



Coming out of the quiet cross street he stepped thoughtlessly into the rush of traffic that sweeps through Union Square. An automobile brushed carelessly by within inches of him. A great lumbering truck came charging down upon him. A motorcycle screamed at his ear. He leaped back to the curb, muttering at the grinning fiend in goggles who shot past.

Wardwell stood on the curb looking out over the shifting lines and tides of trucks, handcars, automobiles, horses and people. He was looking for one person out of the hundreds and hundreds that moved within range of his eye. As well, he thought, look for a particular stone in the paving.

A few men have stepped into the wilderness and never been seen again. But how many, many men, and women, have stepped off a curb into a stream like that and never been seen again.

There's Flynn, the cop, across the street. He knows me by sight. He could say he saw me step off the curb. And that's all he could say. I could lose myself from anybody that ever saw me. The string that holds us where we are is so thin that—Why it's a wonder that anybody stays where he is! It's so easy to walk out, completely out!

And then some of Augusta's excited worry came upon him. Rose Wilding might have been stunned by the fall. She might have walked, dazed, right past her own door, right off this curb and into that sea of moving life!

"Is it kiddin' me you are?" snorted officer Flynn. "Lookin' for your boarding mistress! More like, she's lookin' for you."

"No, I'm not," said Jimmie quietly. "I'm right in earnest. Her daughter has it that she fell and struck her head on the curb, and lost—"

"Sure. There'd have to be a daughter in it." "Oh, go to Blazes!" snapped Jimmie, turning on his heel.

"I might have known better," he growled as he walked away. "They never do anything unless you show them a corpse. And then they'd like to club you for giving them trouble."

He turned south, looking to the only other resource he knew. He was a New Yorker with all of a New Yorker's entire dependence on the two forces that govern his town—the police and the newspapers.

At Astor Place he ran across Jim Ray, a dark little crank of a man, a man who looked as old as the first thing that ever happened, and seemed to have been present at every happening since the first. He was coming from a stormy, snapping interview with an irate, bullying financier, and he was on his way to get the personal story of an interesting adventuress who had gotten herself into jail.

But he listened to Wardwell. In fact, he always listened to everything, until he was sure it was not worth listening to.

He had known Wardwell during the latter's sporadic incursions into newspaper work, and had shown a grudging, contrary sort of liking for him.

"Which do you want to go on," Ray questioned non-committally, "the facts, or the daughter's imagination?"

"Both," said Wardwell stubbornly.

"All right," Ray admitted. "But, if you don't want to be gayed, stick to the facts. Go on down to the office, Grayson will be just about coming in. Tell him I sent you. He'll give the word to the boys as they're going out on their assignments. If anything has happened to the woman, they'll get the thread somewhere."

Wardwell was more or less at home in Newspaper Row, and he thoroughly believed that no accident happening in the city could slip through the net of active intelligence centered there. When he had gotten assurance that the word would be passed to all the reporters going out for their rounds, that every newspaper in the city would be informed, that every police blotter and hospital record would be scanned, he started back to the house with the sure feeling that he had done all that was possible.

Augusta listened, dry-eyed, almost listless, it seemed. She did not say anything. It was plain that she had expected nothing from his search. And Wardwell was chilled by the obvious fact, that he had really accomplished nothing.

Augusta sat a little while, not seeming to notice that Wardwell had stopped speaking. Her soft blue eyes took on a deep, dark blue in which there was no visible expression. Her features were strained and sharp, as though she reached somewhere to another medium of knowledge, outside the common senses. After a little she said vaguely:

"She is not hurt. Not that way. She cannot be found that way. She has lost her thought. I've never yet called to her without getting an answer."

"Eh, what's that?" questioned Jimmie sharply.

The girl seemed to be awakened by his voice. She shivered and suddenly jumped up from her chair.

"What was I saying—? I don't remember."

"You were saying something about calling her and always getting an answer. I don't think you ought to worry so," he soothed. "We haven't the least reason to think that anything's happened her. It couldn't be anything bad, or we'd know of it before now."

Here began those incredible nightmare days, and nights, when it seemed that they were forever in the street, hurrying, the girl leading, Wardwell a wholly useless body-guard following, from house to house of all the people who had known Rose Wilding. Then

came the fearful, timid questionings, at hospitals, at emergency wards, at police stations. And all the while Wardwell kept every newspaper office in town in a constant bad temper with his persistent prodding, by telephone.

Augusta did not go to the newspaper offices, either because she believed that Wardwell's acquaintance would get more attention than she could, or because she believed, as she had said in the beginning, that she herself must find her mother.

Then there were the worse times, when Wardwell, leaving Augusta peremptorily in the hands of Ann, went by himself on the last, gruesome, hopeless round. He did not tell Augusta that he was going to the morgue. He said nothing when he came back, gray of face and deathly quiet in spite of his every effort to hold up cheer. But Augusta knew where he had been, and what he had seen—and what he had not found.

There were days now when Augusta walked, as it seemed, aimlessly. There were no more definite places to be visited. She walked, Wardwell, with a dull pain of helplessness, dogged and uncomplaining at her side, through lower Fifth Avenue and University Place at the noon time when the thousands of women and girls spilled out from loft buildings and swarmed the sidewalks. Evening found her watching the cross streets from Broome to Fourteenth Street, searching excitedly the myriad faces of the crowds that move eastward to that world wonder of human hives, the great East Side.

But Wardwell, watching the girl, the weary, sharply cut look in her face, the pinched, thinning lines of her slender body as she walked home beside him, decided that this must stop. There could be but one end of it for the high strung, over-sensitized mind of the girl.

Jimmie was now the sobered gentleman, the tried and patient servitor always at her side. Neither of them knew how close to each other in sympathy and understanding they had come in these weeks. They had, in truth, been living in a world almost all by themselves with their search. The girl was ready to listen, to believe, to

Augusta had opened the door to announce tearfully: "Mister Jimmy, the boarders are saying that they can't stand it!"



trust; but she could not promise obedience. "I'll stay in to-day, if I can," she promised. "But, if I hear her calling—"

With this he had to be content. And leaving her with Ann he went to his room, hoping to get some work done. His money was about gone. He must get some of the hated skits ready for the Sunday paper from which he drew a hand-to-mouth living.

In the middle of the forenoon he heard Ann's step pounding heavily up the stairs of the quiet house.

"She's away out again, Mither Jimmie!" the big woman panted. "I but stepped out the alley to the corner for an onion. An' I'm just back this blessed minute. An' she's away!"

Wardwell started for the door, but came back. "There's no use going out now," he said. "I wouldn't know where to look. Probably she has started off on some new thought. But about noon I'll know where to look for her. Don't worry, Ann; she's not in the least danger." But it was a confidence he was far from feeling, whatever his common sense might tell him.

Just as the dusk was gathering he heard her key in the door and ran down the stairs. She staggered into his arms in the hall and began to cry fearfully. They were the first tears that he had seen her cry in these weeks, and he did not know whether it was good or bad.

"Oh Jimmie, Jimmie," she cried, with the first direct appeal that she

(Continued on page 46)