

SOCCER POOLS GUIDE—HINTS AND FORECASTS—WITHIN

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CRIME
Novel

THE
Thriller
FAMOUS FOR FIRST CLASS MYSTERY STORIES **2^D**



**FINGERPRINTS
OF FATE**

BY JOHN G. BRANDON

He was not "known to the police." He paid another to do the killing. He thought he was clever. But faint marks on a glass sealed his doom.

By John G. Brandon

Chapter 1. A TRYST OF DEATH!

THE Berlin-Paris air mail swooped slowly down upon the aviation field of Le Bourget, the last stage of its journey completed. In less than five minutes not one of its passengers was to be seen.

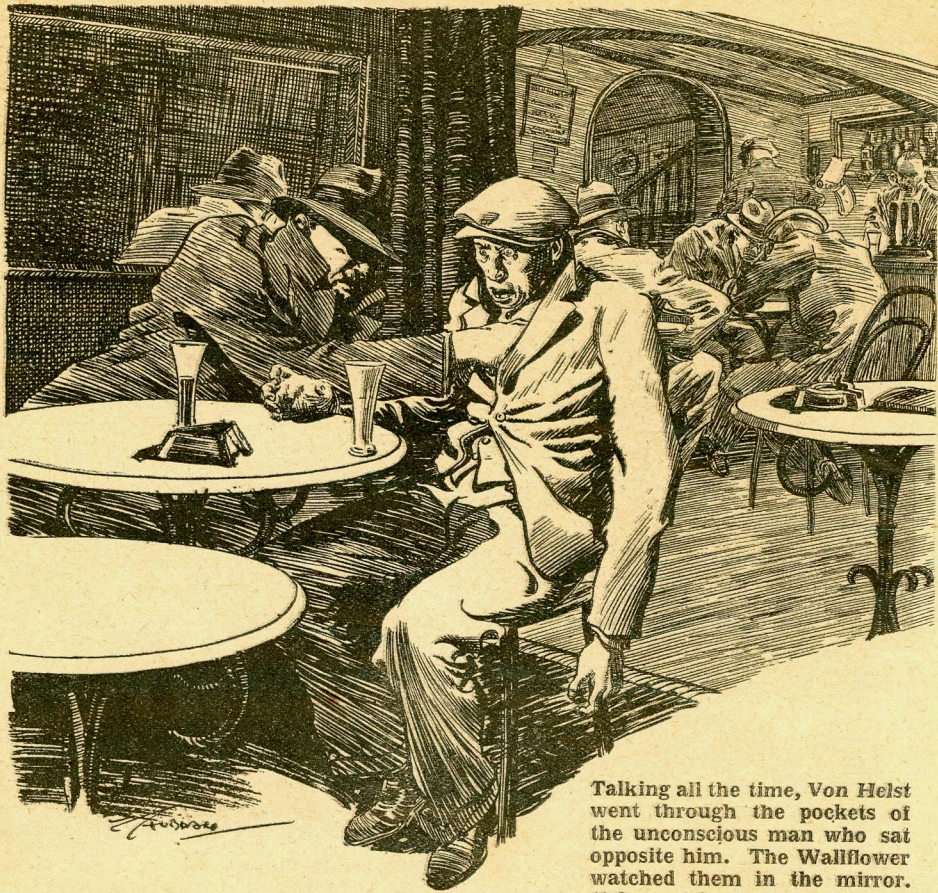
The last two to leave were, singularly enough, the most important-looking of the twenty who made the journey, and the one who was by far the most insignificant. The former, a heavy, paunchy man of true Prussian type, with bristling, cropped hair and upturned moustaches, was what he looked, one of the pillars of Germany's industrial world.

To judge him by his face, a ruthless man, this; one who would have few scruples about crushing, by fair means or foul, any who got in his way. A man not to be taken lightly as an adversary.

The second of the two was a little man who had sat the whole journey in the extreme rear of the saloon and spoken to no one. Stamped upon his face—a face, by the way, which showed decided signs of want and hardship—was a curious expression; one that a trained observer would unhesitatingly call the natural furtiveness of the habitual criminal.

The big man took the first taxi available, but he waited until, out of the corner of his

"Finger-Prints"



Talking all the time, Von Helst went through the pockets of the unconscious man who sat opposite him. The Wallflower watched them in the mirror. "Queer!" he muttered. "Why doesn't the chap stop him?"

hard, blue eyes, he saw that the little man had obtained another; then his own vehicle started in for Paris, followed by the other.

But it was to none of the great and fashionable hotels, in which he was well known, that the big man was driven, but to a shady, and not over-clean, resort in Montmartre, just off the Place Pigalle. And the little man, in his taxi, went there, too.

Dismissing his taxi, the big man walked straight through into an apartment, at the rear of the place, which was occupied by one or two men playing dominoes, and who were, beyond any doubt, of the criminal type.

"Bring two bocks of lager," the big man ordered imperiously, then motioned the little man to a seat. "Take now your last orders," he said in their native tongue when the waiter, having fulfilled their order, had been paid and gone.

Then, for twenty minutes, he spoke earnestly and in tones so low that it was impossible for him to be overheard. Once or twice the little man wrote down laboriously, with a stub of a pencil, a name, or an address, and once the man who was issuing his orders took from a bulky pocket-book a legal-looking document which he handed over to the other, who placed it carefully in his pocket.

"You thoroughly understand what to do with that?" he asked.

"Quite," he was answered. "It is to be deposited—"

"All right, no more! Walls have ears. You speak a little English?" the big man asked.

"A little," he was told. "I learned it as a prisoner of war."

"That will help. Have you friends in London?"

"I have a cousin who lives in a place called Camberwell. He is a baker by trade."

"You have the passports I sent you, and the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"You understand where it is we are to meet three days after the event?"

"Yes, sir. At the Café Bavaria in Greek Street, Soho."

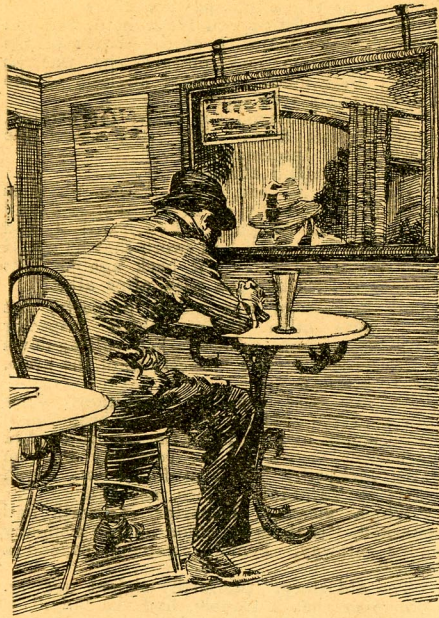
"Very good. You can go now. Travel to England to-day. I shall remain in Paris until—until your work is completed."

Without a word, the little man turned and left the place. Alone, the big man sat for a while in concentrated thought, then, from that bulky pocket-book, extracted a letter stamped with a London postmark.

of Fate

A POWERFUL LONG COMPLETE NOVEL

Featuring Det.-insp. McCARTHY, "THE WALLFLOWER" and OSAKI



Although nearly every word of it was fixed indelibly in his mind, he read it again carefully.

It was a curious letter, one that, read aloud to them, would have made the shareholders of one of England's largest shipping concerns jump to sell their shares at the first possible chance.

It ran as follows:

"Honoured Sir,—Further to your instructions, I beg to say that, since writing to you last week, I have discovered still more important information relative to Lord Warnecke and the affairs of the English Amalgamated Shipping Company.

"There is not the slightest doubt but that the business of the company is in a bad way, and that Lord Warnecke, as chairman, has greatly assisted to that end. My confrère, Stuber, has, by diligent work, ascertained that his lordship is secretly converting every asset of his own, and most of those of the company, into ready money—by which I mean Bank of England notes, got in from all sources, and, therefore, virtually untraceable.

"He has also—I, personally, have discovered—a permanent ticket available by any boat for Valparaiso, Chile, from which country as you are no doubt aware, there is no extradition. By judicious bribery, I have learned from one of his servants that his lordship keeps his cash reserves in a large safe in his bed-room. I enclose you an interior-plan of the same.

"In conclusion, I have only to say that everything indicated that his lordship is on the verge of making an early flight from England, taking with him everything that he can carry.

"Awaiting your further instructions, honoured sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"HERMANN FRICKER.

"Fricker & Stuber, Private Detective Agency, Berlin."

The big man carefully folded the letter and replaced it in his pocket-book.

"Flight," he snarled. "We will see!"

MURDER!

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR McCARTHY stood in the centre of the huge bed-room of Lord Warnecke's Mount Street house, his keen eyes darting here, there, and everywhere.

Over the stark and silent figure upon the bed the divisional-surgeon bent, but it needed no medico to know at a glance that the head of the English Amalgamated Shipping Company would never rise from it again. In the eyes that stared at the ceiling, wide-open and in them a startled horror, death was printed plainly enough for any man to read. It was not necessary to see the horrible, gaping wound in the dead man's left breast at which the surgeon was staring fixedly to know that Lord Arthur Warnecke had been touched by the Black Angel—Death; and at that in its most sudden and violent form.

Before McCarthy, and set deeply into the wall, stood a large safe, the heavy door of which swung wide open, revealing a mass of scattered papers, but nothing more—anything that might have been of intrinsic value in it was gone.

Beside the safe a finger-print man knelt, subjecting every inch of it to treatment.

"Not a sign of a 'dab' on it, sir," he said to McCarthy. "This job was done by an expert."

"I gathered that, Roberts," McCarthy answered dryly. "No amateur is going to work a combination like that. Nothing on that window, there?"

He pointed to a french window that opened on to a balcony overlooking the street.

"Not a sign, sir," he was told. "Who ever did this job was a dab hand. There isn't even a jemmy-mark upon those windows, yet they've been forced, right enough."

"No doubt about that."

He turned to the divisional-surgeon.

"Anything helpful to say, Doc?" he asked.

For a moment the medico stood silent, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"I'd say one thing, Mac," he said, "that this man was never given a chance for his life at all. I don't believe he even realised till the last second of his life that there was anyone in this room. In my opinion he was cold-bloodedly stabbed in his sleep, and was only awakened by the actual slash of the knife into his flesh. A second later he was a dead man. Look at those eyes!"

"I have," McCarthy said with a slight shiver.

"They're the eyes of a man who has died at the apex of a moment of utter horror."

"In other words," McCarthy said quietly, "you believe that the murderer came here to kill first and rob afterwards, and did not murder purely as a self-protective act?"

"That's my opinion, exactly," the doctor said. "This man was sharply roused from a deep sleep—to death. He could have been chloroformed with scarcely a struggle—instead—this!"

"What would you make the time of death—approximately, of course?"

"Impossible to say definitely before post-mortem, Mac, but I don't think I'll be far out if I say two o'clock in the morning."

McCarthy glanced at his wrist-watch.

"And it's now eight," he said. "Six hours start for the killer. Not so good. Well, I can't see anything to be gained by leaving the body where it is any longer."

He nodded to the photographer standing by with his camera.

"Better get to work," he said, "and then the corpse can go to the mortuary."

Passing through the french windows on to the balcony, he subjected it to an intense scrutiny. The whole neighbourhood was intensely quiet; Mount Street and its aristocratic vicinity scarcely begins to move until hours later.

He saw that the balcony was supported upon three pillars that came up direct from a small, paved court; an easy enough entrance for any cracksmen to negotiate.

"Try all these pillars for finger-prints," he ordered, though without much hope; the man who left none inside was scarcely likely to do so where they would be searched for first.

Passing through the room again, he stepped out on to a wide, handsomely-furnished landing large enough to be called a lounge. Waiting there was a sombre-looking individual clad in black who had "gentleman's gentleman" printed all over him.

"I understand you wish to speak to me, sir," he said. "My name is Yates. It was I who discovered his lordship's body."

"What time was that, Yates?" McCarthy asked. "As near as possible exact."

"It was seven o'clock to the minute, sir," the valet informed him precisely.

"Lord Warnecke is always called at that hour. He is—was," he corrected himself, "most particular upon that point; he always did an hour's work in his study before breakfast, which is at nine o'clock punctually. His secretary, Miss Rosedale, arrives at eight o'clock; never later than a minute or two afterwards."

"Oh," McCarthy said, "then she's due here at any moment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now tell me exactly what took place when you entered Lord Warnecke's bedroom this morning."

"I knocked in the usual way, sir, but received no answer. I waited a moment or two and knocked again."

"Was that usual—not receiving an immediate answer, I mean?"

"It was not uncommon, sir; his lordship was a very heavy sleeper—probably because he worked very late at night. In such cases," he went on, "I used to open the door with my own key and wake his lordship personally."

"Did he work late last night?"

McCarthy asked.

"That I cannot tell you, sir. He came in at about midnight and told me that I need not wait up; he had things to do. I presume he did work, sir."

"Well. You entered the room—"

"I did, sir. I saw what—what was to

be seen, sir, and rushed out again. I called the butler, and he rang up Scotland Yard at once."

"And they obliged by dragging me out of my bed," McCarthy replied whimsically, "and here we all are. The great point is nothing whatever was touched in the room between your discovering the body and my arrival?"

"Nothing, sir."

A ring came at the front door, which was immediately answered by a staid-looking butler. He admitted a handsome, intelligent-looking woman whom McCarthy put down to be somewhere about thirty years of age.

"Miss Rosedale, I presume. You'd better get down and break the news to the lady of what's happened," he said quickly. "Then tell her I shall be glad to speak to her in his lordship's study in three minutes."

That the news of his lordship's sudden and terrible death had come as a very great shock to her was apparent to the inspector the moment he entered the room. She was deathly pale and trembling violently.

"I'm awfully sorry to have to put you through even this mild form of questioning, Miss Rosedale," he said gently, "but, in the circumstances, it is necessary that I should find out as far as I can if, to your knowledge, his lordship had any personal enemies?"

"My connection with him had only to do with business," she informed him. "Of Lord Warnecke's private affairs I knew nothing."

"You've been with him as his secretary for some time, I understand?" McCarthy asked.

"Seven years," she told him.

"Long enough, I should think," he put suggestively, "for a highly intelligent lady like yourself to have gleaned some little of a man's private affairs without having been actually told them."

"I am not a prying person, inspector," she said a little stiffly.

"No, no, of course not," he hastened to say, wishing she had been—and talkative into the bargain. "There are a lot of private papers in his lordship's safe," he went on, "which you might possibly—mind you, I only say possibly—be able to assist us in checking over."

"I'm willing to try," she said, "but I warn you that, upon matters which concern his own private affairs, Lord Warnecke was most uncommunicative."

"We can but try," McCarthy said. "Not at the present moment, of course," he added hurriedly, "but later on. This afternoon, perhaps—when the room has been set in order."

"You mean," she said in a horror-stricken tone, "when the body has—has been removed?"

"I'm afraid that's what I did mean, Miss Rosedale," McCarthy said gently. "I wanted to avoid shocking you as much as was possible. There's one question I would like to ask you," he went on. "How are the affairs of the English Amalgamated Shipping Company prospering—as far as is known to you in your secretarial position?" he added hastily.

His quick eyes caught the sharp, nervous glance that she flung at him.

"Aha, milady!" he thought. "You know something more than you're willing to divulge."

"I have no knowledge, inspector," she answered frigidly. "Beyond the information given in the last balance-sheet, which is available for anyone to see, I know nothing of the affairs of the company. My business was purely the taking down and sending of such letters as were dictated to me. What the answers to them may have been, I have no knowledge—his lordship dealt with them himself."

"I see," McCarthy said quietly. "Then, in that sense, you could hardly be called his lordship's confidential secretary," he put probingly.

A sudden, indignant glint came into the eyes which he had earlier noted were glistening with unshed tears, and for a moment he thought she was going to contradict him flatly. Then, in a quiet voice which carried a certain note of hopelessness not missed by him, she said:

"No, I suppose that, in reality, I could not call myself his lordship's confidential secretary."

"And that," McCarthy said to himself, "is lie number two. What you don't know about his lordship's private affairs is not worth knowing, or I'm no judge."

What he openly said was:

"In the tragic circumstances that's rather a pity, Miss Rosedale. There's only one more question I can think to ask you that's important. Do you, by any chance, happen to know whether Lord Warnecke kept large sums of money, jewellery, or anything of big intrinsic value in the safe in his room?"

Again for an instant she stood silent and a deep flush stole into the dead whiteness of her face.

"I have never been in Lord Warnecke's room in my life," she said coldly, "and I have no knowledge whatever of what he may have kept there."

"Lie number three," McCarthy told himself, but to her he said: "That's all, thank you, Miss Rosedale. If you could make it possible to come back here by, say, three o'clock, we shall be very glad of any help you may be able to give us."

He rose and opened the door for her.

"There are several quite private papers of my own here," she said agitatedly. "I presume that I am at liberty to take them with me; they are no concern of anyone but myself."

McCarthy shook his head.

"I'm afraid, Miss Rosedale," he replied, "that nothing whatever must be taken out of this house until it has been examined. Naturally, any private papers of your own will be respected in the highest degree."

The little flush of colour that had come back to her face disappeared in a flash, leaving it whiter than ever. Then, with a low moan, she suddenly slumped forward, and, but for McCarthy's swiftness, would have crashed to the floor in a dead faint.

Carrying her inanimate form to a settee, he laid her down and looked at her earnestly.

"If you haven't struck the tragedy of your life, my girl," he apostrophised the still form pitifully, "then Patrick Aloysius McCarthy is no judge of his fellow human beings when he sees them in trouble."

Shooting out into the hall he encountered the starchy-looking butler.

"Send a woman in to Miss Rosedale at once," he ordered. "The shock of his lordship's death has been too much for her."

Upstairs he went again to where a young C.I.D. man stood waiting for him.

"Outside, you, McKay, and the moment a very handsome-looking lady, obviously very ill, leaves this house, stick to her. And you throw a scare into her by bad work," he hissed, "and I'll see that you get a couple of years pavement-pounding just to go on with!"

On the phone in the hall he dialed Whitehall 1212, and requested to be put through to the assistant-commissioner's office at once. There was just a chance that that hard-working official might be there even at this early hour. And so it proved.

"Bill," he said, "send Millwall up here as soon as possible."

Inspector Millwall was the Yard's financial genius. Woe befide the secretary or managing-director who had faked his books once they fell into Millwall's hands for examination. When he started to analyse figures, even hard-boiled bank managers and chartered accountants flung up their hands in astonishment—and sometimes in terror.

"You mean that you think there's something wrong there financially?"

"I mean that everything's wrong here," McCarthy told him bluntly, "though, as far as I've got, all that's to show for it is a man murdered in cold blood, an empty safe, and a beautiful lady who looks as if the roof of the world had fallen in on her!"

DOUBLECROSS—AND THE ANSWER!

THE murder was out! The papers rang with it. The great English Amalgamated Shipping Co., Ltd., was hopelessly bankrupt. Moreover, the greater part of its assets, save the actual ships themselves, had been turned into cash by the late chairman, Lord Warnecke, and he had undoubtedly been upon the point of flight.

But the money he had so unscrupulously laid hands upon was gone; vanished out of existence. That he had been robbed as well as murdered by the same hand there was no doubt whatsoever.

Frenzied shareholders besieged the offices of the company, hoping against hope that the

murderer had been taken and some part at least of his enormous booty regained.

In the City, crash after crash of smaller firms affiliated were the order of the day and brought ruin to thousands. Then upon the unhappy shareholders there fell another blow. A document found in Warnecke's safe showed that his own holdings, which were enormous, had been resold back to Baron Hugo von Helst, the original owner of the firm, some time before. It was a perfectly legitimate deal which had been paid for in hard cash, which had, apparently, disappeared with the rest.

But as to the actual position there was no doubt. Baron Hugo von Helst held, through Warnecke, the majority of the shares of the company. From now onwards he was its master; that much the legal advisers of the company made very plain.

"Wasn't this Baron von Helst the original owner of this firm?" McCarthy asked the knowledgeable Inspector Millwall.

Millwall nodded affirmatively.

"He was," he said, "but it was seized as enemy property early on in the War and sold to the present company. I've heard it said before that Von Helst had sworn that he would never rest until he got it back again. This looks as if he's had his wish after all."

This knowledge was public property, but there were other things which Inspector McCarthy, despite the unearned calling-down he was getting from some sections of the press, kept to himself.

The first was that in that same inner drawer of the safe in which had been found the document making plain the transference of Warnecke's shares in the company to Von Helst, McCarthy had also found two round tickets to Valparaiso. Two, not one.

"Which means," Inspector Millwall had remarked, "that he intended having company on his getaway. Female company, beyond a doubt."

"The old story," McCarthy sighed wearily. "Wherever there's trouble, find the lady."

But he kept the name of the one who was in his own thoughts entirely to himself. The papers which the dead man's secretary had requested to remove had proved upon examination to have nothing to do with either the financial or the murder side of the case. McCarthy had conducted that examination himself and had handed them back to the silent, stricken woman without comment. Then Inspector Millwall handed the result of his investigations to the newspapers and gave the public the latest and greatest shock. Lord Warnecke's defalcations amounted to nearly half a million in money—half a million which had vanished as though it had never been, and which undoubtedly had been in the safe upon the night he had been murdered.

McCarthy, at a dead loss, was mulling this over with Sir William Haynes, when a telegram arrived from Paris signed Hugo von Helst. It was brief and to the point, and said that the sender had just heard the news about Warnecke upon arrival in Paris, and would cross to London at once, where he would place himself entirely at the service of the authorities to give such information as he could.

That information proved, as McCarthy had feared, to be less than useless. All he could speak of was a financial deal, duly accomplished and paid for. Of the rest of the English Amalgamated Shipping Company's affairs he knew nothing whatever.

"But," he added in his overhearing, arrogant manner and his guttural English, "you may rest assured, gentlemen, that I shall very soon make myself master of all the details, and that under my hands the company will rise again to its former position. Do not forget that this firm was founded by my father, and I am not likely to see it go into bankruptcy through the machinations of such a scoundrel as Lord Warnecke."

"There's an old saying," Sir William Haynes remarked quietly, "that the dead are dead, let their sins rest with them."

"Bah!" the German uttered contemptuously. "That has nothing to do with it. Business is business. What I wish to know is, what efforts are the police making to trace the money?"

"Our first and greatest effort," Bill Haynes

told him curtly, "will be to trace the murderer. The money will be quite a secondary consideration. If it's recovered so much the better; but if it isn't the man will hang."

"A sweet little pet, Bill," McCarthy commented when the baron had taken his departure. "I don't think I should expect much mercy from that man if I were in his power."

Haynes shook his head.

"None whatever," he said. "The true Big Business type—utterly ruthless."

"And unscrupulous, I'd say," McCarthy added softly. "I don't like that man, Bill; he may be the finest fellow in the world, but I don't like him. Where's he staying; did he say?"

"The Hotel Splendide," Haynes said after a glance at Von Helst's card. "Suite A. Costs about three hundred a week. The baron does himself very well."

"I fancy I've heard that said before," McCarthy said. "If I remember aright, I was told that he had two expensive hobbies—food and the ladies. Well, he's no interest to me in the murder job, and if the lost money's likely to go into his hands, I don't care a tinker's curse whether it's found or not."

"There's absolutely no break anywhere over Warnecke's murder, Mac?" Haynes asked anxiously. "The papers are beginning to get a bit restive."

"Beginning!" McCarthy echoed. "They're something more than beginning. But to tell you the truth, Bill, there isn't one gleam of light yet. I'd have as much right to apply for a warrant for you in connection with it as anybody else on earth. It's simply a blank wall."

He got up and picked up his hat.

"But it'll open out before long," he said reassuringly. "I've handled too many murders not to know that the killer always slips up somewhere."

Upon leaving the Yard, Baron von Helst was driven to the Hotel Splendide, there to be received almost as might visiting royalty.

The Hotel Splendide knew the baron, knew him for a man who demanded—and truculently, at that—every possible ounce of service for the minimum of thanks. But he kept up a state which he thought befitted his importance, and spent good money to do it, which was all that concerned the management of the Hotel Splendide. More than one unfortunate servant who had offended his mightiness had been fired instantly, on his demand; servants were cheap, poor devils, but real-moneyed customers such as Baron von Helst on his London visits, were few and far between.

As the baron stepped into the magnificent foyer of the Splendide and from that passed through its wonderful afternoon-tea lounge the eyes of two of its finest-looking and certainly best-dressed patrons fell upon him.

"Isn't that that unspeakable swine Von Helst?" Mr. Marcus Gilliver, better known in the Underworld as the "Wallflower," inquired of his intrepid partner, the gorgeous and exotic-looking Osaki du Channe.

Lazily she turned those inscrutable almond-shaped eyes of hers in the direction indicated. "It is," she said. "I wonder what has brought him to England."

"Some business robbery, you can bet," the crackman said contemptuously. "If ever I've met a man whose nose I've wanted to pull, and pull violently, he's the fellow."

Osaki smiled, showing two rows of glittering white teeth that might have been set in the mouth of the lithe, beautiful-coated panther she somehow resembled.

"Because he once presumed to make violent love to me at the Hotel Adlon in Berlin?"

"It wasn't the fact of his making love to you, Osaki," the Wallflower responded. "I can't blame any man for that. But it was the man's method of doing it—as though you were something to be bought and sold."

Again she smiled.

"I can't say that he got very much change out of it," she said. "I seem to have the impression that the shoe was very much on the other foot."

She drew long and deeply upon one of those long and strangely scented Oriental cigarettes she smoked. For a moment the beautiful oblique eyes clouded in thought.

"I have the idea, Marcus," she said slowly,

"that Herr Baron would still be good for some splendid 'pickings,' as you call them, if you're willing. We've nothing better on hand at the moment."

Mr. Gilliver roused himself alertly.

"Eh? What's that?" he asked quickly.

Lazily she repeated her words.

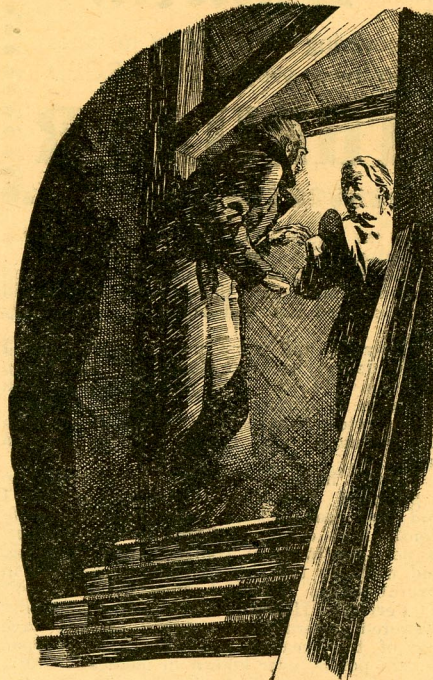
"He was quite infatuated with me, if you remember?" she purred.

The Wallflower growled under his breath.

"I fancy," she went on, "I could very soon re-arouse that infatuation and make it pay us some remarkably good dividends."

"I'd rob that hound of his last copper," the Wallflower hissed sibilantly. "I know quite a bit of his business methods, and he's as ruthless as a shark to any unfortunate soul he gets in his clutches. What's your proposition, Osaki?"

"To begin with," she said, "you and I have a final and irrevocable quarrel. We part for all time. I leave the Bruton Street flat—and you—and take up my quarters here in one of the best suites we can find. I shall throw myself not only in the public eye as much as



As Von Helst mounted the stairs a low beam knocked off his hat. His muttered imprecation caused the woman to turn round, and she looked squarely into his face. She would know him again!

possible, but also in the baron's company. You will continue to come here and dine and give exhibitions of outrageous jealousy."

"That won't be difficult, Osaki," he observed.

"You will have to be a good actor if the plan is to succeed, Marcus," she warned.

"That won't be difficult, either, if I see much of that hog hanging around you. Well, and after that?"

"After that," she answered, "you must leave the rest to me. Until I know what he has to be stripped of it is impossible to say what methods I shall use. I shall communicate with you from time to time—we'd better arrange a meeting-place quite apart from the Bruton Street flat, where I can slip in and meet you without any fear of being seen by any of the social crowd. Where?"

"What about that dirty little underground dive, that brasserie just off Frith Street? No one's likely to spot us there if you're careful about your dress. No one who matters, anyhow."

"Very good," she said. "And now, Marcus, we will commence our play-acting by parting with every symptom of a sudden quarrel. I shall leave you and go at once to where I can intercept the baron. You will pay the bill, showing as much indignation as you can manage, and, for the time being—au 'voir."

Rising, with a whispered "At the brasserie," she turned upon her heel and left him, her face showing every evidence of disgust—a picture of loveliness outraged in its deepest feelings. A moment later Mr. Gilliver, his handsome face distorted with rage, paid his bill and stalked out of the place.

Crossing the floor with that graceful, effortless walk which was one of her greatest characteristics, Osaki timed herself to arrive at the elevator just as the attendant was about to open the door for Baron von Helst. With a quick, "Merci, m'sieu," she swept in ahead of him, a vision of radiant beauty. For a split second he stared at her haughtily, then his hard eyes took in her incomparable beauty, and into them crept the light of recollection.

"Mademoiselle du Channe!" he exclaimed. "Who would have dreamed of meeting you in London?"

She laughed.

"I am in London more often than anywhere else, baron," she informed him. "I am but a bird of passage at any time."

"You are staying here?" he inquired, eyeing her hungrily.

For a moment she hesitated.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then you will dine with me to-night?" he asked eagerly. "In my own suite?"

"I prefer the public salon, baron," she said quietly. "I like the lights, the music—and the company."

"As you will," he said, with a gesture of reluctant resignation. "We will meet later."

Returning to the office, she booked for herself Suite B, which happened to be vacant.

THE BARON MAKES A VOW.

FOR some three evenings this dual dinner engagement intrigued the fashionable habitués of the Splendide, yet upon each occasion it was carried out with the greatest circumspection. Upon the first night the exotic Mam'selle du Channe dined at the baron's specially ordered and beautifully set-out table. Upon the following he dined at that of the lady—and rumour was quick to send it flying around London that the inordinately wealthy Oriental woman had moved her quarters from Bruton Street to the second most expensive suite in the Splendide.

Upon the third night the lady dined again at the baron's table, and this time there were two witnesses to the repast who, hitherto, had not been present.

"Well, by the great and sainted Mike!" the debonair, immaculately clad Inspector McCarthy, equally hidden from view, gasped. "What's in the wind now?"

From the lowered features of the handsome Wallflower he detected instantly that he had no part in it. Whatever that brilliant woman, Osaki du Channe, had in her mind, she was playing the game entirely upon her own.

Small happenings, they say, often finish in unforeseen and unbelievable endings. An unfortunate waiter, new to the place, accidentally dropped a spot of sauce upon the baron's immaculate cuff. In an instant he was up, mouthing in uncontrollable rage at the terrified man—in the next he had struck him, sending him reeling.

From tables around about there came disgusted cries of "Shame!" "Barbarian!" and others still less printable. One man said nothing, but acted. The blow had hardly been struck when the Wallflower was away from his table and making a bee-line for the still-mouthing baron who was glaring contemptuously at his critics.

"And now," muttered McCarthy to himself, "the devil is on his hob and the fat is in the fire."

Straight to the irate German the crackman walked, a look upon his face that left no one who saw it in any doubt as to his meaning.

"Herr Baron," he said in a low, strangled voice, "the man is helpless to retaliate. Permit me to take up the cudgels upon his behalf."

"Pig——" began Von Helst, and that was as far as he got.

The Wallflower's left hand came up in a lightning-like arc and crashed under the other's chin. The blow shook him from head to foot, but it was as nothing to that which followed it—a smashing right-hand that would have felled the proverbial ox—and dropped Herr von Helst flat upon his face.

Turning, the Wallflower bowed to the

baron's companion, who had sat perfectly still as if the whole business were a matter of complete indifference to her. The same contemptuous smile had never for an instant left her face from the beginning of the fracas to the end.

"I wish you joy of your company, mam'selle," the Wallflower said stridently.

"Your wishes, either good or bad, are a matter of perfect indifference to me," she answered in a cutting tone that rang as clear as a bell around that portion of the great room. Diners at nearby tables looked at each other significantly and shrugged their shoulders. There was no doubt that the rumour that the handsome couple had separated finally was perfectly true.

Taking a card from his pocket the Wallflower turned to the waiter who had shrunk back, appalled at what had happened.

"You'll probably get the sack over this," he said calmly. "Here's my card; come to me. I'll find you some work somewhere."

Without waiting for the man's mumbled thanks, he turned upon his heel and walked out of the salon.

"Well, for carrying off things with a high hand give me the Wallflower every time," McCarthy gasped. "Any other man would have been on his way to Vine Street by now."

He cast a glance at the statuesque Osaki and watched her beckon to the affrighted waiter.

"Kindly serve the fish," she ordered, as though nothing whatever had happened.

Von Helst struggled to his feet.

"Out of my sight!" he roared, when with an imperious gesture she stopped him.

"The man is waiting upon me," she said calmly. "Have we not had enough scenes for one night to suit even your Teutonic soul?"

"Well, damme," McCarthy gasped as the baron subsided into silence, "she beats Bannagher, and, according to my old man, he beat the devil."

But later that night when the Baron von Helst sat alone in the drawing-room of his suite his heavy face was set in vicious brooding. Gingerly he passed a hand over his swollen and aching jaw.

"For that, my friend," he hissed savagely, "I will have you killed when Gruen is free."

As though that thought brought up another and bigger, a certain uneasiness filled his mind.

"Why no report from Gruen?" he questioned himself. "Is the dog trying the treachery I warned him against?"

Two nights later he was still asking himself that question, and as each night passed the answer was easier to find. Then the baron set out to seek the man whom he now had fully decided had betrayed him.

From that night in the public salon he had dined in his private suite or that of Mam'selle du Channe, but after that meal he had made excuses of urgent business affairs, and slipping out, had searched the haunts and cafés of Soho for the man whom he now knew had betrayed him.

Even upon that third night when, after the fracas in the dining salon of the Splendide, he had stolen forth to the Café Bavaria to find Gruen not there, instinct told him that the ex-convict had taken advantage of the huge sum in ready money that he had in hand to double-cross him. By the fifth night he knew it and was ready to repay that treachery when the moment came.

IN THE BRASSERIE.

IT was raining slightly when the Baron von Helst, clad in a heavy overcoat that covered him well-nigh from head to heels and which in conjunction with a turned-down felt hat completed an almost impenetrable disguise, turned out of Frith Street and made his way to a little wine-shop below which was an underground brasserie, much frequented by Germans of a type.

It was his agent, Stuber, the Berlin detective, who after two days and nights of concentrated search, had found out the rendezvous used by the missing Gruen and his cousin.

"You will keep this information strictly to yourself, Stuber," the baron had said in his dictatorial manner, "and you will be well paid for it. Should the man meet with any unfortunate accident or die very unexpectedly you will also forget that you have ever even

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THRILLER

heard the name. You will be well paid for that also. You quite understand?"

"Ja, Herr Baron," Stuber answered, and thinking that doing the baron's highly-paid work entailed risks not taken in the ordinary way.

"Yourself and your partner can now, I think, depart back to Germany," the baron went on. "I will give you a cheque. You can leave to-morrow."

He wrote a cheque for a thousand pounds in English money and drawn upon an English bank.

"That," he said, "is nearly double the fee I promised, and if at the end of a year I find that your lack of memory is of a sufficiently high order, you will receive another. If not, you will, of course, receive nothing, and will run the risk of being implicated in several things. I trust I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Herr Baron," the man hurriedly answered, determining within himself to have one of the greatest lapses of memory, upon certain points, ever known in medical history.

"That, then, is understood. You may go. Be out of England to-morrow."

One glance the baron gave around the ill-lit brasserie to find that the man he sought had not yet arrived. Pulling his hat well down over his eyes, he found a table in a secluded corner and waited.

His eyes roved contemptuously over the assembled company. Their status, both male and female, was only too obviously stamped upon their features.

"Sewer rats!" he grunted to himself. "Just the company that a gallows-bird would keep."

But there was one person there whose presence would have considerably astonished Baron von Helst—the Wallflower, awaiting the possibility of a visit from Osaki. He was in immaculate evening-dress covered by an overcoat and his back was towards the German whom he was covertly watching through a fortunately-placed mirror. It was not that the Wallflower recognised Baron von Helst, but there was something about the newcomer's gait and general manner which was familiar to him.

"Now where the deuce have I struck you before?" he murmured to himself, and the mere fact of not immediately finding an answer to that question aroused his interest still further.

He found himself covertly studying the thick-set man who had undoubtedly been at considerable pains to hide his features.

Still more was he intrigued by the arrival of a little runt of a man, obviously in a considerably nervous condition, whose colourless, unblinking eyes told the Wallflower as plain

as could any words that here, should occasion warrant, was a cold-blooded killer.

"And you're another new one," he murmured to himself.

The last arrival ordered himself a lager and seated himself in a corner not far away from where the slouch-hatted and overcoated man had taken up his position.

Suddenly the first man got up, and, crossing to the new arrival, sat beside him. That the little man was startled by the sudden appearance of the other was plain. For a moment he looked as though he intended making off, but there was a certain sinister suggestion in the way the first man's right hand was thrust deep in his overcoat pocket that evidently carried considerable weight towards helping to change his mind.

"Well, Gruen," the baron said lightly and in a tone that was intended to dispel the other's fears, "I have been expecting to hear from you. The arrangement, I think, was that we were to meet at the Café Bavaria upon the third night after the—happening."

"I—I have been ill," Gruen equivocated falteringly.

"Ach, so?" the baron said softly. "It is a thousand pities when illness interrupts a piece of big business such as was ours. I saw by the papers that everything passed off exactly as planned."

There was no answer.

"That is so, is it not?" he asked sharply.

"That is so, Herr—"

"I read where the safe had been stripped," Von Helst interrupted. "I have reasons for knowing that you placed the paper I gave you as I directed." He leant forward. "And the money?" he asked quietly.

"I have it safe," Gruen responded.

"It will be safe with me," Von Helst said meaningly. "Once paid over to me I will give you the price agreed upon—perhaps more—and you can go back to Germany and live a life of comparative ease."

Again there was a silence.

"I would warn you, Herr Gruen," Von Helst went on, "that any attempt upon your part to withhold that money will have drastic results for yourself."

"I took all the risk," Gruen began, when the other silenced him with a quick gesture.

"For a price agreed upon beforehand," he said. "I warned you then of the consequences of trying anything treacherous. Either that money is in my hands by to-morrow or the London police will be anonymously made aware of who killed Lord Arthur Warnecke."

The other turned upon him with a savage snarl.

"And what of the man who paid me to do it?" he questioned. "Will he go scot-free?"

"And who do you think is likely to believe that story of a man in my position? When your criminal record in Germany comes to be gone into, my friend, anything you may say will carry very little weight."

Into the pale eyes there came a sudden cunning gleam.

"I have the money," he said quietly. "Possession, Herr Baron, is nine points of the law so it is said. I want a bigger price than that we arranged."

"How much do you ask?"

"Ten thousand pounds in English money. It goes farther than our German marks."

For a moment or two Baron von Helst studied the face of the man who had done his bidding. Despite his almost cringing attitude, there could be no doubt that he meant what he said. It was double-cross with a vengeance!

"Very good," he said calmly, and waved the matter to one side. "To-morrow night I will come to your lodgings and bring the money. It is robbery, and you know it, but, as you rightly say, possession is nine points of the law."

He beckoned to the waiter and ordered two more lagers.

"We will drink to your unholy bargain."

The drinks brought, beneath the cover of the table, and quite unseen by Gruen, he took a tiny phial from his overcoat pocket, the cork of which he deftly removed.

"Ach," he exclaimed suddenly with a quick look at a man who had entered, "that is one of the officers of Scotland Yard. I have no wish to be seen here."

Instantly the weak-looking blue eyes peered at the new arrival, and in the moment that Gruen's attention was diverted from himself the tiny phial was emptied into his lager and returned to Von Helst's pocket.

The man in question seated himself at the far end of the room in the company of half a dozen others who were playing dominoes.

"Perhaps I am mistaken," Von Helst went on, "but he is certainly like a man who was pointed out to me as an officer of police." He lifted his glass and drank half of it. "To tomorrow night and the finish of our business," he said grimly.

"Ten thousand pounds," Gruen mumbled, avoiding the malevolent eyes his paymaster turned upon him; then, he, too, drank deeply.

"And the address to which I am to bring the money, Gruen?" the baron asked.

The man made a quick movement towards his inside breast-pocket, then stopped suddenly, a cunning gleam in his eyes.

"I will meet you here, baron," he said equally quietly.

"None so mistrusting as he who himself deceives," Von Helst said, his beady eyes watching every movement of Gruen's face. A curious greyness had come into it—once or twice the mouth twitched spasmodically as though with a sudden seizure of pain. Then Gruen half attempted to rise.

"I—I feel ill!" he gasped.

"A faintness, perhaps," Von Helst said softly. "Drink some more of your lager."

Lifting the glass he offered it to the doomed man. Gruen, as though suddenly gone parched, clutched at it and drained it to the last drop. As if realisation suddenly dawned upon him he stared horror-stricken at the man now openly goading over him. A quick convulsion shook his whole body, and his face suddenly froze into a stiffness that looked like paralysis.

"Murder—" he managed to get out in a strangled whisper—then that was the end. Whatever the poison Von Helst had used upon his wretched partner in crime, its effect had been little less than instantaneous, and Gruen had died almost without a sound.

Bolt upright he sat in the chair, his glassy eyes fixed upon the face of his murderer. And almost instant rigidity of the body must have set in, for he sat perfectly square and showed no sign of toppling. The very position in the room the man had chosen for the purpose of effacing himself had made Von Helst's task doubly easy. Gruen's back was to the rest of the company, and, as they sat, there was no room for anyone to get in front of him.

At once the quick-witted Von Helst's face broke into a wreath of smiles, and he began an animated conversation with the dead man. His voice carried quite clearly in the room, and no living soul there could for a moment have detected imposition.

As he spoke the baron's hand stole towards that inner breast-pocket in the direction of which Gruen's hand had lifted when he had been asked his address. From it he extracted swiftly a packet of letters, at which he glanced and, with a grim smile, thrust into his own pocket. Then, and in the same way, he began a systematic search of his victim's clothes, removing every possible source of identity. Still his rapid conversation and chatter kept up, and once or twice he even laughed heartily. It was that laugh which re-attracted the Wallflower's attention to him; he knew that laugh, it was distinctive, and he had heard it only recently.

Through the mirror he once again gave his attention to the man. Watching, he saw the talker's hand come forth again and his fingers dipped quickly into the vest-pocket of his companion.

"That's darned queer," he muttered to himself. "It's a pretty hard-boiled pickpocket who will go through his friend's clothes while he sits looking at him." More than once he saw the operation repeated with different pockets, and it struck him that, unless the man were too sodden drunk to know what was happening, he must be easily the blindest bat walking Soho.

Then the thick-set man with the slouch hat suddenly got up, bade his friend good-night and shook hands warmly with him, walked straight to the door and left the place. And in that very act the Wallflower recognised his man—Baron von Helst.

What the devil was the German plutocrat

doing in a place like this, with a man who had crook printed all over him? And, still more, what was he after in the man's pockets? It was a mystery, and one that the Wallflower had the feeling that it would pay him to solve.

MURDER WILL OUT!

FROM the brasserie the semi-disguised Baron von Helst hurried to the Café Bavaria, where again he selected a secluded seat and began to search rapidly among the papers he had taken from Gruen.

Through the open door of the café the Wallflower watched him select one with a little exclamation of satisfaction, study it for a moment, then slip it into his pocket. Finishing his drink, he left the café and hurried in the direction of Oxford Street. Crossing that, he turned into a network of small and mean streets that lay behind Tottenham Court Road, the Wallflower upon his heels.

Glancing again at the paper, he found the number he wanted—one of the cheap boarding-houses for foreigners in which that neighbourhood abounds. He rang at the bell, which was answered by a slatternly-looking woman, also of German nationality.

Like a shadow the Wallflower slipped into the next doorway, straining his ears to catch every word.

"Your pardon, Fraulein," Von Helst began ingratiatingly, "but I have been sent here by my brother, Adolph Brunn. He has a room in your house and has been called back to Germany upon urgent business. He has asked me to come and collect up his belongings and have them sent after him."

"He cannot have them unless he pays me the rent of the room for a week in advance," the woman said, truculently avaricious. "Those are my terms, I told him so when he came."

"I shall be pleased to pay you the money," Von Helst said, taking a bundle of notes from his pocket, at the sight of which the woman's eyes gleamed. "He also asked me," he went on, "to leave you a small present for your care and attention."

He passed over another ten-shilling note, upon which the woman admitted him instantly and the door was shut.

Von Helst followed the woman up a narrow, dirty staircase where, at a turn, his head collided with a low-hanging beam. A muttered imprecation which brought the woman around sharply came from him as that all-disguising hat was swept from his head to the floor.

Quickly he stooped to recover it before the woman could catch sight of his face, but with a quick apology for the accident, she reached the hat first and handed it to him, looking him squarely in the face as she did so.

With a grunt of anger he took it from her and jammed it down upon his head, then abruptly motioned her up the stairs.

A light appeared a little later in one of the upper rooms, and from the other side of the road the Wallflower could plainly see the shadow of Von Helst



Osaki flung herself on the divan watching Von Helst close the safe and taking care to memorise the combination. It would be easy for the Wallflower to open it again!

searching about the room. A quarter of an hour later he came down, carrying what were obviously two brand-new and heavy cases.

At Tottenham Court Road the Wallflower watched him take a taxi and, hailing another, tailed his man to the Hotel Splendide.

But a considerable change had come over the baron's appearance when he got out of the taxi at the main door of the hotel. His hat was turned up from his face, his coat-collar was down and that garment flung open to reveal the immaculate dress-clothes he was wearing—a very different person in appearance from the man who had picked his friend's pockets in the brasserie.

Instantly he gave the two cases over to the commissionaire with the brusque order: "To be taken up to my suite, at once!"

The Wallflower followed sufficiently far to know that Von Helst went up with them; a glance into the magnificent salon revealed no sign of Osaki du Channe.

What was this mystery in which Von Helst was implicated? It occurred to the Wallflower that as in all probability Von Helst was treed for the night at the Splendide his next and best move would be to pick up the trail of the man who had been left drunk in the brasserie.

Jumping in a taxi, a few minutes brought him to the door of that unsavoury resort, to find the place in a seething excitement, police at the main entrance, while inside he caught a glimpse of several men he knew to be of the C.I.D. and, most prominent among them, Detective-inspector McCarthy.

Around that table at which Von Helst had sat was a group, amongst whom was one whom the Wallflower knew to be the divisional-surgeon.

"Anything wrong?" he inquired of one of the uniformed men at the door.

"Mysterious death, sir," he was told. "One of the waiters discovered that a customer was sitting at a table dead. Heart disease, probably. Anyhow, the surgeon's there."

"No admittance, I suppose?" the Wallflower asked casually.

"None whatever, sir. Our orders are to stop anyone either going in or coming out."

Knowing the hopelessness of endeavouring to evade those orders, the Wallflower turned away. For a moment or two he was undecided whether or not to call McCarthy and tell him what he himself had witnessed, but he decided against it. Let the police work out their own salvation in their own way. More than ever was he satisfied that there was some big game afoot in which the Baron Hugo von Helst was playing a prominent, if unseen, part.

That McCarthy was in the business at all was owing to the fact that the policeman who had been hurriedly called upon the discovery of the body, had, but a moment before, seen the inspector turn into his lodgings in nearby Dean Street. At once he dispatched a man for him.

"What do you make of it, doc?" he asked after the arrival of that official and he had heard the story told by the waiter.

"Dashed if I know, McCarthy," the medico said puzzledly. "Seems a mysterious sort of business; according to the waiter the man was quite all right and drinking with a friend not so long since. The friend left him and he seemed right enough, then they discover he's dead."

Volubly, and in answer to McCarthy, the waiter insisted that the dead man had been perfectly all right when his friend had left the premises.

"I, myself, sare," he said with conviction, "saw him shake hands wit' the other gentleman; when he left he was all right then."

"They appeared to be on good terms?" McCarthy asked.

"Oh, yes, sure! They laugh and talk, all ver' pleasant."

"Did this man order another drink after this friend left?" McCarthy questioned.

"No, sare. It is when I come to ask if he wants something more than I do not get any answer.

Then I see his eyes and I know that something terrible has happened."

"Did anyone else in this place speak to him or have anything to do with him at all?"

"No one, sare. He is a stranger here. He has only been three, or perhaps four, times altogether."

"He knew nobody here at all?" McCarthy asked sharply.

"No, sare. Once or twice he came with another man whose name I do not know."

"What about the man he was with to-night? Was he known here?"

"I could not see him very well, sare. He wore his hat down. But never, I think, has he been here before."

"What nationality was he, do you know?" McCarthy asked.

"German, sare."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure, sare. He spoke ver' little English and I heard him say on the first night he came here that he had arrived from Berlin via Paris by air."

"That's something to go on, anyhow," McCarthy said. He turned to the sergeant who was going carefully through the pockets.

"Anything on the body to identify?" he asked.

"Nothing so far, inspector," was the answer.

"Have his fingerprints taken at once, developed and flashed across to Berlin," McCarthy ordered. "There's just a chance that they may be able to identify. If he's ever been through police hands they certainly will."

"Almost seems to me—speaking from a purely cursory examination, of course—that the man died of a sort of swift paralysis," the surgeon said.

"In other words, a natural death," McCarthy said.

The medico shook his head dubiously.

"I wouldn't say that," he said. "There's a possibility it's suicide by poison. But if so, I'll say, frankly, that it's by a poison not known to me."

He moved to pick up one of the two glasses upon the table when McCarthy stopped him with a warning exclamation.

"Fingerprints, doc," he adjured. "Don't forget the 'dabs.' They're the most likely things to solve this mystery." Lifting the glass which, from its position, had obviously been the one used by the dead man, he wrapped it carefully and held it out to the doctor.

"Have a sniff, if that's what you're after," he invited.

The surgeon did, then shook his head.

"If it was poison, then the one used gives off no odour. But, of course, the laboratory may tell a different story."

"Well, doc," McCarthy said, "I can't see the use of keeping the body here any longer. It had better go to the mortuary right away."

"The sooner the better for me, Mac," the medico agreed. "I don't want to make an all-night job of it."

McCarthy shrugged his shoulders.

"For myself, the quicker someone else takes this business off me the better I'll like it. I've got all my work cut out on the Warnecke business."

But morning brought a report from the Government toxicologist which left the Yard in no doubt that the unknown man had been poisoned. Whether self-administered or not remained to be ascertained.

By night an answering telegram from Berlin came informing them that the man in question was one, Hans Gruen, who had but a few days before been released from a penal concentration-camp. The lengthy telegram also gave his criminal record; a series of convictions for burglary, and added that the man was an expert safe-breaker. Further, that there were two cases of suspected murder against him, but these had not been proved, though the police were quite satisfied in their own minds as to his guilt.

"Wire again for the exact date that this Gruen left Germany," McCarthy ordered. "Also request them to find out from any relatives of the dead man just what business brought him to England."

"There's another point," Sir William Haynes interjected. "What about his passport? How did he, a known criminal, get one? In any case, what has become of it? There has been nothing whatsoever found to indicate where he lived, I suppose?"

"Not a thing, Bill. This fellow's death is as mysterious as Warnecke's—in a totally different way."

"Anything been picked up so far concerning the man who was drinking with him?"

"Up to now not a thing. We've no description of him. He was never at the brasserie before, and as he left while the other man was still alive and actually shook hands with him before going, I'm dashed if I can see what we can do when we do pick him up."

"It certainly is difficult, Mac," the assistant-commissioner agreed. "Coming on top of the dead standstill of the Warnecke case makes it bad."

"The more one goes into that," McCarthy said, lighting a cigarette and drawing at it thoughtfully, "the more serious it becomes. There's apparently only one man to gain by his death, and that's Baron von Helst. By that deed of transfer found in the safe he's secured control over the only part of the company's assets Warnecke couldn't sell—the ships. And, anyhow, he wasn't even in the country at the time of the murder, and that deed proves that he would have had them under any circumstances."

"No trace whatever of the ready money Millwall swears Warnecke must have had by him?"

"Not a stiver of it that can possibly be traced has come into circulation. We're watching out for it everywhere. But the curse of that is that it was so cunningly got together that it's practically impossible to trace it."

"Seen anything of Baron von Helst since he put in an appearance here?"

McCarthy grinned.

"I have, Bill. It's one of the comedies of London. The baron has started a mad infatuation for that lovely creature, Osaki du Channe, which she seems to reciprocate."

"And what does that mean?" Haynes asked.

"If I know my Gilliver," McCarthy answered grimly. "It means that if Von Helst gets up his nose badly enough he'll be a dead lucky man to escape out of England in one piece. As crooks go, Marcus is a very decent fellow, but once get him roused properly and I'd as soon mess about with a tiger."

"What's Osaki du Channe after?" Haynes questioned thoughtfully.

McCarthy got up and picked up his hat.

"Don't ask me," he said. "Life's too short to be answering questions as to what that lady's up to. But I can tell you this: If Herr Baron von Helst takes as much money out of England as he brought into it, then Osaki du Channe is losing her grip. You take it from me, Bill, hell will pop in that direction before we're so much older."

THE WALLFLOWER GETS BUSY.

WHAT had been in those two cases Von Helst had taken from the dingy lodging-house behind the Tottenham Court Road?

That was the question upon which the agile mind of Mr. Marcus Gilliver had been debating every since he had been informed of the mysterious death in the brasserie; the death of the man, his own eyes had shown him in that one glimpse, who had been drinking with Von Helst.

And slowly but surely an ugly thought was growing in the Wallflower's mind. He could not forget the stillness of that figure to whom Von Helst had talked; the stillness he had taken then to be drunken stupor. Yet he could not believe that any man could have been so drunk as not to know that the man in front of him was picking his pockets.

And again, he remembered how speedily Von Helst had departed once he had obtained whatever it was that he sought for—that envelope at which he had glanced at the Café Bavaria before hurrying off to the lodging-house and unquestionably containing the address of the man he had been drinking with. Was that stillness and rigidity something far more sinister than drink?

Who was the man? To the best of his belief Von Helst, when he had masqueraded as his brother to the slattern at the lodging-house door, had called him Brunn. That could have been an alibi, just as Von Helst's story had been a lie. McCarthy, in his official capacity, might have unearthed the man's

identity, but unless the Wallflower was much mistaken, Von Helst had removed all traces of that.

With this in his mind Gilliver set out to do the round of haunts where McCarthy, when working out a Soho case, was generally to be found. It was about midday when he encountered the C.I.D. man in that hub of the empire, Piccadilly Circus.

They greeted as two who had put up many battles of wits, one against the other; there was a certain camaraderie between them, though each knew perfectly well that where business was concerned neither would ask or give quarter.

"Ah, Marcus," McCarthy greeted, eyeing with open admiration the perfectly-groomed man before him. "Giving the street a treat?"

"I don't know that you've much to talk about, McCarthy," Gilliver answered lightly. "That suit you're wearing is about as good as Savile Row can turn them out."

"Not so bad, Marcus, not so bad," McCarthy agreed equably. "The only thing wrong with it is that it hasn't been paid for yet. What brings you to Town?" he inquired, keeping to himself the knowledge that he had witnessed the scene between the cracksman and the eminent financier at the Hotel Splendide.

"Just trying to think out a few payable ideas," Gilliver informed him.

"If those ideas have anything to do with other people's portable property I'd advise you to think them over remarkably well before you act, Marcus. We've also thought out a few and extremely unpayable ideas for people with your gifts."

The Wallflower shrugged his shoulders.

"I had the idea you were on a 'mysterious death' case," he observed. "I happened to be passing that terrible little brasserie just off Frith Street and found a crowd outside and the police keeping the door. A constable informed me that it was a case of mysterious death, and glancing in, I saw you there as large as life."

"And twice as natural," McCarthy cut in whimsically. "As it happens, your informant was quite right; it turned out to be a case of poisoning, but whether self-administered or not it's impossible to say. There was a mysterious second party with the man in the brasserie, but he seems to have vanished into thin air. According to the one waiter who attended upon them, the man was alive when the other left, so I suppose he doesn't greatly matter."

The doubt growing still stronger in the Wallflower's mind as to whether the man had or had not been alive when Von Helst left, he remarked "Oh!" casually, as though the matter held no interest whatever for him.

"Who was the poor devil—any idea?" he asked.

"It turns out," McCarthy told him, "that he's a gentleman of your particular profession in Germany. A German called Gruen—Hans Gruen. According to the Berlin police, he was a pretty hot merchant, and violent with it."

McCarthy glanced shrewdly at the handsome face that was beginning to look slightly bored.

"Ever hear of him?" he inquired.

"Never in my life," the Wallflower answered truthfully. "I thought I knew most Continentals of any class," he added frankly. "What brought him over here? For a skilled man, I'd have thought there were as many opportunities over there as here. One of the violent sort, you say?" he asked carelessly.

"According to the Berlin police, yes. Twice a murder suspect, but nothing could be fixed on him. How he got his passports to get in here is, so far, beyond us. They were made out in the name of Brunn, by the way."

"From what I read in the papers," Gilliver said a trifle maliciously, "murder's becoming fashionable. But finding the murderer isn't. How's the Warnecke case moving?"

"It's moving," McCarthy lied glibly, "just the way I want it to move. You don't suppose for a minute that I keep the papers posted with all I know? One of these days I'll put whoever's at the back of that crime behind bars just as one of these days I shall have the pleasure of putting you in the same place."

The Wallflower smiled.

"Till that great day, Mac," he said blandly.

"I shouldn't let the thoughts of it disturb my sleep."

"It won't," McCarthy answered equably. "It's your sleep that'll be disturbed, Marcus. A cell pallet makes a hard bed."

"So I discovered once in my life," the Wallflower said grimly, "and once is enough."

He smiled and gave a parting nod. But the smile vanished the moment his back was turned upon the C.I.D. man. Once again his brain was working swiftly upon the problem of Von Helst and the dead crackman. What was the connection between the two? He was certain in his own mind that this man Gruen, or Brunn, whichever was the correct appellation, had been brought here from Germany to do a job, and the man who was in some way implicated in his being brought was Von Helst. Moreover, Von Helst had in his possession whatever the proceeds of that job had been. To the Wallflower those two heavy cases told their own story.

With the information he had gleaned from McCarthy plus the knowledge the inspector lacked, he was beginning to be able to add two and two together. Baron Hugo von Helst was a man to watch closely; there were going to be some big pickings from that gentleman when the time was ripe. That is, he thought with a grim smile, if Osaki left anything upon his bones to pick.

Anyhow, McCarthy, without a suspicion, had served his purpose, in which comfortable assurance Mr. Gilliver was doing less than justice to his old enemy.

For a moment after the Wallflower had walked away McCarthy eyed him speculatively.

"Now what the devil are you after, punping me about that dead man?" he apostrophised the retreating figure. "I never knew anyone who minded his own business to the same extent that you do, and that tells me that you're asking questions with a purpose. Now I wonder why?"

So strongly did the situation intrigue him that, hailing the first passing taxi, he got into it and requested the driver to keep Gilliver in sight.

Turning into Regent Street, the world-famed crackman proceeded leisurely along until he came to Hanover Street. From that point he proceeded through the aristocratic West End locality until he came to the Hotel Splendide.

But he did not enter that great building at first; just slowly took a walk around the square that it occupied. McCarthy, from his taxi, could see that the Wallflower was closely studying its windows and fire-escapes.

"And when you start doing that, my lad, it's time for someone to sit up and take notice."

Three times the Wallflower perambulated the huge block before he was satisfied with his study of it, then entered by the main door into that lounge-foyer where stood the offices. McCarthy kept to his taxi upon the other side of the road until some quarter of an hour later he came out again and strolled away at the same leisurely pace as before.

McCarthy went into the Splendide and had a word with the commissionaire.

"You saw that gentleman who just left," he said.

"Mr. Marcus Gilliver, sir," the man said at once.

"The same," McCarthy said. "Did he happen to speak to anyone here, did you notice?"

The commissionaire thought a minute.

"Why, no, sir," he said, "I don't believe he did, now you ask me. He was standing over here looking at the floor plans, or perhaps it might have been the list of guests' room numbers which is just beside them."

McCarthy strolled across to where some five large frames held full plans of the guest chambers. They were drawn in slavish detail, and showed every door, passage, corridor, window and fire-escape in the huge building.

"An exceedingly interesting thing for a man in your profession to be studying, Marcus," he murmured. Then his eye fell upon the framed list of guests which he knew was kept up to date fully. The first two names that he read were "Suite A. Baron von Helst. Suite B. Mademoiselle Osaki du Channe."

The plan showed him that they adjoined,

though the entrances were at different ends of a long corridor. Upon the opposite wall to those of the suites were three small rooms which had probably been built in as bed-rooms for valets or ladies'-maids should the wealthy occupiers of the suites prefer them to inhabit separate apartments. One of them, he saw, was vacant.

"And that," he informed himself, "is going to be the roosting-place of Patrick Aloysius McCarthy for the next few nights, or until such time as I see the result of the Wallflower's study of the building. Someone has something here well worth carting away, or that gentleman would not be wasting his valuable time upon the place."

Ringling the Yard he acquainted the assistant-commissioner with his intention, though without giving him the reason for it.

"But what the deuce for, Mac?" Haynes wanted to know. "That'll be a ghastly expensive business, and the commissioner will want to know all the ins and outs of it."

"You can tell him," McCarthy said, "that I don't do this sort of thing without having



There was a triumphant cry from the police searcher at the fire-grate, and he held up a knife. "Careful with it!" cried McCarthy. "Things are beginning to break at last."

a particularly good reason. But just for the present I'd sooner keep that reason to myself, if he doesn't mind."

"Have it your own way," Sir William said, "only you'll know what to expect if the results aren't as big as the expense. And, by the way, there's a further message come in from Berlin. They've managed to dig out that the man who engineered Gruen's release from the concentration camp was our arrogant friend Baron von Helst."

"Well, by the great and sainted Mike!" McCarthy gasped. "What do you make of that, Bill?"

"Nothing at all, up to the present," the assistant-commissioner answered, "except that the baron seems to be due for a very thorough interrogation as to how the man came to be found dead a few days later in a London café."

"I don't suppose he knows anything about that, Bill," McCarthy said; "but he'll get the interrogation just the same."

Half an hour later a Signor Enrico Malaquisti had booked that spare room, though not before Detective-inspector McCarthy, in the privacy of the manager's office, had had to exhibit his warrant-card and do some remarkably straight talking.

"And you let my identity leak out through the servants, or any other way," he concluded, "and you'll have about as bad a twenty

minutes on the mat at the Home Office as you'll want."

"We have never had police in the hotel before," the foreign manager of it bewailed. "Well, you've got one now," McCarthy said sternly, "so be on your best behaviour and mind your p's and q's. Now ring up Baron von Helst's suite and inform him that Detective-inspector McCarthy of Scotland Yard would be glad of some answer to a few highly-important questions."

THE BARON VERSUS MCCARTHY.

THE baron was examining a large, flat jewel-case which contained some of the finest diamonds that McCarthy had ever seen when the Scotland Yard man was admitted to the sumptuous reception-room of his suite. From their bed of blue satin they glittered and winked wickedly at the inspector as much as to say: "We've caused some trouble in our day and probably will cause a good deal more."

"You are a judge of precious stones, inspector?" Von Helst asked in his pompous way.

"I can't say that I am to the extent of placing a value upon such as those," McCarthy said modestly, "though I've handled a good many thousands of pounds' worth in my professional work."

"Ach! You speak of stolen jewels, not such stones as these."

"I've seen quite as fine stones as those stolen, baron," McCarthy said quietly, "and, if I might suggest, I should take particularly good care that those are kept securely locked away."

Von Helst shrugged his thick, ungainly shoulders.

"Those are intended as a present from me to a lady," he said importantly. "A lady who, I hope and expect, will be accompanying me back to Germany when I leave."

McCarthy said nothing, but he looked at the stones and then at their owner. Magnificent as they were, it struck him that they were hardly worth while a man risking his life over, as undoubtedly the baron would if he persuaded the beautiful Osaki to leave England with him. Marcus Gilliver would have something very final to say to that.

Abruptly the baron shut the case, locked it, and carried it to a heavy-looking safe let into the wall of his room. Placing the large case inside, he swung the doors to. They closed with a hollow, metallic clang.

"And now," he said in that rudely brusque manner of his, "my time is limited. I must ask you to be brief."

It was characteristic of Detective-inspector McCarthy that he never did anything in exactly the manner expected of him, a trait, this, which at times almost caused his superior officers to tear their hair out in hopeless chagrin.

But McCarthy, in what seemed to them some miraculous fashion, got results not achieved by more stereotyped officers of the C.I.D. In this particular case he had an instinctive loathing not only for Von Helst himself, but for the type of monied bully he represented. He had no particular hope that this interrogation would throw any light on the mysterious Gruen, but he determined to prosecute it in as surprising a manner as possible—the element of surprise often brought something to light where tougher measures failed.

"I suppose you know," he said as casually as though he were discussing the weather, "that Gruen's dead?"

His eyes, fixed upon the face of the man he was addressing, caught just one instantaneous hardening of the face—the merest flicker. In a split second it was gone.

"Gruen?" Von Helst echoed vacantly. "I know no one of that name."

"Hans Gruen," McCarthy went on quietly.

"He was an ex-convict and gaolbird generally."

Von Helst stiffened angrily.

"This is insolence!" he roared. "Insolence such as I have neither time nor patience to tolerate. You would do better," he added with blunt sarcasm, "to give your mind and energies to the discovery of who murdered my friend and colleague Warnecke, than in wasting my time talking about people of whom I know nothing."

"Gruen," McCarthy went on as though the other had never spoken, "was found dead of poison in a low-class brasserie in Soho in circumstances that are, to say the least of it, suspicious."

"I tell you I know nothing about the man," Von Helst repeated. "Please to leave my room and allow me to get on with my own affairs which are of importance. For the third time I tell you I know nothing whatever of the man."

"Which is strange, baron," McCarthy said softly. "The Berlin police, we have found, are most capable people, and they tell us that it was thanks to your efforts that Gruen was released from a penal concentration camp little more than a week ago."

For the second time McCarthy got that sudden stiffening of the German's features. It was not much, but quite sufficient to tell him that the news had come as a decided shock.

"The Berlin police say that?" Von Helst exclaimed in well-acted amazement. "Impossible, inspector!"

Instantly also McCarthy detected the change in the man's note; the hectoring tone disappeared and into the voice came a certain ingratiation, and cunning.

"You know something about this death," McCarthy thought, watching the man keenly. "There's something here that you're darned anxious to hide."

"I am to take it then, Herr Baron," he said aloud, "that the police of Berlin are quite misinformed?"

"Quite, quite," Von Helst assured him. "There may be a likeness in names that has misled them. What, I ask you," he said with an expansive gesture, "would a man in my position, one of the most powerful industrially in Germany to-day, have to do with a man such as you describe this Gruen to be?"

"Exactly the question I'm asking myself," McCarthy said inwardly. "It certainly seems incredible, sir," he agreed openly. "I'm

afraid I must go to work in other directions."

"The case of this man's death is in your hands?" Von Helst asked, and McCarthy caught the sudden note of anxiety in the speaker's voice.

"Not only his death, baron, but how his passports were obtained in the first place, and, still more so, who was responsible for bringing him here. We've already discovered that he arrived by air; now what I want to know is, what he came for?"

"And you think that you will discover that, inspector?" the baron asked with a most unusual affability.

"I don't think, baron," McCarthy answered grimly, "I know. There was a person who sat drinking with this Gruen at the brasserie, and when I lay hands upon him the mystery of the man's coming will be an open book. Good-morning. Sorry to have troubled you."

For some time after McCarthy's departure Baron von Helst sat lost in brooding thought.

"This man is dangerous," he muttered at length. "If he becomes too persistent he will have to go the same way as Gruen. The sooner I am back in Germany the better. But Osaki du Channe goes with me—upon that I am determined."

Again McCarthy dialed Whitehall 1212, and for the second time got through to Haynes.

"Bill," he said eagerly, "there's something radically wrong about Von Helst. He knows something of this Gruen right enough, something that he's endeavouring to hide. If Berlin's right about his having the dead man released from the concentration-camp he must have had a motive. In pursuance of that motive, there was a distinct possibility that it was Von Helst who sent Gruen to England. Put every man who can be spared on to the question of 'why.'

"I'm staying where I am to watch him night and day. Don't forget the name—Signor Enrico Malaquisti. I'm just off to my room to make a change, and in an hour at most I'll be back here as a fixture. And, Bill, put out bills and a reward for anyone who can give information as to where one, Hans Gruen, alias Adolph Brunn, stayed during the last few nights in London. It's bound to be in the Soho or Tottenham Court Road district. They all cram in there somewhere. Toothcomb every registered lodging-house between the Euston Road and Shaftesbury Avenue, and let the men that do it carry a copy of the death-mask photo."

"With what object?" Haynes asked.

"There's just a chance that we may pick up anyone who may have visited him during that time and so get a clue to the mystery man who was with him in the brasserie. Once they find the room the man had, put the fingerprint men on to it, we may strike the same dabs that we've got on those two glasses. By the way, send me a photograph of those prints here."

"Right-ho!" Sir William Haynes said wearily. "But what about the Warnecke murder? That's the thing that all the noise is about."

A groan came from McCarthy.

"In my interest in this brasserie mystery I'd forgotten all about that. I must find the man who was drinking with Gruen that night."

As McCarthy made his way towards his Dean Street lodgings to change into the make-up and habiliments of the newly-born Signor Enrico Malaquisti he passed by the one man who could have told him just who was with Gruen that night—Mr. Marcus Gilliver.

But the Wallflower appeared to be lost in his own thoughts as he went along, and by the smile upon his handsome face those thoughts were not unpleasant ones.

"You're a queer bird," McCarthy said ruminatively. "You lose one of the most beautiful women in the world and a working partner that couldn't be matched anywhere under the sky. And there you are, going along grinning like a Cheshire cat. I'd give something to know what's pleasing you."

THE BARON'S PARTY.

It was a great occasion in the dining salon of the Hotel Splendide. Herr Baron von Helst was giving a birthday dinner to the beautiful Mam'selle Osaki du Channe. There were about a dozen guests, all male and of his own nationality, and, without exception, men of his own type.

At the head of the table Osaki, in a shimmering robe that made her look more like some sleek, velvet-skinned creature of the wild, queneed it graciously.

With that strange persistence which she had shown right from her first meeting with Von Helst, she had refused to have the sumptuous meal served either in his private suite or her own.

"In public or nowhere," was her ultimatum, and the baron, since he was about to make a presentation which would glorify himself in the eyes of others as much as anyone else,



My Dear Readers.—During the war the term "No Man's Land" was only too familiar to everybody when referring to the strip of land between the front line trenches of the opposing armies. But there are other kinds of "No Man's Land." Probably the best known is the strip of country between the southern frontier of the United States and the northern borders of Mexico. In this territory the laws of both countries do not operate, and this makes many things possible that would be utterly impossible anywhere else. When prohibition held sway in the States the citizens of California could step across the border to indulge to their hearts' content. In that strip of land were—and maybe still are—dens of vice, where people seek illicit pleasures. And men who are fugitives from justice can remain there

NO MAN'S LAND

and laugh at the police forces anxious to arrest them.

In olden times a criminal, or political offender, could run into a church or monastery and claim sanctuary. Inside the portals of a sacred edifice no man dare lay a hand on them. Our modern sanctuaries are premises occupied as embassies, which protect their own nationals, and international zones where it is difficult for the law of any country to operate efficiently.

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The Editor

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agreed at once. Society at large should see what kind of gifts Baron von Helst could make to the womankind he favoured.

At a table but a few feet from this strangely constituted party sat the elderly Signor Malaquisti, a white-haired and bearded aristocrat if ever one favoured the Splendide. Through pince-nez he surveyed the neighbouring table with a certain amount of amused tolerance, though there were times when it would have become apparent to any observer that the manners of the gentlemen of the party did not find any particular favour with him.

It was at a point towards the end of the dinner that the baron rose and took the jewel-case McCarthy had already seen from a small table beside him. Opening it, he first passed it round to the accompaniment of fervid expressions of admiration, then presented it with a grandiloquent speech.

McCarthy, understanding as he did most of the European languages, translated it for himself as a sort of fifty-fifty affair; fifty per cent of the incomparable charms of Osaki du Channe, and fifty per cent of "See what a fine fellow am I!" for the baron. It wound up with a plain and unvarnished statement that Mam'selle du Channe would be accompanying him back to Germany during the next week, where she would have a half-dozen castles at her disposal, to say nothing of a villa in the Riviera, an Alpine house, money unlimited, and, in general, things not usually possessed by women not so sufficiently fortunate as to rouse the ardent admiration of a gentleman like himself.

To all of which Osaki du Channe said nothing; simply sat smiling that inscrutable smile of hers. But McCarthy, watching her closely, thought that he saw in her lustrous, oblique eyes just the faintest shadow of mockery. For the rest, she accepted the jewels very much as might a reigning monarch graciously receive a gift offered in all humility by some dependant of considerably lower status than herself.

There was another person in that great room who, seated in the most secluded alcove he could find, also watched the proceedings. But what Mr. Gilliver was thinking was certainly not to be discovered from his features. For all that could be read of his thoughts his handsome face might have been that of a green image, carved out of stone.

Long before the party had finished and the guests dispersed he paid his bill and left the hotel. Not even McCarthy, who had kept his eyes very wide open for his appearance, knew that he had been present. But there was one there who did, and she also knew that he had not gone very far away.

It was after midnight when Osaki du Channe, followed by Von Helst, carrying the impressive-looking jewel-case, turned up the main staircase to their respective suites. They were followed by the elderly Signor Malaquisti who limped along by the aid of an ebony stick at some little distance behind them. Neither cast him so much as a glance.

"We will place the jewels in my safe for such time as we are in England, Osaki," the baron said, stopping at his own door.

"With what object?" she asked.

"To prevent their being stolen," he answered in some surprise. "I have already received one warning from an officer of Scotland Yard to keep them locked away."

"Indeed," she answered carelessly. "And which of those geniuses might it have been who so advised you?"

"A certain Inspector McCarthy," he answered. "Something of a fool, I thought. And far too persistent."

She threw him a quick, sidelong glance. "As long as Inspector McCarthy stops at giving advice," she said quietly, "it is perfectly safe to regard him as a fool. But if ever the day should come, Hugo, that McCarthy's interest in you is of a really professional nature, the quicker you revise your opinion as to his mentality the better for you. Where a criminal is concerned, McCarthy is quite the most dangerous man in Europe."

A flash of annoyance came into the baron's beady eyes.

"Which sounds," he said stiffly, "as though you could even conceive so impossible a thing as my committing a criminal act."

"Do not be ridiculous," she said. "Such an



Von Helst waited for Mrs. Scholler to open the door, then his gun came into view and she started back agog with fear.

idea is an impossibility. Please lock up my jewels; I am tired."

She flung herself down upon a divan and watched him while he undid the safe. Its door open, she took a surreptitious notice of its inner locks and tumblers. Compared with the great strong-rooms she had been used to working with the Wallflower it was an old and obsolete one. To Mr. Marcus Gilliver its subjugation would be a matter of some minutes.

"What cumbersome things they are," she remarked, rising and moving lazily towards it. "I have never seen one before. Show me how it works."

A cunning light flashed into Von Helst's eyes. He had no intention of showing her or anyone else the combination of that safe while those two packed cases were in it. Her quick eyes, too, had noticed them; two brand new and obviously inexpensive cases; very out of place among the possessions of the inordinately wealthy Baron von Helst.

"And what is the use of this thing, Hugo?" she asked artlessly, pointing to the dial.

With ready graciousness he explained, but with this difference; each number of turns and the release numbers of the heavy tumblers were wrong. Where he should have said four turns to the right and then set the pointer at the number nine, he told her three to the left and the pointer-number seven, and so forth. By following the combination he gave, no living soul would open the door of that safe. He had no more intention of her handling those jewels in England, except under his eyes, than he had of her handling them in Germany at all. The generosity of Baron von Helst was a myth. They were but a lure to catch the bird.

Even as he spoke she knew the lie, and realised in the strange occult way she had of reading the mind of others, just the motive at the back of it. But again her face remained as calm and tranquil as ever.

With scarcely a look she had seen him open the safe; the very sound of the tumblers dropping back told her just what the combination was. She turned her back upon him and moved away as he relocked it, but her ears were verifying her first impression.

"I will bid you good-night," she said from the doorway. "It has been a long and rather tiring day for me."

Before he could move towards her she had gone and passed along the corridor to her own suite, where, as though by previous orders, her little Chinese maid was waiting at the door. As she passed his door the Signor Malaquisti was putting his key in the lock. For just an instant her eyes lingered upon the tall, elderly figure, and the look somehow left McCarthy with the exceedingly unpleasant feeling that she had penetrated his disguise.

Once inside the door and in front of his mirror he studied his make-up, to reassure himself that it was perfection, even to the old-fashioned touch of his clothes.

"She couldn't have," he told himself. "There's not a single thing she could have got hold of. And yet—"

Despite his self-assurance he was left with an uneasy feeling that Osaki du Channe was laughing at him.

Once in her own suite and the door locked upon her she went first to a small escritoire, and, taking a piece of paper, made a note of some numbers. Then she went to the telephone. But there was no answer from the number she dialed.

Throwing a dark cloak over her gleaming shoulders, she opened the french windows of her reception-room and stepped out on to the balcony. The street below was very still, an occasional taxi either deposited a visitor to the hotel or took away guests who had been supping and dancing there.

Fixing those strangely penetrating eyes of hers upon one of the doorways of a row of stately houses opposite, she waited. A shadow had moved there and she had caught it. Some five minutes she allowed to pass, then a curious little whistle, which had been for years a danger signal between herself and the Wallflower, stole softly out upon the night air. Instantly the shadow in the doorway moved again, this time sufficiently far to reveal that it belonged to a human, and that person Mr. Marcus Gilliver.

Turning back into the room she took the key from her door, then went again to the escritoire, added a few words to what she had already written, wrapped her key in the paper, and returning to the balcony, tossed it towards the other side of the street, to be caught deftly by the Wallflower. At once she hurried back into her suite and closed the window.

He strolled along for some little distance, and in the light of a street lamp read her note.

"The numbers," he read, "are a combination of the safe of Von Helst's reception-room, Suite A. He tried to trick me, but these are correct. Examine carefully two brand-new, cheap-looking suitcases in the safe. Blue jewel-case there, my property; return to Suite B."

"OSAKI."
"P.S. He talks of returning to Germany the day after to-morrow. Make it to-morrow night. Have just discovered McCarthy is here in a disguise, occupying the room exactly between my suite and Von Helst's. He is watching one of us, perhaps both."

Twice Mr. Gilliver perused this letter through, then, placing it in his pocket, walked quickly away in the direction of Bruton Street.

"Right!" he said to himself. "To-morrow night it will be."

He turned the key Osaki had thrown him over in his hand.

"The key of her suite, of course," he murmured. "She means me to make a getaway in that direction."

MCCARTHY MAKES AN ERROR.

It was just after half-past one when the telephone on the stand at McCarthy's bedside rang out. Turning drowsily in the dark, he lifted the receiver and asked who rang. A C.I.D. sergeant answered him.

"We've picked up Gruen's lodgings, inspector," he reported. "I've been through to the Yard, and they told me to report to you here."

"Good work!" McCarthy ejaculated. "It's a lodging-house in Goodge Street," the

sergeant went on. "A place where a lot of Germans stay, mostly chefs and pastry-cooks. It's kept by a Mrs. Scholler, and she's got a funny story to tell about a man who called just a little while after Gruen was found dead in the brasserie. He used the name of Brunn there. This man said he was his brother and he'd come to collect his belongings and pay what dues there were, as his brother had had to go back to Germany suddenly."

"Could she identify?" McCarthy asked eagerly.

"She says so, sir. He was pretty muffled up and his hat well down over his eyes; but this is a very old place, sir, and going upstairs he knocked his hat off against a beam and she got a good look at him."

"The saints be thanked for that," McCarthy said fervidly.

"He seems to have stuck in her mind, principally because he gave her a ten-shilling note for looking after his brother."

"What did he take away?" McCarthy questioned.

"Two heavy suitcases that she said Brunn bought the first day he went there. Will you come along, sir?"

"I'll be with you as quickly as I can get there. Goodge Street, you say?"

"Yes, sir. 648 the number is, but I'll have a man on the look-out for you."

"If I can pick up a taxi, I will," McCarthy said, "but, anyway, you'll know I'm on my way."

Jumping out of bed he proceeded to dress. It was useless to put on his Malaquisti make-up; the house was perfectly still; he could get in and out without being seen by any of the few servants who might be about at that hour.

As he dressed his eye wandered to the telephone, and something he saw made him curse quietly. It was, he saw, wired for two extensions. There was a three-figured dial by the side of it attached to which were three pointers—one marked to Suite A, the other to Suite B, and the third to the room itself. He should have switched the two suites off and turned the pointer to the room number. He had entirely forgotten that the rooms upon his side of the corridor were part and parcel of either or both suites.

Cursing himself for not having noticed the attachment before, he wondered if the message had gone through equally over the three wires. That the 'phone attachments would be bedside, he was positive, in which case the bells might have roused either Osaki du Channe or Von Helst.

If either had been awakened and lifted the receiver they would have got exactly the same message as had he. In the case of Osaki du Channe it did not matter particularly, except inasmuch as that it informed her definitely that he was in the hotel, if she were not already aware of that fact.

But with Von Helst it was a totally different matter. That there was a connection between him and the murdered man was certain, and if by this unfortunate mischance he had heard the message he would be forewarned that further information of Gruen had been picked up. However, it was too late to do anything, and, anyhow, just what the German could do was not very apparent.

He would have been completely undecieved had he been able to see into the Baron von Helst's bed-room, where that gentlemen, a murderous scowl upon his face, was dressing rapidly. He had taken the message, every word of it, and knew that something would have to be done and done quickly if the death of Gruen were not, despite his precautions, to be laid at his door by this cursed detective. He had to be stopped before he could get to that den in Goodge Street, and in some way or other the woman would have to be silenced before she gave forth her description of him. Only too well he remembered the incident of that hat, and the fact was true enough that the woman had taken a long, hard stare at him.

Dressed, he went to a trunk, unlocked it, and took from it a small Luger pistol to the barrel of which was attached a silencer. Then, donning the same coat and hat that he had worn upon the night of Gruen's death, he opened one of the french windows and stole out on to the fire-escape. A moment or two

later he was but a lurking shadow upon the other side of the street.

Nor was the baron the only recipient of the sergeant's message. Osaki du Channe had heard the 'phone-bell at her bedside, and realising the possibility that it might be the Wallflower ringing, picked up the receiver instantly. Intently she listened to every word, though it carried no especial meaning for her. Apart from what she had read in the newspapers of the mysterious death of a German in a Soho brasserie the message was of no interest to her beyond that it made her ponder deeply the reason for McCarthy's stay in the hotel.

She had understood that he was the officer in charge of the Warnecke case. What, then, was he doing there? Apparently watching Von Helst, since there could be no reason on earth for his shadowing her.

By now thoroughly aroused, she got up, drew on a dressing-gown and mules, and went to the window. As she drew the curtain she saw a dark shape rapidly descend the fire-escape from one of the windows of Suite A, a shape that she had no difficulty in recognising as Von Helst. What was he up to, stealing out of the hotel like that?

It did not occur to her that Von Helst, too, had taken McCarthy's message. All she saw in his act was the prosecution of some mysterious business which he wished to keep strictly to himself. Moving softly to the front door of the suite she opened it slightly and glanced along the passage just in time to see McCarthy steal out into the corridor, and after a quick glance in the direction of both her door and Von Helst's, slip down the staircase. She saw that he wore no disguise.

Closing the door she stood for a moment thinking, then went to her own telephone, cut off all house-connections, and dialed the number of the Bruton Street flat. A moment later the Wallflower's voice answered her.

"Osaki speaking," she said quickly. "Marcus, work to-night. The suite is empty, and to-morrow I'm certain we'll be too late. McCarthy's room is empty as well; he was called out upon an urgent message connected with the death of that German in the Soho brasserie. They've found the man's lodgings."

The Wallflower laughed. "I could have told McCarthy that," he said, "and probably would have if he hadn't been so dashed clever in prophesying a long stretch for me. I can tell him who the man was that was with him just before he died."

"Who was it?" she asked. "Your friend, Baron von Helst," he said. "I followed him to that lodging-house in Goodge Street, heard him say that he was Brunn's brother, and saw him come out again with two heavy suitcases that he took straight to the Splendide. The two, I'll bet any money, that you saw. Well, I'll know what's in them before the morning."

"You're certain of this, Marcus?" she asked quickly.

"Positive." "Then, in that case," she said quickly, "McCarthy is in danger. Von Helst must have taken McCarthy's message in the same way that I did. He slipped out by the fire-escape a few minutes before McCarthy left. You don't want telling what that means?"

"I do not," the Wallflower said. "It means that's he's going to lay for McCarthy." There was a moment's pause. "Osaki," he said peremptorily, "ring off now; you know I'm on the job. 'Phone Scotland Yard and tell the night court officer that McCarthy's in danger. Mention no names, but say he's just left the Splendide on the way to Goodge Street, and that you know a certain person is lying in wait for him on the road. It's a thousand to one he'll make straight for Regent Street and cut across Oxford Street from there. Give them the route, answer no question, and the moment they start to ask any ring off. Tell 'em to send a squad car over that ground. Now ring off. When I've got the stuff I'll cut through your suite."

McCarthy came to find himself stretched out upon a table in the dirtiest kitchen he'd ever seen in his life. Bending over him was the same divisional surgeon who had been with him in the brasserie, and on each side of him two anxious-looking C.I.D. sergeants were standing.

They looked as though they were prepared to pounce on him and hold him down at the first sign from the medico. His right shoulder felt as though it was being gnawed by an army of hungry rats.

"Ah, there you are!" the divisional surgeon growled as the inspector's eyes opened and turned upon him. "You would come to just at the most painful moment of the job. Take a grip of him, boys, and hang on to him. I've got to get this bullet out. It seems to me, McCarthy," he went on as a moment of the most exquisite agony shot through that officer's physical system, "that you're in a conspiracy with the devil to prevent me from getting any sleep at all. Steady, now," he warned as McCarthy went rigid under a soul-searing pain. "Got it!" he exclaimed triumphantly, and drew out a thin, steel-jacketed inch-and-a-half slug which he exhibited upon his probe. "Would you mind telling me where you picked up this little trifle?"

"All I can tell you, doc," McCarthy said with a grimace, "is that someone of my 'clients' presented it to me from a doorway in Hanover Square. All I knew was a blaze right in my face, and a thud in my body like the kick of a mule. The next thing I remember," he said whimsically, "is you. How did I get here?"

"Squad car picked you up in a doorway. The Yard had the office by 'phone that you were on the spot and cruised along from the Splendide till they found you. Did you see anything of your attacker?"

"All I saw was the pavement when I kissed it, and not too much of that," McCarthy said. "Whoever did it made a clean job of it."

"One twentieth of an inch nearer and they'd have made a cleaner," the doctor said, laying a finger upon a red, raw streak upon the side of his head. "If that had got you, Mac, your postal address by now would be The Better Land. Pass that basin of water over, boys."

"No one's answered my question as to where I am?" McCarthy said.

"You're where you started out for, Goodge Street," the doctor told him.

McCarthy sat up promptly. "Get this job over, doc," he said. "I want a word with this woman—Mrs. Scholler, isn't it?"

The sergeant who had 'phoned him stepped forward.

"She's in the front room, sir," the sergeant said, "and ready enough to talk."

"You keep still until I get this wound bandaged," the surgeon growled. "And I'll tell you this. If you do any more to-night you'll be in a high fever before you know it."

"I'll be in a high fever if I don't, so what's the odds," McCarthy retorted.

The sound of a knock upon the front door came through to them.

"Who'll that be?" McCarthy said.

"One of the boarders, I expect, sir. They come in all hours, according to the woman. There's another thing I got out of her," the sergeant went on, "and that is that this morning another fellow turned up for this Gruen. He said he was a cousin of his, and his name was Brunn. He was anxious because he hadn't heard anything from him for a couple of days, and when he heard that he hadn't been home he left an address for him to communicate as soon as he did."

"Splendid!" McCarthy ejaculated.

"He's a baker at the Hotel Marano, in Oxford Street. Knowing that, as a baker, he'd be working at this time, I sent the squad car for him."

"That's the stuff!" McCarthy said heartily. "You'll be a 'scooper' some day, my lad—that's if you survive being an inspector."

A dull "plup" sounded somewhere from the front of the building, followed by a bump.

"Sounds as if the lodger's got a load on," the sergeant commented.

"How's the arm feel now, Mac?" the doctor asked.

"Stiff as blazes, but I'll manage along with it all right. If only you'd get through with it," he added protestingly.

"You hold your horses a minute," the surgeon said. "If you want to see yourself with gangrene set in, I don't."

Resigning himself to the inevitable, McCarthy sat as stiffly as possible under the doctor's ministrations.

"This Mrs. Scholler was positive about being

able to identify both callers?" he asked the sergeant.

"Positive, sir, and she said she'd pick the man who took away the suitcases out of a thousand."

"Couldn't be better," McCarthy said. A sudden thought occurred to him. "Has the Yard any idea who phoned them?" he asked.

"According to the squad chaps, no, sir. It was a woman, but when they asked her name she rang off."

"A woman!" McCarthy echoed in surprise. What woman could possibly have known of his intention to go to Goodge Street but one? Osaki du Channe—she must have heard the message to him over the phone extension. And who else, on the other hand, could have known anything of it but Von Helst? Had the German attacked him in the hope of preventing further inquiries into Gruen's death; an utterly futile move, for, with him out of the way, the Yard would have redoubled every effort. Had that extraordinary woman, Osaki du Channe, seen something that had aroused her suspicions? It would almost seem so.

"But all this," he told himself ruefully, "was the merest surmise—suspect as much as he might, he had, so far, not one tittle of evidence against the man."

"Who is up in Gruen's room now?" he asked.

"The finger-print men and a searcher."

"Have they got any 'dabs'?" he asked quickly.

"Several," he was told. "They're testing them out with those plates from the two glasses."

"We'll go up there first," McCarthy said. "After that I'll hear what Mrs. Scholler says. Anybody with her, by the way?"

"No, sir. There was no need. She's only too anxious to tell all she knows, especially as she's got it into her head there'll be a bit of a reward for her."

Upstairs the finger-print men had settled beyond any doubt that both men who had left their prints upon the brasserie glasses had been in that room. In its condition of dirt, dust, and grease its furniture was an absolutely perfect medium for the registering of finger-prints.

"That's something done, at any rate," McCarthy said encouragingly. "Now I'll get down and have this woman's description of the man who took the cases away."

But he had scarcely reached the door when he was stopped by the triumphant cry of the police searcher. From a ledge of bricks up the back of the chimney he took gingerly a wicked-looking knife, the blade of which was still heavily stained with blood.

"Steady with it! Steady with it!" McCarthy cried exultantly. "Lay it on this piece of paper, boys, and let the 'print' men have a go at the haft. Things are beginning to break at last. The moment they've done with it, have it wrapped up carefully, and one of you take it to the laboratory right away. I want a blood-test taken off that blade, and I want it ready for me by eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

He shook a warning finger at the sergeant. "Never mind whether they're in bed or where they are. Call 'em out. This job is urgent and imperative. Tell 'em the assistant-commissioner himself said so—tell 'em anything you like, only see it's done."

"You leave it to me, sir," the sergeant responded. "It'll be done if I have to lug the analyst out of bed with my own hands."

"Now for Mrs. Scholler," McCarthy said, and led the way downstairs again.

But the fates had decreed that that lady was to give no testimony against any man. They found the front door open a foot or two, and, slumped down in the passage, her head lolling upon her scrawny chest, was the woman they had come to interview.

When, with a groan of dismay, McCarthy lifted the body, there was a bullet-hole squarely between her still wide-open eyes. Mrs. Scholler's tongue had been silenced for ever.

A hurried search of the vicinity revealed no one who could be for an instant suspected of the crime.

"And I'll lay any money you like, McCarthy," the divisional surgeon said when they got back, "that the gun you were shot with and the one that murdered this woman is one and the same weapon—the bullet-holes in each case are exactly the same."

"Get it out as soon as you can, doc, and we'll

compare them," McCarthy said with a doleful sigh.

They proved to be identical.

THE NOOSE IS DRAWN TIGHT.

IT was a little after eight o'clock when McCarthy re-entered the Hotel Splendide and made straight for his room. With him were two finger-print men from the Yard.

It had been a hard-working night from the moment they had left the murdered Mrs. Scholler's house, but in the intervening hours McCarthy had laid his plans. But one thing had gone really awry—the man Brunn had, so far, not been found. He had been taken ill at his work, gone home, and, except that he lived somewhere in Camberwell, his exact address was not known. The police of that district were scouring it to find him.

All the branches that he needed at the Yard had co-operated with him nobly, with a result that had left him staggered. Even now, an hour later, he had not yet got over the shock of the result of the blood-test on the knife-blade.



McCarthy found Von Helst, bound and gagged, lying on the floor beneath the safe in the wall. And the door of the safe was open, showing that it had been cleaned out.

McCarthy's first act was to set the dial of his telephone extension so that, when wanted, it could be rung through into the baron's room. Upon a table in the corridor-end, near the baron's door, there stood another instrument, the receiver of which he lifted and polished carefully.

"Now you chaps know exactly what to do," he said, "and, when the time comes, get to it as speedily as you can. Everything, perhaps, is going to depend on you, so don't let me down."

Going to the outer door of Von Helst's suite, he knocked, but received no reply. A second and a third time he repeated the act, but still there was no response.

Taking a pick-lock from his pocket, McCarthy inserted it in the keyhole, and, with a couple of cunning twists, unlocked the door and entered the reception-room, to stand amazed at what he saw. Bound hand and foot and gagged upon the floor was Baron von Helst, nearly black in the face from rage and suffocation combined. The safe in the wall was wide open—and empty!

Quickly he untied Von Helst, who reeled when he tried to move. McCarthy saw an ugly lump upon the side of his head, where evidently he had been sandbagged. But the thing that struck him most was that Von Helst was fully dressed in street clothes, and that

beside him upon the floor lay a long overcoat and a slouch hat. At what time, he asked himself quickly, had the baron changed from his evening clothes to the ones he was now wearing? He had obviously gone out—where? And what time had he returned?

"Robbed!" the baron mouthed strickenly. "Robbed! Ruined!"

"At what time did this happen?" McCarthy asked quickly, and then he saw another thing—that it was not until he actually spoke that Von Helst realised who it was who had released him.

He stared at McCarthy as he might have one risen from the dead.

"You!" he gasped. "You!" then sank almost helplessly into a chair.

"Me," McCarthy answered calmly. "And why not me, baron?"

"What have you come here for?" the other almost stammered.

"Just a matter of business, baron," McCarthy said. "A continuation of that conversation we had yesterday. It looks," he added, "as though I came none too soon."

From the floor he picked up a pad and sniffed at it. The fumes of chloroform still clung to it. "What happened?" he asked tersely.

"I—I had been out," Von Helst commenced falteringly, "and had just stepped inside the door upon my return when I was struck down by some weapon and rendered unconscious. I must have been bound and gagged, as you saw, and chloroformed as well, for when I came round I was alone here, the safe open, and I could see it was stripped of everything."

"What time did this happen?" McCarthy asked again.

"I am not quite sure. It would be somewhere between two and three," the baron equivocated.

"Late hour for changing and going out," McCarthy observed.

"I had important business and my friends keep late hours," Von Helst lied.

"You saw nothing of your attacker?"

Von Helst shook his head.

"Nothing whatever. When I entered the room was in darkness."

"Can you give me a list of the stuff that was in your safe?"

"Not—not altogether," the baron answered. "The jewels that you saw yesterday were in it, and—other things of great value."

McCarthy shook his head.

"I'm afraid that's rather too vague a description for us to do any good, baron," he said.

"Were the contents money, negotiable shares, bonds, or anything of that kind?"

"There was money there," Von Helst said miserably. "A lot of money."

"Traceable?"

"I fear not."

"Rather a hopeless business, baron."

At that moment the telephone-bell in his room rang out loudly. Von Helst got shakily to his feet.

"If you will please excuse me," he said.

"It may be an urgent call."

"Certainly," McCarthy said, and with a grim, set mouth watched the other depart into his bed-room. The moment the door closed upon him he stooped and quickly thrust his hands into the pockets of the heavy overcoat.

From it he drew a small Luger pistol, the bore of which corresponded with the two bullets at that moment in his possession. There was a hard look in his eyes as he dropped it into his pocket, then surveyed the coat and hat. Garments of the kind were, of course, duplicated thousands of times over, but both were identical with those described by the waiter at the brasserie.

A moment later Von Helst returned from the bed-room.

"Something is wrong with my 'phone," he exploded in very much his old blustering style.

(Continued on page 448.)

OUR POOLS EXPERT DISCUSSES WINNING SYSTEMS

THIS WEEK:

Past Performances and a "SEVEN RESULTS" POOL

HAVE you ever noticed how largely matches are influenced by the results of the corresponding fixture in recent years? Many clubs have their "bogy" teams, against whom they always seem to fail—and, curiously enough, they can change every one of their players during the passing years without getting rid of the "hoodoo."

Or is it so curious? Perhaps it is only natural that past history should have its effect on the minds of even the very newest players. "This team always loses to Blanktown Rovers," they tell themselves before the match, thus robbing themselves of much essential confidence. They trot on to the field in a spirit of defeatism—and that's worth a goal to their opponents!

And those opponents have, in turn, quite the contrary outlook. "I like playing on that ground!" they will say to each other if they are away to the team on which they have a "hoodoo." "We always do well there." Filled with confidence, and looking forward more keenly to this game than to most, they are very soon a goal or two up.

That, at least, is how things seem to work out. There are quite a number of engagements in which current form appears to play no part at all; the result is dictated by history. A case that comes readily to my mind is that of Burnley and Plymouth Argyle.

HOW TO PROFIT BY A HOODOO.

IN the 1930-31 season, Burnley were relegated to the Second Division and Plymouth were promoted to it. When the Devon lads paid their first visit to Burnley they did uncommonly well by drawing there. So encouraged, it seems, were Plymouth by that performance that they have never yet allowed Burnley to beat them! Only the other day they paid another visit to the Lancashire club and returned home with both points.

And now you will be wondering whether I have up my sleeve any system based on happenings of this sort. Well, there is one method which I devised some while back and which has given satisfactory results. It is a system which must be worked in two distinct ways. The first way is that by which possible home "certs" are spotted, and the second way is the one to be adopted when you are on the look-out for visiting sides which stand a good chance of drawing or winning.

In the first instance, go through the fixture list and mark all the teams which have won their last three home engagements with their opponents of next Saturday, or which have won two of those games and drawn the other—that is, unless the draw took place last season. In the latter event, the team should be left out of consideration. You will probably find that you have marked a dozen or so clubs. Choose your home selections from these.

HOW THE IDEA WORKS.

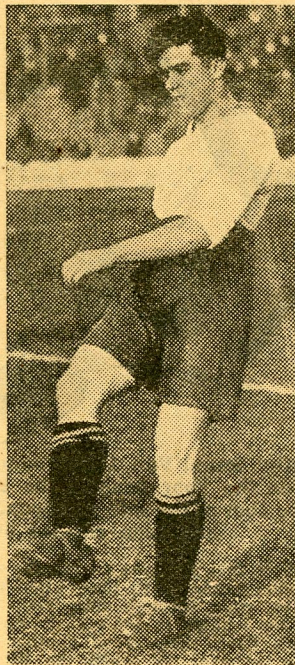
TWICE this season I have worked on these lines. On September 21st the system produced eight wins, one draw, and one loss. I tried it again a week later, and although on this occasion it did not serve me quite so well—giving only six winners in eleven matches—I must remind you that September 28th was a disastrous day for home sides.

Should this system appeal to you, I will save you a little research work by telling you that

it gives the following home winners for Saturday next, November 2nd.

- Huddersfield.
- Sheffield Wednesday.
- Burnley.
- Stockport County.
- Gillingham.
- Reading.
- Celtic.
- Hamilton Academicals.
- Hearts.

Now for the method that you may find even more useful; the one by which past happenings are used to spot draws and away winners. Here we seek out the teams which have gained at least three points out of the six that were possible on their last three visits to their Saturday rivals. If any were beaten in the corresponding game only a season ago, not quite so much confidence must be placed in them; as, however, our "draw and away" list will be a shorter one than our "home side" list, we must take a chance on such teams.



DIXIE DEAN, the famous Everton star turn, whose shooting points can make or mar your coupon.

On those last two occasions when I put the system into practice, this is what happened: Of the teams playing away from home on September 21st, nine had gained three points or more from the last three corresponding matches. Out of these, two were away winners on this particular day, and one drew. That does not sound too satisfactory, but then it was a day when the average dividend was over two thousand shillings in the case of both "Four aways" and "Three draws." Since few of the newspaper experts forecast a single

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away winner or draw the system surely proved its merit by giving three of these results.

A week later, on September 28th, it came out well, giving two away winners and three draws in eight matches. For the coming week's games, it shows that the following away sides may be expected to avoid defeat:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Sunderland. | Carlisle. |
| Leeds United. | Wrexham |
| Walsall. | Coventry. |
| Darlington. | Aldershot. |
| Halifax. | Bristol City. |
| Rotherham. | Watford. |

This number—twelve—is an abnormally large one for the system to produce, but in this instance it cannot be reduced, since none of those sides lost the corresponding game last year.

I am afraid it is impossible to offer any means by which the likely away winners can be segregated from the likely drawing sides; on this point your own judgment must be sufficient guide. You must agree, however, that it's very useful to have some indication of the visiting teams that may achieve either of those results.

A "SEVEN RESULTS" POOL.

BEFORE coming to an end this week, I want to satisfy a number of requests as to how a "Seven Results" pool may best be tackled systematically. I advise that three home teams be selected as "bankers," and that four other likely home winners be covered for either of two results. This can be done in sixteen attempts.

As an example, I will take it that three "good things" for next Saturday are Fulham to beat Sheffield United, Newcastle to beat West Ham, and Lincoln to beat Mansfield. Matches in which the home sides should at least avoid defeat are, for example purposes: Middlesbrough v. Liverpool; Plymouth v. Doncaster; Chesterfield v. Darlington; Cardiff v. Aldershot. The sixteen entries should go as shown in the accompanying diagram.

I want you to understand that in giving you these diagrams and lists of probable home and away winners, I am not suggesting for a moment that you must use my actual teams. I have named them to show you how my systems work. We all have our own ideas as to what teams will win certain matches, and therefore your entries on your coupons will reflect your ideas, and not mine, in this respect. Here's wishing you all the best of luck.

Middlesbro' v. Liverpool	1	x	1	x	1	x	1	x	1	x	1	x	1	x	1	x
Fulham v. Sheffield U.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Newcastle v. West Ham	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Plymouth v. Doncaster	1	1	x	x	1	1	x	x	1	1	x	x	1	1	x	x
Chesterfield v. Darl'ton	1	1	1	1	x	x	x	x	1	1	1	1	x	x	x	x
Lincoln v. Mansfield	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cardiff v. Aldershot	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

to the POOLS THIS WEEK'S BULLETIN

SUGGESTIONS FOR FILLING IN THIS WEEK'S COUPONS

predict this match—which is sure to be on the short lists, would be well advised to go for a draw.

Talking of draws, there are several others which may be picked out. Some of Stoke's best displays this season have been on the grounds of opponents, and as Everton are far from settled the Potteries club should manage a point at Goodison Park. My list of half a dozen draws works out like this:

- Everton v. Stoke.
- Barnsley v. Blackpool.
- Hull City v. Notts Forest.
- Clapton Orient v. Queen's Park Rangers.
- Southport v. Carlisle.
- Arbroath v. Partick Thistle.

There are other games worth bearing in mind as likely to produce most even struggles, and which may be marked here and there as likely draws: Northampton v. Bristol City, Bournemouth v. Coventry, and in the Scottish Second Division Edinburgh v. King's Park.

AWAY WINNERS IN THE NORTH.

Now we have to look around for the away winners, and here, excepting for Arsenal, I am inclined to leave the First and Second Divisions alone, although Southampton at their best would be good enough to beat the somewhat anxious Burnley team. But the

Saints, much improved though they are, have not greatly impressed me of late as an away side. The Northern Third seems to suggest a goodly proportion of away winners, and it will be noticed that this section figures pretty largely in my half-dozen away from home selections. They are:

- Arsenal.
- Walsall.
- Tranmere.
- Wrexham.
- Motherwell.
- St. Mirren.

Regarding our weekly prediction of one in each League, this has proved fairly successful in a general way, but the odd draw here or there has let us down occasionally. So I propose to cut out the draws this week from this type of selection, and make up the list with four home winners and two away winners. Here it is:

- Middlesbrough to beat Liverpool.
- Tottenham Hotspur to beat Swansea Town.
- Luton Town to beat Newport.
- Walsall to win at Accrington.
- Hamilton to beat Clyde.
- St. Mirren to win at Brechin.

I shall always be glad to hear from readers how they are faring, and to hear where, as the result of their experience this season, they have found the snags arising most frequently.

ON the English First Division programme for November 2nd there are some particularly interesting matches. The Brentford v. Arsenal game, for instance, is one to which the followers of Brentford have looked forward most eagerly for many weeks. The whole of the reserved accommodation for spectators was applied for during the first week of the season.

There is sure to be a full house for this match, with the superfluous spectators probably climbing over the rails and sitting close to the touch-line. I think Arsenal are the more likely to win under these awkward conditions because their players are more accustomed to playing before huge and excited crowds. Brentford will be specially anxious to do well, and in the anxiety may lie their downfall.

On the whole, the First Division teams playing at home would seem likely to return results in their favour. From the full programme ten home winners should not be particularly easy to find, and I have picked out these as the most likely:

- Huddersfield Town.
- Charlton Athletic.
- Plymouth Argyle.
- Bristol Rovers.
- Reading.
- Chester.
- Lincoln.
- Stockport.
- Celtic.
- Glasgow Rangers.

Most of the above are teams which have usually done well at home this season.

While the League table placings do not necessarily indicate the current strength or weakness of the teams concerned (we have still to be on the look-out for "seasonal" improvement or decline), it can be taken for granted that the charts now reveal, roughly, the relative merits of the teams. Taking this basis, I have chosen ten other teams which seem to have a good chance of pleasing their own supporters by winning. Here is the list:

- Derby County.
- Sheffield Wed.
- Wolverhampton W.
- Newcastle United.
- Bradford City.
- Luton Town.
- Notts County.
- Southend United.
- Chesterfield.
- Dunfermline.

Perhaps it will surprise some people to note that I have given Derby County to beat Manchester City. I am one of those, however, who believe that Manchester City, capable as they are of playing really good football, do not give of their best against strenuous opponents.

SEVERAL PROBLEM MATCHES.

THERE are several games—an exceptional number indeed—on the programme which give me pause, and some of these, at any rate, are best left alone. It is rather surprising to note that not once on their last four visits to Portsmouth have Sunderland been beaten. Twice the Roker Park men have won there, and twice they have taken part in goal-less draws. It doesn't seem as if the long journey upsets the Sunderland players, but there is a reason for this. They are brought the biggest part of the journey two days before the match, finishing it on the day of the game. That is the Sunderland way of dodging the tired feeling. Those who think they ought to

THE FIXTURE LIST AND FORECASTS FOR NEXT SATURDAY'S MATCHES

With the Results of Corresponding Matches for the Past Two Seasons.

The teams which our Expert gives to win are in black type. Where both teams are in the same type a draw is predicted.

NOVEMBER 2

FOOTBALL LEAGUE

DIVISION I.	1933-4	1934-5
Aston Villa v. Grimsby	—	3-2
Bolton Wanderers v. Blackburn	—	—
Brentford v. Arsenal	—	—
Derby v. Manchester City	4-1	1-2
Everton v. Stoke	2-2	5-0
Huddersfield v. Chelsea	6-1	3-0
Middlesbrough v. Liverpool	4-1	2-0
Portsmouth v. Sunderland	0-0	2-4
Preston v. Birmingham	—	0-1
Sheffield W. v. W. Bromwich	3-1	2-1
Wolves v. Leeds	2-0	1-2

DIVISION II.	1933-4	1934-5
Barnsley v. Blackpool	—	2-2
Bradford City v. Bury	2-2	0-0
Burnley v. Southampton	2-1	3-0
Charlton v. Norwich	3-3	—
Fulham v. Sheffield United	—	7-2
Hull v. Notts Forest	2-2	5-0
Manchester United v. Leicester	—	—
Newcastle v. West Ham	—	3-0
Plymouth v. Doncaster	—	—
Port Vale v. Bradford	3-1	1-1
Spurs v. Swansea	—	—

DIVISION I.	1933-4	1934-5
Aberdeen v. Queen of South	5-0	1-0
Albion Rovers v. Kilmarnock	—	1-0
Arbroath v. Partick	—	—
Ayr v. Hibernians	4-1	1-1
Celtic v. Dundee	3-2	4-0
Dunfermline v. Airdrie	—	1-1
Hamilton v. Clyde	1-0	4-3
Hearts v. St. Johnstone	2-1	2-2
Rangers v. Queen's Park	4-0	0-1
Third Lanark v. Motherwell	2-2	—

DIVISION III (South).	1933-4	1934-5
Bournemouth v. Coventry	3-3	0-2
Bristol Rovers v. Brighton	2-0	0-0
Cardiff v. Aldershot	1-2	1-1
Clapton Orient v. Q.P.R.	2-2	3-1
Crystal Palace v. Millwall	—	1-1
Gillingham v. Swindon	3-3	2-0
Luton v. Newport	1-1	4-1
Northants v. Bristol City	2-3	2-2
Notts County v. Exeter	—	—
Reading v. Torquay	5-2	3-1
Southend v. Walford	1-1	0-2

DIVISION III (North).	1933-4	1934-5
Accrington v. Walsall	1-0	3-3
Barrow v. Oldham	—	—
Chester v. Hartlepoons	3-3	4-1
Chesterfield v. Darlington	0-1	2-2
Crewe v. Tranmere	3-1	1-2
Lincoln v. Mansfield	—	4-0
New Brighton v. Halifax	—	3-0 0-0
Rochdale v. Rotherham	0-2	1-3
Southport v. Carlisle	1-1	0 3
Stockport v. Gateshead	1-0	5-1
York v. Wrexham	2-4	0-0

SCOTTISH LEAGUE

DIVISION II.	1933-4	1934-5
Alloa v. St. Bernards	1-3	2-1
Brechin v. St. Mirren	—	—
Dundee United v. Forfar	0-3	5-3
E. Stirling v. Cowdenbeath	—	2-1
Edinburgh v. King's Park	1-0	1-4
Leith v. Montrose	5-0	5-4
Morton v. Falkirk	—	—
Raith Rovers v. Dumbarton	1-1	4-2
Stenhousemuir v. East Fife	3-1	3-0

"FINGERPRINTS OF FATE!"

(Continued from page 445.)

"I noticed one in the corridor near your door," McCarthy said suggestively.

"I will use it if you will excuse me for a moment or two," Vol Helst said, and without waiting for the permission he asked passed out of the room again.

While he waited the inspector walked over and took a look at the rifled safe. It was an expert's job, right enough. No need to search that for finger-prints. An army of experts could not have found one. Mr. Marcus Gilliver had not been studying the floor plans of the Hotel Splendide for nothing, he thought grimly, but for the moment he had far, far bigger fish to fry.

In a moment or two Von Helst came back, angrier than ever.

"Some foolery is going on," he snapped. "They tell me from below there was no call."

"There certainly was," McCarthy said. "I heard the bell go."

"You say you have come here to continue our conversation of yesterday? What is it you want to see me about now? Not this man Gruen again?"

"I fear so," McCarthy said quietly. "At the risk of exhausting your patience, baron, I must point out to you that you were scarcely

quite truthful when you said that you did not know Hans Gruen. You not only knew him in Germany, but you met him again in England. I have reason for believing," he went on, "that a mysterious man who was drinking with him at the brasserie at the time that he died was yourself."

"Am I to be called a liar?" Vol Helst shouted.

"If you persist in the statement that Gruen was entirely unknown to you, I'm afraid that you are," the inspector said calmly.

"Am I to be insulted as well as robbed with impunity in this cursed country?" Vol Helst raved.

McCarthy took no notice of the question, but leaned forward and looked steadily into the German's angry eyes.

"Do you own a .32 calibre automatic pistol?" he asked bluntly. "A Luger?"

He caught the start of surprise Vol Helst was unable to suppress, and also the quick glance he flung at the coat and hat upon the floor.

"Why am I asked that question?" he asked in an unsteady tone.

"I am anxious to know, that is all," McCarthy said.

"Then the answer is in the negative," Von Helst said, "and, furthermore, I refuse to answer any more questions. I shall consult with my embassy as to this outrage."

"You will, of course, please yourself about that," McCarthy said, still keeping that calm equability which, he knew, was goading the other to fury.

A knock came upon the door. Without a word McCarthy got up and opened it. One of the finger-print men stood outside.

"They're the same prints, sir," he said quietly, "not a shadow of doubt about it. We'll have them photographed and developed in no time. You can stand on us that they're the same as the ones on that second glass."

Closing the door for a moment, McCarthy took the Luger from his pocket and also the two bullets.

"Check up on these," he said quietly, "and if Sergeant Wright has got back, send him up."

When McCarthy turned back into the room he saw that Von Helst had picked up the overcoat and was holding it in his hands. A semi-dazed look was in the man's eyes. There was a very different note in McCarthy's voice when he addressed him to what had been there before.

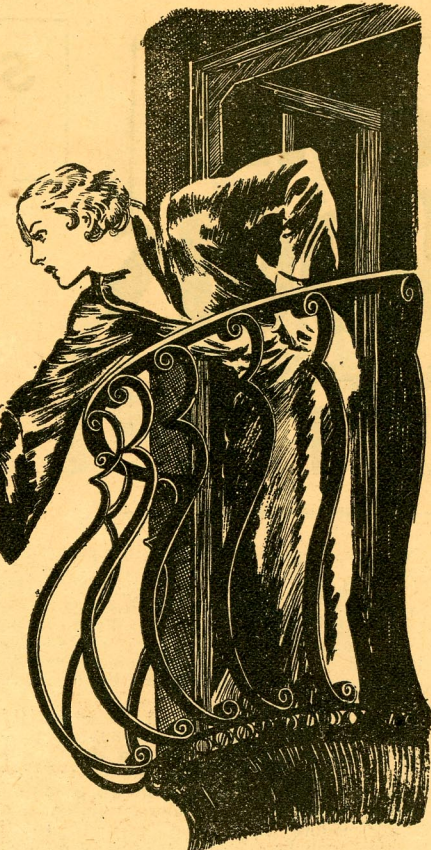
"Now, Baron von Helst," he said sharply, "we'll have done with the lying. Although reasonably sure of my ground, I wasn't absolutely certain until a moment ago that you were the man who was with Hans Gruen in the brasserie the night he was killed, but I can prove now without any question of doubt that you were. Whether he was dead or alive when you left him remains to be proved, but when you went you made straight for his lodgings, passed yourself off as his brother, and took away two suitcases from his room."

"It is a lie!" Von Helst shouted.

"You're very glib with that word," McCarthy said. "We'll see how much 'lie' there is in it later. There was one other thing, though, that you did not take from Gruen's room that it would have paid you well to have searched for."

"Who says that I was in Gruen's room at all?" Von Helst snarled.

"Finger-prints do," McCarthy shot at him. "And finger-prints don't lie, baron, as you'll



Osaki knew this was the very opportunity for her confederate. The key would admit the Wallflower to her suite, and on the paper was the combination that would open Von Helst's safe.

discover. It's by your finger-prints upon the glass you used in the brasserie that we know you were there; it's your finger-prints in Gruen's room that tells us you were there also, even though you killed the woman who would have made that much certain last night."

"How can you prove that they are your finger-prints?"

"Because a few moments ago I tricked you into using that outside telephone. Instantly finger-print experts from the Yard detached the receiver and proved beyond any doubt that all these prints are yours."

A greyness had come into Von Helst's face. "I killed no woman!" he blustered.

"It's my turn now to say you lie," McCarthy said sternly. "You killed her with a .32 calibre Luger pistol, the same weapon that you turned on me in Hanover Square. That pistol I took from your overcoat pocket a few minutes ago. It's being checked up now with the bullets taken from the unfortunate Mrs. Scholler and myself. They won't lie, baron, any more than will your finger-prints upon the gun. But the thing that you should have taken away was the knife with which Gruen murdered Lord Arthur Warnecke. The crime you brought him over to England to do."

A second knock came to the door, to admit the sergeant, accompanied by a big blonde man and the waiter who had served Gruen and the mystery man at the brasserie.

"Put on that hat and coat," McCarthy ordered.

"I refuse!" the man addressed snarled. "Put it on," McCarthy repeated. "If not, the sergeant and I will put it on you."

Slowly and eyeing the man who had tracked him down with a deadly malevolence Von Helst obeyed.

"Now the hat!" McCarthy ordered. "And pull the brim down and turn up that coat collar."

"Is that the man who was in the brasserie with Gruen?" he asked of the waiter.



The Wallflower deftly caught the key, wrapped in the note from Osaki, which she tossed down to him from her balcony.

"It is, sare," came the immediate answer. "Anywhere I would know him in those clothes."

"So much for that," McCarthy said, and turned to the big, fair-haired Teuton. "Are you Brunn?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the man answered. "You were related to Hans Gruen—his cousin, I believe? Did he by any possible chance ever confide in you who was at the bottom of his coming to England, and why he came? You know perhaps," he went on quickly, "that he's dead?"

"Dead!" Brunn exclaimed in horror-stricken tones.

"He was poisoned," McCarthy told him quietly, "two nights ago in a Soho cafe, we believe by this man. Your telling us anything you know can't hurt him now, but it might possibly help bring his murderer to justice."

"One long, bitter look Brunn threw at the baron, then in a flash hurled himself at him. It took McCarthy and the stalwart sergeant all they knew to drag him off."

"Yes," he said, "Hans told me when it was done. This man brought him to England to kill a certain lord. I cannot remember his name—"

"Warnecke?" McCarthy suggested.

"Ja! That is it. He was then to rob his safe, put a certain forged paper in it, and pay the money over to this Von Helst. He was to receive a large sum—just what I do not know. He wanted me to take charge of the money stolen—many, many thousands of pounds, he told me—but I would have nothing

to do with it. That is all I can tell you, gentlemen. It is just what Hans told me."

"And Hans told you truth," McCarthy said grimly. "Lend me your bracelets, sergeant."

Taking them, he moved towards the man who was staring at him like a man suddenly bereft of understanding.

"Hugo von Helst," he said, "I charge you with conniving at and complicity in the murder of Lord Arthur Warnecke through your paid agent, Hans Gruen, and also with the murder of Gruen later, and that of Mrs. Scholler in Goodge Street early this morning. As I think that will be more than enough to hang you on I'll leave the attempt upon myself out of it. Take him, sergeant."

But before that officer could advance more than a step Von Helst darted to a cabinet in the room and dragged a door of it open. In his hand there showed for a second a tiny phial, but before he could draw its cork McCarthy and the sergeant were upon him. Like a madman he fought, but his struggles were short-lived.

From the carpet McCarthy picked up the phial he had twisted from his hand, drew the cork and sniffed at it.

"Sergeant," he said in joyful realisation, "I believe that what we've got here is the poison which killed Gruen. If that is so, the whole chain of evidence is complete."

"There's one thing you haven't got," Assistant-Commissioner Bill Haynes said when later McCarthy related the occurrence to him, "and that's the money of which the unfortunate shareholders were robbed. From what

Millwall tells me it's going to be a disastrous thing for me—the life-savings of small investors, and all that sort of thing. A wretched business altogether. Who do you think worked that robbery, Mac?"

"Whoever it was never left the faintest clue," McCarthy answered evasively, "but all the same, Bill, I'll have a try at getting it back."

McCarthy pondered awhile in his office. He had to make up his mind to a course of action that had suddenly occurred to him, but which was definitely not in accordance with strict police etiquette.

That was one of the things for which the detective-inspector was noted throughout the underworld. He could, at times, forget his official status and look at things from a purely human standpoint.

But how much it cost him in mental struggles no one knew but himself.

Having made up his mind, however, he did not hesitate. He made his way direct to the hotel, marching in as if he owned the place.

The commissionaire eyed him askance as he headed for the lifts. The manager came from his office and intercepted him.

"All right," growled McCarthy. "This isn't official business. I want to speak to Ma'mselle du Channe."

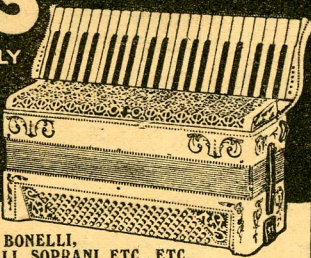
"But, pardon me—" the manager began.

"Forget it," snapped McCarthy. "I'm in a hurry."

Brusquely he thrust the excited manager aside and stepped past him into the lift. The (Continued overleaf.)

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gates clanged, and he was whisked up into space.

He went to Osaki's apartment, but as he approached the door he sensed something was wrong. For one thing, the door stood ajar, which was decidedly unusual, unless Osaki wanted to hear what went on, either in the corridor or Von Helst's former suite.

Those reasons were feeble, and McCarthy knew it. He frowned at the door for a moment, then, squaring his shoulders, laid his hand on the panel and thrust it open.

The rooms were empty. He marched in and surveyed the place—neat, clean, tidy—like Osaki herself, although it was due more to the hotel staff than to her.

McCarthy's brows came down over his brooding eyes as he passed from room to room, coming to a halt in the bed-room. His suspicions by that time were verified. Osaki had left the hotel. The manager would have told him that, but he hadn't given the man a chance to speak.

Osaki's luggage had gone. There was nothing of hers on the premises, and McCarthy knew why. She had accomplished her purpose here, and had gone.

The detective-inspector found himself gazing at the window-outside which was the iron-railed balcony. He opened the window and studied that balcony. The dust and grime of ages seemed deposited on the floor of it, but neatly imprinted in the centre was the shape of a tiny foot. And down in the street, on the other side of the road, was a dark doorway which would make a perfect hiding-place for a watcher.

McCarthy nodded with understanding. He could, in his mind's eye, almost see Osaki on the balcony tossing a message down to the Wallflower—and maybe the key of her apartment as well. And what would that message contain? Of course, there was no proof now—there never would be. But McCarthy was ready to eat his hat if it wasn't the combination of the safe in Von Helst's room.

But Osaki had gone! Where? McCarthy hardly needed telling. She had gone—her work done—to join the Wallflower at his Bruton Street flat.

And thither went McCarthy, a grim expression on his face.

THE LOOT.

IN the drawing-room of the Wallflower and Osaki du Channe's magnificent flat in Bruton Street, that adventurous pair sat and listened to the earnestly expounding McCarthy.

"It's not a darned bit of good you telling me you didn't clean out Von Helst's safe, Marcus," he was saying, "because I happen to know that you did."

"My dear McCarthy," the cracksman said with a pleasant laugh, "making statements and proving them are two very different things. You haven't the faintest jot of evidence against me, and you know it."

"You'll pardon me," McCarthy said, "but I have. That diamond pendant Mam'selle du Channe is wearing at this very minute was part of the jewels Von Helst gave her."

The lady referred to smiled amusedly.

"You, I think, were present, inspector, when Von Helst presented them to me publicly?"

"I was," McCarthy said. "They're yours, there's no doubt about that. But it doesn't get over the fact that they were also part of the loot that was taken from the safe. If that's in your possession, how does it come to be if you know nothing about the rest?"

"Who says that it was?" the Wallflower asked lightly.

"Von Helst."

"He's said a good many things that have proved to be quite incorrect, I fancy?"

"He was right about that, Marcus, and you know it," McCarthy said. "Good heavens, man," he went on, "if you'd robbed him neither I nor anyone else would say a word. He was a cold-blooded, wicked devil, and robbing was too good for him. Anyway, he stole it himself, through another man, of course. But it's not him; it's a lot of decent people who've invested their all in this concern. Millwall's dug out a whole list of shareholders. Little clergymen in the country, retired shopkeepers with nothing else but the dividends to live on, old maiden ladies who haven't a financial hope in the world if this shipping concern goes smash, which it will do if the money Warnecke robbed it of isn't got back."

The Wallflower yawned slightly.

"My dear McCarthy," he said, "you should have been a barrister."

"Or a clergyman," Osaki du Channe suggested in her soft, velvety voice.

Instantly McCarthy swung around upon her.

"You haven't done so badly out of it, mam'selle," he retorted. "The diamonds he gave you must have been worth every penny of fifteen thousand pounds."

"The diamonds," she corrected, "he had no more intention of my having than he had of

making me Baroness von Helst. The presenting them to me openly was nothing more than a blatant gesture."

"You've got them, at any rate," McCarthy said, "and his giving them to you publicly makes them your property beyond any question of right. I'm not asking how you've got them. He swears they were in the safe. I'm talking about the money, and I'm speaking for a lot of poor people who can't plead for themselves."

The Wallflower got up and paced the room once or twice.

"I've already told you I know nothing about it," he said at length.

"And I've told you that I know darned well you do," McCarthy said doggedly. "Come, Marcus," he went on, "you're not the man to bring want and poverty on a lot of people who never did you any harm."

"I'm a plain crook, inspector, and all the talk in the world won't make me anything else."

"No," McCarthy said stoutly, "you'll never be that. Even the police of the world, although they hate you like blazes, have got to admit that you're a cut above the rest—a sort of modern Claude Duval, who robbed the rich and gave to the poor."

"Bunk!" the Wallflower snapped. Again he turned up and down the room.

"You wouldn't like to have it on your conscience," McCarthy began again, "that—"

"I haven't one," Gilliver interrupted. "If I had I wouldn't be what I am."

"That a lot of people, some of them old and sick, probably, were—"

"Oh, take the darned things and clear out with them before I change my mind!" the Wallflower said.

McCarthy jumped to his feet.

"That's the talk, Marcus," he said delightedly. "Where are the suitcases?"

"You've been sitting on them for the last half-hour," the Wallflower informed him.

Pressing a hidden spring in the rich upholstery of the settee upon which McCarthy had been seated, the whole of the bottom lifted slowly, disclosing a cavity in which lay the two suitcases. McCarthy regarded them gravely.

"So there y'are," he said. "The cause of three deaths already, and another one to come as sure as night follows day. Let's see if you can't do a bit of good in the world for a change."

THE END.

RAFFLES

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*Tozinski, the self-styled wizard, used weird magical rites to dupe his confederates, but the plant that provided the poison for his victim provided also the flowers that encompassed his doom.*  
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THE MASTER-WIZARD.

FOR the third night running the girl awakened from light, uneasy sleep, certain that somebody—or something—was in her room. There was nothing modern about the ancient mansion, once a Polish stronghold. She could not get a light without striking a match, and she was afraid to move, incapable of motion. The chamber was vast, heavy drapes shrouded the tall windows, and the night was black.

The moon had sunk back of the great trees, and their leafy boughs shut out the stars. Since the first night she had not dared to open a casement; she had bolted the door and set the back of a chair beneath the handle, but still the mysterious visitant had entered.

There had been, as before, the faint rustle of long garments, even as graveclothes might have rustled if shrouds were black. There was now the weird consciousness of hidden hands being moved above her as if in some sinister ritual, making the signs of Satan's Black Mass.

The cold sweat of terror broke out all over her, from the roots of her hair to the soles of her feet. There was a fetid, narcotic sort of smell in the close air. She dared not open her eyes lest it bring on some fearful climax, or reveal to her, despite the blackness, some sight too hideous for reason to withstand.

She, Mary Blake, had never considered herself as nervous or superstitious. Perhaps there was something latent in her blood, linking with Polish ancestry, that made her sensitive to the things that had happened since she came to Zocrina with bright hopes darkened by the discovery of her uncle's curious death, by the gloom of the place, the antagonism that seemed to lurk behind the hospitality of her aunt, the service of the household.

There was something latent here, something obscure and occult, whose covert atmosphere made breath hard and heartbeats quick as the eyes searched dim corridors or murky corners, the ears seemed to listen to weird sounds. Something sinister, whispering of hidden danger, of death.

She had resisted it, as she resisted now, though her flesh seemed crawling on her bones while some clammy horror slid slowly down her spine, chilling her to the marrow.

Somebody walking over your grave. The old folk-saying had never seemed so true before.

And yet, while she suffered in an agony of dread, hoping her teeth would not chatter and betray her consciousness, she summoned up her spirit to do what she had made up her mind to do.

She had rights here. Until it was proved she had not, she was going to stick it out.

This was the land of were-wolves, where the folk-lore told of ghouls and vampires. She was alone in a strange land, among strangers, her only advantage the fact that she had learned Polish from her mother, whom her British father, engineering in the drainage of swamp lands, had married and taken to London.

Even though the sombre place sought to obsess her with horror that seemed to move and mow and mutter behind a not quite opaque veil—even though murder itself had skulked and slunk in the ancient castle—she meant to see it through.

Her body cowering, her mind dismayed, she called upon her soul to combat the portentous terror that beset her.

It—whatever it was—moved away with the faint whisper of rustling robes. Mary bit into the sheet to keep her jaws set against the adventure she was determined on. This had been no gracious spirit visiting her in the night to make sure she rested well!

Evil had hovered over her. There was evil in that fetid odour that could be likened to nothing else save that it was hellish.

There were curtains to the great four-poster bed. A valance of thick damask, hanging in motionless, funereal folds.

With all the grit she possessed, Mary slid silently from beneath the coverings and stood, screened by the drapery, every sense alert for the opening that must manifest itself somehow, or leave her assured that the visit was supernatural. That she would not grant; if she did she would go mad.

It came again, the faintest of sliding sounds, a mere whisper of some well-adjusted panel. A faint visibility made itself manifest, dim and uncertain, in the room. Presently she would hear again the click, as it had happened last night. But this time she meant to cheat that click, to risk disaster.

The great bed faced the door. To the right were the windows, to the left the vast, hooded fireplace, carved with heraldic symbols, with the arms of the almost defunct but once mighty family of the Poznanowskis, whose blood ran in her veins, and should not be congealed by happenings in the castle of her ancestors. For, British as she was by birth and by pride, she was the closest surviving heir to the estate.

She clutched the stick that she had brought to her bed-room, hidden behind the curtain.



The girl crouched amidst the trees watching the conspirators perform their rites of Black Magic by the light of the moon, knowing that they plotted against her own life.

Save where windows, door and fireplace broke the walls, they were all panelled.

There was a panel sliding back into place now, urged by a hidden, well-oiled spring. The space so swiftly diminishing was higher than a tall man. Through it, with a contraction of her heart, she saw a black figure passing down a narrow hall.

She slid her stick into the narrow space, and the panel made a slight click upon it. The black, gliding figure did not look back, used to the automatic closure of the panel.

Mary Blake set her young strength to the panel and slid it open. She wedged it with the end of the hazel stick she had cut for the purpose in the garden and shaped into a wedge at one end with her cuticle knife.

She trailed down the now empty passage to where she heard the murmur of voices. There seemed to be no door, only heavy curtains, through which she peered. This part of the house, or castle, was new to her. The actual dwelling quarters formed a square between four tall towers, small citadels in themselves, of old construction.

This was the south-western tower. There was no panelling on the curved walls, only tapestries over the stone. The narrow slots of windows were set with bars. The carven, heavy furniture was that of many generations gone.

A man and a woman sat at a table facing another woman, whose back was to Mary Blake—peering through the curtains. This was her midnight visitor, Eliza Matejko, the housekeeper.

She was tall and willowy, but she was voluptuous though no longer young. Mary believed her in love with the man who sat at the table beside Katerina Poznanowski, the impoverished and distant cousin of Ignace Poznanowski, an angular, withered spinster, sheltered by Ignace Poznanowski and, up to the arrival of the girl, believing herself the next in line to inherit his estate.

The man was Tadeusz Tozinski; he had been introduced to Mary Blake as steward, but she knew that title had greater significance

in Poland than England. He was major-domo of the house, and he had authority.

His face was mask-like, pale, lantern-jawed; his eyes often piercing, hypnotising, challenging, sometimes dull. He was bald, save for a natural tonsure of black, lank hair. There were wide spaces between his teeth. His manner was usually unpleasant and cold, but there was heat in the man. He might have been thirty-five or fifty-five, but he was the master of these two women.

Katerina Poznanowski simpered at him from time to time in a furtive fashion. Eliza Matejko regarded her with a certain complacent scorn.

The girl had an idea that her cousin—if that were the relation—was somewhat demented, perhaps feeble-minded in certain ways, though she could be imperious and dominating, and affect an aristocratic rage.

Mary's heart pounded, her throat was dry as she listened. A bony finger seemed to tap-tap-tap upon her shoulder as Death whispered to her through lipless, tongueless jaws.

It was then that she was immediately convinced, as if that grizzly spectre had told her, that her uncle had not died a natural death; that this was indeed a House of Murder, that she was listening to the discussion of her own grim ending.

Tozinski spoke.

"She was asleep when you made the charm. You are very sure of that, Eliza? It must be made when the senses cannot rally to resist, when the soul sleeps."

The man was an impudent charlatan, Mary told herself. But he was dangerous. He did not himself believe in this hocus-pocus of woven gestures, but he had made the women believe in it. He held them in a web of mysticism, looking to him as some sort of wizard.

"She was asleep," said the woman. "She wandered in the woods all day. She ate well. She was weary. She is but a gross Englisher."

"Not entirely, Eliza. There is Poznanowski blood in her veins. Too much of it. It is well she wanders in the woods and sleeps well. Some day she will wander too far, perhaps, or sleep too long."

"Taduss," said Katerina Poznanowski, "I do not like this thing. Yet you say that it is a test approved in holy writ. Not evil. And surely it is dangerous."

Mary Blake could almost have sworn that Tozinski winked at Eliza under cover of his hand. Then he took both the hands of Katerina in his own, gazed into her eyes.

"Would you have a foreign woman possess the treasure of Poznanowski? I tell you that this method is approved of by the old books. There is no danger. It is not us but the spirit we evoke that sits in judgment—and executes righteous sentence. Do you not believe in me?"

Katerina simpered again. Eliza Matejko turned aside her head to hide a smile. It was plain enough, this triangle.

"Sit down, Eliza; pour yourself a glass of wine."

It was patent that Tozinski was the present master of the place, whatever his legal status. As for Mary Blake, true heiress to the treasure— It was not cold in the passage, but the girl shivered, listening for the lightest syllable of the grizzly conclave.

She could have used a glass of that wine herself. Glass and decanter clicked, and so did her own teeth. She set her lip between them, as she had set the sheet.

None of these three were entirely sane. Their minds had mouldered in seclusion, fostering ambitions, suffering from inhibitions. Katerina was infatuated and girlish. Tozinski was making a fool of her for his own purposes. He was probably the lover of Eliza. He had meant to marry Katerina, to handle her inheritance.

If Mary Blake disappeared, Katerina would still be the heir. It took time to settle estates when they were distant from legal centres. Who could be sure that Mary Blake had ever arrived, or if she left again?

At Mary's birth, her mother, Ignace Poznanowski's only sister, had written her brother. Mary herself had written him when her mother died, and again when her father succumbed to pneumonia after injuries in a motor accident. She had also sent him pictures of the three of them.

He had answered briefly. His last letter had been the only one either lengthy or cordial:

"I am growing old, my dear, and my health fails me. I look at your picture and see again your dear mother as she was in her youth. You are now orphaned, and, you tell me, without much means.

"So I am writing you to ask you to come to me, at my castle in Zoecina. You will not have to bear with me long, and you will be my heir, as you are my next-of-kin.

"The glory of our house has departed. Poland is rapidly changing and the new generation would never understand the ancient order, the old ways. Therefore, I do not expect you to remain in Poland. Take back with you to your new land what there is left of the estate. Not so much that is now visible, but the treasure of Poznanowski will soon be revealed and it is yours.

"There will be a few bequests about which we shall speak together. . . ."

He had enclosed money for her expenses, to pay her passage, telling her to come as soon as was convenient.

He had suddenly turned from uncle to fairy godfather, waving a magic wand. For she had been hard put to it to get a job, to make a living.

She had expected to cable, but the company would not give any hope of delivery. At Danzig, and at Warsaw, she tried to telegraph, and found that Poland, while advancing, was still primitive in many things. Private telephones and telegraphic service for the public were unknown outside the large cities. There was no way of wiring or speaking through to Zoecina Province, to the estate of Poznanowski.

The railroad service for that sort of communication was reserved for official use. The railways themselves had not yet recovered from the destruction of tracks, bridges, depots and rolling stock in the wars.

It was a devious and tedious journey. So she had found him dead and buried, dead of heart failure, five days in his grave.

And she had not been expected. It had been a shock to Katerina Poznanowski, and to Tozinski. Katerina had even shown doubt of her identity until Mary Blake had provided proofs—her visa'd passport was one. She had, she thought, shown too many proofs. Her uncle's letters, especially the last one, announcing her as his heir, as next-of-kin, mentioning the treasure of Poznanowski.

Katerina's eyes had widened at that. Mary Blake was sure this was the first she had heard of it. But Tozinski had drawn her aside, whispering and conferring with her. He had come forward, suave, welcoming, explanatory.

"Your cousin," said Tozinski, "has not yet recovered from the shock of your uncle's death. Your arrival is a surprise. She did not even know that your mother was dead, nor that she had a daughter. They were never intimate. Your uncle was reserved about his personal affairs.

"But you are welcome. You will, of course, stay here until the estate is settled. Warsaw must be informed of your just claim, your proofs. . . ."

And now they were plotting in devilish confederacy.

The next words were like the tolling of a funeral knell.

"It will be to-morrow, at midnight," said Tozinski. "It must be when the moon is full. On the knoll beyond Murderers' Wood, beneath the old gallows, there shall we find what we seek, engendered from the rotted flesh of murderers dropped from the chains. There shall we find the dragon that is a man. The spawn of Satan that shall be bound to our service. I have the sword, the dog. I know the mystic words that shall chain the earth demon to our will."

This was not gibberish. Witchcraft it might be, but there was power to it. Tozinski knew what he was about, knew its efficacy. The marrow seemed to melt in the girl's bones at his unctuous assurance.

"You do this alone?" asked Katerina Poznanowski tremulously. "This unholy thing?"

"I have told you it is not unholy. Three are needed. You will both come with me."

"And then?"

Both women hung on his words, hypnotised by his mystic wisdom, his diabolic will. "It will take three days before the charms can work. The 'erdman' must be made welcome, bathed, dressed with ceremony. There are cantrips to be spoken, rites performed. Then will come the end—and the new beginning."

He leered at Katerina, whose eyes were wide, fixed on his.

"This is witchcraft," she whispered. "It is forbidden."

"Aye, but I am a master wizard. They will never try me for sorcery. Already Fate marks the way Ignace Poznanowski has gone to his fathers. He failed to prolong the ancient line. Now we consult the oracles to find out whether the treasure of Poznanowski shall pass to one of diluted blood—or to a son of Poland."

He had been willing to marry this infatuated old maid before they knew about the treasure—at least, before she knew about it, the girl thought. Now he was ready to restore her as the heir, with himself as her lord and master, her husband. She was old and past her prime, but he made her believe in miracles. This talk of men dragons, of erdmen spontaneously generated from the flesh of murderers hanged in

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chains, was mixed up in some way with the consummation of her suppressed desires.

Tozinski was promising the spinster love and marriage! She looked at him with a wild and pitiful yearning.

"Will this erdman truly do such things?"

"If you are believing and obedient." To Eliza, the housekeeper, he showed his tongue thrust mockingly in the side of his cheek. But the girl believed he was mocking her also. Give this majordomo, this charlatan, possession of a treasure, and he would find other ways to enjoy it than with either of these women.

"It can surely do these things. You shall read it to-night, in the old books. They believed these things in those days."

It was certain that blasphemy had no fears for Tozinski.

"To-morrow, then, when the wind blows from the west, when the moon is full and the owl hoots from the tree that bears no leaves—"

She gripped the curtains until her nails bent backward, steadied herself and fled back to bed, releasing the panel.

THE MYSTIC RITES.

At eleven o'clock Mary Blake was ready, dressed in a travel suit of tweed, wearing low shoes soled with rubber, a beret binding her cropped hair.

She stood by an open window, looking sideways through boughs that scraped their ends against the castle wall, looking towards the salon where Katerina Poznanowski, fancying herself the chatelaine, presuming more than she had dared when Ignace Poznanowski lived, was playing the piano.

She had been well trained. She played with precision and technique in great, crashing chords.

The moon, an hour later to-night, was still well above the trees. The playing ceased. She saw her aunt's gaunt figure between lamp and blind. It was joined by two more. They performed in a grim prelude to a shadow drama, three shapes blending into one as they drew together like conspirators. Tozinski's easily recognised figure held out a long, thin blade.

The lamp went out. There was a faint light still behind the blind. That vanished, with the figures.

The girl slid back the bolts of her door. It was fastened from the outside. By day they watched her. At night—especially this night—they made her a prisoner.

She was not so easily put off. Her natural fear was tempered by indignation. She went back to the window, trying to judge how the great boughs grew. One reached very close to her casement. If she got to that she thought she could descend. If she could return the same way was another matter, a bridge later to be crossed, even though it might be burned behind her.

She saw a lantern moving over the ground, going towards the wall and the gate in it at the back of the house. Tozinski wore a broad-brimmed hat and a cloak. The two women were cloaked and hooded. One of them carried something that looked like a long trumpet, a coach horn. The other led a lean hound. It seemed weak and looked half starved.

Tozinski had a closed basket. The sheath of his sword thrust up his cloak as he set a hand on the hilt.

Mary Blake watched them until trees and shrubbery hid them. She heard the sound of a gate opening, closing. She had not dared to keep the panel open since the night before. Above all things, they must not discover she was spying on them.

The starostwa, or district of Zocrina, was nominally part of the republic, but practically under the control of the old families whose former overlords still controlled provincial politics. Mary Blake, to all intents and purposes an alien, would have faint hopes of winning in any hearing she might be able to provoke.

Certainly not without more evidence than a talk she claimed to have overheard. They would claim she was demented—if it ever got to any sort of court. There was slim chance of that. It was up to herself to get free from the web of dismay and death that was already being spun to entangle her.

She was barely twenty years old, and she was utterly alone.

Athletic enough, she balanced, crouching, on the wide window-sill and made her desperate leap. She landed clinging to the bough that bucked like a horse beneath her. Bark scraped her hands, branches thrashed at her, twigs and leaves almost blinded her.

It seemed to her she made as much noise as if the bough had fallen, and she clung there, panting and listening for an alarm. But the peasant servants lived in a far wing. They had long since gone to bed. They had heard nothing. The old mansion stood dark within, the moon silencing its western turrets and facade where the trees did not cast fantastic shadows.

She climbed down through the boughs, half-slid, half-fell down the wide, high trunk. She would never get back that way without assistance, or a ladder.

There was a ponderous lock to the gate, and the key had been taken away. Through the ironwork she could see the lantern jiggling over the ground like a will-o'-the-wisp, the three figures barely distinguishable.

The stone wall was high and hard to climb. She managed it at last by wedging herself between it and a small tree, scrambling up at



Wounded though he was, Marculf swung an arm like a club and attacked Hilton, who fired—a snap shot. Mary was recolling from Tozinski, and Hilton was anxious to help her.

the expense of her stockings and her knee, scraping her shoes, though the soles helped her.

She looked for the lantern again and saw it, a mere pin-point of light before it vanished among trees.

Beyond the trees were low hills, beyond them swamps and then dense forests ranging into the wild Carpathian mountains where there were wild boar, bears, wolves and lynx. This was not the fair land of Poland, with waving grain fields and fertile farms, deep rivers smoothly flowing—this was the wilderness, far from culture and any centre of civilisation, a region of mystery and legend, where the peasants still believed implicitly in the ancient legends, sunk in old superstitions, willingly ignorant.

Mists rose from the swamps and the moon, full, but sinking swiftly in the west, looked like a crimson platter, a disc that had been dipped in blood. The hound howled dismally. It seemed to sense that it was being dragged to a dismal fate. To the girl there came a fancy that its cry was taken up by others far away, high-pitched cries that mounted swiftly and held a quivering note—the cries of wolves.

That might be imagination, but it did not much matter since the fears that now began to

obsess her in the open, came from within as much as without. Her knees were tremulous, so was her heart, so her mind. She had been safer in the house, she told herself.

Her door might be barred without, but she could bolt it within. She could bolt her windows, she could block the panel by shifting the great bed in front of it. Here, in the open, she was defenceless. She was used to cities and the sounds and scents of the rude solitude beleaguering her. She felt like a hare trembling in a covert. She imagined she saw the eyes of wild beasts watching, furtive forms slinking through the undergrowth.

The quivering hoot of an owl gave her the creeps. When the great bird came floating by, orbs like lamps, she almost screamed aloud.

The howl of the dog roused her, gave her fresh sense of direction. Again she thought it answered by some ranging pack. She entered a wood, not too thick to shut out all the moonrays. She came out of it to a stream that flowed about a knoll. Two rotting logs made a perilous footbridge. The lantern showed again, going on up the knoll that was bare at its summit.

She could see a tilted framework, tall timbers and crossbeam. This was the gibbet, the gallows, the tree that bears no leaves, where

once were hung the men condemned by the overlords, robbers and murderers whose bodies swung rotting in chains until they fell apart to the ground.

She had just passed through Murderers' Wood. There were other trees beyond the stream, gnarled and twisted growths that suited the place of death and vengeance.

Wind was blowing now, rustling the leaves. The twigs seemed like clutching fingers.

The lantern was now set upon the ground beneath the gibbet, casting curious splotches of light and shade on the three figures grouped about it. The basket had been set down. The dog, held back by one of the women, sniffed eagerly at it.

Mary Blake looked at the luminous dial of her wrist-watch. It wanted five minutes to midnight. Ghastly scraps of eerie tales came into her head. Moss scraped by witches from hanged men's skulls to make love philtres.

The girl hung desperately to her sanity. The red moon was low and shed a lurid light upon the bald pate of the knoll, upon the gallows beams and the ghastly relics.

The blade in Tozinski's hand flashed dully crimson.

Now the two women stood aside. Tozinski tried the wind with a wetted finger, stood with his back to it and traced three circles in the soil with the point of his sword.

He spoke words she could not hear—did not wish to—devil-raising cantrips and incantations, syllables of occult blasphemy.

Mary Blake had gone up the hill as far as she dared, almost to the edge of any cover. The bloody, gibbous moon was tangled in the trees, smouldering in the lower, thicker haze. She heard the gabble of the abracadabrac chant, watched the three group again.

She smelled again the dank, narcotic odour that had been in her bed-room.

They were doing something with the dog, as if about to make a sacrifice of it. It whined and yelped with eagerness and then yowled with sudden anguish. There was a scream, not from the beast, but hideously inhuman, drowned by the strident blast of horn. Then followed only the fading, lessening agony of the dog.

Mary Blake could stand no more. She ran pell-mell through the thickets, every hair of her head seemed to stand up like a prickling quill. She fled across the logs and raced, with her heart beating in her throat—or so it felt—through Murderers' Wood. It seemed to her that a shout of evil, demonic exultation was borne upon the wind behind her. It was like a breath straight from hell's portals that would strangle her if it overtook her.

Stumbling and blundering, she fled as one in a nightmare who makes desperate speed yet does not advance an inch, or leaps down steep stairways whose treads come up towards him as in a treadmill. The spells, the scream and the dog's torment echoed in her brain.

She found the road, though in her frenzied race she did not know it was the road. As she crossed it, panic-stricken, there came a sudden, blinding glare over a rise that held her in its bright, betraying beam. That there could be any reasonable cause for such a light in this wilderness never entered her harassed consciousness.

She sprang to escape its revelation of her as a failing hare leaps from the hound's open, slaving jaws, about to close upon it. The light bore down upon her. It was like the single, glowing orb of some uncouth monster.

Her foot caught in a looping bramble and she fell headlong. For the first time in her life she fainted, sinking through Stygian chasms to merciful unconsciousness.

STRANGE RESCUER.

MATT HILTON was young but he was efficient, capable of handling responsibility and meeting emergency. Otherwise, he would not have been sent so far upon a mission that called for a confidential expert.

He was the engineer-agent of a London corporation dispatched to inspect and report upon certain possible oil lands in south-western Poland. Poland is a country still twenty-five per cent. forest, with vast coal-fields, with petroleum fast coming to the fore.

Like Mary Blake, he had journeyed deviously by rail to Krakow. There he had chartered a car and had it shipped by freight to Przemyśl. From there he had taken to the roads, rough though they were, preferring to do some preliminary scouting before he presented himself to the landowner who had paid for this survey in the hope of a fortune.

Hilton had seen the value of languages to a physical engineer before he completed his course at the University. He was specialising in oil-fields, and that meant travel in strange lands where a man ignorant of native tongues would be at fault.

When he found that the firm with whom he became connected—a powerful financial investment corporation—was interested in Poland, he qualified, not merely taking lessons, but living in a boarding-house where none but Poles had so far resided. Hilton was thorough in his ideas and practice. He landed a commission that ordinarily would have gone to a far older man.

There was, he had been told, a fairly decent inn at Zocrina, as Polish hostels were called. He meant to stay there before he saw Ignace Poznanowski. He could not assume that Poznanowski would invite him as a guest. He had said nothing about his business, and he knew nothing of the landowner's death.

As he topped the rise, he saw the girl dart across the road. His first quick thought was that she was a frightened peasant, scared at having her clandestine rendezvous with a lover uncovered. Cars were strange objects in this corner of Poland, old-world and remote. The girl might never have seen one.

Somehow the girl did not look like a peasant. She did not move like one. There was too much grace in her action.

He saw her stumble, noticed there was no further movement in the brush, and he threw out his clutch and braked to a standstill, setting his gears in neutral.

There was a spotlight, and he swung its separate beam and saw silk stockings. They were scratched and torn with brambles, beyond repair, but they encased a pair of legs Marlene Dietrich could have used for doubles. He sized up the scraped shoes, the costume, and knew enough about girls' toggery to be sure they had come from a West End store.

The trim tweed costume had been snagged with briars and thorns, it had picked up wisps of vines, and there was a rent in the skirt.

He spoke to her, touched her, saw she had fainted, and had her face-up in a moment, resting against his knee.

She was only a kid, he told himself. Those lashes were curling, as well as long. A darned pretty girl. Her pulse was beating, tripping.

She had bolted across the road like a scared rabbit, and he had scared her still more. She had been running desperately. Trying to escape from something, or from somebody. She had been so frightened that even now her heartbeats were irregular.

She was in distress. Unwittingly he had added to it, caused her to fall, prevented her escape. And there was something about her, unconscious as she was, that knocked then and there at the door of his heart.

She had wanted to get away. He would take her, get her off the line of flight. He was well-built, in training. The girl must have weighed about a hundred and twenty-five pounds, but he handled her easily, set her in the car, propped up by the side of it, climbed in beside her, steadied her with one arm.

Her head dropped like a weary flower on his shoulder as he started the car, and without any fuss from the engine—due to his own care and knowledge of it—they slid down the road, up and over another low hill, rounding a curve, their headlights well out of vision, as the three came down from the gallows' knoll through Murderers' Wood.

The dog was not with them. Tozinski bore the basket, handling it as if it now contained something of inestimable value. The scabbard of his sheathed sword tilted the hem of his long cape.

Eliza Matejko went first, bearing the lantern, for now the moon was set and the way was dark.

Katerina Poznanowski came last, rapt in ecstasy. She was from now on a mystic, bewildered with her own emotions, the slave

of them, and of Tadeuss Tozinski. In him centred and dissolved her own will, her knowledge of good and evil. He was her god—or her devil—she did not care which.

They did not notice the tyre-marks in the road by the light of the bobbing lantern, throwing its own shadow.

Tozinski knew about the oil, he had surmised that Poznanowski meant to develop it, but he was not in the confidence of the aristocrat. He had not known about the correspondence with Mary Blake, nor did he know that Poznanowski had sent for an expert. If he had it might have delayed Ignace Poznanowski's death.

And Katerina had not even known that her distant relative who had gone to England had ever had a child, nor dreamed that child would arrive to claim the inheritance. Not yet did Katerina think that Tozinski had murdered her master.

But Tadeuss held no doubt but that the oil was the true treasure. There was some other source of income, some investments, the lands, the castle; but the family had been impoverished by the war. The new government held heavy lien on timber and mineral claims; Tozinski had believed Katerina sole inheritor, and through her he meant to handle it all.

Katerina was in it, dazzled with illusions of grandeur, no longer the poor dependant, but living in Warsaw, with Tadeuss as her husband-lover, elevated in rank by her and therefore devoted to her.

Eliza was in the web, sure that Tadeuss would divorce Katerina once he got grip on the money. The half-witted woman she despised would be their stepping-stone to fortune and happiness.

Tadeuss considered them both coldly. Once they served his purpose he would free himself of them, one way or another. He had removed Ignace, he could remove them, if not entirely without suspicion, without proof.

Now this chit, this girl who was to all intents and purposes a foreigner, had arrived. She had startled him, but he was not dismayed. She, too, must go.

She might be drugged, not to die in the house apparently, but to be borne into the marshes, found there as if she had gone there in her wanderings, demented, perhaps, by her uncle's death.

Meantime, by the mystic, midnight rite tonight, he had bound both Eliza and Katerina to him as accomplices.

In the basket he carried devilry. He, the supreme sorcerer, had used its power before. He would again.

So they passed on, back to the castle where Tozinski took the key he carried and unlocked the gate in the high back wall. The building lay dark. There were only two servants now, inferior to Tozinski and Eliza, who neither of them considered themselves any longer as servitors.

Both were in bed. Marculf, the peasant, giant in stature and dwarf in brain, stupid but obedient to those he considered had the right to order him, powerful as Samson. Marie, who cooked, a woman also as strong as Marculf, with whom she steadily quarrelled, bullying him, wanting him for her lover, despising and almost hating him because he stolidly ignored her advances.

An hour later Hilton and Mary Blake came to the back wall on foot from the road where he had parked his car.

When she had opened her eyes, midway to the tavern, she had heard him talking to her in her own tongue. Her fear of him, of the situation in which she found herself, vanished.

"Why, you poor kid!" said Hilton.

"You're—you're English," gasped the girl.

"Absolutely, and this is an English car. It's not new, but it has stood the racket. I found you by the road. I saw you fall, running from something as if the devil was after you."

Mary Blake studied him by the light of the dash-bulbs. It was sufficient for her, with her own woman's intuition, to accept him very definitely as a rescuer, inclined to consider him a hero. For Hilton was good to look at from a girl's standpoint.

"I think he was," she said seriously.

"Suppose you tell me all about it."

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It did not take so very long. The recital was spurred by her anxiety to get back into the castle unobserved. Hilton was not at all sure that was a good move.

"It looks to me as if they had killed your uncle," he said. "Now they are out to do you in. This Tozinski is at the bottom of it. After that hidden treasure, which looks to me very much like wet gold—oil. I wouldn't count on it too much. But I certainly don't like the idea of your going back there to-night, or any other night. Of course, I'll be on hand to-morrow, but I think I ought to take you to the police, tell them all about it, get you protected."

She surprised him then. She was a girl, she had been afraid, he had protected her, but she was far from resourceless.

"I am going back," she said firmly. "Don't forget the police will not be prejudiced in our favour. We have no definite proofs. And there never will be any if I do not go back there. If you are asked to stay it will be so much the better. But I am not leaving until I find out if or not my uncle was murdered. If he was, I shall see he is avenged."

"I'm with you," Hilton said. "And he was the client of my firm. They have plenty of influence over here. Once we get proof of any kind we can get action."

"I think they are all more or less mad," said the girl. "When I think of what they might have done up on that hill by the gallows to-night, it gives me the creeps. It is devilry."

"I'm going to have a look into that, as soon as I get you back, if you insist on it. It looks as if that talk of three days before the charm can work gives us a little breathing space, but you be careful not to eat or drink anything you don't see someone else take first, and keep your room locked if you have to shift that bed, or change to another room. That might be better. My name, by the way, is Matthew Hilton, 'Matt' to my friends. I can show you my credentials—"

"I think you have already, Matt. Mine is Mary Blake. I don't know how I'm going to get back to my room, over that wall and up that tree."

"I'll show you," Hilton told her, and proceeded to demonstrate. She stood on his shoulders to get to the top of the wall, and he came up with a running jump and an uplift with his biceps that, aided by his toes, brought him beside her.

He had with him his flashlight, also a gun. "Good thing there isn't a dog," he said, as they sat atop the wall. "They make an awful racket, even if they don't tackle you."

"There was a dog," she said. "I think it's dead."

"You sit here. I won't be a jiffy. I'm going to try to find a ladder."

She saw his carefully flashed torch-ray dancing like a giant glow-worm through the shrubbery, between the trees. Then it disappeared. It seemed as if an hour passed. It was chilly and dark and she was played out. She would have given anything for a hot drink and a hot bath, and knew she was not going to get either of them. An owl hooted dismally.

Then at last she saw the dancing torch-ray. Matt Hilton was back.

"I found a ladder," he said. "Got it up by the wall of the house. I think it's your window. Come on down. It was too clumsy to lug over here. Take a chance and jump. I used to play Rugger."

There was nothing dignified about the way she sat on the coping of the wall and half-slid, half-jumped, into his arms. But it was very satisfactory. He held her, stepped back a little under the impact, and she clung to him. So did his lips to hers, for one spontaneous second.

They went hand-in-hand to the ladder. "I'm going into your room first," he told her, and left her alone once more while he climbed. She was tired as a lost dog; she craved her bed. She loved him, or there was something about him and herself that was pretty close to it. Better than gratitude. But she wished he would hurry. She was half-asleep from sheer weariness when he came down again.

"It looks okay. Better take my gun."

But she would not. It was a man's weapon. She did not know how to use one. She could not carry it on her without it being seen, nor hide it in her room. She was sure that Marie, if it were not Eliza, searched it regularly.

"Good-night, Matt, and thanks a lot," she said before she started up the ladder. It certainly beat tree-climbing, jumping back from bough to sill. She could never have made it.

"Good-night until to-morrow," he whispered.

THE FLOWERS.

MATT was tired himself, and hungry, but he put away the ladder and got over the wall to his car. And then he went back to where he had picked her up, and followed the trail with his torch to the top of the knoll, under the gallows.

He found a dead dog there, stiffening in a clotting pool of its own blood, thrust through the ribs. There was food on the ground not far from it, untouched. And the dog's ribs showed it had been starving. There was a rope tied to its tail.

There was a spot where the earth had been torn up, as if something had been disinterred or uprooted violently.

The place smelled fetid, an oppressive odour that seemed to make him sleepy. He picked up a cluster of whitish purple blossoms, trying to remember something that lingered in the back of his tired brain. He left the dog, and the broken victuals evidently meant for it, but which had been left alone, made his way down to the car and drove in a semi-torpor to the inn.

It was a hard job to rouse them, hard to get a welcome until he told them, in Polish, that he was British. To them the word meant millionaire. And nothing was too good for him. The landlord asked if he wanted a fire, brought him food, served it in his bed-room.

The landlord came to take away the tray. By then the meal had become breakfast, the sky was greying.

Hilton had remembered the flowers he had found lying plucked on the ground close to the dead dog. He put them into a glass with water. He saw his host staring at them, staring with distinct aversion.

"Know what these are?" asked Hilton.

The landlord crossed himself. "Do not you?" he asked. "Where did you get them?"

"Oh, quite a way from here. What's wrong with them?"

The landlord crossed himself again.

"They grow only beneath where gallows stand, or have stood," he said. "They are nourished by dead men's juices. They call them Gallows' Drip. Some call them Satan's Buttonhole. They are unholy. To possess them is bad luck, to wear them—death. I beseech you to throw them away, to forget you ever saw them."

"I'll dispose of them," said Hilton easily. "I thought they were rather attractive. Do you know their real name? I'm a bit of a botanist. These are interesting."

"My wife is a German," he said. "In her country this flower grows, as it grows everywhere. Do you speak German?"

"Enough, perhaps," said Hilton.

"In Germany they call it Galgemannlein. Also Allruniken odor Erdmannikin. The Mandrake. The Alraun, named from those witches who, bare-limbed and loose of hair, will slay a man and divine the future from his inwards."

"This is the twentieth century, you know," said Hilton good humouredly. "That old magic stuff was played out years ago. Well, I'll get rid of them, somehow. Have you got a good doctor near here?"

"You are not ill?" The landlord's eyes were filled with concern, as if he feared the fatal flowers had already affected his guest. "There is, indeed, a learned one, and famous. Dr. Waclaw Zoblocki. He goes often to Warsaw to cure, or to lecture. You could not do better. He lives close by. And he is at home."

"Nothing wrong with me," said Hilton. "Nothing going to be. I have a special reason for consulting a physician. About a friend of mine."

That was the absolute truth. And the friend

was Mary Blake. But he did not throw the flowers away. Nor did he sleep as soon as he wanted to. Mandrake—Man—Dragon—Mandradora. He remembered the mention of this in Shakespeare, as a drug.

Hilton slept until the sun was high. It was well afternoon when he faced Dr. Waclaw Zoblocki, an old man who looked like Dr. Faustus before his temptation.

Hilton showed him the flowers, named them as mandragora.

"If you can tell me anything about the history, ancient and modern, of this plant," he said, "I shall be much obliged to you. Considering it, of course, as a consultation."

The doctor looked him over, seemed to come to a decision.

"Can you read Latin?" he asked.

"I used to." The old physician took down from his shelves two books, one a materia medica, well up to date, the other an old tome, its leather cover peeling and blistering.

"The fee," he said, "will be twenty kloty. I have many poor patients."

At the current rate a kloty was worth about a shilling. Hilton gave him a hundred of them in two bills.

"We've got poor in our own country," he said.

The learned physician left him, the geophysicist, struggling with the memories of a classical education. He read a lot about mandragora officinalis, dating back to 300 B.C., culled from it what seemed important. The legends were innumerable.

The root had always been associated with sleep and fertility. The Greeks believed an evil spirit lived within it. That belief had never died. It was widespread through Europe. The root was supposed to shriek when pulled from the ground and strike dead the presumptuous person who made the endeavour.

Therefore, rites were designed, variant in different countries, to protect the gatherer. Pliny advised standing with back to the wind, making circles with a sword, the use of a hungry dog with a cord tied to its tail and also to the plant. In its struggle to get at the food it would uproot the plant and be killed by the angry demon whose shriek of rage, despair or agony was drowned by the blowing of a horn. And this seemed to have been known to the ancient Hebrews, the Greeks, and many other old races.

It was used as an emetic, a purgative, antispasmodic, a narcotic in amputations and as a love philtre. It was worshipped as a charm all through Europe, in Syria, Greece and Turkey, in Germany, Norway, Finland and England.

It brought good luck, it confounded all enemies, would win any lawsuit when brought to court tucked in a pleader's armpit. The curiously shaped root, with forked limbs, with face and beard, was treated as a fetish, bathed and clothed.

Hilton waded through all this and came to modern findings.

Mandrake, or mandragora, was a solanaceous herb with ovate leaves, a short, thick stem, and violet-purple flowers. It was a narcotic. It was a poison. Its active principle was discovered by Ahrens, mandragorine; a mixture of bases of which hyoscyamine is the chief, mingled with scopolamine, its action strongly allied to that of atropine.

That was what Hilton wanted, though the superstitious end of it had a strong connection. He returned the books to the doctor and asked him a pointed question.

"Did you attend Ignace Poznanowski when he died?"

"Why do you ask that? As a matter of fact, I did not. I was his physician, yes. He had a poor heart. Valvular trouble, heightened by injury in the war. He was already dead when I saw him."

"Heart trouble?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Symptoms and fatal effect that might have been simulated and brought about by a dose of atropine?"

Zoblocki was suddenly hostile.

"You challenge my certificate of death?"

The physician's eyes were cold. His reputation was threatened by this stranger, this intruding foreigner.

"I challenge nothing, doctor," Hilton

hastened to assure him. "But I have a definite interest in the death of Ignace Poznanowski. I don't know your Polish methods, but in England I'd demand an autopsy. I believe that Ignace Poznanowski was murdered."

"Murdered? How? By whom?"
"I don't know by whom. But here's my hunch about the atropine."

He tossed the faded flowers in front of Zoblocki, who picked them up, sniffed at them, his eyes brightening with interest.

"So?" he said softly. "So—oh? You British are rash, but when you read Latin, when you look into my materia medica with such result, I have a great respect for you. Ignace Poznanowski was my friend. You suggest atropine—stop, if you, please—"

"I'm sorry, doctor, but I can't. Your own end of this is up to you. But I've got to get busy before there is another murder."

He got into his car and started for the castle. He carried his gun in his side pocket, making sure that it was loaded and in working order.

He did not trust the "three days of respite" as much as Mary Blake. If Tozinski ever found out that she had seen what happened on the knoll beyond Murderers' Wood, below the galls, her mouth would be promptly stopped—perhaps for ever.

THE MAGIC FAILS.

TOZINSKI had his private suite of two semi-circular rooms in the north-eastern tower. The first he used as a sort of combination parlour and office, the back-room was his sleeping quarters. There was a cot and a wash-stand with basin, jug and a towel rack. A long mirror hung on the wall.

There was also a table on which were assembled various parts of chemical apparatus. Pipettes, test-tubes, pestle and mortar, a retort, glass beakers, phials. An enamelled pot was set over a spirit lamp. In it was a mash of macerated mandrake root. It gave out the unmistakable stench, like the gas that issues from graves not long filled.

He did not appear to notice it. He was conducting something that was no longer an experiment with him, a distillation of the poison, which he would later reduce to crystals of mandragorin.

He had plucked two plants under cover of the dog's efforts, the scream of Katerina as she

fought with hysteria. Eliza might have seen him. He did not care. Eliza worshipped him, her nature was the kind that does not balk at crime.

Katerina believed in the man-dragon as a power to induce love. Even now she had the roof the dog had dragged out installed on the bureau in her own room. It sat there like a fetish. She had bathed it, made clothing for it as for a doll. It slept in a drawer, swathed in silk. She worshipped the demon, knowing nothing of the drug. She had made a pact with the fiend, given her soul in exchange for the love of Tozinski.

Tozinski bent over the pot, taking off the scum that gathered on his mash, setting it aside to use later, watching his devil's broth; his face that of an exultant fiend; when a quick knock came on his outer door, a series of signal raps.

He frowned a little, but left the room, carefully closing the door. It was Eliza.

She came in with her face charged with news.

"She was out last night. She told Katerina she would not sleep any longer in her room, could not. She must have found out about the panel. Katerina agreed to move her, and she seemed to like the rooms I showed her. I tried to consult you, but you would not open up before. So I—Tadeusz, this place smells like a rotting body—are you—"

He nodded.
"Go ahead. How do you know she was out? And where have you put her? She may have to be moved again."

"She is in the north-west tower, on the ground floor."

"Good. That is excellent, Eliza. You have brains, and use them."

Eliza flushed with pleasure. She had thought he would approve. The north-western tower was known as the Prisoners' Keep!

"Marculf was to move her trunk. It was locked, but it was not hard to open. I searched it and found a pair of torn stockings, of scraped shoes. The stuff of her travelling costume was pulled, and there was a rent in the skirt."

Tozinski's face was ugly, his eyes and mouth slitted.

"From now on she is a prisoner. Marculf shall take her what food we give her. He shall dig her grave to-night."

Eliza shrank from the cold, vicious malevolence of his voice.

"Her grave—where—not here—in the garden?"

He grinned evilly.

"Why not? And yet—perhaps we will drug her, Eliza—let us be artistic about such matters. We will starve her a little first, then give her the potion when she is so thirsty she would drink seawater. We will carry her far out to the swamps. She liked to wander, poor girl. She must have lost her way. Think of her terrors, the hunger, the weakness, the cries of wolves. Only she will actually know none of them. So we shall miss her, search for her, and at last find her—dead. That will be the best way. Better than having her disappear. It is a pity she is so alluring, a beautiful face and body—a pity—"

He broke off, laughing, as he saw Eliza's face, her blazing eyes, lips drawn back, hands half clenched.

"You run along," he said. "You have done very well."

He gave her a cool kiss, but she clung to him passionately until he put her away. He had barely got back to his devilish mash when she knocked again. He opened angrily.

"There is a man," she said, "he speaks Polish, but he is a foreigner. He came in a car. He asked to see Poznanowski. On important business. He says he has come all the way from England on this business."

"From England? What did you tell him—that the man he wants to see is dead?"

She shook her head.

"I showed him into the gold and ivory reception-room and asked him to wait. He is there now."

"Good! He gave no name?"

"This!"
Tozinski read the card. The English words were easy to understand:

MATTHEW R. HILTON,
Universal Petroleum Products,
79, Well Street,
London, E.C.

His enlightenment was complete. Poznanowski had sent for this man, who must be an expert, to investigate the "treasure" that lay buried in the ground. The pools in the marshes were often coated with iridescence, there were places in the swamps where the air smelled of oil. Tozinski was no geologist, but he felt sure that there was real fortune at hand.

He would see this expert, explain to him the death of Ignace, introduce him to Katerina as the heir to the estate. He would have to coach her. The dead man had saved him a lot of trouble. Tozinski would hardly have known how to go about it. And Ignace had already made affiliations. The expert must go ahead.

It was all his. Tozinski nodded, well pleased. All played into his hands. The only fly in his imperial ointment was the fact that he must endure Katerina for a while, until the money flowed out of the wells. The public would get a nice fat tax, but he, Tadeusz Tozinski, grandson of a witch, obscure and poor, would blossom out into a grandee.

Katerina had her delusions, but Tozinski, as mad as she in his own manner, had golden visions in his brain.

"I will see him," he said.

He was very suave, even respectful to the Britisher. He thought him young for an expert, but he knew that the British were often geniuses at an early age. He regretfully spoke of Ignace Poznanowski's death. He hinted that it need not interfere with Hilton's mission.

"I am sure that Katerina Poznanowski, my mistress, will want to go ahead. I will arrange for an interview with her. She is still in seclusion after her relative's death. He was very dear to her."

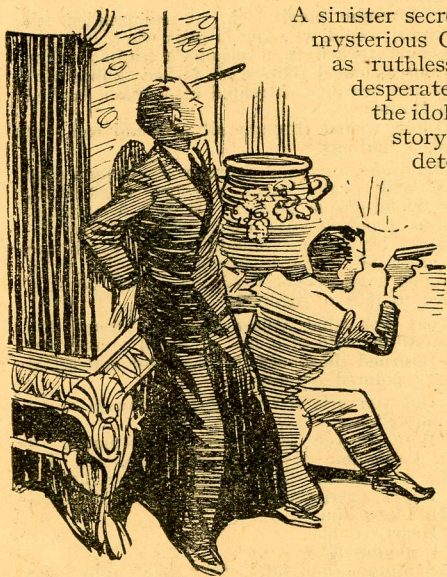
"She inherits the estate?" asked Hilton.

Tozinski fell into the trap.
"Naturally."

Hilton controlled himself. He wanted to smash the liar and murderer in the face. It was patent that Tozinski did not intend him to stay under that roof.

"I understand there is an English lady staying here," he said. "A Miss Blake. Also a relation of the late Ignace Poznanowski. I should like to see her."

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It was a bold move, and it scored. Hilton saw suspicion, rage and hate in the majordomo's eyes. Tozinski was having a hard time of it. He wanted to use this expert, but he must find out why he wanted to see Mary Blake.

"You know her?" he asked.

Hilton froze.

"You are perhaps authorised to ask me such a question? Naturally, I know her. I have a message for her."

Tozinski hesitated, sorting lies. But he could see no way to evade the direct issue.

He ushered Hilton into the gloomy tower suite, bowed and left them together, closing the door behind him. Then he darted to a spot shadowed by the winding stairway, crouched and set his ear to a listening-hole, concealed by a heavy chest, placed long ago to hear what the prisoners of the Poznanowskis deemed worthy of these rooms—at least temporarily—might say between themselves.

Mary Blake went straight into Matt Hilton's arms. "I should have taken your advice," she said. "I am a prisoner. It is not only the locks but the face of Eliza Matejko. They hate me. They mean to kill me. You must take me away."

"That's what I came for. I went up on the knoll. I found evidence. I saw the doctor who gave the certificate, and I have got him stirred up. You can bet your life you're coming with me, here and now. We'll have to cook up some excuse not to make Tozinski suspicious."

They talked in English, and Tozinski cursed his ignorance. But he heard the names mentioned. Presently Hilton spoke of Zoblocki by name, and Tozinski sensed the game was up unless he acted quickly. Curse the meddling Britisher! Curse all Englishers!

The oil development would have to be made by some other firm. There were flaws in the plan, but he could eliminate them with a little time to think it all out. There would be inquiries, tracings of these two Britishers; but he would say—Katerina and all would say—that it was clear the two had run away together. That was not his affair.

He sought out Marculf. Marculf would have to dig two graves. But first there were other things for him to do.

"When he comes out, Marculf, this Britisher, you must seize him. You will take him to the dungeon, you understand. He is an enemy, a spy, seeking the treasure of Poznanowski. You understand?"

"Ya!" The stupid giant nodded, flexed and unflexed his great hands, strong as those of a gorilla, more flexible. "I understand."

"Good. You shall be rewarded. Go and stand by the door."

Hilton came out, but, in common courtesy, he let the girl precede him. He was not anticipating immediate trouble.

It disconcerted Marculf. It bothered Tozinski. And the girl saw the latter, halfway from his hiding-place, his eyes like those of a wolf.

"Matt," she cried, "look out!"

Matt was looking out. He thrust the girl aside to get her out of the fracas he saw was imminent. He ducked under the swooping grasp of Marculf and got his gun in the clear.

"Get back, the two of you!" he told them in Polish.

Tozinski sought cover under the curl of the stair, cursing because he had no gun, did not know how to use one, or even a knife, except clumsily. His weapons were more subtle.

Marculf charged, and Hilton shot him. He did not want to kill this dull puppet. The pistol barked, the confined space re-echoed it, stank with the reek of powder.

Mary Blake stayed, watching. Tozinski slunk towards her. She could have fled down the stairs, but she knew that this was the castle of her enemies, that Matt must win, or—

Marculf swung an arm like a club. Still force was in him. He groped for Hilton's throat as he fell upon him with his half-dead weight, bore him to the ground.

Hilton struggled free, drenched with blood.

Mary was fighting with Tozinski, clawing him.

Matt caught him by the scruff of his neck and slugged him behind the ear with the muzzle of his automatic. Tozinski dropped to the stone floor like a discarded bathing suit.

They were not away yet. Eliza faced them like a tigress. She had a long-bladed knife in her hand. Hilton shot it out of her hand. The bullet struck where steel met haft.

"You killed him!" she shrieked. "You killed my lover, Tadeuss!"

"I hope not," said Hilton. "I left that for the hangman."

A wailing, hysterical figure confronted them, harmless enough. It was Katerina Poznanowski, nursing in her withered arms the mandrake mannikin.

The car had not gone a mile when they met Zoblocki. He was on foot, and with him marched a file of Polish provincial police.

Hilton braked.

"You were right," said the doctor. "I have made autopsy. It was atropine. We go to arrest Tozinski."

"You'll find us at the inn," Hilton told them.

"Do we have to give evidence?" asked the girl.

"I suppose so, dear. I don't suppose you'd like to be married here, in Poland, to me? I wouldn't dare ask you, as an heiress, but I don't think the estate will bring much, if you can ever sell it. And that treasure isn't going to materialise. I've looked it over. It's just shale-rock seepage."

"As if that mattered. After all, Matt, I was born here. I suppose a Polish wedding would be legal anywhere?"

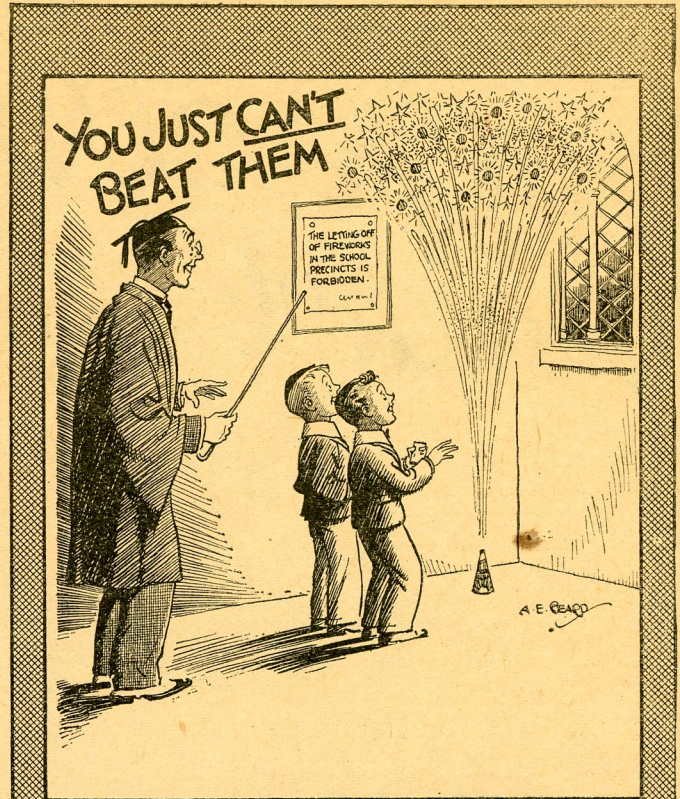
"We'll make it so. I'll marry you a dozen times. You mean it?"

She answered him first with a kiss, and then:

"I want to feel safe, Matt. I know I'll be safe with you. Safe—and happy."

When Hilton started the car again he went clean through his gears. But that did not seem to matter.

THE END.



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The Great Mail Racket

By GEORGE
DILNOT

DOLORES PLAYS HER PART.

WHEN Horace Augustus Elver, detective, was coming to England on the liner Gigantic, investigating a series of robberies from the mail-bags which had taken place aboard many ships, he rescued a young fellow named Armstrong from the clutches of a card-sharper who was later murdered in his cabin. Elver was convinced that members of the Mail Racket gang were aboard, and later a girl passenger, Sheila Servine, a friend of Armstrong's, appealed to Elver for help. She was being forced to smuggle the stolen stuff ashore in her baggage and take it to the house of a Member of Parliament, Sir Gentle Tegare. Elver rescued the girl, but got no direct proof of Sir Gentle's crimes.

As the girl's evidence would be damaging, Mardon, one of Tegare's men, abducted her from Armstrong's flat. Elver induced Armstrong to help him find the girl. He also arranged for Dolores, the girl friend of Little Frankie, his own assistant, to lend a hand. He and Garry Conrigan, a Scotland Yard man, were trying to devise a way of rescuing Sheila Servine, when her father turned up. He blamed them for his daughter's plight, but Elver promised to rescue the girl within twenty-four hours. Meanwhile, Sheila had been forced to lure him into a trap by a letter, but she managed to warn him by means of a code. Elver is expected to wait for news at midnight near Tooting Common, and Mardon has arranged to have him shot down. Elver got busy in collaboration with Garry Conrigan, and roped in Dolores Devere to help him.

A cold wind was sweeping gustily across the common. A woman seated on a bench that commanded a view of the fifth lamp-post drew her shabby coat closer about her and shivered. Dolores Devere had been there for three-quarters of an hour and there might be even yet another hour to go. The seat was hard, the ground was damp, there was a hint of rain in the air, the place was getting more and more lonely, and she had a cold in the head. Somewhere about, she knew, were Frankie, Horace, Garry Conrigan and other detectives, but for all she could see or hear of them she might have been in the middle of a deserted prairie.

Since she had been sitting there she had shed several illusions about a detective's life. She wished she had put on thicker clothes and heavier boots. But she comforted herself with the thought that most of her miseries were in the part. There had been a careful rehearsal with Horace before she had left the West End.

"You are broke," he had explained. "Broke and blotto. You've spent the day hawking flowers from door to door and the evening getting blotto. Your husband does casual work at Spitalfields Market, and he's promised to knock your block off if you go home. He's pinched your money and left you to it. You've nowhere to spend the night. That's your background. Get it?"

She lolled helplessly back in her chair and muttered incoherently.

"Gaw love-a-duck, can't y' let me kip in

peace! Wassa marrer?" She straightened up. "How's that, Mr. Elver?"

"Swell. Now look. They're going to try to shoot me up at this lamp-post. They won't want any more spectators than they can help. It's my guess that they'll have a look round beforehand, and if they see a woman on this seat they'll try to shift her. That'll give you a chance. Miss Servine won't be far away. It's up to you to find her." He added other directions.

There was little need for acting misery as she sat huddled in a corner of the hard bench. Another hour of it, she decided, would be about all that she could stand. She hoped something would come of it now. She would like to show them. But she might be going all through this for nothing. Mr. Elver had said that it was only a hunch and that he might be wrong. She rubbed her unglowed hands and thrust them inside her jacket. Would nothing ever happen?

A frail figure in a heavy overcoat, the storm collar turned up to partly conceal the face, approached her. Mr. Theodore Mardon dropped a hand on her shoulder.

"Haven't you got a home, my good woman?" he inquired benevolently. "This is no night for a woman to be out."

Dolores grunted, shifted an arm and looked resentfully up at him from under an unshapen hand and dishevelled hair. A dirty face, a darkening under the eyes and a few other deft touches of make-up had made her look more than twice her age.

"Gō 'way!" she muttered. "Lemme sleep. Ain't doin' no 'arm, am I? Wassit do with you where I kip?"

"I'm not a policeman," Mr. Mardon spoke benevolently and pressed five shillings into her hand. "There you are. That should be ample to get you home or to get you a night's lodging. Shall I help you up?"

She opened and closed the hand with the silver in it.

"Blimey, you're all right, guv'nor, you are. Fine old bloke. Nemmine about me. Live Whitechapel. My ol' man'd knock me block off if I went 'ome, see? Kipping here, see? Goo' ni'."

She snuggled up again on the seat with her feet under her. Mr. Mardon wondered whether she was drunk enough and sleepy enough to be ignored. He decided not. Putting a hand under her elbow he tried to raise her.

"Come along now. It's going to rain. I'll put you on your way to where you can pick up an all-night car."

She allowed him to help her to her feet and swaying slightly clung to his arm.

"Struth, it's parky. I ain't a-goin' home. Not for nobody, I ain't a-goin' home. Y' can't force me to go home. Free country. Gotta kip somewhere. May as well stay here."

"Well, at least I can find you shelter," he said, and Dolores objections to this course being less pronounced he led her away. But during the next few minutes he discovered that it was not going to be easy to get rid of her. She clung to him with drunken obstinacy. In despair he took her to the derelict villa and introduced her to the one-eyed caretaker.

"Give this woman a shake-down somewhere," he commanded.

"Ow are you, dearie?" asked Dolores, clutching vaguely at the other woman's shoulder and almost falling with the effort. "Did your ol' man give you that eye? I'd 'a got two if I'd 'a gone 'ome to-night. He's gotta job at Spitalfields. This your ol' man? Where does he work?"

The caretaker sniffed. "Ain't I got enough to do without being woke up to look after a drunken trollop?" she asked, but Mardon's lowering brow gave her no encouragement to pursue the complaint. "Come on, you!"

"Ain't drunk, and who you callin' a trollop?" declared Dolores. Then she switched at a tangent. "Where am I goin' to kip?"

Ten minutes later she was sitting in a basement and by the light of a single candle pledged friendship in a cracked cup, frequently replenished from a gin bottle. But the bulk of the girl's share found its way to a pot on the windowsill that nourished a faded fern. She talked volubly at every opportunity, but it was noticeable that she always paused when the other woman showed signs of striking in. And all the while her ears were keyed to catch any sound either from inside or outside the house.

Dolores had lived long enough in this world to know that the action of a pump is sometimes improved by pouring water down it. She improvised maudlin confidences of a colourful married career, confidences that stimulated and inspired Mrs. Cabbigewin—such it appeared was the one-eyed lady's name—to draw upon her own stock of memoirs.

She had, she declared, seen better days. Time was when she had been married to a flourishing marine store-dealer, but there had been misunderstandings with the police about the kind of goods he bought. He was alleged to be a receiver with an occasional finger in organised robberies. A corrupt police and a biased judge and jury had sent him to Dartmoor, and Mrs. Cabbigewin, after some unhappy experiences with other "protectors," now eked out a precarious living by charing with occasional spells as a caretaker.

"Men are all the same," observed Dolores. "You can't trust any of them." She giggled and passed the cup. "Drink 'earty. I'm payin' my share. The old boy who picked me up gave me five bob." She slapped the money on the packing-case that served them as a table. "You take it, Mrs. Ca—Mrs. Cash—Mrs. Cattleswinger. Funny, ain't it? I thought he was your 'usband at first."

Mrs. Cabbigewin snorted and then cackled with laughter.

"Im? That dried-out, thin-gutted 'erring? I'd want a better man than 'im, even now. 'E ain't the sort. I likes my men lusty. Fancy you thinkin' 'e was my old man. Shows 'ow you makes mistakes. There was me thinking when he brought you in that he had got 'old of another bit of stuff."

Dolores pricked up her ears.

"Another? Is he like that?"

The old woman leered and jerked her thumb over her shoulder towards the ceiling.

"Y' wouldn't think it to look at 'im, would y' now? 'E's one of the deceiving sort. Wouldn't wonder if he's a church warden. I ain't one for telling tales out of school, speshully when I'm paid to keep me mouth shut. This crib ain't so bad compared with some."

"Ave some more gin," urged Dolores, and poured out a liberal portion.

"Goo' luck," said Mrs. Cabbigewin, and drained the cup. She fixed the girl with her bleary single eye. "No, 'e's as artful as a wagon-load of monkeys, 'e is. Got her locked up in a room up there. Tells me she's mad and 'e's looking after her till her relatives get back from abroad. I cook all 'er meals, but I never see her. He takes them up. If you ask me, she's no more mad than I am." She winked portentously. "Tain't no business of mine, but I got me thoughts. I keep 'em to myself. There's twenty-five quid I've got tucked away, and another twenty-five if I look after her so she don't get away."

"That's all the gin, dearie," said Dolores, investigating the bottle. She cast a glance round the room. There was one bed, dirty and uninviting. An empty beer case had been substituted for one missing leg. "What about

a little shut-eye? Where do you want me to kip?"

Mrs. Cabbigewin hiccupped and considered. "There ain't no other bed 'cept the one upstairs, and she's using that. Dunno what you can do unless you park on the floor. I can lend you a blanket."

"Better than a seat on the common," said Dolores philosophically. "I like you, Mrs. Cranbotham. No, I wouldn't take your bed, not for anything I wouldn't. I'm used to roughing it. You lay down now and don't lose any more of your beauty sleep. Gimme a blanket and I'll find a soft spot."

She selected a corner near the door and curled herself up. Mrs. Cabbigewin flung herself on the bed and blew out the light. In a few minutes she was snoring. Dolores counted sixty, got up and groped for the candle. She dared not light it till she was out of the room, and her heart was in her mouth as the door creaked on its hinges. The other woman, however, went on snoring and the girl felt more confident when she had closed the door and lit the candle.

Shading the light with her hand she ascended the stairs. In which room Miss Servine was confined she did not know, but she pressed her ear closely to the panels of every door she passed and cautiously tried the handles. In most cases they yielded instantly, for they were all empty rooms.

She came at last to a door that resisted her efforts, and realised with some thankfulness that it was at the top of the house, as far away as possible from Mrs. Cabbigewin. For a moment she listened and thought that she could hear gentle breathing within, but she was not quite sure whether her nerves were playing her tricks. She scratched lightly on the door with her fingernail and this time was definitely sure of a slight movement within as if someone had suddenly sat up and were listening.

"Miss Servine!" she whispered. "Miss Servine!"

"Who is that?" asked Sheila in a low voice. "What do you want?"

"I'm from Mr. Elver. A friend. A detective." Dolores got a kick out of that. "Don't make a noise, but come nearer to the door."

There was a soft thud as Sheila leapt from the bed. She stood on the other side of the heavy door.

"Where is Mr. Elver? I suppose he understood my note? How can I get out? Is there anyone with you?"

One at least of these questions Dolores could not answer. She had drawn back a couple of bolts on the outer side the door, but it was still locked and was obviously strong enough to defy any effort that the two girls could apply. She leaned against it and gave a futile push with her shoulder.

"I don't know," she confessed. "What about the window?"

"Barred. Miles from the ground, anyway. Isn't there anything you can do? Are you alone? What was that?"

She broke off in an involuntary scream. From somewhere in the outer darkness, but very plain in the quiet of the night, came the unmistakable rat-tat-tat of a burst of machine-gun fire, followed by a shrill chorus of police-whistles.

Dolores also was startled, but she had been warned what to expect and had more self-control.

"Shut up, you fool!" she hissed. "Do you hear me? Shut up! If I were that side of the door I'd wring your neck. Keep quiet!"

But the damage had been done. Down below Mrs. Cabbigewin's voice was heard raised, and although they could not distinguish the words she seemed to be very angry. She had discovered the absence of her boon companion and had apparently put two and two together. A string of blood-curdling threats and the lighting of innumerable matches marked her progress up the stairs.

Dolores blew out the candle and with lips pressed tightly together crouched waiting at the top of the stairs. She was not quite certain what she intended to do. Mrs. Cabbigewin took the last angle of the stairs and came into sight. The light of a match gleamed on a long carving knife. She saw the girl and shook it menacingly.

"There you are, you— You been playing a fine game, ain't you. Come down here, or I'll cut your liver out."

She paused to steady herself against the wall and to strike another match. The red-headed sweetheart of Little Frankie did not hesitate. She leapt downwards a couple of steps and her small fist struck the other woman square between the eyes.

Mrs. Cabbigewin, never too certain of her balance, swayed, dropped the knife, missed a wild clutch at the banisters, and crashed heavily backwards to the landing below.

THE FRAME-UP.

It is seldom that Scotland Yard men go armed, but there were thirty or more scattered within a mile radius of the fifth lamp-post in Tooting Bec Road, most of whom were carrying automatic revolvers. A few Flying Squad men, not quite sure of their marksmanship, and perhaps relying on getting to close quarters, preferred "coshes" of various sorts, ranging from the regular police baton to knuckle-dusters, pieces of rubber tubing, and other unauthorised weapons. They had been warned that they might be in for a fight.

Yet for all the concentration about the neighbourhood it wore the usual deserted aspect of a suburban district after midnight. An occasional car or a belated pedestrian passed, but there was no sign of anything untoward.

A policeman walked his beat, his cape glistening in the cold rain that was beginning to fall. But solitary policemen may be seen anywhere at any time. The sight was not unusual enough to attract attention from anyone who might be keeping watch. Garry had thought it out, and for the first time in thirty years had donned the uniform of a police-constable. It allowed him a certain freedom of movement, and was, perhaps, for his purpose, the most subtle disguise that he could have adopted. Even Horace had congratulated him upon a brainstorm.

For a moment or two he sheltered under a tree. A taxicab passed him and there was a smile on his face as it drew up so closely to the fifth lamp-post that it almost touched. The driver rapped on the glass panels behind him, but his fare was evidently asleep and, after a moment or two, he descended and, pulling open the door, put his head and shoulders inside. Garry watched and listened with critical interest.

"What, here already?" cried a voice that was unmistakably that of Horace Augustus Elver. "That last couple of drinks must have made me sleepy. Give me a hand out."

"Sure this is where you want?" asked the driver doubtfully. "Funny place to come on a night like this. Steady, sir!"

The cab almost completely screened the two from the opposite side of the road, but it was obvious that Horace was being helped to alight. A closer view would have shown that he seemed to reel as he reached the ground, and the driver put an arm round his waist to support him.

"Hang on to the lamp," said the driver a few seconds later. "You dead sure you want to stop here? Don't mind me saying it's a queer place and time for anyone to wait."

"That's my business," said Horace curtly. "Beat it."

The cab drove away. A tall, gawky figure was leaning against the lamp-post with one arm hooked round it. Garry surveyed it critically for a moment, the smile still playing round his lips.

"That patter might have taken me in if I hadn't known," he commented to himself. "Looks as if he'd had a bit of a jag, but it ought to pass."

He trudged on. There were still twenty minutes to go. A quarter of a mile farther along the driver of an ancient Ford van that had broken down hailed him.

"Hey, where's the nearest garage?"

"What's the trouble?" asked Garry.

"Would I be asking for a garage if I knew? This old bag of bones just died of old age, I reckon." The speaker had on a macintosh with the collar turned up and the peak of his cap was drawn well over his eyes. He descended in the shadow of the van and a

familiar chuckle came to Garry's ears. "How'm I doin'?" demanded Horace.

"I heard your voice. Where were you?"

"Lying on the floor of the cab. Does the hoojah look lifelike? That man you lent me as a taxidriver was pretty good, I thought. He had a little trouble fixing it, but I daren't leave the cab to help him in case of being seen. Mine was only a speaking part. I'm thinking of taking up ventriloquism as a profession if everything else fails me."

"From where I was it looked as if you'd been celebrating a little," said the superintendent. "But it's a rotten night and, anyway, they'll not be stopping for a close inspection."

"No, I don't suppose they'll want to dally. Seen anything of Frankie or his lady-love?"

"Not a hair of Frankie. The girl was there, but she's gone now. She was seen walking with an elderly man who, I assume, was Mardon. I hope it's all right leaving that end to him. I ought to have had someone follow them up, myself."

"I should have thought that you'd have had a bellyful of trying to tail that bird. One man ought to be plenty—and I don't know that I could have kept Frankie away from that dame of his with fixed bayonets. You can trust him. Every extra man would have meant an extra risk of being discovered. How are your people making out? Everything O.K.?"

"We've done everything we can. There are plenty of our men around. Trouble is that

(Continued overleaf.)

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we don't know from which way these blokes may come. However, I've got cars at both ends and at every side-turning. I'll be surprised if they get by."

"So will I. I'll do my little best to stop 'em if I get a chance before they run into your men." Horace patted a side pocket affectionately. "In a way I wish I'd got Frankie. He's a better shot than I am, and between the two of us we'd have been pretty safe."

Garry turned a disapproving eye on him. "This isn't Chicago," he said. "Street shooting's liable to hurt other folk than those you aim at. I've warned my lads about promiscuous gun-play. They are to fire only in self-defence."

"Well, I've got my own views about it. I'm out to save the expense of a trial by judge and jury if I can. Don't worry about my bullets. They'll go more or less where they're sent. Besides, I want to know what you call self-defence. There's my alter ego, or astral body, or what you like to call it—you've no idea what a trouble I had to get a lay figure to fit my clothes—standing up there to be all spoiled by machine-gun bullets. You wouldn't like it if it was you, Garry. In effect they're shooting at me, and I make it a habit not to allow people to shoot at me without joining in the dance."

"You'll never be able to repress those savage instincts of yours; I won't waste breath arguing with you. Personally I like to get 'em alive if I can."

"There you are. That's the old C.L.D. tradition in your blood. Myself I don't care very much whether I deliver them as pigs or pork. It would be different if one of 'em were likely to be Sir Gentle Tegare. I wouldn't have the slightest objection to seeing him hanged. But I'm afraid that these gentry won't be any of the gang-leaders that we know, Garry. Certainly not Tegare or Mardon, and Rekart is at Southampton. I think we can count Silas out, too—a black man would be rather easy for anyone who might see him to remember. That leaves only Danny Deever among the big noises. I don't fancy he'd jump into this, if he could help it. No, the big shots will keep in the background. There'll be one man to drive and at least one for the gunning. When we get 'em I'm prepared to make a little bet that we'll find that they're people to whom we've never been properly introduced. Whoever they are they'll be better dead."

Garry looked at his watch and cut short any further bloodthirsty reflections.

"It won't be long before we know. We're cutting it rather fine. I'm going to get back. As long as you keep that pistol of yours turned away from me I don't mind all that much."

"At the bottom of your heart you're rather wishing me luck," retorted Horace.

Garry turned on his heel and disappeared in the rain. Although he never looked behind him he was sure that Horace was not very far away, moving silently as a panther and keeping well away from any lights. A man brushed by the superintendent.

"Good-night, officer!" he said, and Garry returned the salute.

It was Mardon taking a final turn before the curtain went up.

Horace had slipped through a garden gate and was lying at full length behind a low wall on top of which iron railings had been fixed. A distant clock struck two o'clock, and Horace rested a hand that gripped an automatic on the parapet, and took tentative aim at the dummy of himself some forty yards away. Although the darkness and the misty rain had their advantages, they were not going to make quick and accurate pistol-shooting easy. He tensed as the lights of an approaching car drew rapidly nearer. But it passed quietly on its way and he laughed to himself.

"I never thought of that. Was that car exactly to the minute just a chance, or was somebody taking a preliminary run?"

Another five minutes went by and a couple

of creases grew on his forehead. A small doubt began to grow in his mind. Had some hint or premonition come to the gang so that they had abandoned the project? Had someone viewed the dummy figure from close quarters? A soft and increasing purr from the other direction reassured him. A big saloon slipped quietly along at an easy pace on the opposite side of the road. The muzzle of Horace's automatic followed it. It checked for perhaps a dozen yards as it neared the dummy, and the quiet of the night was shattered by the chatter of a sub-machine gun. A blast of bullets lifted the figure from its position, carried it two or three paces, and let it drop in a grotesque heap to the pavement.

The driver trod on the accelerator and the car leapt forward. Horace fired through the rain with concentrated deliberation half a dozen times. At his second shot the car swerved, edged on to the pavement and, with a second swerve, recovered the roadway.

Horace stood up. Garry's oiled cape showed out of the mist and darkness.

"There were two of them!" cried his friend. "I got one, at least, but I think that I only winged the driver. It's tricky shooting in this light."

Garry had to remove the whistle that was between his teeth before he could answer.

"They'll not get by my boys," he said, and started to run.

He had a little the start of Horace, but the latter was the younger man, and easily overhauled him, dropping into a trot by his side. He still carried his pistol in his hand. It could only have been a matter of seconds before a crash sounded ahead of them.

"Good lads!" breathed Garry. "They've rammed 'em."

A hundred yards farther on they came upon a couple of cars. One was lying on its side, a complete wreck. The other, with twisted bumper, smashed wings and wind-screen, was being pushed away from it by two or three men. Others were busy in the wreckage of the other.

"Made a pretty complete job of it," said Horace.

A plump inspector of the Flying Squad came to them mopping at his bleeding face with a handkerchief. He was wearing a broad grin as he nodded to Garry.

"Got 'em, sir," he said complacently. "A good piece of judgment that. If we'd taken 'em head on we'd have been worse minced than they are. We managed to get 'em diagonally as we came out of the turning."

"Anybody hurt?" queried the superintendent.

"Nothing to speak of. A few of us got cuts and bruises and I think our driver's sprained his wrist. Lucky all through. It's a different story with the other blokes, though."

As Garry and Horace turned their attention to the wrecked car, a man, moaning softly, was being carried to the grass verge of the common, where someone had placed a couple of rugs. They laid him down and the superintendent dropped on one knee by his side and made a hurried examination.

"Looks like a bad case," he muttered and, taking a brandy flask from his pocket, forced a few drops between the man's teeth.

The other coughed and gave a feeble laugh. "Thanks, guv'nor! It's no use. I've got mine. I'm washed up and I know it."

"Nonsense, my lad! Don't move. There's nothing much the matter with you beyond a bash on the head. We'll have a doctor and an ambulance here in a jiffy." But his face was grave.

"That and a bullet in my left side somewhere. You can't kid me! I know I'm through, but I'm not whining about it. It was coming to me. You had a nice little packet all framed up for us."

Garry's big fingers were skillfully making a bandage with his own handkerchief and a couple more that had been passed to him.

"What's your name?" he asked.

The injured man managed to conjure up an

ironical laugh, although a spasm of pain crossed his face at the same time.

"You're asking me? It doesn't matter. Call me Mr. Mug of Mugginsville if you're thinking of putting up a monument to me. You won't get anything from me. I took a chance of picking up five hundred easy quid, but I ain't howling because the cards have run against me. I ain't never squealed on anybody yet, and I'm not finishing up that way." He closed his eyes. "Let me alone, Mr. Busy. I ain't feeling a bit conversational."

Garry recognised a brave man and, according to his lights, a loyal man. Whoever the fellow was he was not going to give anyone away. These are qualities not necessarily absent from the worst of crooks. But it was his duty to smother any feeling of sympathy he might feel, and he put another question.

"You know a man named Mardon?"

"Plays for Kent, don't he? Or is it the Arsenal? Or did he come second in the Derby? I seem to have heard the name!"

Garry finished his temporary bandage and remained looking down for a few moments in silence. Then, giving up the attempt to extort any information, he rose to his feet and moved over to another group gathered about the second occupant of the car. Horace had just disengaged himself.

"I don't feel like badgering a dying man," said the superintendent. "He's as tight as an oyster. What about the other bloke?"

Horace shrugged his shoulders. "You won't be any more lucky there. He'll answer no questions. I got him through the head. But I can tell you something, because I've met him before. They called him Piano Chike on my side of the water. As a gunman he'd got a record as long as your arm. Five years ago he was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He broke gaol a year or eighteen months ago."

"The only thing the other fellow let drop was that they were being paid five hundred pounds each for this job," said Garry.

Horace took out a cigar and stuck it in his mouth.

"A high price for Piano," he commented. "When I knew him he'd have pulled a murder for as little as ten dollars if you cared to make a bargain. But I suppose these things run higher in England."

Someone twitched at his sleeve. Little Frankie had materialised, and spoke out of the corners of his mouth.

"You all through here?"

"I thought you were watching Dolores," said Horace sternly.

"I know the joint where Mardon took her," replied Frankie. "It can't run away. The kid's still in there, and Mardon ain't been back. I guess you wouldn't find your way by thought-reading, so I dived back to take you. Now's the chance for a quiet look-see. I'd ha' gone in by myself, but you told me to hold back unless the girls were in obvious trouble."

"Wait a minute. You're sure that Mardon had no idea you were tailing him?"

"Dead sure. Would he have taken her there if he had?"

"Right you are, son, I'll be with you." He turned to Garry. "We don't want to advertise that we've found this nest. I'll take a little trot round with Frankie first."

Garry handed him a police whistle. "I'll have my hands full clearing up here for a while. This'll fetch us if necessary."

"There are times," said Horace, "when you display an almost human intelligence."

(Is this a show-down for Sir Gentle Tegare? And will Horace Augustus Elver manage to rescue Sheila Servine? If he fails, then Dolores as well is in a tight fix, and Little Frankie will be in a murderous mood. Taking it all round, Elver has forced a crisis, and anything might happen. Whatever you do, don't miss next week's long instalment of this sensational serial.)