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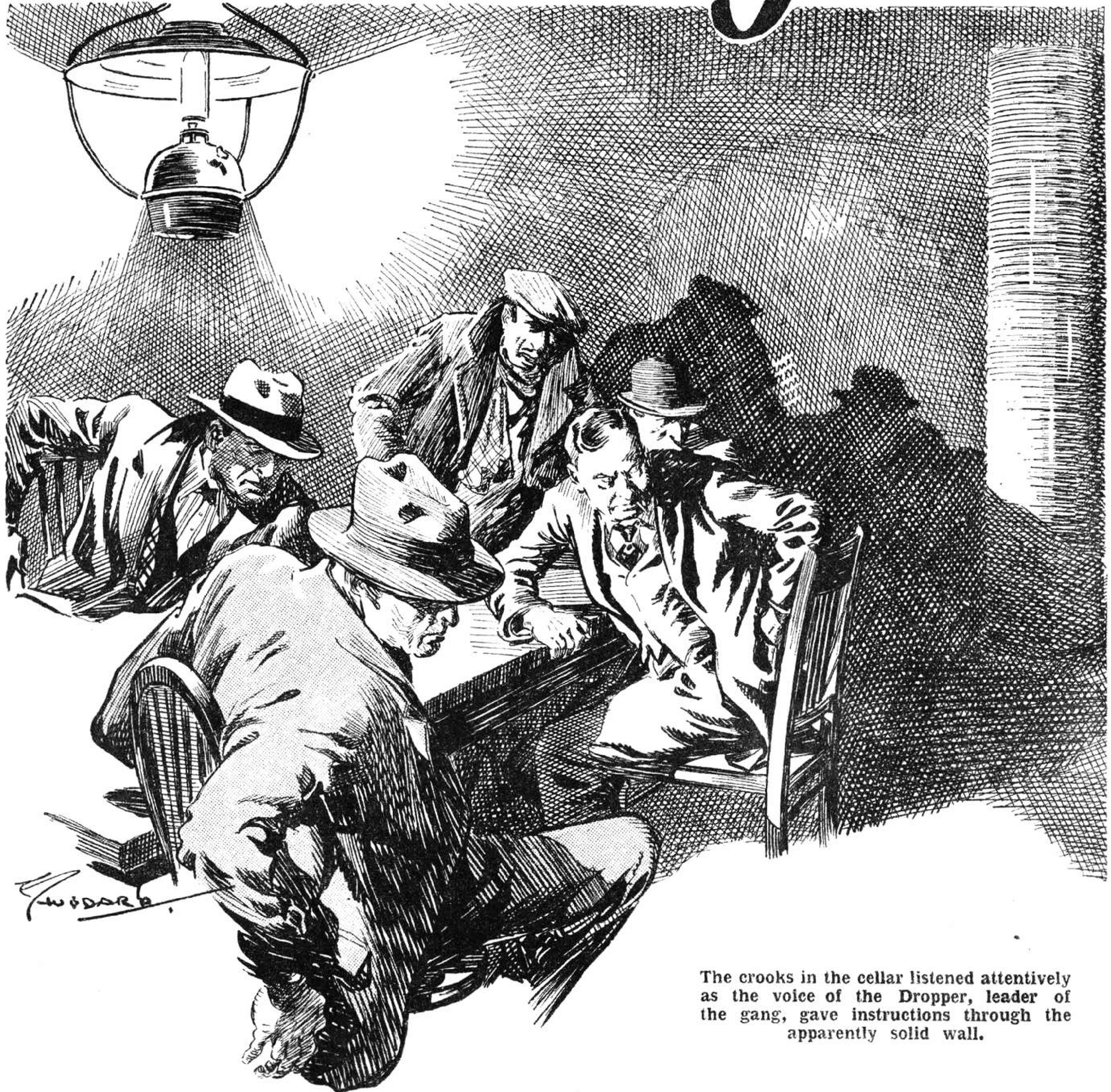


**Call in
the Yard**

A GRIPPING MYSTERY
STORY of the UNDERWORLD

In a semi-conscious
condition she was led
to the ambulance—
and fell into the hands
of the kidnappers

Call in the Yard



The crooks in the cellar listened attentively as the voice of the Dropper, leader of the gang, gave instructions through the apparently solid wall.

Chapter 1. LIMEHOUSE NIGHT.

SAMMY PETERS strolled along Limehouse Causeway with a jaunty stride, a smirky smile, and a feeling of hilarity. He had no reason to feel disconsolate. His pocket contained twelve pounds. Attached to his right arm was Elsie Meers, whose beauty was known from Stepney to Tidal Basin.

"You're a great kid," he told Elsie, squeezing her arm tightly to indicate his enthusiasm, his sense of proprietorship.

"You're not so bad yourself," said Elsie. The girl believed firmly that beauty never enthuses. "Where are we going?"

"To the pictures, cherub."

He was wrong. A few yards farther along the Causeway a man stepped from a darkened doorway, and strolled across the pavement.

"I want a word with you," he told Sammy.

"Can't you see I'm busy?" remarked Sammy.

"Forget it!" The man's tone was

offensively casual. "When my boss wants to meet people, their girl-friends just walk home."

"Are you telling me——" started Elsie.

"Yes, lady," said the man easily. "I'm even telling you. Good-night!"

Sammy stretched to his full five-feet-three.

"You're looking for trouble, stranger," he snapped, "and if you don't beat it I'll provide you with all you want."

The man laughed nastily. He was tall and bulky. A nose spreading over a

Sammy Peters, small-time crook, was found dead, with the gun which fired the bullet that killed him still gripped in his right hand. Suicide or . . . ? That was the problem Detective-sergeant Sanderson, of Scotland Yard, set out to solve, and it started him on the trail of strange adventure.



BY DAVID HUME

quantity of his face indicated that someone had once hit him with greater force than Sammy could possibly muster. But there was a hard, icy light in his pale blue eyes that made Sammy shiver. His girl-friend watched her escort closely.

"Are you going to let this big stiff talk to you like that?" she shrilled. "Send him on his way. He's making the pavement look untidy."

The stranger grinned. "One day, girlie," he said, "I'll come round and take you for a walk myself."

"Look here," said Sammy, realising that he was losing prestige. "You can't stand there trying to ride high and mighty over me!"

"Is that so? Listen, little boy. The Dropper is waiting to see you!"

Sammy took a deep breath, and his pale face grew even more pallid. Slowly, he released his grip on Elsie's arm. The girl looked at him wonderingly, and her carmined lips started to curl scornfully.

"Elsie," said Sammy, after licking his dry mouth, "we'll have to call off the date. I'm sorry. I'll see you to-morrow!"

"Think again," snapped the girl. "I've

got no time for yallerlegs. I thought I'd come out with a man. The mistake was mine. Take your boy-friend with you."

She spun round on her high heels, and strutted down the Causeway. Sammy stared after the retreating figure for a second, and then turned to the sailing man by his side.

"That's caused it," he said. "What am I wanted for?"

"Couldn't say. I was only told to collect you."

"I've never set eyes on you before. How'd you know me?"

"I didn't. But I'd seen the girl before, and I was told to collect the fellow with her. Come on—this way!"

Sammy was growing cowed. As his companion turned off the Causeway and dived into the criss-cross of narrow streets leading down to the West India Docks he shivered.

Followed an uncomfortable period of silence. Then the stranger turned off down a street, passed into the darkness of an alley, threaded his way through, and walked quickly under an arch into another alley. Peters was almost running. The big man's raking strides swallowed distance.

A dim lamp shone at one end of the alley, breaking the darkness with a sickly light. Sammy pulled the collar of his overcoat closer about his neck. A cold, dank river mist was eddying up from the nearby Thames. At the far end of the alley a small flagged passage turned to the left. The guide led the way round the corner.

Sammy thought his knowledge of East End topography was more than adequate. But the stranger had defeated him on this sudden walk. They reached the end of the passage before the man turned to Sammy.

"We dive in here," he said. "Watch your step. There are no lights on."

Sammy gulped, felt a cold quiver start at the base of his spine, and sensed the hairs lifting on the nape of his neck. They ploughed through the darkness, turning to the left, and suddenly the big man opened a door. He stumbled into a black passage, Peters groping in the rear.

"Shut the door as soon as you're through," came the hoarse instruction, "and don't make too much noise. Let me grab your hand, and I'll lead the way for you. Don't try to hurry!"

Sammy closed the door, seized the extended hand, and edged his way forward. The air was damply musty, and the cold seemed to grow more intense. Sammy was straining his hearing to catch every sound, but, apart from the trivial shuffle of their feet, there was none.

"Bend your head. We're going through a low doorway."

Sammy bent obediently, and, still led by his left hand, trailed his right along the wall as a guide. He could feel the dampness of soddened plaster. As they went along the passage he counted seven paces. Then his guide stopped, and turned to him:

"We start down to the cellar when we

get through this door. Be careful—the steps are wet and slippery.”

Peters said nothing—there was nothing for him to say. At odd seconds he thought of Elsie, thought of the film he wanted to see, tried to think of anything except the Dropper. The descent to the cellar was slow and dangerous. Twice Sammy felt his feet sliding on the steps. He grew colder and colder—and not only from the chilly air.

When at last they reached level ground again, Sammy felt himself dragged round to the left, and led through a darkness so definite that it could almost be felt. Peters was baffled. He knew that under the old Limehouse houses lay some very curious cellars, relics of the days of the tong wars, the heyday of smuggling, the peak period of dock robberies, and hiding-places of a multitude of crimes, but the one through which he stumbled now seemed more ominous than anything he could have imagined.

His nostrils caught the muggy smell of river water. That added to his puzzles. His guide had led the way towards the river, but they should still be far away from it. Again Sammy waited while his escort opened a door. Once more they plunged through darkness.

“Where are we going?” whispered Peters. “Never mind about that. We’ll be there in a few seconds,” came the hoarse reply.

“I hope so,” said Sammy, speaking through chattering teeth.

A few more paces, and then he felt his arm gripped, and he was pushed forward, while the thug stood on one side to make way. Sammy extended his right hand, and felt the face of a door. He waited, hesitantly, for instructions.

“Give three double knocks,” ordered the guide. “Password is ‘Revel.’”

Sammy raised a trembling hand, and knocked. He heard a slur of movement, and the squeak of a hinge. Then a voice spoke—so close to his ear that Peters started violently.

“Who is it?” asked the invisible man.

“Revel,” stuttered Sammy.

There came the click of a lock, and Sammy heard hinges whine as the door drew back. Still he could see nothing. There was no light beyond.

“Come this way,” said the unknown.

Peters, pushed from the rear, hurried through the doorway, the guide holding his left arm from the back. As soon as he crossed the threshold someone held his right wrist.

“Follow me,” said the newcomer, and immediately started moving away. Peters could feel blobs of perspiration trickling down his face. He clenched his teeth, tried hard to appear unconcerned. The effort was not a success.

The leader opened another door, and, for the first time in five minutes, Sammy saw a light. He closed his eyes for a second to steady the effect of the sudden light, and opened them again to discover that the illumination was dimmer than he had thought. Facing him was a long cellar, and from the far end of the low ceiling hung an acetylene lamp. The floor was flagged with stone, and the walls were green with age and damp.

In the centre of the cellar was a long table, and around it sat four men. There was no other furniture. Sammy advanced tremulously, examining the men as he drew nearer to them. The lines across his forehead deepened. He knew none of them. He was led to a chair, and slumped into it with relief.

The man who had opened the door walked over to the far wall. It was then that

Sammy jumped again, for the man spoke into the wall!

“They are all here now, sir,” he said deferentially.

Peters gulped, and took another look. He could see nothing except the wall. It seemed that the speaker was talking to the bricks.

“Very well,” came a deep, resonant voice. “I am ready to start!”

Sammy blinked his eyes, and took another look. The speaker was invisible. He looked at the other men. They appeared quite unsurprised.

“Good-evening, gentlemen,” said the mysterious speaker. “This, as you know, is the Dropper—pleased to meet my East End employees and friends again. Particularly am I delighted to note that our latest arrival obeyed the message with such promptitude. I will commence business without any further waste of time.”

The men bent their heads forward, staring towards the wall. Sammy was dazed. It already seemed a far cry to Limehouse Causeway!

SECRET ORDERS.

“AT seven o’clock this evening,” the Dropper commenced, “a ship arrived in the Thames from Oslo. It is now in Bugsby’s Reach, waiting to get into Victoria Docks. That ship is the Christina. Among a mixed cargo is a consignment addressed to the Pinakothek Gallery in Munich, which is due for transshipment. I do not intend that it shall reach Munich, although the consignment has, in fact, been dispatched by the Christina for safety. It was thought that such a cargo would never be expected on such a boat. My agents provided me with the information.”

The Dropper paused. His speech was metallic, incisive. The men, their faces strained, continued to stare at the wall. Then the voice went on:

“The consignment is not considerable in size. The length is eight feet, the width five feet, and the depth nine inches. The total weight may be a hundred pounds, or a trifle more. That article, I understand, is being kept for safety in the captain’s cabin. I want it, and I am going to have it.”

Sammy raised his hand, and ran his fingers between his collar and his throat.

“I have made most of the arrangements, but certain matters will have to be left to you men. It is to be hoped, for your own sakes, that no faults will be made. The consequences of any errors might be very, very troublesome for all of you. I hope I am making myself quite clear.”

The silent men nodded their heads. They knew what the Dropper could do. He was making himself quite clear—a little too clear as far as the warning concerned Sammy.

“The most difficult problem in any matter such as this is to gain access to the boat. I have saved you the trouble. The officer taking over during the middle watch will offer no opposition. I have made the necessary arrangements with him. That watch, as you know, lasts from midnight until four a.m.

“Having said so much, it only remains for me to give instructions to you individually. I do not want to mention your names now. That is opposed to my policy. I therefore want you to walk over to this wall, one by one, and I will give directions to each of you. Start from the head of the table.”

A tall, burly man rose and stepped across the cellar. His face was yellow rather than pale, and a long raincoat, swathed closely round his body, accentuated his height.

“I want every man in the room to pay close attention to all the orders given,” said the Dropper. “That will save unnecessary repetition. You, my friend, will find a motor-launch waiting at the side of Miller’s Wharf, Silvertown, at midnight. All the other men here will join you there at that time. You have from now until midnight to discover the exact position of the Christina. Take the launch along as quietly as possible, and get enough way on her for you to cut off the engine a fair distance from the ship. Apart from that all you have to do is to wait in the launch until the others rejoin you. Have I been thoroughly understood?”

“Yes, sir,” said the man.

“Next man,” ordered the Dropper.

A middle-aged man with a swaggering gait, and a general air of arrogance, stepped across to the wall.

“In that launch,” said the Dropper, without hesitating, “you will find a key hidden under the third floorboard at the stern. Open the locker with it. There you’ll find three automatics, all silenced, and a bottle of butyl chloride. Far at the back of the locker is an ether spray. I want you to board the ship first, and lead your other men as an attacking party. I don’t mind whether you shoot them, dope them, or leave them alone—so long as I get that consignment. If the crew cause trouble, let them have the works. Try to grab the captain first, and dope him while you search his cabin for that package. Get the consignment down to the launch as best you can. I leave that to you, but there should be some very simple way. All clear?”

“All clear, sir!”

“Very well. The next two men at the table needn’t rise from their seats. I leave them to take their instructions from you as occasion demands. But see that they are armed before you board the Christina. Now I’ll speak to the next man.”

Sammy rose leisurely, trying to appear unconcerned. But he could feel a curious pain in the pit of his stomach, a singular dryness in his mouth, an odd twitching of his fingers, and a shaking tremor running down his legs, making his walking balance unsteady.

“Yes, sir,” he said, voice unnaturally pitched.

“You have worked for me before,” said the Dropper, “but this is the first time we have met. I have watched your work with interest. You have never let me down on a job. You have always obeyed the orders sent to you, and you have been successful. For those reasons I feel that the time has come for you to receive more important work. That is why I have sent for you tonight. If I hadn’t trusted you I would never have promoted you to the work I am giving you. Clear?”

“Quite, sir!”

“Right! Well, you travel in the launch with the other men, board the ship with them, and give such assistance as you can. The important part of your job arises afterwards. When the launch has returned to Silvertown you will find a lorry waiting at the rear of the wharf. Under your instructions the men will assist you to put the package in that lorry. The men will then leave you, and go to their respective homes. To you will be given the task of seeing that the package is safely delivered to me. Is that all clear?”

“Yes, sir,” said Sammy, without any enthusiasm.

“You are to drive as though making for Sevenoaks. Just before you come to the town a man will put up his hand to stop you. If he says: ‘Is this the way to Tonbridge?’ reply ‘Yes.’ He will then give you further instructions. Don’t make any

mistakes. Just as I pay heavily for work well done, so do I make those pay who make mistakes. Is there any question you wish to ask—any additional information you want?"

"I don't think so."

"Never say that to me. I employ only those who know what they're doing. I have no room for men who can only think they know."

"I am sorry, sir," spluttered Sammy.

"That will do. I have finished with you. If you are successful you'll be more than satisfied with my treatment of you. The same applies to all the men in the room. The men I have not yet spoken to will remain behind after the others have left. I have special work for them which doesn't concern the remainder of you."

The men thus dismissed rose immediately, and started to file out of the cellar. Sammy turned to his old guide, worried and anxious.

"Tell them to take me with them," he said. "I don't know my way out."

The man gave the necessary instructions, but as Peters was hurrying out the Dropper called him back.

"You have more than two hours yet before you need start work. In the meantime collect a map, and make certain that you'll be able to follow the road I gave you without fumbling. And, for your guidance, the lorry waiting for you is a Morris Commercial. You drove one before you joined me—that's why I selected it. Good-night!"

Sammy arrived in the street more dazed than ever, verging on panic at the thought that he might have forgotten, or misunderstood, some of the instructions. His associates left him immediately they reached the street, and he walked slowly on his own towards the Causeway. He was not happy.

In the days when he drove a van, Sammy had thought crime was exciting, profitable, a "swell" existence. That, perhaps, was why he left his steering-wheel to commence on a career as a "van-dragger"—raiding goods from merchants' vans. At first it seemed novel and thrilling, and it certainly brought more financial grist to the mill than mere lorry-driving. But at times he found the stolen parcels hard to fence, had found it difficult to persuade men to pay more than a tenth of the value of any article he stole. It was then that he found a more reasonable fence—one of the many men who worked for the Dropper. Thereafter he found himself more and more in the meshes. Instructions would reach him by a dozen and one channels; instructions which sent shivers down his back, but which he was afraid to disregard. The Dropper had left a trail behind him in the seamy side of the underworld that could not be ignored.

"I never wanted to be a big-timer," Sammy told himself again and again as he wandered back to the Causeway. "I wanted to carry on in my own little way. And now this happens! Oh, what's the use—"

His memory restored to him the conversation, the orders about the carrying of automatics, the use of ether and butyl chloride.

"Darn the Dropper!" he said bitterly. But he whispered the words so softly that even the air didn't pick them up. It was said that the Dropper had a million ears in London. Sammy thought of Elsie Meers, and his face became pathetic with misery as he plunged on, his cold hands sunk in his overcoat pockets.

THE PRICE OF KNOWLEDGE.

MIDNIGHT chimed. A strong wind was whipping across the Thames, and the night was bitingly cold. The men on the wharf huddled together in silence, blowing into their cupped hands,

ready to make the move upstream. It was ten minutes later when the launch slid quietly into the water, engine just ticking over, and moved away on the breast of the tide.

Before they left the wharf Sammy had been handed his automatic. He sat back nursing it with a horrible dread flooding his mind. He didn't want to hurt anyone. But what would the Dropper say afterwards if he was told to fire and did not? The thought made Sammy colder than the night could ever do.

The launch was twenty yards from the bank when the pilot opened up, and there were a few dim chugs as the nose was turned upstream. The men's faces were tensed, their eyes staring unseeingly over the black water. After a time, the lights on the launch were extinguished, and the engine was switched off.

"We're about seventy yards away from it," whispered the pilot.



As the crooks' launch bumped against the Christina's hull, a voice called down: "Who's there?" "Friends—as arranged," came the whispered response.

Away on their right they caught the lights of a ship. A minute later they could see the black shadow of the hulk limned against the clouded sky. The man by the side of the pilot bent over the side of the launch, and groped with his hand as they touched the side of the Christina with a faint bump. It was some time before they found a mooring-rope for small boats trailing from the stern. The pilot held it, steadied the launch by it, and one of his associates raised a dim voice:

"Ahoy there! Anyone aboard?"

The men waited anxiously. For a short time all they heard was the sucking gurgle of the Thames swirling round the cargo-boat. Then a soft, cautious voice called from above:

"Who's there?"

"Friends—as arranged," was the reply.

"Hold tight for a moment. Ladder coming down."

They waited until the end of a rope-ladder appeared through the darkness. The man by the pilot's side was the first to start

the ascent. One by one they made their way up the swinging ropes. The passage was slow and difficult. Sammy, his teeth chattering, was the last to essay the climb. When finally he clambered over the rails his associates were wending their way along the deck. He joined the procession. At the head of a companion-way the man who had lowered the ladder stopped, and drew them together.

"Bottom of the steps and turn right. Fourth door along's the captain's, and you'll find what you want there. I'm going to get into the launch."

He slid away into the darkness, and the men started the descent of the narrow, steep stairs. Below they found a dim light burning, and tiptoed along the corridor. Then they stopped, and the leader pointed to a door. In his left hand he held a torch, in his right a gun. He nodded towards the door, and whispered to the nearest man:

"Open it, and then stand back."

The man thus bidden turned the handle and slid the door back quietly. Immediately their leader turned on his torch, and stepped into the cabin. The others crowded in on his heels.

The torch shone its beam quickly round the cabin, picking up the position of the bunk just as the captain raised himself.

"What the——" he commenced, and got no farther.

"Hoist those hands," snapped the leader. "There are three of us holding down on you. We've come for that consignment for Munich."

"The heck you have," said the captain, sitting more erect. Sammy backed away a little and closed the cabin door.

"Where is it?" asked the Dropper's man.

"I don't know."

"You soon will. Want to hand it over or die?"

"You couldn't kill me—you'd swing." The man seemed quite calm now the first shock of the visit had passed.

"Couldn't, eh? You'd be surprised. I'll count five—that's all. At the end of that count either I know where that package is or you're rubbed out. Take your choice. This is no leg-pull. I'm starting. One——"

The captain blinked his eyes, and moved as though to slip down from his bunk. The Dropper's leader stepped forward and stuck his gun into the man's ribs. Sammy could see the cabin swirling round him. The automatic in his hand was swaying from side to side.

"Two——"

"Don't be a fool," said the captain, growing more uneasy.

"Three——"

"You can't murder me—not in England—like this!"

"Four——"

"No, no, no!" The captain's voice was a whimper.

"For the last time," said the thug, grimly, "are you going to tell me where that package is, or do I shoot? I'll give three seconds. When I say 'Five,' I shoot!"

The captain's eyes protruded, and his weather-beaten face began to grow pale. His hands clutched tightly at the clothes. Sammy saw the scene as though through gauze.

"Five! Take it!"

There was a faint, dull plop. An odd expression flooded the captain's face. His mouth opened, then sagged. His hands started to move towards his chest, but dropped before they could reach it. A spreading patch of red showed on the left side of his pyjama coat. Then he reeled over and flopped down, his head hanging half over the bunk's side.

The murderer blew calmly down the

uzzle of his gun before turning to the man.

"Obstinate swine," he said, without a flicker of emotion. "Start on the cabin boys, and let's get out of here!"

They turned on the light, and Sammy covered himself before his fright could be discovered. He had been propping himself against the side of the cabin, waiting until the swirl of mist cleared from his eyes, until some strength came back to his tottering legs, until waves of dumb fear ceased threatening to throw him into a faint. Without looking at the man in the lorry, he stumbled round with his associates, searching here and there for the consignment.

It was soon found, lodged against the wall in the captain's bath-room. The consignment was light, but cumbersome. Once or twice, on their way to the deck, a corner of the package clicked against woodwork, and the men stood rigid, waiting until all was silence again.

The betrayer of the Christina had left a coil of rope on deck immediately above the launch, and they secured this rope round the package. Then the leader sent Sammy down to the launch to assist in stowing the consignment while it was powered. Peters thought he was more likely to arrive in the Thames than the boat. His heart was pounding into his ribs with the force—as it seemed to him—of a trip hammer, and there were seconds when his limbs felt jellified.

Three or four minutes later the launch pushed off from the side of the Christina, and floated downstream for thirty yards before the engine burst into a gentle purr. As the boat ran down-river, two men balanced the cargo while the remainder sat, tense and keen-eyed, guns in their hands, searching for any sign of a police boat. But they reached Miller's Wharf safely, and at five minutes past one Sammy Peters started the engine of his lorry, and turned the vehicle out on its journey.

He felt better now. It was more comfortable to be alone, even though his cargo smelt a murder, and the night air bit into him. As he passed through Greenwich Marshes, and on to Lee Green, it seemed that the events of the evening were too staggering to be true. His mind was dulling, refusing to accept that Sammy had that evening seen a man butchered in cold blood.

So he drove on through Bromley, and then to Farnborough. Soon he would have to search for the waiting man. He had not long to wait. Shortly before he reached Riverhead a man stepped into the road, and Sammy trod on the brake.

"Is this the way to Tonbridge?" inquired the man.

"Yes," said Sammy, stopping the lorry.

The man advanced and bent over the edge of the driving seat.

"Then turn right to Brasted, then left, and then left again to Leigh. A man will stop you this side Leigh, and ask for a lift to some place. Ask him what he'll give you. If he says he'll give you a bob, let him ride with you. That's all."

Peters started again, feeling weary. He wondered where this early morning drive would end, how long it would be before a policeman stopped him and asked awkward questions. His foot pressed down harder on the accelerator, so that he almost missed the man who hailed him when he reached a spot a mile outside Leigh.

"Give me a lift to Maidstone, mister," said the man.

"What'll you pay me?"

"A bob."

"Jump in!"

The stranger had a black felt hat pulled

down over his face, and a well-worn overcoat was turned up round his chin. Immediately Sammy engaged the clutch he received further instructions:

"Turn right on the Tonbridge Road, pass through the town, take the road to left at Pembury, and carry on until you get the other side Yalding on the Maidstone Road. Stop when I tell you to. Get going!"

Peters travelled along the road without speaking. The stranger's way of giving orders was compelling. Peters sighed. After what he had seen and done that night a little extra trouble didn't seem to matter. They were a mile beyond Yalding when the instruction was given:

"Slow down. Hundred yards on your left you'll see a house standing back. The drive gate is open. Turn in there, and drive straight into the garage facing you. That's all."

Peters swung the wheel, saw the laurel beds flanking the drive, and headed through the open doors of a garage. He pulled the lorry to a stop, and stretched himself, then started to open the door.

"Wait," said the stranger. "Stay where you are for a while. I want to talk to you. Did everything go off according to plan?"

"I think so."

"Don't you know whether it did or not?" asked the man sharply.

Sammy started to twist round. A sudden thought flashed across his mind—a thought that froze him to the marrow.

"Are you the Dropper?" he asked.

"Don't ask questions. What happened to-night? Tell me all about it."

Sammy told the story falteringly. Once again he was gripped by fear. The hidden man by his side just listened, saying nothing. After Sammy had finished there was silence, then his companion spoke:

"Are you quite certain that you have got the right consignment in this lorry?"

"Quite sure. I saw it put in myself."

"H'm! And are you glad that you've been promoted?" Peters thought he detected a sneer in the voice.

"I think so, sir," he said, and immediately corrected himself. "I mean, of course, I am."

His companion smiled.

"All right," he said. "You'd better make your way back to London. Have you still got the automatic with you?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I give you a hand with the package?"

"I'll have that taken out before you go. I wouldn't risk going back with that gun on you if I were you. If you're stopped it'll make things awkward. Hand it over to me, and I'll get rid of it for you."

Without demur, Peters handed over the weapon, glad to dispose of it.

"You were right about me, Peters," said the man with a curious, sinister change of voice. "I am the Dropper. Would you like to know why I promoted you?"

"Yes, sir," said Sammy, more frightened than ever.

"I'll tell you. I wanted someone to take the risk of bringing this package out of London, but I didn't want any member of my organisation to know where it was left. That was awkward. So I wondered which one of my employees I could best afford to lose. You were only a small-time thief, Peters, but you could drive a van. I thought if you brought the package here I could work on the policy that dead men tell no tales. Your destination will die with you."

"What d'you mean——" started Sammy, sick, a lump filling his throat.

"I mean just that," commented the Dropper, and his trigger-finger flexed. The gun spoke. Sammy groaned slightly and

pitched forward over the wheel, a bullet lodged in his heart.

Sammy Peters, small-time thief, had ceased to live.

The Dropper placed the automatic in the right hand of the corpse.

MISSION OF DEATH.

NINE men sat around a table at New Scotland Yard. They were the commissioner, an assistant-commissioner, two chief-constables, and detective-superintendents representing the central, north, east, west and south districts of the metropolis.

"I'm certain," said Chief-constable Maling, "that you can't leave this job to a divisional detective-inspector. It isn't a local job. You'll find tentacles from that case spreading over most of Britain. I'm certain the Dropper arranged it, and he's a job for the Yard—and no easy job, then. We've lost four men through him already."

"The newspapers are screaming about the Dropper, and the public are beginning to wonder what they're paying a police force for," said the commissioner wearily. "If we don't break this man, he'll break us. That's certain."

The men looked at one another gloomily. Four hours before they had learned of the murder of Captain Osling, of the Christina. Since then they had discovered that a Rubens picture, valued at Munich as worth thirty thousand pounds, had been stolen from the ship. They knew that the man on the middle watch was missing—whether associated with the crooks or murdered they did not know. And that was all.

It was true that a divisional detective at Limehouse had had an inquiry put through about a man named Samuel Peters. It seemed that he had committed suicide under odd circumstances in the garage of an empty house near Maidstone. He had been found sitting in the seat of an empty commercial vehicle which had been stolen on the previous evening from Covent Garden. The man was a small-time "van-dragger," his own finger-prints were on the gun, and on the previous evening he had been "given the air" by his girl friend. It was, so said the police, an open-and-shut case of suicide, not worth any further inquiry—particularly when they were engaged on a murder case of first importance.

"The trouble is," said Chief-constable Conway, "that the Dropper is as hard to find as any man we've known. He's got a twisted genius for organisation, a gift for hiding behind the folks who work for him, and more than a faculty for frightening them. Every time we find some man connected with him the job's hopeless. They're so tight that you couldn't open them with a dynamite charge. They'd rather take the trip to the Moor than open their mouths. The Dropper has taught them that you can come back from the Moor, but you can't come back to this earth if you've squealed on him."

"But something has got to be done," said the commissioner.

"Naturally," said the assistant. "the inquiries into this murder will continue in the ordinary way, but I'm certain the Dropper did not commit the murder himself. That means that if the investigation is successful we will only collect a few dumb men, who dare not point their finger at the Dropper—even if they know him, which I doubt."

"Wouldn't it be possible to start some man working on the inside?" asked the commissioner. "I mean, a sort of under-cover man."

Superintendent Walkley stared at his chief and shivered. No one spoke. The commissioner's suggestion was not meeting with any enthusiasm. It was not that the men were nervous. They would not have risen from a beat to their positions at the Yard if their yellow streak had been the width of a pin. But they knew more about the Dropper than did their chief.

"Trouble is," said Chief-constable Conway, "that you could not give that job to any of the higher officers at the Yard. Every one must be very well known to a man like the Dropper. And it's too big a task, and too dangerous, for any young officer to take on."

"I can't think that is so," said the commissioner. "Why not run through your men, talk to some of them, and see whether there

is one smart enough, and with enough personal courage, to do it?"

When the conference eventually broke up they had made no further progress. The practical men hadn't expected that they would. They knew already how many hours had been spent, how many risks had been taken, how many hundreds had been interviewed in that will-o'-the-wisp quest for the mysterious man who called himself the Dropper.

Shortly before lunch Chief-constable Maling was walking along a corridor to his office in the Yard when a man called to him.

"Sir, could I have a moment with you?"

"Certainly, Sanderson. What is it?"

Maling looked at the young man curiously. Somewhere he had a fund of affection for Detective-sergeant Sanderson. He admired the poise, the smart, powerful figure, the deep-set blue eyes, small mouth, resolute jaw. He looked at the well-cut, dark grey suit. Others at the Yard thought Sanderson too much of a dandy to make a good "split." But that was not the view of those who knew his record.

"I brought in Snide Collins for that job along at Holborn. He's come clean, and the case is all open and shut. But I've got an idea that he was working for the Dropper."

"And what are you going to do about that, Sanderson?"

"Shall I try to make him come through with the goods?"

Maling smiled sympathetically, and patted Sanderson's shoulder.

"Take on that job when you've stopped the Thames flowing. You'll never get one of the Dropper's men to squeal. They live if they don't, and they die if they do."

Sanderson shrugged his wide shoulders, and the chief-constable started to walk away. Suddenly he stopped and wheeled round. The sergeant was walking along the corridor.

"Sanderson," called Maling. "I want you to see me in my office for a few minutes."

"When, sir?"

"Now. Follow me."

Maling closed the door cautiously when they reached his room, and beckoned to a chair.

"Sanderson," he said, "we had a long talk at our meeting this morning about the Dropper, and we all agreed that we'd never catch him by using ordinary methods. I don't want to talk about the time when you left the Yard, but I know that before you were reinstated you worked on your own as a sort of under-cover man. That's when you caught Lees. Have you got enough confidence in yourself to imagine that you could try your hand along the same line with the Dropper's mob?"

Sanderson grinned, showing a spread of white, even teeth. He was about to reply when Maling raised a restraining hand.

"Wait one moment. You'd be running with a crowd of murderers, and you could get no support from the Yard. That would be impossible. If you took that job you'd work as a lone detective with every hand against you. You'd start with none of the advantages and all the disadvantages. Your rank wouldn't count—because it wouldn't exist. What d'you say?"

Detective-sergeant Sanderson did not hesitate for a second.

"Thanks very much, chief," he said. "That job is just my handwriting."

"I don't feel very comfortable about landing you into it, but I can't think of anyone else. I'll arrange for you to make an inquiry for us into those insurance ramps at Hammersmith. That will give you at least a week in which to look around."

"What's the business at Hammersmith, sir?"

Maling rose to his feet and winked.

"I won't tell anyone at the Yard what you're doing. As a matter of fact, I've finished the Hammersmith job myself. The point is this—that since we don't know the identity of the Dropper, it might—although that's almost impossible—be someone at the Yard. We'll take no risks. Remember that the secret lies between us two. I'll stay dumb about it, and if you start talking—well, you might as well shoot yourself to-day, before someone does it for you. Good-bye—and good luck."

They shook hands in silence.

"I'll count five—and then I'll either know where that package is, or you're rubbed out. I'm starting. One—"



FIND THE LADY!

SANDERSON sat in a restaurant reading the evening paper. Twice his keen eyes scanned the story of the murder, and each time his gaze paused to rest on the final paragraph:

"The police believe they have received information which may lead them to discover how the painting was removed after being stolen from the Christina. A night watchman from the Silvertown district has made a statement with regard to a vehicle which he saw at an early hour this morning. The police attach great importance to this information, and inquiries are proceeding."

Each time after he had read the paragraph, he turned to the centre page on which was reported the story of Sammy Peters' tragic death. In that report two paragraphs impressed him. The first announced barely that the deceased was found at the driving-seat of a stolen Morris Commercial. The second, after stating that the dead man was well known in the East End, followed with the statement:

"Miss Elsie Meers, an attractive blonde, of 67, Culbert Street, Stepney, told an 'Evening Post' reporter that she was last with Peters yesterday evening in Limehouse Causeway. He then seemed a little distressed. She was not engaged to him, and it was untrue that he might have taken his life, following upon a lovers' quarrel."

The more Sanderson read both reports the more slowly he consumed his coffee. Peters lived in Limehouse—he left his girl in the Causeway—a vehicle was seen in the early hours at Silvertown—Peters was found dead at the wheel of a commercial lorry.

He collected his bill, paid, and walked out. The chance seemed remote, very remote. But

a dim lead was better than nothing at all. When playing a hand against a man like the Dropper, chances had to be taken, and a blind gamble must be tried.

Sanderson strolled into a firm of ready-made tailors in the Strand, tried hard to impress upon the salesman that he did not want an expensive suit, that he did not want one of similar cut to the one he wore. The salesman stared at him with some small contempt; he had no room for men of little taste, and his dissatisfaction was complete when the customer walked out with a blue suit, pin-striped, possessed of "lemonade-bottle" shoulders and a high waistline. Thereafter, the Yard man purchased a blue shirt and collar, a black tie, a cheap tie-pin, a pair of black socks, and patent-leather shoes with "winkle-picker" toes. A hard hat completed the outfit.

An hour later his original clothes were in the cloak-room at Charing Cross Station, and Sanderson was bound for the East End. As the train rattled on, he looked at his reflection in the dark window and smiled. His appearance was certainly curiously changed by his amazing rig-out.

He alighted at Stepney, inquired the way, and sauntered along in the direction of Culbert Street. He found that the street was short, the houses all the same, the road narrow. As he passed No. 67 he glanced idly at the window. His heart missed a jump. The luck was with him. In the window was a small printed card—"Apartments."

Sanderson walked over to the door, knocked, and waited for a couple of minutes without getting any response. Again he knocked. Suddenly the door swung back and he was faced by a tall, scraggy woman, with a pale face and an angry expression.

"I don't want any more newspapermen hanging round here," she said, and immediately began to close the door. Sanderson placed his hand on it and prevented it closing.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm no newspaperman. Do I look like one? If you don't want people to stay at your house, why the devil do you put that sign in the window?"

She softened with express speed, pulled back the door, and waved the way into a narrow passage.

"I'm sorry, sir. I've been pestered all day by them."

Sanderson elevated his eyebrows, appeared tremendously surprised.

"Really? What on earth is the matter, then? Any trouble?"

"No, no, no," said the woman quickly, visualising a vanishing client. "My daughter knew a man who committed suicide, and they've been trying to pester her about him. They were at her all dinner-time."

"Poor girl. That's too bad. May I look at the rooms you have?"

The woman led him round. The exhibition did not last long. There was a room to let at the front, another at the back. The difference between them in price was three shillings. Sanderson plumped for the front room, and paid his week's rent of twelve shillings in advance, explaining that he would not be wanting any meals. For ten minutes they talked. When occasion warranted, Sandy was a convincing and most sympathetic talker.

At ten minutes past six he saw a pretty blonde pass under the street lamp opposite and cross the road to the house. Elsie had not been in the kitchen more than five minutes before she had heard her mother lyricising the appearance and virtues of the new boarder.

Elsie could transfer her interests as speedily as she changed her emotions. Although Sammy had not long been dead, she considered that grief had had its fair share of her young life. She acted on the time-honoured phrase: "The king is dead; long live the king!"

That was why Sanderson, descending the stairs shortly before seven, had the good fortune to meet her in the hall. Elsie simulated surprise with some ability. She had not been to the cinema three times a week for nothing.

"Are you Miss Meers?" asked the Yard man. "I'm the new boarder."

Elsie, eyeing him, came to the conclusion that he was good to look at—the sort of man you could lead along Commercial Road with some sensation of pride. They commenced to talk. She found him a facile talker, and a sympathetic listener. Sanderson was a fast worker. At half-past seven they were heading for a cinema. At half-past ten he knew all there was to be known about the unfortunate Sammy Peters, and, more particularly, about the man who stopped him in the Causeway.

They talked about the strangeness of the affair as they walked back to Culbert Street. She grew more and more communicative.

"You say, Miss Meers, that he actually had the nerve to say he'd take you out one evening?" Sanderson appeared painfully astonished.

"What's your Christian name?" inquired the girl. She also was a fast worker.

"Eddie—and I'm tired of calling you Miss Meers. I'm going to call you Elsie. But did he really say that?"

"He did—and a big, powerful fellow, too." She clung closer to his arm, felt the swerve of muscle under the sleeve, and walked along wondering what would happen to the broken-nosed man if he met her with her new boy friend.

"Don't you know anything about him—his name, or where he lives, or where he works?"

"Why do you want to know?" inquired the girl artlessly.

Sanderson looked at her. The girl was as open as a barn door, as easy to read as a poster. He smiled at her.

"I'd just like to tell him where he gets off—that's all."

"Oh!" said Elsie. After that she continued the walk with her head well back and her feet mincing along the pavement. What it was to have a he-man as a boy friend!

"Well? Where do I find him?"

"I don't know his name," she said eventually, "but I've seen him coming out of the Crown and Sceptre, at Poplar, a few

times. But I wouldn't go near there if I were you. He's terribly strong."

"I should worry. What time have you seen him coming out?"

"Oh, sometimes at dinner-time, sometimes at night."

"Then you tell me exactly what he looks like, and I'll have a few words with him. Don't worry about that lout. I'll see him off."

Elsie looked at him. Sanderson knew the look. He had seen Janet Gaynor producing the same one for the benefit of Charles Farrell. But one thing he found to admire about the girl. She had a photographic memory. By the time she had described the man, Sanderson felt that he would remember him until Judgment Day.

Back at the house again, they stood in the darkened hall till eleven o'clock, whispering to each other about their enjoyable evening at the cinema. When they parted Elsie retired to bed with glorious visions of a full future. Sanderson also had visions of a full future—but not quite the same sort. He had brought in with him a late edition of an evening paper. Before undressing he sat on the edge of the bed, and looked through for fresh news of the Christina tragedy, or of Sammy Peters' sudden end. He found something on the back page and smiled.

"There was a dramatic scene in the House of Commons this afternoon at question time," he read. "The circumstances of the murder on the Christina had been raised earlier, and the Home Secretary made a non-committal reply. Later, however, Mr. Martin Cross (Ind., Stroatham) asserted that the House was being misled by vague statements."

"He said that for nearly a year London had been terrorised by the criminal known as the Dropper, and that this callous murder is attributable to him. He then demanded a statement from the Home Secretary explaining why nothing is being done, and why this man has not been arrested."

"The Home Secretary's reply was that it would be prejudicial to the interests of justice to make any statement at this stage."

Sanderson read through to the end with a sardonic smile playing round his lips. He was still grinning when he turned out the light and jumped into bed.

"Nothing being done," he muttered to himself, adding caustically: "Says them!"

Two minutes later he was soundly asleep. In a back bed-room Elsie was involved in a dream which included wedding-dresses, black eyes, Sanderson, Greta Garbo, and the late Sammy Peters.

JOB WANTED.

SANDERSON met Elsie on the following morning as she was leaving the house. He also was ready to make a move. Together they walked along towards Leman Street.

"Are you starting work?" she asked.

"I certainly am, Elsie. What d'you do for a living?"

"Work for a furrier's near Mark Lane Station. And you?"

"Me? Oh, I just travel in—in books, all sorts of books."

"Maybe you'll be in when I get back to-night?"

"I certainly will, if I can finish my round by then. So long!"

When they parted, Sanderson strolled on until he reached a public telephone box. He dialled Whitehall 1212, asked for Chief-constable Maling, refused to give his name, and after two subordinates had had an attempt to speak to him Maling came on the wire.

"Is there any news, sir? You talked to me yesterday. Remember?"

"Certainly I remember you, Wilson. The only news is that the boss has recruited nearly everyone here on the job. And at your end?"

"Can't say. I may get a break. Good-morning!"

Sanderson ate breakfast in a small café, and then walked towards Poplar, sauntering leisurely, killing time. Eventually he arrived at the Crown and Sceptre just as the doors opened. Even then he was the third to reach the counter in the saloon bar. A pert girl with closely waved hair, bowed lips, a retroussé nose, and a ring worth hundreds if it had been genuine, slid a glass of beer across the counter.

"Hallo, Brighteyes!" said Sanderson "How's trade?"

The girl stared at him insolently. She was not more than twenty-two, but behind that glance was a mature sense of judgment, an instinct for cunning beyond her years.

"Trade's rotten. So is the name you handed out. That'll be fourpence."

He paid the money and slid on to a high stool. The barmaid did not move. She was still trying to place him.

"What's the trouble?" Sanderson asked. "Isn't my tie straight, or is it that you just don't like my face?"

"Does it matter?"

"Well, yes. I can straighten my tie, but I can't afford a plastic surgeon. Looks to me as though you don't like new customers round here."

"Any sort are better than none. Haven't seen you before, have I?"

"Surely! Didn't we meet in the enclosure at Ascot?"

"Was it you, then, selling boot-laces along that way?"

"Not me, lady. I was among the grande dames peddling face-lifts."

"Is that so!" snapped the girl, turning to face the mirror and pat her hair.

"It is. But listen! Listen. I'm looking for a man who uses this place. No, don't look so startled. I don't mean what you look as though you think I mean. Do I look so bad you've mistaken me for a split?"

The barmaid was quick to notice the sudden tone—from banter to questioning. She stared at Sanderson with more interest, but averted her glance to satisfy a clatter of glasses on the counter farther along the bar. Even while she pulled more beer, and later returned to the cash register, she cast occasional glances his way. When she returned she stood with her elbows on the bar, and her head cupped in the palms of her hands. Sanderson withstood the scrutiny without a tremor. His hand holding the glass was as steady as a monument.

"Who is this man you want to see?" she asked.

He gave Elsie's description of the man with the broken nose.

"That's Mr. MacMichael," she said. "He'll be along soon. Comes in every morning about this time. What d'you want him for?"

"Lady, compared with me the Sphinx is a loud-speaker. Still, what about having a spot of something with me?"

The girl poured out a drink, and Sanderson took another himself. Half an hour afterwards they were still bantering when the swing-doors opened, and before the Yard man could turn round the barmaid called:

"Mr. Mac, there's a gentleman here wants to have a word with you."

Sanderson turned slowly to survey the newcomer, wondering which would be the best opening gambit. He saw a tall, broad-shouldered man, deep in the chest, thick in the neck, nose well broken, spatulate hands, small blue eyes, snarling lips, and square jaw. Mac didn't hesitate before walking across to the bar, but all the way his piggy eyes were set on Sanderson's face. It was an uncomfortable moment. Sanderson slid off his chair and pushed out his hand.

"Howdy!" he said. "I've been waiting for you. What's yours?"

"Who the heck are you? I don't know you."

The man was arrogant, and as he spoke he turned to the girl with a smirk as though pleased with his exhibition. Some of his confidence—but not much—ebbed when he noted that Sanderson still faced him with a steady, unperturbed glance.

"I didn't ask you to take some prussic acid at my expense. I merely said, 'what's yours?'"

Mac eyed the man from head to foot, noted that he had an advantage of two inches in height, and a good two stone in weight, and swelled his chest as he glared.

"Get out of my way, stranger," he snapped. "I don't drink with boys."

"And apparently," said Sanderson quietly. "you're not used to drinking with men. I came here to talk business with you."

Mac's neck grew like the chest of a pouter pigeon. Sanderson lit a cigarette and turned to the barmaid.

"Fill mine again, and yours if you want another."

Mac placed a great hand on Sanderson's shoulder, and spun him round.

"Where I come from," he said menacingly, "folks like you just don't walk around. The world falls in on top of them, and then it's lights-out!"

The Yard man placed his hands on his hips, and smiled coldly.

"Is that so?" The words were slow and soft. "Listen, you may think you're the king of the bailiwick around here, but you're sixteen stone of very little to me. Don't look so annoyed. I'm just telling you."

The girl behind the bar was gaping at them, her eyes starry with astonishment. At every moment she expected to see the stranger soar through the air, and arrive on the pavement via the window.

"I'll take a bitter while I talk to you," said Mac.

"That's the idea. A bitter, miss, please. Sit down, Mac. It costs no more."

They sat facing each other, both cold-eyed, both waiting to see which way the jump would come. Sanderson continued to smile.

"I hate the sight of your face," said Mac, "but I admire guts when I come across it—even if the man is a fool. What's the business?"

"I'll talk to you about that somewhere else. It's not exactly saloon bar business. I came here as a preliminary so that I could meet you. It seems a pity that you had to start by getting fresh with me."

"Eh?" Mac blinked his eyes unbelievably. He thought he had misheard.

"You heard me." Sanderson raised his drink, and emptied some.

"Who the heck are you, anyway?" Mac was getting worried.

"Something above van-draggers, slang dippers, broadsmen, screwsmen, and that sort of thing. How's trade with you?"

Mac replaced his drink on the counter, and stared curiously.

"You seem to have bought the book of words," he said. "What's your line—snow sweeping?"

Sanderson grinned, swallowed the insult, and rested his elbow on the bar. The girl walked to the other end to attend to customers. The Yard man bent forward and tapped Mac on the knee.

"Listen," he whispered, "maybe I look dumb, but if you get that idea into your head you're getting off with both feet in the wrong place. Small-time stuff doesn't interest me. When I broke into town a certain party told me you knew your stuff. I came to see you because maybe I know a lot you've never even thought of. Follow me?"

Mac nodded seriously, and then noticed that the girl had returned to her place behind them. He nodded his head, slid forward his glass.

"We'll be having two more of those," he said.

For twenty minutes they talked about everything but crime. Then Mac slid from his stool, and emptied his glass.

"We'll be going, eh? O.K. with you?"

"Yes, I'm with you."

They walked through side streets for ten minutes before Mac opened the door of a small house tucked away at the end of an alley. Sanderson followed him into a small front room. It was well-furnished—too well-furnished for that type of property. The Yard man sat down in a chair worth the rent of the house for a couple of months. Mac pushed a whisky bottle and a siphon over to him.

"Help yourself, and then tell me about things."

"I'll take my own time, Mac. I reckon what I tell you goes no farther than this room, eh? If I thought you were a snout I'd see you off."

"That's a bit of a joke! Can you see me handing stuff to the splits?"

"Just so long as we know where we are. Fact is, Mac, I'm on the run. I'm not going to give you my history from the cradle to the grave, and I'm not going to tell you what I'm wanted for. You'll have to let that ride. But I've just got off a warm spot in a tough place. I'll have to let a bit of water flow under the bridges before I can work again round my own bailiwick. All clear?"

"It's a story I've heard before," said Mac, non-committally.

"But not from me. At any rate, that's the history so far. I landed down these parts on the run, and I didn't much care whether I worked on my lonesome or whether I weighed in with a crush, but it seemed best to me that I should fall into line with some of the boys since I don't know my way around. That's sense, isn't it?"

"Sounds like it."

"So I thought. Well, yesterday I drifted around putting out feelers. The folks round here give me a pain in the neck. The first couple I contacted seemed to think that smash and grab was the high-water mark. The next man told me he worked with a partner as a dip. The fourth said he was working the deracs with the race mob. None of that was any good to me."

"I asked the last man if he knew anybody about these parts who might have a better idea

"Are you on the run for anything really serious?"

"I call it serious, but from what I've seen of the men round here they'd call it a European War."

"H'm. Ever hurt anybody? Follow what I mean, Eddie?"

"I carry this in case I ever feel like being nasty."

Sanderson slipped a Browning automatic from his pocket, and laid it on the table. Mac stared hard, licked his lips, said nothing for a time.

"You mean you really wouldn't mind using that if you had to?"



"If you scream I'll plug you!" Mac told the terrified nurse. "Hand over the key to Room 5." The panic-stricken girl obeyed immediately.

of doing real stuff. He was a bit cautious about it, but after we'd had a few drinks together he told me I might find a man known as Mac who would have a talk to me if he fancied me.

"After that I put out a few more feelers till I found which pub you used. This bloke told me you were dangerous. It made me laugh. He gave me just the intro I wanted. All I want is heavy metal, and I don't mind taking the risks to get it. So I headed for the Crown and Sceptre. Seemed that my reception wasn't too good, but I'll forgive you for that. Now, Mac, it's your turn. Make a start."

Obviously Mac had grown more impressed as the story proceeded.

"Who gave you my name?" he asked.

"Mac, would you employ me if I spilled people's names?"

"I get you. Maybe you're right. What's your best line?"

"Mostly safes, but I don't mind having a crack at anything so long as the dough is good."

"What's your name?"

"Did I hear you?" Sanderson sat back with mock astonishment. "As a matter of fact I'm the Wandering Jew, but if you call me Eddie Kell it'll be good enough for me. Suit you?"

"All right, Eddie. What part have you come from?"

"The North. You can take your pick of all the places up there."

"I don't carry it so that I can stroke it from time to time."

"Where are you staying down here?"

"Search me. I told you I don't know the place. What's good?"

Mac rose and paced the room for a while. Then he sat down again, and stared at Sanderson across the table.

"If your story is straight you're the sort of man I want. If it's phoney you go to the cemetery in top gear. I can't tell you what I'll do till I've had a word with one or two folks. This is the position—I'll take you along to some digs right away where you'll be all right. Later to-day I'll come along and tell you how things stand. Drink up, and we'll be moving."

"This sounds like sweet music to me," said Sanderson, slipping the gun back into his pocket, and heading towards the door.

"Don't count your chickens. We're a tough crowd."

"I'll be glad to meet 'em. Sounds like really good company."

They walked out together.

FIRST COMMISSION.

SANDERSON was lying on a bed in a squalid back bed-room, when the owner of the house entered to inform him that Mac would be along in an hour's time. It was then three in the afternoon. The Yard man nodded casually and surveyed his landlord. So far he hadn't found out exactly where the house was, but he judged that it lay somewhere

The Man a Safety-Pin Hanged

THE lips of the man staring into the wake of the transatlantic liner twisted into a grim smile. That wide lane of frothing water meant freedom—a new life in a new land, where he could forget the crime that had made his name a byword in the England he had left. Therefore Crippen smiled; he was safe at last.

Forgotten was the wife whose dismembered body he had buried in flesh-destroying quicklime. Forgotten, too, was that wise old saying that the law never forgets. But even more disastrous was the third oversight, that Marconi had given wireless to the world.

Crippen had a companion on that fateful voyage—a woman, his accomplice, disguised in boyish clothes. She was the fourth flaw in his almost-perfect crime. And the reason? Because, woman-like, she used a safety-pin to keep up the trousers which hid her shapely legs.

THAT safety-pin hanged Crippen.

Seen by one of the ship's officers, it attracted attention to its wearer. The disguise was thin—good enough to pass muster before a casual glance, but not to hide its owner's sex from a studied scrutiny.

From the woman it was but a short step to her companion. That straggling moustache, those watery eyes, that weak chin—all were familiar to men who, but a few hours before, had stared aghast at the newspaper details of the Crippen murder, and at the photos of the man for whom the law sought.

Aboard the speeding liner, wireless cracked. In London, at New Scotland Yard, the radio message was spelled out anew. And a fast transatlantic liner leaving England had a new passenger. A passenger who carried handcuffs in his luggage.

A few days later, those handcuffs circled Crippen's wrists as he left the liner in a Canadian port, under arrest on a charge of murder. The law hanged him—hanged him because a safety-pin accused him, wireless arrested him, and twelve good men and true pronounced him guilty.

MANY men have been brought to justice by the aid of wireless since Crippen's day, but Crippen will always be remembered in the annals of crime as the first murderer whom radio helped to hang. Now a new marvel of wireless science is on its way to aid crime detection—television, promised by the radio prophets to be an accomplished fact within the next few months.

In next week's issue of THE THRILLER, Anthony Skene looks ahead to the possibilities of television and crime in his new novel, "The Crime Ring."

A man looking into the ground-glass panel of a television receiver sees murder committed, sees the flash of the killer's gun, and the victim's lifeless body falling to the floor. *But he does not see the gunman's face—only a strange ring on his trigger-finger.*

Round that intriguing situation is built up a story that will grip you. Clue by clue, you follow the trail that leads to the killer's identity, and then beyond to the unravelling of a web of international intrigue and the struggle between rival forces for the possession of a secret worth a million pounds.

Next week, too, we have the start of a new serial, "The Purple Tie," by Richard Essex, a murder-mystery story that is really different. It is not merely the story of a thrilling and baffling crime, but of what happens to real ordinary people when caught in the net of the law—murder and its consequences as they might happen to YOU!

There will also be another crime puzzle, and a one-week competition with big cash prizes. And don't forget to keep your eyes open for further great news of great authors and great features in the future.

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

between Bow and Poplar. Mac had made all the arrangements with the landlord, and had obviously told the man to remain dumb.

Except for one moment when he had been brought some sandwiches, Sanderson had neither seen nor heard anything in the house. He had thought of looking round the premises, but abandoned the idea. Mac was no fool, and he would certainly lay a guard on Sanderson—just in case of accidents. The landlord still stared at him.

"What's the matter, mate?" asked the Yard man. "Have I changed colour since you last saw me?"

"No, I was just wondering where I'd seen you before."

Sanderson's heart performed a hop, skip and jump, but the landlord saw no trace of surprise or anxiety on his face.

"Don't remember your face, mate. If I'd lamped it once I wouldn't have forgotten it in a hurry. Maybe you're mixing me up with another bloke. Send somebody out for a packet of fags, will you?"

He threw the man half-a-crown, and was glad to see him depart. It would be throwing a spanner into the works, if the owner of the place told Mac that he recognised the new boarder. Even the thought of such an eventuality made Sanderson slip his hand into his pocket and give his gun a reassuring pat.

Mac arrived, looking remarkably cheerful; his greeting was almost effusive. Sanderson eyed him warily, wondered whether this was a prelude to a storm. But Mac took one of his cigarettes and settled down on the edge of the bed.

"Looks as though you've got a break," he said. "I've had a word with a man who counts, and he's had a talk farther up the line. I told 'em all I knew about you, all you'd told me, and you're one of the firm. What d'you know about that?"



DON'T MISS THIS!

"Thanks, Mac." Sanderson sent a spiral of smoke towards the ceiling. "When do we get some action? I'm tired of parking my body on this bed. What's the first job?"

"Blimey, you believe in making an early start, don't you?"

"I don't expect to draw dough for miking round here, sleeping, smoking, and knocking back beer. When do we make a start?"

"Listen. There's something in the wind for to-night, but I haven't got the goods on the job yet. I'll know about eight o'clock. As soon as I get the 'off,' you'll hear about it. That's honest."

"Let's take a walk, Mac. This place is giving me the pip. I'd make a darn bad invalid. Let's go to the flickers. They might have something exciting on there. That'd be a change for a bloke on the run."

"You're a funny cove," said Mac, "but that's O.K. with me."

At half-past seven they emerged from the cinema. After walking along the road for a while, Mac stopped outside a public 'phone box.

"I've gotta give a ring, mate. Stand tight."

Sanderson waited outside the box, fretting and anxious, wondering what number was being called. In less than a couple of minutes Mac came out with a smile.

"We've got a job," he said. "I'll call a cab and tell you all about it. This is a doings after your own heart—the sort of thing you've never done before in your life."

Mac collected a stray taxi, and they piled in, ordering the driver to stop at Ludgate Circus. On the way, Mac seized his new recruit by the arm and explained matters:

"Ever done a snatch, Eddie—a real kidnapping job?"

"A few," said Sanderson casually. "They're nothing new."

Mac sat back in the cab and chuckled.

"This one is," he said. "Have you ever

snatched a lunatic from a private mental home?"

"Can't say I have. That one's new on me. What's the lay?"

"Don't know for certain. We'll be meeting one of the bosses in a while, and he'll hand out all the dope on the job. Be patient."

"Where is the mental home? What's the snatch? A millionaire, eh?"

"Lay low till we hear the goods. We'll dump the cab at the Circus, and I'll take you along to meet one of my bosses. Smoke?"

"Thanks." Sanderson took a cigarette and lit it. "How many handed will we be working—any idea?"

"Nope. My crowd never shout about the works till we've got the decks clear."

They had a drink together in Fleet Street, and Mac led the way towards the Strand, pausing before the Law Courts to find the name of a labyrinthine passage before he took his companion by the arm, and led him into the semi-darkness. At the end of the narrow entry a man was waiting for them. He was tall and broad, and a reefer overcoat swathed him, its deep collar encircling the lower part of his face. As they walked under a bracket-lamp, suspended over a door, the man looked at them and immediately turned to walk away. They followed him a few yards until he opened a door and mounted a flight of rickety stairs. Mac lunged after him, Sanderson close on his heels.

The tall man turned on the light in a sparsely furnished office, waited until they sat down, and then locked the door. Sanderson held his right hand in his pocket. His index finger was twirled round the trigger of his gun, and he eyed the man warily, but could not remember having seen him before. The stranger made no attempt to lower his coat-collar, and Sanderson saw nothing beyond a pair of staring brown eyes—eyes that scrutinised him with deadly care.

"This our new friend?" the newcomer asked Mac. His voice was low and well modulated, the voice of an educated man.

"That's so," replied Mac.

"Been in this racket for long?" This to Sanderson.

"About eight years. You been in for long?"

"Never talk to your boss unless you're asked to. Mac tells me that you don't mind taking a risk or two. Is that so?"

"Should be. Try me and see for yourself."

"That's exactly what I'm going to do. Open the flaps of your ears and listen to me. And that goes for both of you. Two weeks ago a man wanted to be without the pleasure of his wife's company for a matter of three months. She was an eccentric, but far from being mad. How he arranged matters doesn't concern us. But the fact remains that he placed her in a private mental home in Beaumont Street—apparently as a case for observation.

"In her enforced absence he has left for the South of France with another woman. If his wife knew about this excursion on his part she'd certainly sue for a divorce, and she'd undoubtedly get one. That would not suit him. He's a millionaire, but he's terribly sensitive about the purity of his reputation. Sounds unusual, but it's true. If we get his wife out of that nursing-home we can hold a threat over him that would mean heavy money. In the first place we could threaten to tell his wife where he was and whom he was with. In the second place we could prove that he faked affairs to place her in that mental home.

"That's all clear. In any event, getting money from the man has got nothing to do with either of you. We're only employing you to get her out of that home. She's in a private room, No. 5, on the second floor. Beyond that we can tell you nothing, except that the mental home is at 56a, Beaumont Street. How you get her out of there we leave to you. It only remains for me to say that she must be delivered to us at 459, Essex Road, between Islington and Highbury, at any time between midnight and two o'clock. That's all, but we'll meet again."

The man rose from his seat, unlocked the door, and ushered them out.

SNATCH RACKET.

SANDERSON and Mac strolled past the imposing pile of Broadcasting House as clocks were pealing out midnight. For three hours they had sat making arrangements. Now they were ready for action. Sanderson was thinking more about Essex Road than he was about Beaumont Street. It seemed unduly optimistic to think that on his first night with the crowd he should meet the Dropper. But accidents do happen!

They turned off Portland Place into Devonshire Street, walking slowly. Both were silent. Now that risks faced them, Mac had lost some of his ebullieny and Sanderson had too much to think about. At last they turned into Beaumont Street, pausing at the corner for a final word.

"Sure it wouldn't be better to try a climb from the back?" asked Mac.

"Still sure. The backs of these houses are too tricky by a mile. We'll bowl straight in and see what happens. Funny that your boss didn't put more men on this job."

"Seems so to me. It doesn't look like an easy two-handed business."

"Well, we've burnt our boats. Let's get it over. I only hope that bloke will turn up in time with the ambulance."

"Don't worry about that. You can rely on Percy."

The street was deserted as they walked towards the house. Both took a final look along the pavements before mounting the steps. Then Mac twisted round to stare at his companion.

"I'll leave you to do your stuff, mate. This is a try-out for you."

Sanderson nodded, and pressed the bell at the side of the door. As soon as the ring echoed through the house he slipped a gun from his pocket and moved nearer to the door. Mac stood behind him. It seemed an intolerable time before they heard footsteps in the hall, waited while chain bolts were withdrawn. Then the door opened, and a sleepy-looking man peered at them through the darkness.

The Yard man prodded his gun into the man's ribs.

"I've got a gun on you," he snapped. "Keep your mouth shut, and maybe I won't shoot. Step back slowly into the hall."

The man hesitated for a second, and the muzzle prodded him again. Then he moved back, slowly and uncertainly. Mac followed and closed the door. The hall was barely illuminated with a dim light. The night porter—as they thought him to be—was quivering as though afflicted with a palsy. Twice he opened his mouth to speak, and each time no words came through his trembling lips.

"I want you to lead me to Room 5 on the second floor," whispered Sanderson, "and if you raise any noise I'll drill you. If we pass any person on the way, try to look casual. Don't forget that though you can't see the gun, I'll have it in my pocket, and the business end of it will be pointing at you. Start moving, and remember that lead poisoning is a terrible thing to die from. Don't turn any lights up as you go. We can both see you all right."

Without a word the man started towards the foot of the stairs. For some indefinable reason Sanderson grew thoroughly uneasy.

The ascent was slow, and the Yard man prodded his guide, ordered him to "put a jerk into it." The man increased his pace without any comment. For a short spell they paused on the first landing, listening for sound of movement. The house was quiet, too quiet to be comfortable. A dim electric lamp shone at the far end of the passage. They paced up the second flight of stairs; then they stopped. A nurse sat on a chair at the far end of the corridor. She was reading a novel under the yellow glow of a night-light.

Sanderson touched the guide, placed his finger to his lips, and signalled for a stop. Then he turned to Mac.

"Look after her," he whispered. Mac gripped his gun and pressed past Sanderson, walking along the corridor silently. He was not more than four yards from the girl when she looked up. Her lips parted as she stared, and Mac waved the gun menacingly.

"If you scream I'll plug you. Sit still and stay quiet."

The nurse cowered back in her chair, her body quivering.

Sanderson turned to the night porter. "Show me Room 5," he growled. The man pointed to the door, and Sanderson pushed him along towards the nurse. "Look after both of them for a few seconds, Mac, while I do the necessary. Nurse, give me the key to Room 5. Hurry up."

The trembling girl offered no resistance, detaching a bunch of keys from the chain fastened to her belt. Silently she separated a key and held it towards Sanderson. The Yard man immediately retraced his steps along the corridor and turned the key in the lock. The room inside was dark, inkily dark, and he groped around with his hand for some time before he could find the light switch. Instantly he took a quick look.

The room was small, almost uncomfortably clean, and barely furnished. Apart from the single bed, the room held one chair, a small wardrobe, and a cabinet. The floor was polished. A young woman lay in the bed, unawakened by the sudden intrusion. Sanderson looked at her closely. She had a singular beauty—a pale, oval face, features of astonishing regularity, and raven hair.

On the door of the wardrobe hung a dressing-gown. Sanderson took it down and advanced to the side of the bed. Then he bent over and touched the girl's shoulder. The movement was repeated before she moved. Her eyelids raised slowly, drowsily, to reveal eyes of cinnamon brown. It seemed some seconds before she appreciated what was happening. Abruptly she sat erect. Sanderson swallowed hard. Jobs like this were not much in his line.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "I've come to take you to some friends. Slip this dressing-gown on and I'll take you away."

"Who are you?" she whimpered.

"Just a friend—that's all. Come along."

He threw the dressing-gown on the bed and walked over to the door. The girl waited for a while, staring blankly round the room. Then she slid from the bed and wrapped the gown round her, pausing to place a pair of mules on her feet. Sanderson took her by the arm, walked into the corridor. Mac was standing over the porter and the nurse.

"Stay where you are until I'm clear out of here, and then follow me. Don't leave those people until I'm clear of the house."

Mac nodded, and the Yard man walked along to the far end of the corridor, drawing back a curtain from the window to peer into the street. An ambulance was waiting outside, and he hurried down the stairs. The girl paced at his side like a somnambulist. Sanderson turned to look at her. He was puzzled. At no time had she offered the slightest remonstrance, the most trivial resistance. Yet she did not give the impression that her mind was unbalanced.

He swung back the front door and hurried across the pavement. His brain was working with disconcerting speed. By now he was certain that his earlier fears were not misplaced. Everything had happened with too much ease. The driver of the ambulance touched his cap, and the Yard man walked round to the rear doors. As he placed his hand on the handle he spoke to the girl:

"Don't be nervous. You'll soon be all right."

She looked at him dumbly. It seemed that her face was expressionless. The Yard man had more worries than one. He knew that whatever he was leading the girl into, he would have to lead her out of it again, and that, most certainly, would not be as easy as this "snatch" from the nursing home.

The doors drew back, and he pressed the girl forward. With the action of an automaton she stepped inside. There were no lights. The Yard man climbed in after her, then turned to discover whether Mac was leaving the house.

He bit his lip, felt colour draining from his face, and then raised his hands slowly above his head. Something hard pressed into his ribs.

"Hoist those hands, friend," said someone unseen. "I've got the drop on you." A hand groped in his pocket and pulled out his gun. The engine purred into life. The ambulance started to move away.

DEATH SENTENCE.

SANDERSON, lurching in the darkness as the ambulance turned a corner, felt the girl bump against him. Suddenly a hand pushed him, and he fell back on to a stretcher bed. The girl sat beside him, still silent.

"Looks to me as though you're standing on a tough spot," said the unseen man.

"Maybe you're right," remarked the Yard man, recovering from the shock. "What's the lay-out of this business?"

"You're going for a ride, my friend. So's the lady. Suit you?"

"Can do. Who're you working for?"

"The Dropper."

"Sounds funny. I thought I was. D'you know that Mac was left?"

"Yeah. He can look after himself. Don't think that because you can't feel this gun you're not covered. I know to an inch where you are. Sit tight or you'll take a stomach full."

The Yard man was growing more composed. He had expected that trouble would arise—now he had walked into it. He pressed the girl's arm, anxious to console her, to protect her from fright. He might as well have offered solace to Cleopatra's Needle. Five minutes went by without a word being said. Sanderson lost count of the number of corners they had turned, had no idea which direction they were taking.

"Where are we making for?" he asked.

The man facing him laughed.

"The driver knows," was the laconic reply.

"So long as someone knows it's O.K. with me. Mind if I smoke?"

"I certainly do. You're striking no matches in this ambulance."

"You don't sound as though you're very proud of your face."

"Stow that!" snapped the man. "If I told the Dropper that you got fresh on the way and I had to plug you he wouldn't worry."

"Is that so? Sounds as though I've got a funny sort of boss."

"You've said it. Keep your mouth closed for the rest of the trip. Maybe you'll be wanting the use of your tongue later."

"Are you feeling all right?" Sanderson asked the girl.

She made no movement, offered no response. Again there was silence. For another twenty minutes they passed through the silent streets. It seemed to Sanderson that they must be well clear of the suburbs. He had tried to work things out, had abandoned the effort. Everything was too crazy too contradictory, to fit into any scheme.

He felt the ambulance shudder a trifle as the brakes were applied. Then the vehicle stopped. Sanderson felt some garment fall across his knees, and the stranger snapped out an instruction.

"That's a lady's coat. Help the girl to put it on."

The Yard man was not reluctant. He had felt the girl shiver by his side as the journey was nearing its end. She rose impassively and thrust her arms into the coat.

"I'm going to step out first," said their captor, "and I'm getting out backwards so that I can hold the drop on you. The girl comes out next. Then you. Follow the driver when you get out. I'll walk behind you. And no noise, mind. Get going."

The doors opened, and Sanderson saw the black outline of the man. He pushed the girl forward, cursing the man for asking her to go first. It blocked any action by making the girl a bullet-shield. The stranger was certainly no fool!

They stood on the pavement in gloomy darkness. At their side a huge building towered towards a mackerel sky. The driver started forward immediately, and Sanderson led the girl after him, conscious all the time that a gun was pressing under his left shoulder blade.

They groped their way through a narrow alley, flanked on both sides by high walls. A biting wind cut into them. The girl trembled with cold. At the end of the alley the driver wheeled round to the left, and soon turned again. He held out a hand as though giving a traffic signal, then stopped. Pulling a key from his pocket he opened a door, and the Yard man found himself in pitch darkness.

The driver waited for them, gripped each by

the arm, and moved forward again. Sanderson tried to take his bearings without success. They twisted and turned round sharp-angled passages, walked down slopes, through rooms, until the Yard man abandoned any hope of keeping track of their direction. At last the driver produced another key and unlocked a door leading to a scantily lit room. It was a long cellar, the floor flagged with stone, the walls green with age and dampness. In the centre was a long table. The room was untenanted.

Sanderson heard the lock snap behind them, turned to scrutinise his captors in the faint light. In the interval between opening the door and locking it, both had slipped black crepe masks over their faces.

"Sit down," said the man with the gun, "and make yourselves at home."

The Yard man looked round the cellar and grinned mirthlessly.

"Comfort isn't your strong point," he said. "D'you mind if I slip my coat off and hand it to this girl? She needs it."

"Carry on, Sir Galahad," sneered the man. "I reckon you're getting too hot under the collar to need an overcoat."

"Maybe," said Sanderson, slipping off his coat. "I reckon it's better to be hot under the collar than cold inside your shoes."

The girl looked round the room dreamily, donned the coat without any acknowledgment, and sat down on the edge of the table. The three men walked over and joined her. Curiosity tempted the detective to look again at the girl. He found himself staring at her left hand, and saw immediately that she wore no wedding-ring.

Sanderson whistled softly, lounged in a chair, and smiled.

"Suppose you don't mind me smoking now, eh?"

"All right," said the driver. "But I'll get the smokes from your pocket. We don't want you pulling any fast stuff."

"Getting nervy?" asked the detective. "O.K. Help yourself."

He pulled at his cigarette, watched the blue clouds mounting to the low ceiling, and examined the room closely.

"How much longer do I have to wait here?" he asked. "I've finished my job for to-night, and a spot of bed seems indicated."

"You'll stay here until the Dropper has had a word with you."

Sanderson almost dropped his cigarette. It seemed too good to be true that he could meet the Dropper.

"And when is that likely to happen?" he inquired easily.

"Any time now."

The man stopped speaking. Everyone in the room—with the exception of the girl—turned to face the far wall. It was from that direction that they had heard a sharp click, as though a lock had been turned. But there were neither doors nor windows there. Sanderson thought he had been deluded, turned his back on the wall, and replaced the cigarette in his mouth. But he drew no smoke. A voice behind him caused him to whip round. He blinked his eyes. There was no speaker, but he heard the words.

"So you brought the lady here quite successfully?"

Sanderson made no effort to reply. He was waiting to see whether either of his gaolers would speak. Apparently they were waiting for him.

"Step this way, you. Come nearer to the wall. I want to talk to you."

The detective stood up, and sauntered leisurely across the floor. His keen eyes were scanning the wall. He was not more than five feet away when he solved the secret. A sudden draught had arisen outside the cellar, and a small square on the wall wavered in the breeze. A block had been taken out, and the aperture had been covered with a painted canvas, coloured to resemble the stonework, fashioned after the style of a theatrical back-cloth.

"I want to learn something about you, young man. I suppose you know who is talking?"

"I imagine," said the Yard man slowly, "that you are my employer."

"You are right. I am the Dropper."

The speaker paused as though to study the effect created by his announcement. He must have been very disappointed. Sanderson

received the statement without turning a hair.

"That's what I thought," Sanderson replied, deciding to take the offensive. "And there are one or two things I want to ask you. You gave me a job to do. I have done it. Why have me brought here as though I've done wrong? This is my first try-out with you, and I don't think you're treating me any too well. What's the trouble?"

"People don't ask me questions. They just reply to mine. Why were you so anxious to join my crowd?"

"It's pretty obvious, isn't it? I was on the run, and wanted a job."

"Maybe you've got a job—one that you didn't apply for. How did you establish contact with Mac?"

"He's explained all that already. Why bring it up again?"

"I want to hear the version from you."

"Very well. Here are the facts." And then, for two minutes, Sanderson recited his story. Afterwards there was silence for a short spell. The detective grew uncomfortable.

"You tell the tale very well," said the Dropper, "but it doesn't ring true to me. Have you stopped to think what would happen to you if I thought you were working as an undercover man?"

Sanderson felt his mouth growing dry.

"I certainly haven't. It doesn't concern me. What time do I go?"

"Not for a while. I want to give you another chance to show that you're genuine. I'll send you on a job in such a way that you either come back completely in my confidence—or you don't come back at all. How will that suit you?"

Sanderson knew that hesitation would be fatal. He plunged:

"So long as the job's not impossible the arrangement suits me."

"It is just as well that you say that. Otherwise I would have shot you now. Before we talk about details, tell me—did you have any trouble along at the nursing home?"

"None. It was too easy to be comfortable. I left Mac there."

"I intended that you should. Very well. That part of your work is finished. If you do your next job as well I'll see that you're paid accordingly. In ten minutes time I am leaving here. Half an hour later I want you to leave with two men. You'll meet them after I've gone. A private car will drive the three of you to Westbourne Terrace. You must be there by three o'clock."

"You will have a loaded gun in your hand. So will the other men. You will be looking through the window at the front door of 345, Westbourne Terrace. At about that time a man will leave that house. Immediately the car will drive alongside the pavement, taking you within a few feet of the man. You will empty your gun into him. Is that quite clear?"

"Quite clear," said Sanderson, licking dry lips.

"The other two men," said the Dropper, "will point their guns at you. If you don't give that man the works—they'll hand it to you!"

"Sounds as though I'm in a tight spot. Who is the man I've got to rub out? I might as well know."

The Dropper laughed, and announced softly:

"The man you have got to murder is really quite well known. It is Chief-constable Maling, of New Scotland Yard!"

Sanderson collected his scattered nerves, clenched his fists, and made no reply. There was a sound of movement from behind the wall.

The Dropper had gone.

HIGH-STAKE GAMBLE.

THE detective walked slowly back to the table, both hands plunged in his trouser pockets. He felt like a rabbit in a snare. Did the Dropper know him? If not, why choose a newcomer for such a dangerous job? Why send two professional murderers to ensure the commission of a crime which they could do themselves?

"Feeling happy now?" asked the man with the gun, sarcastically.

"Perfectly. How's the girl?"

The girl looked at him listlessly. Her face

was even more pallid than it had been before, and there was a curiously bemused expression playing round her eyes. She smiled pathetically. Sanderson saw the gleam of white, even teeth, and swore beneath his breath. If he went out on this job what would happen to the girl? Perhaps in his absence she would be moved to some unknown spot. But that, he reflected, would not matter very much since he was even then unaware of his whereabouts.

"You heard the Dropper say that I've got to have a gun," he said. "Hand me that one of mine. I'd rather handle something I'm used to."

"You'll get that when the other boys arrive to escort you. Until then, have another smoke and talk to your girl-friend."

The men seemed less belligerent. The Yard man smoked and thought. It seemed impossible to find a way out of the impasse. If he refused to visit Westbourne Terrace he would be shot. There was no doubt about that. But if he left the cellar the girl would



be unprotected, and Chief-constable Maling would certainly be put on the spot. He gave up the struggle, and waited to see what would happen next. Sanderson had been born with great faith in lucky breaks. He needed them badly.

He was sitting on the edge of the table, swinging his legs, when the door opened, and two men walked in. One was Mac, the other was a stranger. He was small, ferret-faced, with eyes that twitched a trifle. The Yard man diagnosed the case instantly. A "coke" sniffer. It was like the Dropper to elevate a man with "snow" and then send him on a murder job.

"Hallo," the detective greeted Mac. "What happened to you? Why didn't you tell me I'd got to come here on my solitary?"

Mac grinned, and waved a warning finger. "Not this child, Eddie. I'm very particular about seeing that my body doesn't get ventilated. Looks as though we've got a busy night. Meet one of the crowd—Albino Cassell."

The little man shuffled forward, gripped Sanderson with a cold, damp hand, and muttered something unintelligible. The detective looked towards Mac and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"How's the little girl keeping?" asked Mac, swaggering over to her. Sanderson stood tense before he moved. Then he placed a hand on Mac's arm and stopped him.

"Cut that out, Mac. Dames don't mix with murder. When I walk out on a real man's

job I don't want to sit between a bloke with women on the brain, and a lad who sniffs everything except pepper."

Albino stepped forward angrily. "Are you trying to tell me—" he commenced. He got no further.

"Brother," commented the Yard man, "I'm just telling you to be a good boy. Don't start any rough stuff. You've got a busy night, little man. Mac, hand me my gun. I feel sort of cold without it. That boy near the door borrowed it from me."

Mac took the gun, and passed it to Sanderson. The detective examined it, and noted, with relief, it had a full magazine. It would not have surprised him if they had sent him on the ride with an unloaded weapon. He slipped the weapon into his pocket, and took

Mac looked at him with questioning suspicion. Then he drew a .45 from his pocket, and passed it over.

"I wouldn't advise you to miss with your own gun," he said softly. "Because I won't miss you."

"Thanks. What arrangements have you made? Since I've got to do the rubbing out I may as well know."

"Come outside with me, and I'll tell you about it."

The detective strolled to the door, opened it, and passed into the darkness. He stood with Mac in another cellar.

"Everything's set. We've got the car waiting outside for us. The driver is O.K. Maling gets a bogus call telling him to report at the Yard. He leaves the house, and we fall in

stopped abruptly, and Sanderson smiled in the darkness. That was something! He thought for a while before he asked:

"And how do we let the boss know that the job's been done, and that everything is O.K.?"

"Oh, that's easy enough. We'll come right back here. He'll be waiting for the news. Are you about ready to make a start?"

"Pretty well. Let's get back and have another smoke before we hit the trail. This is a rotten cold place for a hang-out. It gives me the dithers."

"That's because it's under river level, and these old places are full of draughts and damp. Get inside."

They walked back into the room. The detective's original guards sat at the far end of the table playing cards. Albino paced the floor restlessly. The girl sat with her shoulders bowed, looking up as they entered, obviously frightened. Sanderson walked over to her.

"Are you feeling warm enough, kid?" he asked.

It seemed to take a few seconds before she appreciated the question.

"Not very," she said. "Why have I been brought here? What's the matter?" Her voice was tremulous, but the tone was that of a cultured woman.

"Anybody got a rug hanging about?" asked the Yard man. "Just because the girl's here she hasn't got to freeze."

No one moved, and he turned to Mac: "Lend the kid your coat, Mac, until you come back. You won't be wanting it in the car. You can see she's ill, and this cellar is no place for invalids. She's got mine already."

The girl looked up with a wan smile. Mac hesitated, then peeled off his coat. It was not that he cared for the girl's health or feelings, but at times Mac prided himself as a lady's man, and he didn't want to be defeated as a cavalier. As he took off the coat Sanderson helped him out of it, and then walked over to the girl with the garment folded over his arm.

She rose from her seat, and as her right hand came down the sleeve the Yard man, as though straightening the sleeve, pressed her hand through into the side pocket, facing the girl so that her face could not be seen. Her fingers touched something hard, and a frown crossed her face. Sanderson gave a slight wink, and the girl felt again as she settled back in her seat. She averted her face, and stared at the floor.

Now she knew that she was holding the butt of a revolver. Mac's .45 had soon changed hands. Some seconds passed before she raised her eyes.

"Thank you very much indeed," she said to Mac. But the Yard man knew that she was speaking to him.

"We're all ready for the road," said Mac. "Come along, you two."

"Wait for me," said the Yard man. "Don't forget that I don't know my way out. This place is an absolute labyrinth."

As they threaded their way through the darkness Sanderson struggled to trace their route. Mac waited for them at the exit, and Sanderson fell in by his side. Albino, walking at the back, hadn't noticed the sudden move with which Sanderson ground his lighted cigarette into the wooden door.

After passing through the Stygian blackness of the cellars the detective found that he could see comparatively well outside. In fact, as they turned the first corner, his keen eyes detected a water tap affixed to the left-hand wall. As he passed he gave the tap a trivial twist. In the road a saloon car, carrying no lights, was parked against the kerb. Sanderson opened the door, and stood on one side while Mac and Albino climbed in. His eyes scanned every direction. Three things he saw which remained in his memory. The first was a broken pane in a derelict warehouse at the head of the alley, the second was a sign hanging over the door of a Salvation Army Hostel, and the third was a packing case resting against the wall at the entrance to another alley.

He climbed into his seat and slumped back, wondering, with an odd detachment, whether he was heading for death.



As Sanderson helped the girl into the coat, he pressed her hand into the side pocket, and her fingers touched the cold, hard butt of a revolver.

the procession. You shoot the works. And that's the end of Maling. All very simple."

"Not quite so simple, Mac. The Dropper might be the big noise, but I'm not landing into anything like the last job. What happens to us after we've given Maling the works? I haven't forgotten yet what happened after our party in Beaumont Street. What about the getaway?"

"That's easy. We just drive back here." "You're telling me? I don't fancy a ride all the way from Westbourne Terrace to here after I've drilled a chief-constable. They're not quite like ordinary policemen, and we've got a helluva way to come back."

"It isn't as far as all that. Don't get nerves about the job."

"But we're a long way from Westbourne Terrace."

"Never. It can't be more than six or seven miles from there to West India Docks." Mac

another look at the girl, noticing that she seemed to be less dazed. In her eyes before he had only read a story of apathy and numbness. Now expressions of fear were fleeting across them, and she shivered as she pulled her clothes nearer to her.

"Have you got another spare gun, Mac?" he asked. "This one of mine carries a release to spring the bullets in a stream. If I use that and I miss with the first pull the bloke will have gone before I can have a second crack. Let's have one for the reserve fund."

TAKING THE RISK.

"You take things very cushily," said Mac, staring at Sanderson.

"What's the use of any other way? If my boss wants a job done I just get on with it. What's worrying me is the getaway after we've given Maling the works, and I'm not fancying my chance of hitting that man through this window. It seems to me that the Dropper hasn't got much idea of how to run these jobs."

"Have you done anything like it before?" inquired Mac.

"I'm telling no stories. But I'll pass this tip to you for nothing—if ever you have to handle a running murder, drive the car yourself. It's the safest way of keeping out of trouble."

"I can't see that it makes any difference."

"That's because you've never tried it. How does the guy sitting at that wheel know my methods? How does he know whether I want to shoot from the rear, the side, or the front? How can he tell when I'm ready for him to put his foot down and scam? How does he know whether I'd rather take the man with a turning car or with a car running alongside the kerb, whether I'd rather he drove in the opposite direction to Maling or towards him the other way? There's another half dozen reasons why you make a better job if you're driving yourself."

Mac appeared impressed, thumbed his chin as though reflecting.

"I never thought there was all that in it. Reckon you're right, and the Dropper hasn't handled one of these jobs before."

Sanderson saw the opening, and spoke quickly:

"It's all very well to say that, Mac, but you've got to remember that we're taking all the risk. We're the ones who carry the can back if anything goes wrong. I reckon the Dropper has doubled our risks by letting that other bloke drive this bus."

"It's no good arguing. If we altered the plans now the boss would sit us on a warm seat."

"Why? He wouldn't know anything about it. As soon as I'd done my stuff I'd swing the car round, drive like blazes for five minutes, and then hand the wheel over to the bloke again. If we did it that way the Dropper wouldn't know the first thing about it. What d'you say about it, Albino?"

"Anything goes with me," said the man.

"In that case, Mac, I reckon we'll do it my way. One other thing—to make sure that we've got him, one of you can lean out of this window, and slam him with a couple when I fire. Tap the window, and tell the driver to stop for a minute."

Mac paused irresolutely, and then rapped on the dividing glass. The driver slowed down and turned round. Catching the message, he applied the brakes, slipped out of his seat, and walked round to the rear of the car. Mac acted as spokesman:

"I've changed the arrangements," he said. "You get in the back with us, and Eddie here will drive the car."

The driver appeared astonished, but he offered no opposition. The Yard man climbed out of his seat, struggling to hide his triumph. He was in no hurry to start away. He had succeeded in obtaining the driving seat, but he had no idea what use he could make of it. The men behind could shoot quite easily through the glass, and he would be unable to prevent them murdering both Maling and himself.

He turned up Gray's Inn Road and weaved through the streets lying alongside it. Finally he cruised along Bolsover Street, and had reached the junction with Euston Road when he suddenly arrived at his decision.

Sanderson took a deep breath, his lips set in a firm, straight line, and he drove across Euston Road into Albany Street. Someone in the back of the car tapped the window. He knew why. They thought he was taking the wrong way. They were right. Mac and his companions never knew quite what happened. The Yard man slammed his foot down on the accelerator pedal, threw himself on the floor on the left of the driving seat, and wrenched the wheel away from himself. Then he clenched his teeth and waited for the smash.

He felt the car reel as the wheels struck the kerb, dive forward again, heard screams from

the rear, placed his head on his arms, and then heard a tearing crash as the car struck. He was flung forward with his arms against the door, and he rocked as the vehicle swayed drunkenly. Then he almost stood on his head as the car pitched over on its side. It was a second before he realised that he was not hurt. He started to drag himself up, and at that moment the door beside the driving-wheel opened, and a policeman looked into the wreck.

"Armed men in the back," shouted Sanderson. "Call for help."

The constable whipped a whistle from his pocket and blew. Almost as though produced by the wave of a magician's wand three more policemen appeared. Sanderson drew his gun from his pocket and hauled himself out of the car.

"All get your 'cuffs out," he snapped. "Arrest the three men in the back. I'll cover them while you get the bracelets on."

The detective walked round to the other side of the car and wrenched at the door for some time before he could open it. Mac was the first to emerge. His face was covered with blood. The driver followed him out, holding his shoulder and whining with pain. Albino was lying unconscious on the floor, and the police dragged him out.

"What's the game?" demanded Mac, weak-voiced with shock.

"That's what I want to know," said the sergeant.

"I'll tell you plenty later on," cut in Sanderson. "Charge these three men with loitering with intent. There's plenty more to come, but it can wait."

"But who are you?" asked the sergeant.

"Detective-sergeant Sanderson, New Scotland Yard."

Mac gave him a stupefied stare. Then he groaned as he saw near by the blue light of a police-station.

"You're seeing straight," said Sanderson. "I crashed the car into Albany Street Police-station."

The men trailed into the station, and Sanderson seized the telephone, called for Chief-constable Maling's number.

"Sanderson here," he announced. "Come along to Albany Street Police-station right away, sir. Tell the operator on the exchange to get the number of any person who calls you in the next half-hour and telephone it to the Yard. Give instructions at the Yard to trace that number and try to arrest the person who called you. Do that before you come round, sir, but for the love of Mike be quick!"

Maling was too old in the ways of the Force to waste time asking questions. He slammed down the receiver and started work, while Sanderson telephoned the police in the West India Docks' district and connected with a detective-sergeant.

"Sergeant Sanderson, of the Yard, speaking. I've got a very urgent and very important job for you. Somewhere in your district there is a Salvation Army hostel, and near it there is a packing case lying on the pavement. Ten yards away from that case there is a broken window in an empty warehouse. I want to know in what street that is. Have you got that clear? Whoever takes on the job must not be seen. That's vital. Tell them to report back to the station and wait for me to arrive. Have four or five men ready to come with me. Serve them out with revolvers. All clear? Good! See you soon."

He snapped down the receiver and made another call. This time he telephoned the River Police at the West India Docks.

"Sergeant Sanderson, of the Yard, speaking. We're going to raid a place within the next hour that backs down to the water in your district. Some of the people we're after may try to get away via the Thames. Tell your patrol boats to cruise up and down that stretch of water until I give them the all-clear. They are to look out particularly for any boat in which there is a young woman; but any vessel that starts moving within the next hour must be stopped, whoever is in it. All clear?"

LOCKED DOORS.

SANDERSON was pacing to and fro across the charge-room floor when Maling burst into the station. Instantly he rushed over to the sergeant.

"What's going wrong to-night? What's that car piled up for outside? Phew! I've never had such a job in my life. You'll have to come back to the Yard with me. Something terrible has happened."

"It certainly has, sir."

"But you can't have heard the news."

"I've heard enough to-night to last me for a lifetime."

"But the commissioner is stark, raving mad."

"Maybe he'll be feeling better by the morning. If you've got a car outside we'll jump in and get down to the East End."

"We certainly will not. We'll go to the Yard right away. You can forget your job. I've got something more important for you to help with—the worst crime we've had since the Yard was built."

"It's got to be pretty bad if I can't tell you of any worse."

"Don't talk, Sanderson. Let's start moving. I'll tell you what's happened as we go along. You can drive."

Maling seized the sergeant by the arm and dragged him outside.

"But I've got a very important job to do, sir," protested Sanderson.

"Listen to me," exploded Maling as the car pulled away from the kerb, "the commissioner's daughter has been kidnapped!"

"What?" Sanderson slowed down, and turned to gape at Maling.

"Can't you hear? Sir Phillip Mason's daughter has been snatched! She was in a nursing home, and someone sent a dummy message, and had her transferred to another home. She was abducted from there."

"Where was the second home?" asked Sanderson weakly.

"Fifty-six-a, Beaumont Street. Why?"

The car stopped suddenly as the brakes whined. Sanderson could feel globules of sweat pouring down his face. Maling looked at him.

"What's the matter? Are you feeling ill?"

"I certainly am! I'm the man who kidnapped her!"

Chief-constable Maling sat up as if he had been stuck with a pin. He stared at Sanderson with eyes that seemed about to burst. Before he had time to speak the sergeant took off the brakes, twisted the wheel, and plunged along the road, driving like a maniac.

By the time they reached Stepney the chief-constable had heard the whole story.

"We ought to have brought forty or fifty men with us," he said.

"No, sir. If you took a regiment down there you'd get the crowd on the run. It can be done with half a dozen men." He whizzed round a corner, teetering on two wheels, then added, so softly that his chief scarcely heard him: "I got the girl into the mess, and I'm going to get her out of it."

"If anything happens to that girl, Sanderson, it'll be your last day with the Force. I know you did it all for the best, but you'd never be able to tell that to the commissioner."

"I know, sir. I wouldn't try to. If anything happens to that girl I won't wait to be sacked. Here's the station."

Both men jumped out and ran across the pavement. They found a young divisional detective waiting for them. He saluted the chief and wasted no time before he handed out his information.

"You want Forbes Street, sir. I'm ready to take you there."

Before Maling could reply, three men walked from an inner office. The leader saluted.

"Sergeant Wayne, sir. We're ready when you are."

"Take your instructions from Sanderson," said Maling. "He's in charge of the raid."

"Are you all armed?" asked Sanderson. The men nodded grimly. "Then I'll tell you what I want you to do." He explained the position of the alley at length, told them the position of the entrance door, spoke of the labyrinthine passages inside, of the false square on the wall. "Does anyone know that place well enough to tell me whether there is a back way? I want to get to the spot behind that cellar. I want to get into the room from which the Dropper spoke."

"I think I can take you," said Wayne. "Of course, I don't know the room, but I've got a rough idea of the back way. The place

used to be a bonded store for wines and spirits, but it hasn't been used for twenty years."

"That's splendid. I want two of you to stand guard over the entrance to that place in the alley. Don't move from there, and if anyone comes near, knock him unconscious before he can raise any sort of warning. I want you, sir, to wait outside with another of the men for twenty minutes after your arrival there. At the end of that time open the door, and start working your way through to the back cellar. Keep your guns in your hands, and don't be afraid of using them."

"While you do that Wayne will show me the back way into the place, and he can stand guard there while I work my way through."

"But you're not going in alone, Sanderson," protested Maling.

"I certainly am, sir. It isn't a two-man job, and in any case the Dropper is my pigeon. We'll start moving after I've telephoned the River Police."

Sanderson was soon satisfied. The Thames Police were on the prowl, casting eagle eyes over the range of black water fronting the West India Docks. He led the way out of the station, stopping for an instant on the doorstep.

"If you get into that cellar all right, sir, shout to Miss Mason to press against the left-hand wall. Otherwise she'll be in range from that hole in the wall, and if I haven't got there by then the Dropper may shoot her out of spite. If I have him pinned down by the time you arrive, I'll let you know as soon as I see you. All clear?"

"Certainly. It was a new experience for Maling to take orders from a sergeant, but he felt that the leading of the raid was in good hands. They had not walked far before Wayne touched the Yard man on the arm.

"This is where we part company," he said, turning down a narrow alley. Sanderson followed him.

Wayne twisted and turned along the narrow alleys, bending all the time towards the left. Finally he arrived at the end of a cul-de-sac and pointed to a high wall.

"Climb on my back and get on the top of that. You can pull me up."

It was not long before both men dropped down into the yard of a factory, walked down to the end of the yard, clambered over another wall, and arrived on a wharf. A night-watchman emerged from the shadows and challenged them. Wayne signalled him to be quiet, and whispered:

"Quiet. You know me. Have you got a small boat?"

The watchman had spent so much time in solitude that he had learnt the art of silence. Without another word he led the way down to the riverside, pointed to a small rowing boat, and walked away.

Wayne slipped the mooring rope, pulled into the stream and rowed westward. He had not travelled more than twenty yards when they heard the low hum of a motor, and a boat slid alongside.

"Who is that?" called a man.

"Detective-sergeant Sanderson, of the Yard, and Detective-sergeant Wayne. Is that the River Police?"

"It is." A lamp shone in their faces. "All right. The best of luck." The police boat edged away, to vanish in the darkness. Sanderson watched it disappear and nodded his head approvingly. It didn't look as though the Dropper would escape by water, unless he shot his way through.

Two minutes later Wayne pulled in to the edge of another wharf, fastened the boat and clambered out.

"This is the river frontage to that place of yours," he told the Yard man. "Follow me carefully, or you'll end up by swimming. There are cuts leading to this wharf from the river."

Sanderson gripped the other man's sleeve, and was led along in silence. Now that the moment for action was drawing near, the Yard man was coldly resolute. Again and again his mind conjured up a vision of the commissioner's daughter, pale-faced and trembling. Wayne stopped suddenly before a large wooden door. A steel bar ran across it, and in the centre was a padlocked chain fastening.

Sanderson watched his companion draw a piece of metal from his pocket and force it

under the bolts securing the bar. Wayne, taking no chances, had brought a jemmy with him, and as the bolts came adrift from their fastening and the bar dropped, Sanderson caught it so that no sound should be made. Then Wayne started work on the padlock. It offered no obstacle to a man who knew how to handle it, and soon they pulled back the doors and advanced cautiously and slowly through the dark interior.

"I'm going to chance a light," whispered Wayne, placing his handkerchief over the glass of a torch. The dimmed illumination was switched on just in time. The men were standing not more than four feet from the edge of a narrow cutting running from the river up the wharf, and into the shed. Sanderson saw something else. Farther along the cutting stood a small launch—and he could hear the engine ticking over. Obviously its owner was ready to stage a rapid exit. They walked over to it, and flashed the light down.

Suddenly the Yard man bent down and raised the engine cover. His fingers worked deftly for a few seconds, then he rose again with a smile.

"He won't get that boat out of here tonight," he whispered, "unless he uses a pair of oars. Let's walk on at the side of this cutting, and see where it ends."

After taking ten paces they found that the water stopped against a brick wall, and to the left was a small door. Wayne tried to force it with his jemmy, found it impossible to get proper leverage, and worked on it with skeleton keys for some time. Both sighed with relief when it swung back. Sanderson gripped his gun in his right hand, tensed, expecting to meet trouble any moment. The interior of the warehouse was strangely quiet. Even in the dark, although they could not estimate the size of the building, it gave the impression of being huge.

"I know these places," said Wayne. "There'll only be one exit from here, and that'll be at the far end. Mostly there's a doorway leading down to the cellars."

He was right. They found the doorway tucked in a small alcove. It proved easier to open than the entrance portal. Wayne was moving forward again when the Yard man touched his arm and shook his head.

"No," he said. "You've done your part of the job. The rest is up to me. Just stay near this door and see that no person comes in or out."

Wayne started to remonstrate, but before he could speak Sanderson had vanished into the darkness. He groped with his feet as he advanced, testing each foot of ground before he placed his weight on it. It was as well that he did. He was not more than five or six yards away from Wayne when his right foot found no hold. He was at the head of a flight of stairs.

Holding the wall with his left hand, he started the descent. The air was cold and dank, chilling him. The steps were slippery with moisture, and even the wall exuded a cold slime.

At the foot of the stairs he fumbled his way along a narrow passage. Then the path began to swerve to the right. Holding out the gun



The Dropper's gun and Sanderson's boomed out together, and the master-criminal's weapon clattered out of his hand.

in his right hand, and pawing the other wall with his left, he searched for doorways as he advanced, but could find none. It seemed that the passage was interminably long. He had counted forty-three paces before he was confronted with another door. This one was not locked. Again, after passing through the opening, his way led along a path bending to the right, and again there was no door on the way.

Suddenly he stopped, raised his head, and sniffed the air. Either some person smoking a cigar had walked along the passage, or some cigar-smoker was near him. He stepped forward more cautiously. And just as he turned another bend he saw the first glimmer of light—a dim yellow flicker in the distance.

Sanderson slipped his gun into his pocket, bent down, and took off his shoes. Silently he continued his advance, waiting for action. At the next bend he saw that the light was glowing round a corner, and he edged his way along the wall to peep round the angle. It was fortunate for him that his approach was stealthy.

A man sat on a chair in the centre of the passage not more than two yards away from him. He was reading an evening paper. Sanderson saw a revolver lying on the floor at the man's side, and stole towards him on tip-toe. He changed the gun round in his hand, his arm rose in an arc. The watchman never knew what hit him. Bone scrunched, the man groaned faintly, and Sanderson caught him as he toppled from his chair.

He was walking away from the man when another thought occurred to him, and he deprived him of his overcoat and cap, leaving his own hat behind. The light, he discovered, came from a small gas-jet farther along the passage. As he passed that he saw a door facing him. It was lined with green baize, and looked as though it was erected as a sound-proof structure. He walked forward even more slowly. The smell of cigar smoke was stronger.

Now that he was nearer to the door he could see that a keyhole broke the line of baize. He bent to discover whether there was any key

inserted. There was not. But a light shone within. Sanderson cupped his fingers round his left eye to throw off the effect of the gaslight behind him, and peered into the room.

He had expected to see a dull, drab cellar with a stone-flagged floor, and dirty, damp walls. Instead, the narrow angle of his vision displayed a space of velvet curtains on the ar wall, a large gilt standard lamp, a damask divan fashioned in rich purple, the corner of a luxurious fur rug flung over the end of the divan, and a coal fire blazing merrily in a brick fireplace. Beyond that he could see nothing.

He held his nose close to the keyhole. Someone in that room was smoking a cigar. He laced his ear against the aperture, but heard no sound. For a couple of minutes he hesitated. It would be fatal to try the door if the Dropper was inside. That would be one way to certain death. He stood wondering whether it was locked or barred.

Then he heard a sound of movement, stifled, and stared.

ACCORDING TO ORDERS.

THE noise was slight, just a gentle rustle like feet falling on a carpet of rich pile. Then a figure came into line with the keyhole. He had walked from some position near the door across the room, and his back was turned to Sanderson. The man wore an immaculate evening suit, and carried an amber cigar-holder in a pale right hand. He had poise, an air of complete confidence.

Was this the Dropper? The man's action on reaching the far side of the room was curious. He placed his hand on a small water-colour, framed in ebony, and moved it to one side. Behind it was a small steel door, very similar to an inset safe. He languidly took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door. Inside was a square opening about two feet long, a foot wide, and eighteen inches deep. The man stood staring into the opening.

Suddenly the man spoke. Sanderson sighed

with relief when he discovered that he could hear him.

"Michael," he said, "is there still no news of Mac and the others?"

The reply could not be heard, but the detective had no doubt about the nature of it. He saw the man snap his fingers irritably.

"One of you get round to the back," ordered the man, "and make sure that my launch is all right. I can't wait much longer."

That settled it. Something would have to be done, and done quickly. The Yard man backed away along the corridor, gripping the gun, then his thirteen stone of bone, sinew, and muscle hurtled along the passage, crashed into the door with the force of an avalanche, and there was a tearing, splintering sound as the door flew open.

The Yard man did not lose balance, but the man who wheeled to face him acted with the speed of a striking adder. His hand streaked to his breast-pocket, a gun rose, and Sanderson swerved and fired. The other's gun boomed out also, and a hot stabbing pain seared Sanderson's left shoulder.

The man facing him grimaced horribly as his gun clattered out of his hand. Then he gripped his right arm, and they stared at each other for seconds without moving. Sanderson held the gun with an unsteady hand. Blood was coursing from his shoulder.

He had never seen this man before. He examined the refined, aquiline features, the cold grey eyes, the carefully toiled black hair. This was no ordinary man.

"You're making a great mistake—" began the other loftily.

"So will you if you move," cut in Sanderson.

Suddenly, both men started. A shot had echoed in the adjoining cellar. Sanderson decided to wait no longer. Walking over to the man as though to handcuff him he drew behind him, struck him on the base of the skull

with the butt of his gun, watched him fall, and then hurried over to the hole in the wall. Through the canvas he caught a vision that made him gasp with relief. One of Miss Mason's guards was lying on the floor, groaning, and holding his stomach. The other stood sullenly by the door. Maling and the local man covered him. The commissioner's daughter leant against the table, a revolver in her hand.

"Chief," shouted Sanderson, "I've got the Dropper out here."

Maling looked round, puzzled, until Miss Mason led him over to the wall. Sanderson dropped his gun and wrenched away the canvas. He grinned cheerfully when the chief saw him.

"Who is he?" asked Maling breathlessly.

"I dunno him from Adam. I'll lift him up and you can have a look."

Maling peered through the opening, while Sanderson, wincing with pain, seized the unconscious man by the shoulders and lifted him.

"My hat!" shouted the chief. "I can't be seeing straight. That's Martin Cross, the Independent Member of Parliament for Streatham—the man who attacked the Yard for not finding the Dropper! Hold on, I'll send someone round there."

Sanderson didn't have long to wait. Maling's prisoner volunteered the necessary information, and the local detective slid through the covered trapdoor in the corner of the cellar, to reappear in the Dropper's private room. Immediately Sanderson handed over the prisoner, and made his way into the cellar. Maling stared at the blood soaking through the sergeant's clothes, and shook his head mournfully.

Miss Mason stood back, too surprised to speak. It was Maling who effected the necessary introduction.

"Then you're not a criminal at all," she said.

"It's just that I've never been found out. What happened to you, Miss Mason. How'd they come to kidnap you?"

"Daddy sent me to a nursing-home for an operation—just glands. I got a message, changing the home. It seemed genuine enough. When I got to the other place they gave me something to take, and I didn't remember any more until I found myself here."

"I thought you'd been doped," said Sanderson. "Reckon they gave you morphia." He turned to their conscious prisoner. "What was the idea of sending me along to murder Chief-constable Maling?"

"He told the others to bump you off, whether you shot your boss or not. He thought it was a good joke to force you into shooting your own boss. He was funny like that!"

"So he'd tumbled you," said Maling. "What an escape you've had. But you'd better get along and have that wound dressed. Get someone to take you in my car, I'll have to stay on here to clear things up."

"I'll see Miss Mason home, on the way, then, if you don't mind."

"I shouldn't trouble," said the girl, staring at his shoulder.

"I may as well finish the job," remarked the Yard man with a grin. "After all, I brought you here, so I'm entitled to take you back."

Without waiting for her answer, he walked over to the local detective, pulling his notecase out of his pocket.

"I want you to do a job for me this morning. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least."

"Thanks. Take this pound, and buy a large box of chocolates and a bunch of flowers. Take them along to 67, Culbert Street, Stepney, and present them to a lady named Elsie Meers. Tell her they come from Eddie, who has been called to the North very suddenly, but who'll remember her with gratitude and affection for the rest of his life. Thanks."

The door slammed. Detective-sergeant Sanderson was on his way.

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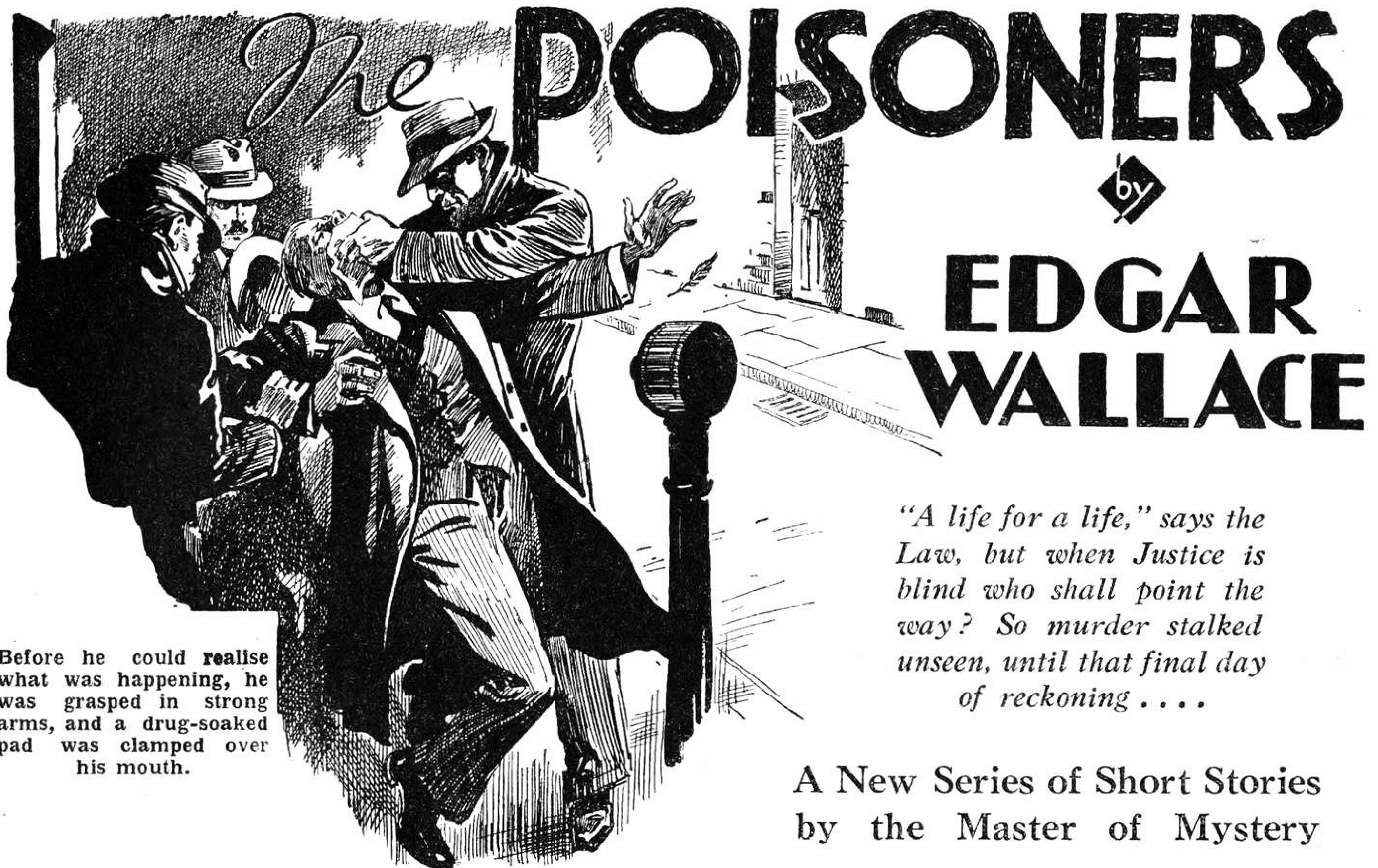
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Before he could realise what was happening, he was grasped in strong arms, and a drug-soaked pad was clamped over his mouth.

The POISONERS

by

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"A life for a life," says the Law, but when Justice is blind who shall point the way? So murder stalked unseen, until that final day of reckoning

A New Series of Short Stories
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CALLED ABROAD.

MR. ESSLEY paced up and down his study at Forest Hill. The table was a litter of opened letters, for the doctor was paying one of his brief visits to the practice.

He took up one of the letters and read it again. It was written in French and bore at its head the stamp of the Ministry of Justice. The writer had the honour and felicity to inform M. le Docteur that the Four Just Men had disappeared, as from the face of the earth, and that they were certainly not domiciled in France.

The doctor threw the letter down. They had all said the same. No authority helped him. The new Spanish writer, De la Monte, whose work on crime had recently been translated into English, made no mention of the men. Yet he wrote with assurance, and was a likely man to supply information.

A thought struck him. He turned the leaves of the telephone-book and found a number. He asked for this, and in a few minutes he was speaking with the publisher.

"I am Dr. Essley," he said. "I am most anxious to find the address of the author of a book you have recently published; it is called 'Modern Crime.'"

"De la Monte's?"

"That's the man."

"If you will wait, I will find out," said the voice.

The doctor held on till the speaker returned.

"It is in Cordova."

A sudden light came to Dr. Essley's eyes.

"Yes?" he said eagerly. "Can you give me the exact address?"

"Forty-one Calle Moreria."

"Thank you!" The doctor hastily scribbled the address and hung up the receiver.

Cordova! Of all the providential things in the world! Interest of another kind called him to that city. There was a certain Dr. Cajalos he wished to see.

He rang the bell, and the old woman who formed the domestic staff of his little house answered it.

"I am going away for a few days," he said. "I have been called to Paris."

"If Mr. Black rings up, sir—"

"He won't ring up," he said shortly; "and, if he does, you may tell him that I am away from town."

Dr. Essley then left the house, walking briskly to the railway-station, very briskly for a grey-haired man, and the vigour of his stride no less than the swing of his shoulders spoke of a strength which is not ordinarily possessed by a man of fifty.

Yet, for all the buoyancy of his walk, he was uncomfortable. He had a hateful suspicion at the back of his mind that he was being watched. Twice he looked round sharply, but saw nothing. Under his breath he cursed his folly.

"I have got these infernal Four Just Men on my nerves," he said to himself.

He reached Victoria and took a taxi-cab to Charing Cross. He had a quarter of an hour to wait. Standing before the bookstall, he had that uncomfortable feeling again. He was being watched. He turned sharply and saw nothing but unoffending passengers. The man who had been watching him had turned a fraction of a second before, and Essley only saw his broad back as he stooped to fasten the strap of his valise.

The doctor, with a bitter little smile of self-disgust, returned to a contemplation of the bookstall. A flaming placard announced the fact that Cresswell Black had gained control of the F. and B. Railway. He bought a paper and read:

"We understand that all obstacles to the amalgamation of the Finsbury and Bursat with the North-East London Railway have disappeared with the death of Mr. George Wallison, the late chairman of the F. & B. line. Mr. Wallison, it will be remembered, was taken suddenly ill at a City banquet, and though attended by a doctor, succumbed from heart failure. Mr. Cresswell Black, presiding at a meeting of the N.-E. L.

expressed his regret that the realisation of his plans had been made possible by so sad a happening."

Dr. Essley folded the paper under his arm and walked thoughtfully along the platform to his train.

The man who sat at the marble-topped table of the Café de la Gran Capitan, in Cordova, was a man of leisure. A tall man was George Manfred, with a trim beard and grave grey eyes that searched the street absently as though not quite certain of his quest. He sipped a coffee and drummed a little tune on the table with his slender white hands.

He was dressed in black. His cloak was long and lined with black velvet, and the deep collar was faced with the same material. His attire was conventional enough—for Cordova—and, in spite of his grey eyes, he might have been a Spaniard.

His speech was flawless. He spoke with the lisp of Andalusia, clipping his words as do the folk of the South. Also, there was evidence of his Southern origin in his response to the whining beggar who shuffled painfully to him, holding out crooked fingers for largesse.

"In the name of the Virgin, and the Saints, and the God who is above all, I beseech you, senior, to spare me ten centimos."

The bearded man brought his far-seeing eyes to focus on the palm.

"God will provide," he said, in the Arabic dialect of Spanish Morocco.

"Though I live a hundred years," said the beggar monotonously, "I will never cease to pray for your lordship's happiness."

He of the velvet-lined cloak looked at the beggar.

The mendicant was a man of medium height, sharp-featured, unshaven after the way of his kind, terribly-bandaged across his head, and with one eye. Moreover, he was lame. His feet were shapeless masses of swathed bandages, and his discoloured hands clutched a stick fiercely.

READER WINS £50 THIS WEEK!

The £50 FIRST PRIZE offered in our third "Cash-names" Competition has been won outright by the following reader whose entry was all-correct:

Mrs. H. Wickham,
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Sevenoaks, Kent,

Sixteen competitors came next in merit—all with one-error attempts—and therefore share the £10 Second Prize. These winners are:

Mrs. A. Bennett, "Muretta," Saughton Road, Corstorphine, Edinburgh.

Mr. A. Carr, 183, Clepington Road, Dundee.

Mrs. Cheatham, 5, Windsor Road, Denton, Manchester.

Mrs. L. Chilton, 31, The Strand, Dawlish, Devon.

Miss Corcoran, 10, Queens Gardens, Annitsford, Northumberland.

Miss E. Davey, 76, Beckway Road, Norbury, S.W.16.

Mr. R. Fairhurst, 19, Church Street, Pemberton, Wigan.

Miss N. Hamilton, 150, Butterbiggins Road, Glasgow.

Mrs. Hill, 73, Hawthorn Road, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester.

Mrs. M. Macdiarmid, 4, Bawthirley Road, Greenock.

Mr. E. Peach, 95, Winson Street, Birmingham, 18.

F. Sarney, Wood Street, Wallingford, Berks.

Mrs. V. Stokes, 15, Enmore Avenue, South Norwood, S.E.25.

Miss Wells, Timberland, Lincoln.

Mrs. Wiggins, 11, North Down Gardens, Swilly, Devonport.

Mr. J. Williams, Derry House, Llandilo, Carm.

The correct solution was as follows: 1. Glasgow. 2. Boston. 3. York. 4. Daventry. 5. Stretford. 6. Denby. 7. Leigh. 8. Barrow. 9. Hereford. 10. Stone. 11. Garmouth. 12. Barlow.

These prizes were despatched on or before February 15th.

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"Senor and prince," he whined, "there is between me and the cursed pangs of hunger ten centimos, and your worship would not sleep this night in comfort thinking of me tossing in famine."

The man at the table sipped his coffee unmoved.

"Go with God," he said.

Still the man lingered.

He looked helplessly up and down the sunlit street. He looked into the cool, dark recess of the café, where an apathetic waiter sat at a table reading the "Heraldo." Then he leant forward, stretching out a slow hand to pick a crumb of cake from the next table.

"Do you know Dr. Essley?" he asked in perfect English.

The cavalier at the table looked thoughtful.

"I do not know him. Why?" he asked in the same language.

"You should know him," said the beggar; "he is interesting."

He said no more, shuffling a painful process along the street. The other watched him with some curiosity, then, standing up to his full height—he was well over the six-foot mark—he shook his cloak and began to walk slowly in the direction taken by the beggar.

He overtook the man in the Calle Paraiso, passed him, and finally came to the Bridge of Calahorra. He reached the centre of the bridge and leant over, watching with idle interest the swollen yellow waters of the Guadalquivir.

Out of the corner of his eye he watched the beggar come slowly through the gate in his direction. He had a long time to wait, for the man's progress was slow. At last he came sidling up to him, hat in hand, palm outstretched. The attitude was that of a beggar, but when he spoke the voice was that of an educated Englishman.

"Manfred," he said earnestly, "you must see this man Essley. I have a special reason for asking."

"What is he?"

The beggar smiled.

"I am dependent upon memory to a great extent," he said, "the library at my humble lodgings being somewhat limited; but I have a dim idea that he is a doctor in the suburbs of London; rather a clever surgeon."

"What is he doing here?"

Gonzalez—for such was the beggar's name—smiled again.

"There is in Cordova a Dr. Cajalos. A marvellous man, George, performing miracles undreamt of in your philosophy. Making the blind see, casting spells upon the guilty, and creating infallible love philtres for the innocent."

Manfred nodded.

"I have seen him and consulted him."

The beggar was a little astonished.

"You're a wonderful man, George," he said with admiration in his voice. "When did you do it?"

Manfred laughed softly.

"There was a certain night, not many weeks ago, when a beggar stood outside the worthy doctor's door patiently waiting till a mysterious visitor, cloaked to his nose, had finished his business."

"I remember," said the other, nodding. "He was a stranger from Ronda, and I was curious. Did you see me following him?"

"I saw you," said Manfred gravely. "I saw you from the corner of my eye."

"It was not you?" asked Gonzalez, astonished.

"It was I," said the other. "I went out of Cordova to come into Cordova."

Gonzalez was silent for a moment.

"I accept the humiliation," he said. "Now, since you know the doctor, can you see any reason for the visit of a commonplace English doctor to Cordova? He has come all the way, without a halt, from England by the Algeciras Express. He leaves Cordova to-morrow morning at daybreak by the same urgent system, and he comes to consult Dr. Cajalos."

"Poiccart has written?" asked Manfred.

"Poiccart is here; he has an interest in this Essley. So great an interest that he comes blandly to our Cordova, Baedeker in hand, seeking information of the itinerant guide, and submitting meekly to his inaccuracies."

Manfred stroked his little beard with the same grave thoughtful expression in his wise

eyes as when he had watched Gonzalez shuffling from the Café de la Gran Capitan.

"Life would be dull without Poiccart," he said.

"Dull, indeed. Ah, senor, my life shall be your praise, and it shall rise like the smoke of holy incense to the throne of heaven."

He dropped suddenly into his whine, for a policeman of the town guard was approaching with a suspicious eye for the beggar who stood with expectant hand outstretched.

Manfred shook his head as the policeman strolled up.

"Go in peace," he said.

"Dog," said the policeman, his rough hand descending on the beggar's shoulder. "Thief of a thief, begone lest you offend the nostrils of this illustrious."

With arms akimbo, he watched the man limp away, then he turned to Manfred.

"If I had seen this scum before, excellency," he said fiercely, "I should have relieved your presence of his company."

"It is not important," said Manfred conventionally.

The man walked by his side to the end of the bridge, where they stood chatting near the principal entrance to the cathedral.

"Your excellency is not of Cordova?" asked the officer.

"I am of Malaja," said Manfred without hesitation.

"I had a sister who married a fisherman of Malaja," confided the policeman.

Manfred merely nodded. He was interested in a party of tourists who were being shown the glories of the Puerta del Perdon.

One of the tourists detached himself from the party and came towards them. He was a man of middle height and strongly built. There was a strange reserve in his air, and a saturnine imperturbability in his face.

"Can you direct me to the Paseo de la Gran Capitan?" he asked in bad Spanish.

"I am going that way," said Manfred courteously. "If the senor would condescend to accompany me—"

"I shall be grateful," said the other.

They raised their hats to the policeman—Manfred with ease, the other a little awkwardly—and moved off.

They chatted a little on divers subjects—the weather, the delightful character of the Mosque Cathedral.

"You must come along and see Essley," said the tourist suddenly. He spoke in perfect Spanish.

"Tell me about him," said Manfred.

"Between you, my dear Poiccart, you have piqued my curiosity."

"This is an important matter," said the other earnestly. "Essley is a doctor in a suburb of London. I have had him under observation for some months. He has a small practice—quite a little one, and he attends a few cases. Apparently he does no serious work in his suburb, and his history is a strange one."

"He was a student at University College, London, and soon after getting his degree, left with a youth named Black for Australia. Black had been a hopeless failure, and had been badly ploughed in his exams, but the two were fast friends, which may account for their going away together to try their luck in a new country. Neither of them had a relation in the world."

"Arrived in Melbourne, the two started off up-country with some idea of making for the new gold-diggings which were in full swing at that time. I don't know where the diggings were; at any rate, it was three months before Essley arrived—alone, his companion having, it was reported, died on the road. This report could not have been true, for Black eventually turned up after a complete disappearance."

"Essley does not seem to have started practising for three or four years. We can trace his wanderings from mining camp to mining camp, where he dug a little, gambled a lot, and was generally known as Dr. S.—probably an abbreviation of Essley. Not until he reached Western Australia did he attempt to establish himself as a doctor. He had some sort of practice, not a very high-class one, it is true, but certainly lucrative. He disappeared from Coolgardie in 1900. He did not reappear in England until 1908."

They had reached the Paseo by now. The streets were better filled than they had been when Manfred had followed the beggar.

"I've some rooms here," said Manfred. "Come in and we will have some tea."

He occupied a flat over a jeweller's in the Calle Moreria. It was a well-furnished apartment, "and especially blessed in the matter of light," explained Manfred as he inserted the key. He put a silver kettle on the electric stove.

"The table is laid for two?" questioned Poiccart.

"I often have visitors," said Manfred with a little smile. "Sometimes the begging profession becomes an intolerable burden to our Leon, and he enters Cordova by rail, a most respectable member of society, full of a desire for the luxury of life—and stories. Go on with yours, Poiccart; I am interested."

The "tourist" seated himself in a deep arm-chair.

"Where was I?" he asked. "Oh, yes, Dr. Essley disappeared from Coolgardie, and after an obliteration of eight years he reappeared in London."

"In any exceptional circumstances?"

"No, very ordinarily. He seems to have been taken up by the newest kind of Napoleon—that same companion whose death had been reported, but who was very much alive."

"Cresswell Black?" asked Manfred, raising his eyebrows.

Poiccart nodded.

"The same," he said. "At any rate, Essley, thanks to what practice he could steal from other practitioners in his own suburb—some-where in the neighbourhood of Forest Hill—and what practice Napoleon's recommendation gives him, seems to be fairly well off. He first attracted my attention—"

There came a tap at the door, and Manfred raised his finger warningly. He crossed the room and opened the door. The concierge stood outside, cap in hand; behind him, and a little way down the stairs, was a stranger—obviously an Englishman.

"A senior to see your excellency," said the concierge.

"My house is at your disposal," said Manfred, addressing the stranger in Spanish.

"I am afraid I do not speak good Spanish," said the man on the stairs.

"Will you come up?" asked Manfred in English.

The other mounted the stairs slowly.

THE FOUR JUST MEN.

HE was a man of fifty. His hair was grey and long. His eyebrows were thick and shaggy, and his underjaw stuck out and gave his face an appearance which was slightly repulsive. He wore a frock coat and carried a big, soft wide-awake in his gloved hand.

He peered round the room from one to the other.

"My name," he said, "is Essley. Essley," he repeated as though he derived some satisfaction from the repetition—"Dr. Essley."

Manfred motioned him to a chair, but he shook his head.

"I'll stand," he said harshly. "When I have business I stand."

He looked suspiciously at Poiccart.

"I have private business," he said pointedly.

"My friend has my complete confidence," said Manfred.

Essley nodded grudgingly.

"I understand," he said, "that you are a scientist and a man with considerable knowledge of Spain."

Manfred shrugged his shoulders. In his present rôle he enjoyed some reputation as a quasi-scientific literateur, and under the name of "De la Monte" had published a book on "Modern Crime."

"Knowing this," said the man, "I came to Cordova, having other business also—but that will keep."

He looked round for a chair, and Manfred offered one into which he sank, keeping his back to the window.

"Mr. de la Monte," said the doctor, leaning forward with his hands on his knees and speaking very deliberately, "you have some knowledge of crime."

"I have written a book on the subject," said Manfred, "which is not necessarily the same thing."

"I had that fear," said the other bluntly.

"CASHNAMES" CONTESTS.

We are informed that a Test Case under the New Act to determine the legality of this type of competition may shortly come before the Courts. Pending a decision in that case we are suspending publication of the "Cashnames" Contests.

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"I was also afraid that you might not speak English. Now I want to ask you a plain question, and I want a plain answer."

"So far as I can give you this, I shall be most willing," said Manfred.

The doctor twisted his face nervously, then: "Have you ever heard of the Four Just Men?" he asked.

There was a little silence.

"Yes," said Manfred calmly, "I have heard of them. Are there not only three now? One was killed, don't you remember?"

"Are they in Spain?"

The question was put sharply.

"I have no exact knowledge," said Manfred. "Why do you ask?"

"Because—" The doctor hesitated. "Oh, well, I am interested. It is said that they unearth villainy that the law does not punish; they—they kill—eh?"

His voice was sharper, his eyelids narrowed till he peered from one to the other through slits.

"Such an organisation is known to exist," said Manfred; "and one knows that they do happen upon unpunished crime—and punish."

"Even to—killing?"

"They even kill," said Manfred gravely.

"And they go free!" The doctor leapt to his feet with a snarl and flung out his hands in protest. "They go free! All the laws of all nations cannot trap them! A self-appointed tribunal—who are they to judge and condemn? Who gave them the right to sit in judgment? There is a law, and if a man cheats it—"

He checked himself suddenly, shook his shoulders, and sank heavily into the chair again.

"So far as I can secure information upon the subject," he said roughly, "these men are no longer an active force; they are outlawed; there are warrants for them in every country." Manfred nodded.

"That is very true," he said gently; "but whether they are an active force, time must reveal."

Dr. Essley twisted uncomfortably in his chair. It was evident that the information or assurance he expected to receive from this expert in crime was not entirely satisfactory to him.

"And they are in Spain?" he asked.

"So it is said."

"They are not in France, they are not in Italy, they are not in Russia, nor in Germany," said the doctor resentfully. "They must be in Spain."

He brooded awhile in silence.

"Pardon me," said Poiccart, who had been a silent listener, "but you seem very interested in these men. Would it be offensive to you, if I asked you to satisfy my curiosity as to why you should be anxious to discover their whereabouts?"

"Curiosity also," said the other quickly. "In a sense I am a modest student of crime, as our friend De la Monte is."

"An enthusiastic student," said Manfred quietly.

"I hoped that you would be able to give me some help," said Essley, unmindful of the significant emphasis of the other's tones. "Beyond the fact that they may be in Spain—which, after all, is conjectural—I have learnt nothing."

"They may not even be in Spain," said Manfred, as he accompanied his visitor to the door; "they may not even be in existence; your fears may be entirely groundless."

The doctor whipped round, white to the lips. "Fears?" he said, breathing quickly. "Did you say fears?"

"I am sorry!" laughed Manfred easily. "My English is perhaps not good."

"Why should I fear them?" demanded the doctor aggressively. "Why should I? Your words are chosen very unwisely, sir. I have nothing to fear from the Just Men—or from any other source."

He stood panting in the doorway like a man who is suddenly deprived of breath.

With an effort he collected himself, hesitated a moment, and then, with a stiff little bow, left the room.

He went down the stairs, out to the street, and turned into the *Passeo*.

There was a beggar at the corner who raised a languid hand.

"Por dios—" he whined.

With an oath Essley struck at the hand with his cane, only to miss it, for the beggar was singularly quick, and, for all the discomforts he was prepared to face, Gonzalez had no desire to endure a hand seamed and wealed; those sensitive hands of his were assets to Gonzalez.

The doctor pursued a savage way to his hotel.

Reaching his room, he locked the door and threw himself into a chair to think. He cursed his own folly; it was madness to have lost his temper even before so insignificant a person as a Spanish dilettante in science.

There was the first half of his mission finished—and it was a failure. He took from the pocket of his overcoat, hanging behind the door, a Spanish Baedeker. He turned the leaves till he came to a map of Cordova. Attached to this was a smaller plan, evidently made by somebody who knew the topography of the place.

He had heard of Dr. Cajalos first from a Spanish anarchist he had met in some of his curious nocturnal prowlings in London. Under the influence of good wine this bold fellow had invested the wizard of Cordova with something approaching miraculous powers; he had also said things which had aroused the doctor's interest to an extraordinary degree. A correspondence had followed; the visit was the result.

Essley looked at his watch. It was nearly seven o'clock. He would dine, then go to his room and change.

He made a hasty toilet in the growing darkness of the room—curiously enough, he did not switch on the light—then he went to dinner.

He had a table to himself, and buried himself in an English magazine he had brought with him. Now and again as he read he would make notes in a little book which lay on the table by the side of his plate. They had no reference to the article he read; they had little association with medical science. On the whole they dealt with certain financial aspects of a certain problem which came into his mind.

He finished his dinner, taking his coffee at the table. Then he rose, put the little notebook in his pocket and the magazine under his arm, and made his way back to his room. He turned on the light, pulled down the blinds, and drew a light dressing-table beneath the lamp. He produced his notebook again, and with the aid of a number of closely-written sheets of paper taken from his valise, he compiled a little table. He was completely engrossed for a couple of hours.

As if some invisible and unheard alarm clock warned him of his engagement he closed the book, locked his memoranda in the valise, and struggled into his coat. With a soft felt hat pulled down over his eyes, he left the hotel, and without hesitation took the path which led down to the Calahorra Bridge. The streets through which he passed were deserted, but he had no hesitation, knowing well the lawful character of these unprepossessing little Spanish suburbs.

He plunged into a labyrinth of narrow streets—he had studied his plan to some purpose—and only hesitated when he reached a cul de sac which was more spacious than the street from which it opened. One oil lamp at the farther end added rather to the gloom. Tall windowless houses rose on either side. Each was pierced by a door. On the left door the doctor, after a moment's hesitation, knocked twice.

Instantly it opened noiselessly. He hesitated. "Enter," said a voice in Spanish. "The señor need not fear."

He stepped into the black void, and the door closed behind him.

"Come this way," said the voice.

In the pitch darkness he could make out the indistinct figure of a little man.

"The lantern went out," said the voice, with a chuckle. "Doubtless blown out by the spirits."

He chuckled again.

"Spirits and devils abound," he said. "In this patch of ground I have spoken with many such. Pleasant enough and obedient, but disconcerting to the stranger. Look"—he stopped suddenly and clutched the other by the arm—"look!" he whispered. "That is the spirit

of one who died by poison. He, he!" He giggled horribly, and Essley felt a shiver run down his spine. "A green devil!" the little man went on—"and very sad. This is the way of green devils; they do not hop and jump as the others, but drag their feet and sob great tears. Dios!" he muttered. "Why weep they when they died so easily?"

"In God's name do not talk like that!" said Essley hoarsely.

"You must not be disturbed," said the other. They had come to the black bulk of a house, and the doctor heard the fumble of a key in the lock and the snick of it as it turned. "Enter, my friend."

The doctor stepped inside and surreptitiously wiped the sweat from his forehead. The old man lit a lamp, and Essley took stock of him. He was very little; scarcely more than four feet. He had a rough, white beard and head as bald as an egg. His face and hands were both grimy, and his whole appearance bore evidence of his aversion to water.

A pair of black, twinkling eyes were set deep in his head, and the puckering lines about them revealed him as a man who found humour in life. This was Dr. Cajalos, a famous man in Spain, though he had no social standing.

The room they were in was vast and high. It was furnished very poorly. On one big table stood an untidy retort, and there were innumerable test-tubes, balances, scales, and graduated measures in various stages of uncleanness.

"Sit down," said Cajalos. "We will talk quietly, for I have in the next room a senora of high quality to see me, touching a matter of a lost affection."

Essley took the chair offered to him, and the doctor seated himself on a high stool by the table. A curious figure he made, with his dangling little legs, his old, old face and his shining bald pate.

"I wrote to you on the subject of certain occult demonstrations," began the doctor, but the old man stopped him with a quick jerk of the hand.

"You came to see me, señor, because of a drug I have prepared," he said—"a preparation of physostymonine."

Essley sprang to his feet.

"I—I did not tell you so," he stammered.

"The green devil told me," said the other seriously. "I have many talks with the foot-draggers, and they speak very truly."

"I thought—"

"Look," said the old man. He leapt down from his high perch with agility. In the dark corner of one of the rooms were some boxes to which he went. Essley heard a scuffling, and by-and-by the old man came back holding by the ears a wriggling rabbit.

With his disengaged hand he unstopped a little green bottle on the table. He picked a feather from the table, dipped the point gingerly into the bottle. Then very carefully he lightly touched the nose of the rabbit with the end of the feather, so lightly indeed that the feather hardly brushed the muzzle of the animal. Instantly, with no struggle, the rabbit went as limp as though the life essence had been withdrawn from the body. Cajalos replaced the stopper and thrust the feather into a little charcoal fire that burnt dully in the centre of the room.

"Physostymonine," he said briefly; "but my preparation."

He laid the dead animal on the floor at the feet of the other.

"Señor," he said proudly, "you shall take that animal and examine it; you shall submit it to tests beyond patience. Yet you shall not discover the alkaloid that killed it."

"That is not so," said Essley, "for there will be a contraction of the pupil, which is an invariable sign."

"Search also for that," said the old man triumphantly.

Essley made the superficial tests. There was not even this invariable sign.

A dark figure pressed close to the wall outside, listening. He was standing by the shuttered window. He held to his ear a little ebonite tube with a microphonic receiver, and the rubber which covered the bell-like end was pressed against the shutter.

For half an hour he stood thus, almost

motionless, then he withdrew silently and disappeared into the shadows of the orange grove that grew in the centre of the long garden.

As he did so the door of the house opened, and, with lantern in hand, Cajalos showed his visitor into the street.

"The devils are greener than ever," chuckled the old man. "Hey, there will be happenings, my brother!"

Essley said nothing. He wanted to be in the street again. He stood quivering with nervous impatience as the old man unfastened the heavy door, and when it swung open, he almost leapt into the street outside.

"Good-bye!" he said.

"Go with God," said the old man, and the door closed noiselessly.

RECORD OF DEATH.

CRESSWELL BLACK was a name to conjure with in certain circles. In others it was never mentioned. The financial lords of the City, the Farings, the Wertheimers, the Scott Teasons, had no official knowledge of his existence.

They read of Cresswell Black in their grave way, because there were days when he dominated the financial columns. They read of his mighty stock deals, of his Argentine electric deal, his rubber flotations, and his Canadian copper mines. They read about him, neither approving nor disapproving. They regarded him with the dispassionate interest that a railway engine has for a motor-car.

Black came to the City of London one afternoon to attend a board of directors' meeting. He had been out of town for a few days, recruiting in advance, as he informed the board with a touch of facetiousness, for the struggle that awaited him.

He was a man of middle height, broad of shoulder. His face was thin and lank, his complexion sallow, with a curious uniform yellowness. If you saw Cresswell Black once you would never forget him. Not only because of that yellow face of his, that straight black bar of eyebrow and the thin-lipped mouth, but the very personality of the man impressed itself indelibly on the mind of the observer.

His manner was quick, almost abrupt; his replies brusque. A sense of finality marked his decisions. If the financial lords knew him not, there were thousands that did. His name was a household word in England. There was hardly a middle-class family that did not hold his stock. The little "street punters" hung on his word; his issues were subscribed for twice over. And he had established himself in five years. Unknown before that time, he had risen to the dizzy heights in that short space of time.

Punctual to the minute, he entered the board-room of the suite of offices he occupied in Moorgate Street.

The meeting had threatened to be a stormy one. Again an amalgamation was in the air, and again the head of one group of ironmasters—it was an iron combine he was forming—had stood against the threats and blandishments of Black and emissaries.

"The others are weakening," said Fanks. "You promised us that you would put Sandford straight."

"I will keep my promise," said Black shortly.

"Widdison stood out, but he died," continued Fanks. "We can't expect Providence to help us all the time."

Black's eyebrows lowered.

"I do not like jests of that kind," he said. "Sandford is an obstinate man, a proud man; he needs delicate handling. Leave him to me."

The meeting adjourned lamely enough, and Black was leaving the room when Fanks beckoned to him.

"By the way," he said. "I met a man yesterday who knew your friend, Dr. Essley, in Australia."

"Indeed?"

Cresswell Black's face was expressionless.

"Yes, he knew him in his very early days. He was asking me where he could find him."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Essley is abroad, I think. You don't like him?"

Augustus Fanks shook his head.

"I don't like doctors who come to see me

in the middle of the night, who are never to be found when they are wanted, and are always jaunting off to the Continent."

"He is a busy man," excused Black. "By the way, where is your friend staying?"

"It isn't a friend—he's a sort of prospector, name of Weld, who has come to London with a mining proposition. He is staying at Verlet's Temperance Hotel in Bloomsbury."

"I will tell Essley when he returns," said Black, nodding his head.

He returned to his private office in a thoughtful mood. All was not well with Cresswell Black. Reputed a millionaire, he was in the position of many a financier who counts his wealth in paper. He had got so far, climbing on the shadows. The substance was still beyond his reach. He had organised successful organisations, but the cost had been heavy. Millions had flowed through his hand, but precious little had stuck.

He was in the midst of an unpleasant reverie when a tap on the door aroused him. It opened to admit Fanks.

He frowned at the intruder, but the other pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Look here, Black," he said. "I want to say something to you."

"Say it quickly."

Fanks took a cigar from his pocket and lit it.

"You've had a marvellous career," he said. "I remember when you started with a little bucket-shop in Copthall House—well, we won't call it a bucket-shop," he said hastily as he saw the anger rising in Black's face—"outside-broker's. You had a mug—I mean, an inexperienced partner who found the money."

"Yes."

"He died unexpectedly, didn't he?"

"I believe he did," said Black abruptly.

"Providence again," said Fanks slowly. "Then you got the whole of the business. You took over the flotation of a rubber company, and it panned out. Well, after that you floated a tin mine or something. There was a death there, wasn't there?"

"I believe there was—one of the directors. I forget his name."

Fanks nodded.

"He could have stopped the flotation; he was threatening to resign and expose some methods of yours."

"He was a very headstrong man."

"And he died."

"Yes"—a pause—"he died."

Fanks looked at the man who sat opposite to him.

"Dr. Essley attended him."

"I believe he did."

"Yet still he died."

Black leant over the desk.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Nothing; except that Providence has been of some assistance to you," said Fanks. "The record of your success is a record of death; you sent Essley to see me once."

"You were ill."

"I was," said Fanks grimly, "and I was also troubling you a little." He flicked the ash from his cigar to the carpet. "Black, I'm going to resign all my directorships on your companies."

The other man laughed unpleasantly.

"You can laugh; but it isn't healthy, Black. I've no use for money that is bought at too heavy a price."

"My dear man, you can resign," said Cresswell Black; "but might I ask if your extraordinary suspicions are shared by anybody else?"

Fanks shook his head.

"Not at present," he said.

They looked at one another for the space of half a minute.

"I want to clear right out," Fanks continued. "I reckon my holdings are worth £150,000. You can buy them."

"You amaze me," said Black harshly.

He opened a drawer of his desk and took out a little green bottle and a feather.

"Poor Essley," he smiled, "wandering about Spain seeking the secrets of Moorish perfumery. He would go off his head if he knew what you thought of him."

"I'd sooner he went off his head than that I should go off the earth," said Fanks stolidly. "What have you got there?"

Black unstopped the bottle and dipped in the feather.

He withdrew it and held it close to his nose.

"What is it?" asked Fanks curiously.

For answer Black held up the feather for the man to smell.

"I can smell nothing," said Fanks.

Tilting the tip quickly downwards, Black drew it across the lips of the other.

"Here—" cried Fanks, and went limply to the ground.

Dr. Essley was in his study, making a very careful microscopic examination. The room was in darkness, save for the light which came from a powerful electric lamp directed on to the reflector of the instrument. What he found on the slide was evidently satisfactory, for by and by he removed the strip of glass, threw it into the fire, and turned on the lights.

He took up a paper from the table and read it.

One item of news interested him. It was an account of the sudden death of Mr. Augustus Fanks, a well-known company director.

"The deceased gentleman," ran the account, "was engaged with Mr. Cresswell Black, the famous financier, discussing the details of the new Iron Amalgamation, when he suddenly collapsed, and before medical assistance could be procured, expired. Death was due, it is believed, to heart failure."

There would be no inquest, as Essley knew, for Fanks had, in truth, a weak heart, and had been under the care of a specialist, who, since his speciality was heart trouble, discovered symptoms of the disease on the slightest pretext.

So that was the end of Fanks. The doctor nodded slowly. Yes, that was the end of him. And now?

He took a letter from his pocket. It was addressed to him in the round, sprawling caligraphy of Sandford.

Essley had met him in the early days when Sandford was on friendly terms with Black. He had been recommended to the ironmaster by the financier, and had treated him for divers ills whenever the northerner had come to London. "My London doctor," old Sandford had called him. The ironmaster was staying in London and had written to him.

"Though I am not seeing eye to eye with our friend Black," he wrote, "and we are for the moment at daggers drawn, I trust that this will not affect our relationships, the more so since I wish you to see my daughter who is staying with me."

Edith Sandford was the apple of the old man's eye. Essley remembered having seen her once—a tall girl, with eyes that danced with laughter and a complexion of milk and roses.

He put the letter in his pocket, went into his little surgery, and locked the door. When he came out he wore his long overcoat and carried a little satchel. He had just time to catch a train for the City, and at eleven o'clock he found himself in the ironmaster's private sitting-room at the Grand South Central Hotel.

(Continued overleaf.)

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"You are a weird man, doctor," said the ironmaster with a smile, as he greeted his visitor. "Do you visit most of your patients by night?"

"My aristocratic patients," said the other coolly.

"A bad job about poor Fanks," said the ironmaster. "He and I were only dining together the other night. Did he tell you that he met a man who knew you in Australia?"

A shadow of annoyance passed over the other's face.

"Let us talk about your daughter," he said brusquely. "What is the matter with her?"

The ironmaster smiled sheepishly.

"Nothing, I hope. Yet you know, Essley, she is my only child, and I sometimes imagine she is looking ill. My doctor in Newcastle tells me that there is nothing wrong with her."

"I see," said Essley. "Where is she?"

"She is at the theatre," confessed the father. "You must think I am an awful fool to bring you up to town to discuss the health of a girl who is at the theatre."

"Most fathers are fools," said the other. "I will wait till she comes in." He strolled to the window and looked out on the brilliantly illuminated street.

"Why have you quarrelled with Black?" he asked suddenly.

The older man frowned.

"Business," he said shortly. "He is pushing me into a corner. I helped him four years ago—"

"He helped you, too," interrupted the doctor.

"But not so much as I helped him," said the other obstinately. "I gave him his chance. He floated my company, and I profited, but he profited more. The business has now grown to such vast proportions that it will not pay me to come in. Nothing will alter my determination."

"I see," Essley whistled a little tune as he walked again to the window.

Such a man as this must be broken, he thought. Broken! And there was only one

way. That daughter of his. He could do nothing to-night. That was evident—nothing.

"I do not think I will wait for your daughter," he said. "Perhaps I will call in to-morrow evening."

"I am so sorry—"

But the doctor silenced him.

"There is no need to be sorry," he said with acerbity. "You will find my visit charged for in my bill."

The ironmaster laughed as he saw him to the door.

"You are almost as good a financier as your friend," he said.

"Almost," said the doctor dryly.

THE JUST MEN'S WARNING.

ESSLEY went straight to the nearest call-office and rang up a temperance hotel in Bloomsbury.

He had reasons for wishing to meet that Mr. Weld who knew him in Australia.

He had no difficulty in getting the message through. Mr. Weld was in the hotel. He waited whilst the attendant found him. By and by a voice spoke.

"I am Weld. Do you want me?"

"Yes, my name is Cole. I knew you in Australia. I have a message for you from a mutual friend. Can you see me to-night?"

"Yes, where?"

Dr. Essley had already decided the place of meeting.

"Outside the main entrance of the British Museum," he said. "There are few people about there at this time of night, and I am less likely to miss you."

There was a pause at the other end of the wire.

"Very good," said the voice. "In a quarter of an hour?"

"That will suit me admirably. Good-bye!"

He hung up the receiver. Leaving his satchel at the cloak-room at Charing Cross Station, he set out to walk to Great Russell Street. He would take no cab. There should be no evidence of that description. Black would not like it. He smiled at the thought.

Great Russell Street was deserted save for a constant stream of taxi-cabs passing and repassing, and an occasional pedestrian. He found his man waiting. Rather tall, and slight, with an intellectual, refined face.

"Dr. Essley?" he asked, coming forward as the other halted.

"My name is Cole," Essley said harshly.

"What made you think I was Essley?"

"Your voice," said the other calmly. "After all, it does not matter what you call yourself. I want to see you."

"And I you," said Essley. They walked along side by side until they came to a side street.

"What do you want of me?" asked the doctor.

The other laughed.

"I wanted to see you—you are not a bit like the Essley I knew. He was slighter and had not your colouring, and I was always under the impression that the Essley who went up into the bush died."

"It is possible," said Essley in an absent way. He wanted to gain time. The street was empty. A little way down there was a gateway in which a man might lie unobserved until a policeman came.

In his pocket he had an impregnated feather carefully wrapped up in lint and oiled silk. He drew it from his pocket furtively, and, with his hands behind him, he stripped it of its covering.

"In fact, Dr. Essley," the man was saying, "I am under the impression that you are an impostor."

Essley faced him.

"You think too much," he said in a low voice. "and, after all, I do not recognise you. Turn your face to the light."

The young man obeyed. It was the moment. Quick as thought Essley raised the feather.

A hand of steel gripped his wrist. As if from the ground two other men had appeared. Something soft was thrust into his face. A sickly aroma overpowered him. He struggled madly, but the odds were too many, and then a shrill police-whistle sounded, and he dropped to the ground.

He awoke to find a policeman bending over him. Instinctively he put his hand to his head.

"Hurt, sir?" asked the man.

"No."

He struggled to his feet and stood unsteadily.

"Did you capture the men?"

"No, sir; they got away. I just spotted them as they downed you, but, bless your heart, they seemed to be swallowed up by the earth."

Essley looked around for the feather. It had disappeared. With some reluctance he gave his name and address to the constable, who called a taxi-cab.

"You're sure you've lost nothing, sir?" asked the man.

"Nothing," said Essley testily. "Nothing. Look here, constable, do not report this." He slipped a sovereign into the man's hand. "I do not wish this matter to get into the papers."

"Very good, sir," said the man, "but I shall have to mention it. You see, I blew my whistle, and my mate will report it even if I didn't."

With that Essley had to be content. He drove home to Forest Hill, thinking, thinking.

Who were these three? What object had they?

He was no nearer the solution when he reached his home. He unlocked the door and let himself in. There was nobody in the house but himself and the old woman upstairs.

His comings and goings were so erratic that he had organised a system which allowed him the most perfect freedom of movement.

There must be an end to Dr. Essley, he decided. Essley must disappear from London. He need not warn Black—Black would know.

He would settle the business of the ironmaster and his daughter, and then—there would be a finish.

He unlocked his study, entered, and switched on the lights.

There was a letter on his writing-table, a letter enclosed in a thin grey envelope. He picked it up and examined it. It had been delivered by a messenger, and bore his name, written in a firm hand.

He looked at the writing-table and started back.

The letter had been written in the room and blotted on the pad!

There was no doubt at all about it. The blotting-paper had been placed there fresh that day, and the reverse of the bold handwriting on the envelope was plain to see.

He looked at the envelope again.

It could not have been a patient; he had none. The practice was a blind. Besides, the door had been locked and he alone had the key. He tore the envelope open and took out the contents. It was a half-sheet of note-paper. The three lines of writing ran:

"You escaped to-night and have only forty-eight hours to prepare yourself for the fate which awaits you.

"THE JUST MEN."

He sank into his chair, crushed by the knowledge.

They were the Just Men—and he had escaped them.

The Just Men! He buried his face in his hands and tried to think. Forty-eight hours they gave him. Much could be done in forty-eight hours. The terror of death was upon him who had, without qualm or remorse, sent so many on the long journey.

He clutched at his throat and glared round the room. Essley the poisoner—the expert, a specialist in death. The man who had revived the lost art of the Medicis, and had hoodwinked the law. Forty-eight hours. Well, he could settle the business of the ironmaster. That was necessary to Black.

He began to make feverish preparations for the future. There were no papers to destroy. He went into the surgery and emptied three bottles down the sink. The fourth he would want. The fourth had been useful to Black. A little green bottle with a glass stopper. He slipped it into his pocket.

He let the tap run to wash away all trace of the drug he had spilt. The bottles he smashed and threw into a waste bin.

He went upstairs to his room, but he could

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not sleep. He locked his door and put a chair against it. With a revolver in his hand, he searched the cupboard and beneath the bed. He placed the revolver under his pillow and tried to sleep.

Next morning found him haggard and ill, but none the less he made his toilet with customary care.

Punctually at noon he presented himself at the ironmaster's hotel, and was shown into the sitting-room.

The girl was alone when he entered. He noted with approval that she was very beautiful. That Edith Sandford did not like him, he knew by instinct. He saw the cloud come to her pretty face as he came into her presence, and was amused in his cold way.

"My father is out," she said.

"That is good," said Essley, "for now we can talk."

He seated himself without invitation.

"I think it is only right to tell you, Dr. Essley, that my father's fears regarding me are quite groundless."

At that moment the ironmaster came in and shook hands warmly with the doctor.

"Well, how do you think she looks?" he asked.

"Looks tell you nothing," said the other. It was not the moment for the feather. He had other things to do, and the feather was not the way. He chatted with the two for a while, and then rose. "I will send you some medicine," he said as he rose.

She pulled a wry face.

"Can you come to dinner?" asked Sandford.

Essley considered. That would give him a chance.

"Yes," he said, "I will come."

He took a cab to some chambers near the Thames Embankment. He had a most useful room there.

Mr. Sandford had an appointment with Cresswell Black. It was the final interview before the break.

The City was busy with rumours. A whisper had gone the rounds—all was not well with the financier; the amalgamation on which so much depended had not gone through.

Black sat at his desk that afternoon, twiddling a paper-knife. He was more sallow than usual; the hand that held the knife twitched nervously.

"Essley will have to go," he muttered. "He is too dangerous—far too dangerous. He has outlived his usefulness, and a man who outlives his usefulness is already dead."

He looked at his watch. It was time Sandford came. He pushed a bell by the side of his desk, and a clerk appeared.

"Has Mr. Sandford arrived?" he asked.

"He has just come in, sir," said the man.

"Show him in."

The two men exchanged formal greetings, and Black pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Sandford," he said curtly.

"Now exactly how do we stand?"

"Where we did," said the ironmaster uncompromisingly.

"You will not come into my scheme?"

"I will not," said the other.

Mr. Cresswell Black tapped the desk with his knife, and Sandford looked at him. He seemed older than when Sandford had last seen him. His yellow face was seamed and lined.

"It means ruin for me," he said suddenly. "I have more creditors than I can count. If the amalgamation went through I should be established."

"That is your fault," said the other. "You have taken on too big a job—more than that, you have taken too much for granted."

The man at the desk looked up from under his straight brows.

"It is all very well for you to sit there and tell me what I should do," he said, and the shakiness of his voice told the other something of the passion he concealed. "I do not want advice or homily—I want money. Come into my scheme and amalgamate, or—"

"Or?" repeated the ironmaster defiantly.

"Do you think I am afraid of threats?"

"I do not threaten you," said Black sullenly.

"I warn you—you are risking more than you know."

"I'll take the risk," said Sandford. He

got up on his feet. "Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing."

"Then I'll bid you good-bye."

The door closed with a slam behind him, and Black leapt up, his face working convulsively.

"Essley shall do his best job!" he vowed.

There was no more work for him to do.

He drove back to the handsome flat he occupied in Victoria Street and let himself in.

"There is a gentleman waiting to see you, sir," said his man, who came hurrying to help him out of his coat.

"What sort of a man?"

"I don't know exactly, sir, but I have got a feeling that he is a detective."

"A detective?"

He found his hands trembling and cursed his folly. He stood uncertainly in the centre of the hall. In a minute he had mastered his fears and turned the handle of the door.

A man rose to meet him.

He had a feeling that he had met him before. It was one of those impressions it is so difficult to explain.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the man, a note of deference in his voice. "I have called to make a few inquiries."

It was on the tip of Black's tongue to ask him whether he was a police-officer, but somehow he had not the courage to frame the words.

The effort was unnecessary, as it proved, for the next words of the man explained his errand.

"I have been engaged," he said, "by a firm of solicitors to discover the whereabouts of Dr. Essley."

Black looked hard at him.

"There ought to be no difficulty," he said, "in that. The doctor's name is in the directory."

"That is so," said the man, "and yet I have had the greatest difficulty in running him to earth. As a matter of fact," explained the man, "I was wrong when I said I wanted to discover his whereabouts. It is his identity I wish to establish."

"I do not follow you," said Black.

"Well," said the man, "I don't know exactly how to put it. If you know Dr. Essley, you will recall the fact that he was for some years in Australia?"

"That is true," said Black. "He and I went out together."

"And you were there some years, sir?"

"Yes, we were there for a number of years, though we were not together all the time."

"I see," said the man. "You came home together, I believe?"

"No," replied the other sharply. "We came at different periods."

"Have you seen him recently?"

"No. I have never seen him, although I have frequently written to him on various matters."

Black was trying hard not to lose his patience. It would not do for this man to see how much the questions were irritating him.

The man jotted down something in his notebook, closed it, and put it in his pocket.

"Would you be surprised to learn," he asked quietly, "that the real Dr. Essley who went out with you to Australia died there?"

Black's fingers caught the edge of the table, and he steadied himself.

"I did not know that," he said. "Is that all you have to ask?"

"I think that will do, sir," said the detective.

"Can I ask you on whose behalf you are inquiring?" demanded Black.

"That I am not at liberty to tell."

After the detective had gone, Black paced the apartment deep in thought. Assuredly Essley must go.

He took down from the shelf a Continental Baedeker and worked out with a pencil and paper a line of retirement. It might well be that Cresswell Black would have to go, too. If so, it was best to be prepared.

His game was up. The refusal of Sandford to negotiate with him was the crowning calamity.

He crossed the room to the safe which stood in the corner, and opened it. In the inside drawer were three flat packets of notes. He

picked them out and laid them on the table. They were notes of the Bank of France, each for a thousand francs.

It would be well to take no risks. He put them in the inside pocket of his coat. If all things failed, they were the way to freedom.

As for Essley—he smiled. He must go, anyway.

He left his flat and drove eastwards to the City.

And as he went, two men followed him, unseen.

(Continued overleaf.)

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ESSLEY'S SECRET.

It was a gay little party that assembled at the Great South Central Hotel. Edith Sandford had invited a girl friend, and Mr. Sandford had brought back the junior partner of one of the City houses he did business with.

Essley was in his workaday clothes, but that did not occasion any surprise, because he had never been known to wear the conventional garb of the Englishman-at-dinner.

He was obviously ill-at-ease and nervous. The second warning of the Just Men had arrived that evening as mysteriously as had the first.

"Sit down, Essley," said Sandford.

There was a vacant chair between the iron-master and his daughter, and into this the doctor dropped.

His hand shook as he took up his spoon.

He put the spoon down again and unfolded his serviette.

A letter dropped out. He knew those grey envelopes now, and crushed the letter into his pocket without attempting to read it.

From then on, that letter in his pocket obsessed his every thought. A letter that he touched secretly from time to time to make certain that it was still there. One half of his brain was engaged in this occupation, the other half concerned itself with a glass. It was a bright wine-glass on his left and on the girl's right. She would drink champagne from this later. That was an important matter. She would drink champagne from it, and go sliding to the floor like a marionette figure when the strings were cut. If he could—but he was losing his nerve.

A week ago there would have been no difficulty; he would have taken the bold step. Now he feared. Every movement, he felt, was watched. That was the awfulness of it. Any one of these suave waiters, moving silently from guest to guest, might be one of the Just Men. Once he stretched out his hand to take her glass. Then he had the consciousness that every eye was fixed on him.

It was nearly time; he saw one of the waiters twisting the wires from the

champagne bottles. The table was in a roar at some sally made by the junior partner. The waiters were hovering about the man with the bottle.

In a second the bottle of green fluid was on Essley's lap—uncorked. He spilt a little on the corner of his serviette, restoppered the bottle, and slipped it into his pocket. He took the glass on to his lap. Twice he wiped the drinking edge of it with the damp napkin. He replaced the glass unnoticed.

Now it was done he felt better. He leant back in his chair, his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets. It was an inelegant attitude, but he derived a sense of comfort.

"Essley! Wake up, my dear fellow!" Sandford was talking to him, and he roused himself with a start. "My friend here was rude enough to comment on your hair."

"Eh?" Essley put his hand to his head. "Oh, it's all right, and it isn't disarranged; but you're a fairly young man to have white hair."

"Yes."

He did not further the discussion. The waiter filled the glasses. First, the girl's, then his.

He raised his own with unconcern and drank it off. He saw the young girl's slim white fingers close round the stem of the glass, saw her half-raise it, still looking to her partner.

Essley pushed his chair a little to one side as the glass reached her lips. She drank, not much, but enough.

The doctor held his breath. She replaced the glass, still talking with the man on her left.

Essley counted the slow seconds. He counted sixty—a hundred—oblivious to the fact that Sandford was talking to him.

The drug had failed!

The doctor searched furtively in his pocket. He found the bottle again. With a finger he removed the stopper and brought it out.

"What is that over there?" he asked suddenly. Every eye was directed to the corner of the room to which he pointed. Quickly he emptied the contents into the girl's glass.

"I see nothing. What is it?" asked Sandford.

"Nothing—nothing. I am afraid I have been overworking."

In two minutes he was normal. Laughing awkwardly over his own folly, he refused to leave.

Again he watched and waited, but this time he took part in the conversation. Somebody proposed the health of the host. It was a jesting toast, but every glass went up. The girl's with the rest.

Nothing happened. Two minutes went past. The drug could not have lost its potency. He put his hand into his pocket and touched the letter. He took it out.

"Excuse me," he said gruffly as he tore open the letter. "I forgot to read this."

He took out a half-sheet of notepaper. He smoothed it carefully and read it.

"You will save yourself trouble if you know that we have replaced the poison of Dr. Cajalos with water."

"THE JUST MEN."

He left the table hurriedly and went blundering blindly from the room.

In the corridor of the hotel he came in his haste into collision with a man. It was the man who had called upon Black that afternoon.

"Excuse me," said the man, catching his arm. "I am Detective-sergeant Kay, from Scotland Yard, and shall take you into custody."

At the first hint of danger the doctor drew back. Suddenly his fist shot out and caught the officer under the jaw. It was a terrific blow, and the detective was unprepared. He went down like a log.

The corridor was empty. Leaving the man upon the floor, the fugitive sped into the lobby. He was hatless, but he shaded his face with his hand, and passed through the throng in the vestibule into the open air. He signalled a taxi.

"To New Cross Station," he said.

He dismissed the driver at the station, and took a ticket to London Bridge. The train came in as he reached the platform. He found an empty first-class carriage and entered it.

As the train moved out a man came racing down the stairs. He leapt on the footboard as the train moved.

In his carriage Essley went rapidly to work. He pulled down the blinds. It was by great good fortune a main line train. There was washing apparatus in the lavatory. He went to work rapidly.

He had finished before the train came to London Bridge. He pulled the blinds up; came face to face with a man standing on the footboard—a man with stern, grave eyes.

"De la Monte!" he shrieked, and aimed a savage blow at the other.

It never reached him. De la Monte had slipped along the footboard into the open door of a carriage. Essley pulled up the window again and drew down the blind. He took a revolver from his pocket and looked at it stupidly.

On the platform a group of officers waited. "I had a telephone message," explained a paunting officer, "telling me our man was on this train."

"Have they arrested the other man yet?" asked the inspector.

"Black? No, sir. We have got men in his flat waiting for him. I wonder who sent the telephone message?"

The train came to a standstill, and the little group began their search. One window had the blind down. They opened the door.

On the floor lay a man, a revolver by his side.

"That's queer," said the inspector, looking at the dead man's face. "So that was Essley's secret!"

A colleague looked up sharply. "This man isn't Essley," he snapped.

"I'm afraid you're wrong," answered the inspector. "It's Essley—and Cresswell Black as well. They're one and the same man!"

THE END.

(The next adventure of the Four Just Men appears the week after next.)



The light from Blake's torch revealed the figure of a dead man stretched across the bed. And then a sound drew his attention and he saw a dark form climbing through the window. With a bound he leapt across the room, hot upon the murderer's trail.

This dramatic incident is taken from the early chapters of a brilliant detective story entitled THE VANISHED MILLION. It is a novel of baffling mystery and tense excitement, and is now on sale in No. 467 of The SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, price 4d. at all Newsagents.