyn, very businesslike, directing operations, and the tall blonde Brinsley wielding a hatchet. Lyn gave Mack a brief glance.

“So he came back,” he said. “I didn’t think he’d be fool enough!”

All was confusion inside Mack. The voice was silent.

Lyn picked up the chair that contained Mack’s secret and turned it over. “Try this,” he said to Brinsley.

Brinsley took a crack at it, and Mack cried out as if he had been struck.

The bottom of the chair had been split wide. Lyn tore off the pieces of wood and pulled out the sheaf of inventories. He laughed. “I had narrowed it down to this room,” he said. “I knew they were here!” Brinsley picked up Lyn’s hand and shook it.

“Well, that finishes my job,” Lyn went on. “You can arrest this man, fellows. Take him before the United States Marshal. Put the cuffs on him; he’s dangerous.”

One of the men took a hand off Mack to get out the handcuffs. The voice whispered to Mack: *Now!* Gathering himself up for a supreme effort, Mack threw them both off. He caught the stair rail behind him; leaped over; struck the steps; tumbled to the bottom.

In a second he was out of the house. Something wrong with his right leg; it dragged. What the hell! He could drive. Wasn’t going to use a brake! He flung himself into the car and started it, pulled out the hand throttle to its limit and let her go. There was a whole chorus of voices inside his head now, shrieking, Go! Go! Go!



He dashed across Third Avenue and gathered speed through the long block beyond. Sixty; sixty-five; that was the way to drive through the streets of New York! At the Second Avenue corner he struck a light car and sent it flying up on the pavement. As he sped on he heard it crash into a show window. Great to hear things smash!

There was still more speed in the Mackinac; seventy, seventy-five; no man ever drove like this before. The people ran for their lives. Ahead at the First Avenue corner men saw him coming and ran into the street shouting and waving their arms to stop the north- and southbound traffic. Get out of the way of Mack Shenton! Across First; the river ahead; a long pier. The car left the ground altogether and planed through the air. Mack yelled in delight. . . .

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IN THE living-room of John Comerford's comfortable apartment in Washington Jack was telling his story. Muriel was beside him on the Chesterfield with her arm twined in his; nearby sat Kate Whiteley, looking at them and occasionally dabbing a handkerchief to her eyes. Her pride and happiness in the young couple and her thankfulness for dangers escaped made Kate tearful and she didn't care who saw it. John senior paced the room, for there was agitating matter in his son's story.

"You see, Dad, the situation was much complicated by my falling in love the night after I went to work for Mack Shenton. And was it a fall? Abysmal! I wanted to shoot Shenton on the spot when I saw him handing Muriel into his car."

"It was Jack who telephoned me that Shenton had taken Muriel to the night club," Kate put in. "That's my first debt to him."

"You said it was a detective you had hired who telephoned you," said Muriel.

"That was only to protect Jack from Shenton's rage. There wasn't any detective."

"Well, go on," said Mr. Comerford.

"While I was waiting for Kate to come, I was watching Shenton and Muriel from the bar," said Jack. "But he came and ordered me outside. I suspected that he was putting something in Muriel's drink, and I was afraid Kate wouldn't get there in time. So I started a rumpus outside in order to create a diversion. By Golly! more than anything else that happened, I regret punching that poor harmless chauffeur. But I had to do something quick. I'll try to find him now and square him."

"What about the man you shot?" asked John senior. "That bothers me."

“It was necessary, Dad,” said Jack coolly. “You see I didn’t know what they were up to until we got to Kate’s house. Then it was too late to call in help. It was up to me.”

“He saved my life!” said Kate tearfully.

“Don’t misunderstand me,” said Mr. Comerford quickly. “I’m not blaming the boy. I’m only troubled by the effect it may have on him. . . . You’re sure it’s not on your mind, son?”

“Absolutely not,” said Jack. “It was *necessary*. That satisfies my conscience. Remember this Snake was a professional murderer at nineteen, Dad. He was bad! How could you regret stopping such a one? . . . If it’s any satisfaction to you, Snake saw me and shot first. Emil and Keesing both heard it.”

“Would they testify?”

“Well, that would be asking a good deal of them,” said Jack, grinning. “If you think there must be an investigation.”

Mr. Comerford took a turn up and down before answering. “No, I do not,” he said. “I have consulted the Attorney-General and he agrees with me. . . . Go on.”

“I’ve told you the main facts of the story,” said Jack. “There are only a few details to fill in. . . . Shenton got it into his head that Kate had shot Snake, or hired somebody to do it, so I fixed it up with Phil Brinsley to call Shenton up and make out that he, Phil, had shot Snake. Shenton fell for the story, but unluckily Phil mired his car after planting the map on the scene and he had to abandon it.”

“Wait a minute! What map?”

“This was a rough map that Snake had drawn of the neighbourhood of Kate’s place. After they had settled on everything the map was cast aside. I picked it up in Shenton’s office the day after the affair, and afterwards sent it to Phil to add realism to his story.”

“Go on.”

“Shenton succeeded in tracing the car to Phil and laid for him in Phil’s own flat. I reached there just in time to save Phil. When Shenton’s plot to ruin Kate came out, I couldn’t stand it any longer. Phil and I kidnapped Shenton and while Phil drove him around I made a last desperate attempt to find the inventories. But Shenton caught me in the act and I had to make a quick getaway. Luckily I had prepared for it by hiring a flat in the Allingham.

“Well, after Shenton found me out, I thought my job was washed up. I didn’t see how I could ever get back in the house again. So I persuaded Muriel to elope with me. We took Kate and motored down to Elkton and got married. We were going south to stay until the smoke blew away. But it didn’t work out that way.

“All this time, I must tell you, Shenton had Nell Cottar planted in the Settlement as a spy on Muriel, and we knew nothing about it. When Muriel blew up with the women down there, Nell made out to befriend her and took her and Kate to stay in her flat, where they were out of reach of the dogs of the press. Of course they were right under Shenton’s thumb there. A near thing. But I got them out. Nell’s not a bad sort.

“Shenton followed us to Elkton. I bribed his man Emil to come over to our side. Emil said that Shenton had gone loony and he was ready to abandon the ship. We ran off with Shenton’s car, leaving him flat, and when we got back to New York I decided to have one more try at finding the inventories. I got Phil and hired a couple of good guys to help me. We entered the house with Emil’s key. Emil and Lena beat it quick for parts unknown.

“Just as we found the inventories Shenton turned up. Well, you read in the newspapers what happened. He had gone completely off his nut. Made a spectacular leap over the stair rail and drove off through the streets at seventy miles an hour. Right across town, out on a pier, and wham! into the East River. When they fished the car out a couple of hours later they found he had broken a leg in his leap. So that was the end of the best-known man on Broadway.”

“What has happened to the rest of the gang?” asked Mr. Comerford.

Jack grinned deprecatingly. “You wouldn’t want me to testify against them, would you Dad?—under the circumstances.”

“Well . . . perhaps not,” said his father reluctantly. “You were given a certain job to do, and you did it. The rest is up to the regular agents.”

“You see, I got quite pally with the bunch,” Jack went on. “We were all in the same boat. We had to make common cause against that madman, Shenton. Megalomania, that was what was eating him. He coined the phrase: The best-known man on Broadway, and set it in circulation. Got away with it for fifteen years, too. He was a phenomenon!”

Mr. Comerford continued to pace the room agitatedly. “My God! what scenes you have been through!” he cried. “It makes me sweat just to think of it! I shall never forgive myself for exposing you to it, never!”

Jack unhooked his arm and flung it around Muriel. “Gosh, Dad! Suppose you hadn’t given me this job? Then I would never have met Muriel. That thought makes *me* sweat. I cannot imagine a life without Muriel now. . . . It has all worked out to the good. I’ve had my fill of excitement, and I’ve won my heart’s desire. I’m ready to go into the law office any time you say!”

“Muriel must be consulted now,” said Mr. Comerford.

“The woman is plumb crazy about me, Dad,” said Jack, grinning. “She is even willing to live in Pittsburgh.”

“There is nothing the matter with Pittsburgh,” said his father with dignity.

Jack laughed. “Well, I told her there were plenty of poor little brats in Pittsburgh for her to wipe the noses of. That is really what clinched it. Wiping noses is her line.”

Muriel pulled his hair.

“And Mrs. Aymery?”

“After Shenton’s death,” said Jack, “when the payments ceased, the plot against Kate quickly collapsed. Newspaper men got hold of the girl who was the principal witness against her, and when she was satisfied that there was no more money in lying, she accepted a good fat sum for telling the truth, and then beat it. Wellington has publicly apologised to Kate and the job of hostess at A l’Aigle d’Or is waiting for her. I’m afraid she won’t come to Pittsburgh with us; however, I’ll ask her.” He turned to Kate, grinning. “Kate, will you come and live in Pittsburgh?”

“Nothing doing, my lad,” said Kate. “I’m not going to be anybody’s mother-in-law. My God! I suppose you’ll be making me a grandmother next year!”

“I’ll do my part.”

“No!” said Kate. “Back to Broadway. That’s my life. I’ll only be good for it a few more years. When I’m fired again I’ll go down to look at the ruins in Guatemala.”

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 *The Murder of a Bad Man* by Hulbert Footner]