

a cream-coloured gown. Over her slender young shoulders, I further made out, hung an opera cloak of delicate lacework.

She stood for a moment at the carriage step, as though awaiting a cab or taxi. Then she quickly crossed the avenue and, turning north, passed the waiting man in blue. She passed him without a spoken word.

But as the cream-coloured figure drifted nonchalantly by the broad-shouldered man I caught a fleeting glimpse of something passing between them, a hint of one hand catching a white packet from another. It was a hint, and nothing more. But it was enough.

MY first impulse, as I saw that movement, was to circle quickly about and warn Palmer of what had taken place. A moment's thought, however, showed me the danger of this. And the young lieutenant, I could see, had already changed his course, so that his path southward through the centre of the square paralleled that of the other man now walking more briskly along the avenue curb.

He had clearly stated that I was to watch any confederate. I had no intention to quibble over side issues. As I started northward, indeed, after that mysterious figure in the Gainsborough hat and the cream-coloured gown, a most pleasurable and purposeful tingle of excitement thrilled up and down my backbone.

I shadowed her as guardedly as I was able, following her block by block, as she hurried up the empty thoroughfare that was now as quiet and lonely as a glacial moraine. My one fear was that she would reach the Waldorf, or some equally complex beehive of human life, before I could overtake her. Once there, I knew, she would be as nicely lost as a needle in a haystack. She may have suspected me by this time, I felt, for twice I saw her look back over her shoulder.

Then I suddenly stopped and ducked into a doorway. For a moment after I saw a wandering hansom come clattering into the avenue out of Thirty-third Street I discovered that, at her repeated gesture, it was pulling up beside the curb.

I stood well back in the shadow until she had climbed into the seat, the apron had slammed shut, and the driver had wheeled his vehicle about and started northward again. Then I skirted along the shop fronts, darted across the street, and made straight for the hotel cabstand and a taxi driver drowsily exhaling cigarette smoke up toward the tepid midnight skies. The bill I thrust into his hand took all the sleep out of his body and ended the incense to the morning stars.

"Up the avenue," I said, as I clambered in. "And follow that hansom two blocks behind until it turns, and then run up on it and wait."

IT turned at Forty-second Street and went eastward to Lexington Avenue. Then, doubling on its tracks, it swung southward again. We let it clatter on well ahead of us. But as it turned suddenly westward, at the corner of Twenty-third Street, we broke the speed laws to draw once more up on it. Then, as we crossed Twenty-third Street, I told the driver to keep on southward toward Gramercy Square. For I had caught sight of the hansom already drawn up at the curve half way between Lexington and

Fourth Avenues, on the east side.

A moment after we jolted across the car tracks I slipped away from the taxi and ran back to the cross street on foot. As I reached the corner I caught sight of a figure in a cream-coloured gown cross the side-walk and step quickly into the doorway of a shabby four-storied building.

I had no time to study this building. It might have been an antiquated residence turned into a cluster of artists' studios, or a third-rate domicile of third-rate business firms. My one important discovery was that the door opened as I turned the knob and that I was able quickly and quietly to step into the dark hallway.

I stood there in the gloom, listening intently. I could hear the light and hurried click of shoe-heels on the bare tread-boards of the stairs. I waited and listened and carefully counted these clicks. I knew, as I did so, that the woman had climbed to the top floor.

Then I heard the click of metal, the sound of a key thrust into a lock, and then the cautious closing of a door. Then I found myself surrounded by nothing but darkness and silence again.

I stood there in deep thought and silence for a minute or two. Then I groped my way cautiously to the foot of the stairs, found the heavy, old-fashioned balustrade, and slowly and silently climbed the stairway.

I did not stop until I found myself on the top floor of that quiet and many-odoured building. I stood there, at a standstill, peering through the darkness that surrounded me.

My search was rewarded by the discovery of one thin streak of yellow light along what must have been the bottom of a closed door. Just beyond that door, I felt, my pursuit was to come to an end.

I groped my way to the wall and tiptoed quietly forward. When I came to the door I let my hand close noiselessly about the knob. Then, cushioning it with a firm grasp, I turned it slowly, inch by inch.

The door, I found, was locked. But inside the room I could still hear the occasional click of shoe heels and the indeterminate noises of an occupant moving quietly yet hurriedly about.

I stood there, puzzled, depressed by my first feeling of frustration. Then I made out the vague oblong of what must have been a window in the rear of the narrow hall. I tiptoed back to this window, in the hope that it might lead to something. I found, to my disappointment, that it was barred with half-inch iron rods. And this meant a second defeat.

As I tested these rods I came on one that was not so secure as the others. One quiet and steady wrench brought an end screw bodily out of the half-rotted wood. Another patient twist or two entirely freed the other end.

I found myself armed with a four-foot bar, sharpened wedge-like at each end for its screw head. So I made my way silently back to the pencil of yellow light and the locked door above it. I stood there listening for a minute or two. All I could hear was the run-

ning of tap water and the occasional rustling of a paper. So I quietly forced the end of my rod in between the door and its jamb, and as quietly levered the end outward.

Something had to give under that strain. I was woefully afraid it would be the lock bar itself. This I knew would go with a snap, and promptly betray my movement. But as I increased the pressure I could see that it was the socket screws that were



"'Sit down!' I commanded, as authoritatively as I could."

slowly yielding in the pinewood jamb.

I stopped and waited for some obliterating noise before venturing the last thrust that would send the bolt free of the loosening socket. It came with the sudden sound of steps and the turning off of the running tap. The door had been forced open and stood an inch or two from the jamb before the steps sounded again.

I waited, with my heart in my mouth, wondering if anything had been overheard, if anything had been discovered. It was only then, too, that the enormity of my offence came home to me. I was a house-breaker. I was playing the part of a midnight burglar. I was facing a situation in which I had no immediate interest. I was being confronted by perils I had no means of comprehending. But I intended to get inside that room no matter what it cost.

I heard, as I stood there, the sound of a drawer being opened and closed. Then came a heel click or two on the wooden floor, and then an impatient and quite audible sigh. There was no mistaking that sigh. It was as freighted with femininity as though I had heard a woman's voice. And nothing was to be gained by waiting. So I first leaned my iron rod silently against the door corner. Then, taking a deep breath, I stepped quickly and noiselessly into the lighted room.

I STOOD there, close beside the partly opened door, blinking a little at the sudden glare of light. There was an appreciable interval before the details of the scene could register themselves on my mind.

What I saw was a large and plainly furnished room. Across one corner stood a rolltop desk, and from the top of this I caught the glimmer of a telephone transmitter. In the rear wall stood two old-fashioned, low-silled windows. Against this wall, and between these two windows, stood a black iron safe.

Before the open door of this safe, with her back turned to me, was the woman in the cream-coloured gown. It was quite plain that she was not yet aware of my presence.

She had thrown her hat and cape aside, and was at the moment bending low over the dark maw of the opened safe, reaching into its recesses with one white and rounded arm. I stood there watching her,



"He had deliberately robbed a sleeping man!"