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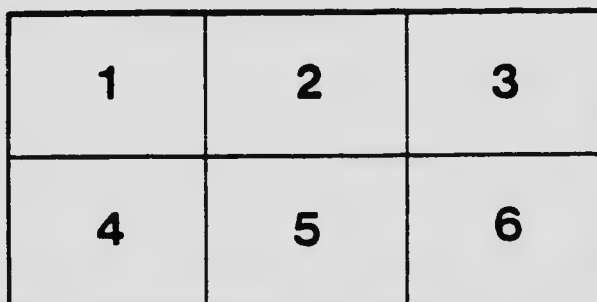
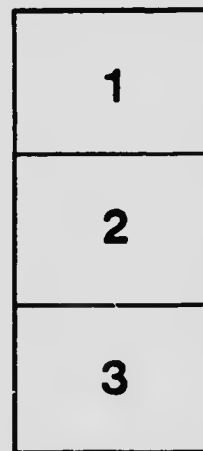
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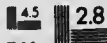
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The Golden Scarab

By

Hopkins Moorhouse

*Author of "The Gauntlet of Alceste," "Every Man for Himself,"
"Deep Furrows," etc.*

Toronto

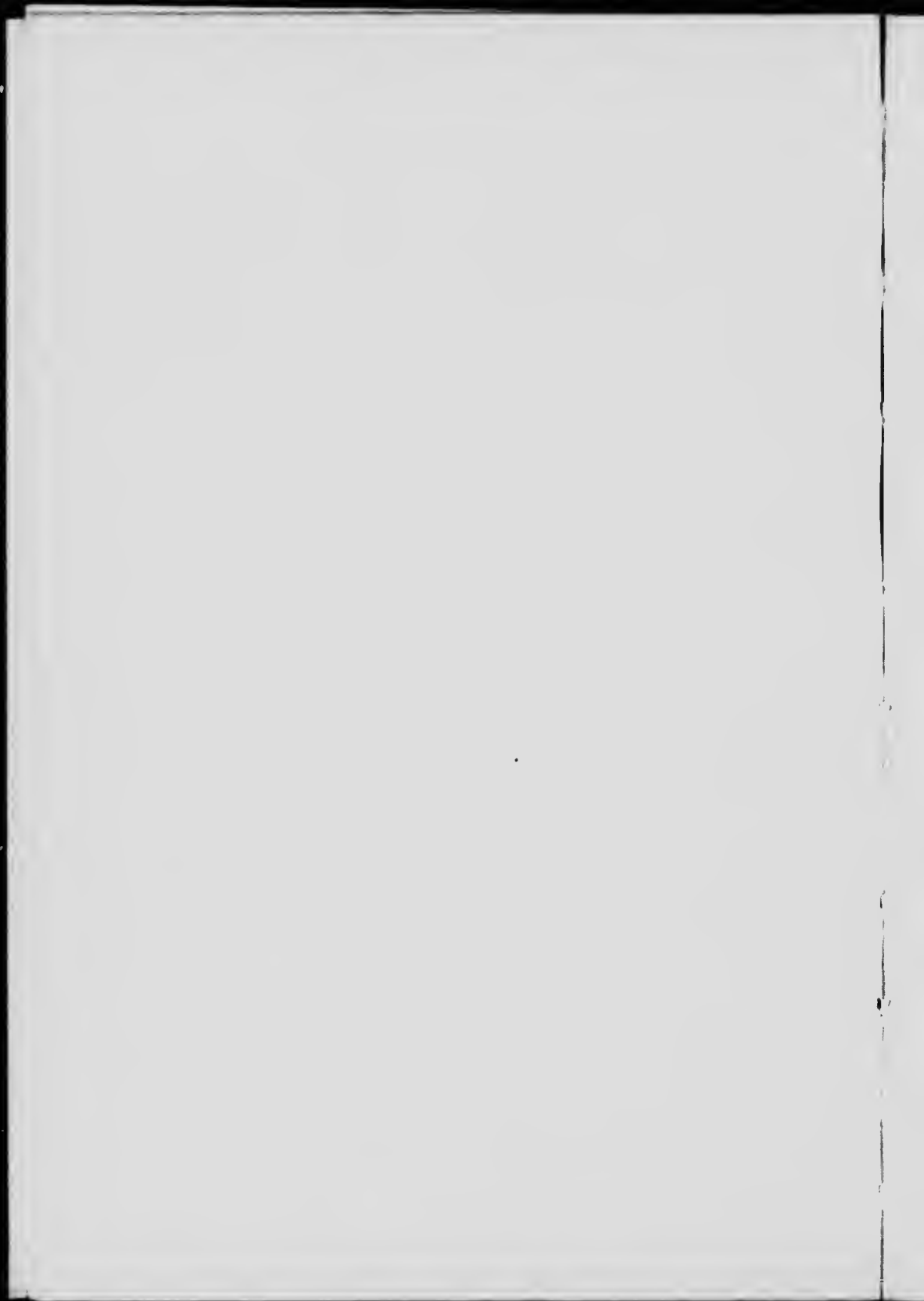
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TO
MY WIFE



FOREWORD

IN presenting to the public a second chronicle from the somewhat intimate records entrusted to me by my old newspaper friend "Mr. Addison Kent," I have been led to select the case of *The Golden Scarab* for a number of reasons. Chief of these, aside from its timeliness, is the fact that it brought Kent once more in contact with his old enemy "Alceste," in rather a remarkable way which bears directly upon certain startling material in my possession for possible use at some future date. Also, I have received from readers of *The Gauntlet of Alceste* so many requests for the further history of this gentleman's exploits that I am left but little choice in the matter.

It has been my endeavour to adhere closely to the actual records, sufficiently strange in themselves. The assistance of Mr. Arthur Weigall, late Inspector-General of Antiquities, Egyptian Government, Member of the Catalogue Staff of the Cairo Museum and Officer of the Order of the Medjidieh, is gratefully acknowledged. In his volume *Tutankhamen* (Thornton Butterworth, Limited) he relates an actual experience of his own in connection with the mummy of a sacred cat, discovered

in the Theban necropolis in 1909 by Lord Carnarvon; the incident is so analogous to the adventure which befell Addison Kent that I have taken the liberty of drawing upon some of Mr. Weigall's impressions and data in order that the portrayal may be accurate.

H. M.

TORONTO, CANADA.

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T. W. W. W.

MR. RICHARD MALABAR, late of the London *Daily World*, had not dallied with hazards in the ports of the Seven Seas without learning to be discreet. He was well aware that in all metropolitan centres are certain districts where at times the passing stranger does well to hold steadfastly upon his way; where blindness and deafness may be even imperative if one is to continue the enjoyment of fine music and beautiful sunsets. New York's polyglot East Side was hardly the place for experimental interference, if simple kindness could be so misconstrued. Nevertheless, in the early evening of this day in late summer——

A curt command brought the taxi to a sudden stop at the curb. Richard Malabar stepped out, his polished malacca cane hanging from his left forearm as he smoothed the yellow gloves on his sinewy hands and strode around the corner into the nearest side-street.

“Good evening, officer. What seems to be the matter?”

The Italian owner of the fruit-cart stopped gesticulating. The ragged urchin whom he held by the collar ceased squirming. The little girl with the Cinderella hair and the comically smudged face allowed one big gray eye to peek over a grimy fist while her sobs became less demonstrative, and she held closer to the policeman's coat-tail. Patrolman Tierney turned a quizzical Irish eye upon the newcomer in the sudden lull that had come upon the noisy group.

" Tony says thim two kids has tuk foive oranges and t'ree bananas widout payin' fer thim," he explained. " He's afther wantin' me to put in a gin'ral alar-rm to Headquarters to call out the reserves an' pinch the little divils as danger-rous characters !"

Malabar looked at the " dangerous characters " with a twinkle in his eye.

" Desperate thieves, eh ? What did you steal them for, son ?"

" Please, mister, we didn't steal 'em," piped the thin-faced boy hopefully. " We just took 'em. The kid sister was hungry, see ? We hadda git eats !"

" A case of economic pressure, officer," smiled Malabar. " With your permission, I shall proceed to dispose of the case against the prisoners by settlement out of court. How much do five oranges and three bananas come to, Tony ? Well, here is your money."

He called the newsboy over to him and pressed a bill into his hand.

" You and your sister go and dine at the Waldorf, old chap. What did you say your name was ? Spud ? Well, away you go, now !"

He shook hands with Patrolman Tierney, cleverly parting with another bill in so doing, and in a moment had vanished around the corner into his taxi.

To Richard Malabar, much travelled cosmopolite, the incident but served as an after-dinner mint to the excellent meal he had just enjoyed at a little Hungarian restaurant. He liked to dine in odd corners, and he leaned back in his seat well content. For the sight of Spud and his sister had brought back a vision of his own childhood woes. Poor little beggars ! The smile which banished the haunting melancholy from his clean-cut face unlocked for a moment the golden

personality that underlay the habitual mask behind which he was accustomed to retire from the world. Before he was more than a few blocks away his mind was back among the problems that obsessed him—problems gray cloaked in gravity.

At last, with a shoulder shrug of impatience, he dismissed them and directed his thoughts to the evening before him. The taxi was speeding for the comfortable quarters of Addison Kent, popular novelist and young man of good looks, health, wealth and fame, who lived in Minaki Annex, just off Riverside Drive. During the past two weeks Dick Malabar and Addison Kent had grown very close to that deep sort of friendship which transcends the mere companionship of kindred, bachelor spirits. And to-night they were to spend the evening together out in Westchester.

Malabar had first met the novelist some years ago at the Press Club in Wine Court Alley, London. Then the stories and articles of this hard-working Canadian newspaper youth were just beginning to attract attention in various magazines. The mutual liking between the two young men might have ripened rapidly into friendship if the journalist had not been called away on one of those overnight commissions for his paper which frequently took him on long and difficult journeys. Now, meeting Kent again in New York after the lapse of the years, Dick Malabar had found him riding the crests of the literary seas with a success which would have upset any young man not well ballasted with a sense of humour. And as their friendship grew, Malabar had been delighted to find that his own hobby, criminology, was likewise Kent's; to find the author's bookcases filled with rare books and his filing cabinets stored with a more complete collection of newspaper

and magazine clippings than was available in any newspaper "morgue" or even at Police Headquarters; to find in Addison Kent's keenly trained mind a match for his own upon almost any subject.

The novelist greeted him jovially when at last Malabar reached the apartment. Kent had dined with his misguided publisher, he said, had delivered the new manuscript and his worries were over for a while.

"Are one's worries ever over?"

"Well, if that's how you are feeling, you need a tonic, my boy," laughed Kent. "I wish we were going out for a livelier evening than we are likely to have with the worthy Professor; but I guess we are in for it, Dick. Caron has been 'phoning again to make sure we would be on hand and that——" He broke off abruptly. "Anything gone wrong, old man? You appear to possess all the expansive merriment of a conscientious undertaker at a rich man's funeral!"

The gravity upon Malabar's face remained unrelieved for a moment as he stood regarding the novelist intently. Then a slow smile dispelled it.

"A bit of a wash and I am ready for the worst your professorial friend can do to us."

"That's George, signal-honking for us out front now. It will take us about an hour to run out."

"Right-o!"

Professor Emil Caron, the noted Egyptologist and archæologist with various letters after his name, had arrived in New York just two days ago. Because he was a close personal friend of Mr. Armaund Lamont, the well-known Fifth Avenue jeweller, silversmith and collector of antiques, and because Addison Kent had received a special request from Mr. Lamont that he look after the French savant upon arrival, Kent had

met the liner at the dock. Professor Caron had been confined to his berth with sea-sickness all the way across the Atlantic, and was in a highly nervous state. It was fortunate for his peace of mind that the novelist was there to ease through the Customs the cherished possessions of the excited little Frenchman, or he would have gone to the asylum for the insane direct from the boat, instead of to the Westchester mansion of his friend Lamont. Even as it was, there was enough fuss over certain odd-shaped cases and boxes to make Kent heave a breath of relief when the ordeal was over.

Professor Caron was by way of being something of an authority in archæological circles. He was bringing with him to America quite a collection of antiquities for distribution among various museums. Most of these had been consigned direct; but not all. The careful transfer of the "luggage" had required the personal supervision of the gesticulating owner, whose English failed him utterly under stress, and whose French was so voluble that at times it outran even Kent, who prided himself on his proficiency in that language. However, the novelist had done everything possible to facilitate the Professor's adjustment to his new surroundings and was rewarded by the genuine gratitude of the little man.

It would take a day or two to get unpacked and settled, he had explained, but the very first guest to be invited to this most magnificent home must be Mr. Addison Kent. Had he not had warm eulogy from his great friend Lamont?—the very warmest praise of Mr. Kent and his very great abilities? Nothing must interfere. He must come and Professor Caron would be honoured to show him things he would be interested to see, and to tell him things that would amaze him—

some very great secrets which on no account must he repeat.

"You have been so very good, Mr. Kent, to help me like this. I may have still greater need of your help, and it is well to prepare, is it not? You will come?"

Even had Kent not been interested in the subjects encompassed by Professor Caron's special hobby, he would have found it difficult to refuse. But he was greatly interested in such subjects and a little intrigued by the Frenchman's manner. He knew, too, that Dick Malabar had been in Egypt, and the mention of the fact brought an immediate invitation from the Professor for Malabar to come also. A friend for whom Mr. Kent could vouch—what could be more pleasurable?

Following a double wedding, Armaund Lamont and his bride, accompanied by Thomas Traynor and his bride, had gone abroad on an extended honeymoon tour. It would be some time yet before they returned, Kent knew; but the letter he had received from Lamont spoke in highest terms of Professor Emil Caron. Indeed, Lamont's confidence was best expressed in the fact that he had placed his newly acquired palatial home in Westchester at the disposal of the Professor for whatever length of time he chose to stay in New York. The place had been closed for the summer after the decorators had completed their work, and had been left in charge of Mokra, Lamont's Algerian butler, with the gardener to look after the grounds. This visit of a guest meant the hiring of a chef and kitchen help; but these details had been arranged by Lamont's office manager.

"I wonder what the little Professor has in store for us this evening," Kent remarked as they neared their destination. "He spoke as if he had some surprise

or other up his sleeve. Aside from that, I must warn you, Dick, that Lamont's house is full of queer and rare things, picked up in odd corners of the earth. I think some of them will interest you. Lamont's confidential man is an Algerian—quite a character in his way. And Caron has brought with him a Nubian servant whom he picked up somewhere 'east of Suez'—a big, brown animal of a man who could draw good money as a Silent Slave in a leopard girdle in one of these Western stage spectacles of the Very Far East. He'd look great, posed on the marble steps of the Caliph's palace against a Maxfield Parish ultramarine sky, arms folded to bulge the biceps, a figure in bronze with a spot-light playing— Why, say, the fellow must be fully seven feet tall!"

"Oh, come now! come now!" chuckled Malabar.

They presently rolled in between the huge stone gateposts of the Lamont estate and curved up the avenue between trees and shrubs that circled the lawns to the great brownstone house, perched high above the Sound. Evidently the noise of their car had apprised the Algerian servant of their approach, for the great iron-grilled glass doors swung open to them before they could press the electric bell. Mokra himself stood there—a tall, dignified figure in immaculate black and white—and welcomed Addison Kent with a smile of recognition which seemed to consist largely of perfect teeth, startlingly white in contrast to his swarthy skin.

As he took their hats, gloves, canes and light overcoats, close to his heels stood the finest Persian cat Malabar had ever seen—a big, coal-black one, whose great golden eyes regarded the visitors with a calm stare of indifference. A regular snob of a cat! He seemed to know that his fur was long and silky, that the

red ribbon around his neck was very becoming to him and that he belonged to the aristocracy of Catdom. As Mokra preceded them down the wide hallway so did the cat, hugging close and picking steps with infinite grace across the polished floor.

"What a beauty!" Malabar admired.

"Lamont thinks a lot of him," Kent smiled. "He's captured no end of ribbons. Name's Aristophanes—'Toph' for short."

"Ah, a humorist! That accounts for his solemnity!"

In the passage beyond the great staircase suddenly they were confronted by a giant figure. He appeared before the heavy velvet hangings that curtained the archway towards which the butler was leading them. His advent was so unexpected and he was of such startling physique that both guests halted involuntarily. Recalling Kent's description, Malabar identified him at once as the Nubian who acted as servant or body-guard, or both, for Professor Emil Caron; while he may not have been seven feet tall, his bulk seemed to tower over them—almost to threaten as he stood with folded arms, frowning at the Algerian in silent disapproval. In very truth, all he needed was a leopard skin about his loins, gold hoops on his ears, and a drawn scimitar to complete the impression of Arabian Nights theatricality!

In the fleeting tableau Kent and Malabar were aware of Mokra drawing back, half in fear, half in resentment; of domineering contempt that crossed the brown face of the Nubian like the shadow of a sneer; of the black cat with back arched! Then the Nubian was bowing and holding aside the curtain for them to pass, while Mokra was smiling and politely assuring Mr. Kent that their host would be found in the library beyond.

PROFESSOR CARON was half-way across the big room, eagerly greeting them even before he was close enough to shake hands. He had awaited their arrival with the impatience of an enthusiast who requires only an intelligent audience to make him happy. A little man of spectacles and the stooping neck of a student, as if he had spent many years in peering and prying for Knowledge in a never-ending game of Hide-and-Seek. And, like so many men who devote their lives to restricted fields of intensive investigation, he lacked complexities; to a degree, the world even ceased to exist for him outside of his own particular orbit. He knew that Addison Kent, being a literary man, was a fellow-student, and he soon sensed the fact that Kent's friend belonged in the same category. It pleased him greatly to be able to converse with them freely in his own language about his work, and to feel that their interest was genuine, their minds competent. He beamed upon them, therefore, with an enthusiasm so unaffected that it was almost childlike.

The great room in which they lounged, comfortably ensconced in deep leather chairs, was a harmony in luxury. The walls were lined with bookcases and various antiques, with here and there a valuable painting. The floor rugs were costly. The furniture was massive, particularly the round library table in the centre; it must have been eight feet in diameter, and was curiously carved and inlaid. As his glance

roved the room, Dick Malabar's face showed approval of the artistic taste with which Mr. Armaund Lamont had arranged everything.

Noticing this interest, Professor Caron graciously suggested that presently they would make a tour of inspection. In addition to Mr. Lamont's most interesting pieces there were some things of his own which they might like to see. He had assembled them on an upper floor—in his own most beautiful bedroom, to be exact. It was there that he had unpacked his treasures, including the mummies.

"Mummies!" echoed Malabar, amused. "Hardly bedroom companions, Professor!"

"I sleep with them around me; for then I know that they are safe," he explained ingenuously.

"There's an idea for you, Kent. Write a story about the theft of a mummy, though I'm blest if I know how you would go about stealing one, or what you'd do with it after you got away with it!"

"It is not the mummies, Mr. Malabar, but the things that are buried with them. Some of these antiques are very beautiful and very valuable. In this great city are many wealthy people who would pay big sums—collectors, you understand." Professor Caron smiled a little uncertainly in mild reproof. "Robbery of the royal sepulchres was common in ancient Thebes; for, as you know, it was the Egyptian custom to bury with the dead much jewellery and great wealth in gold, silver, bronze and precious stones."

"Desecration of a tomb, I understand, was a very serious offence," prompted Kent.

It was. Professor Caron explained at some length just why it was so serious. To begin with, the ancient Egyptians believed in a life hereafter, and that to

obtain everlasting life it was necessary to preserve the embalmed body. They believed that the spirit dwelt in the tomb with the body for some three thousand years before it was summoned to the Judgment Hall of Osiris, the god of the Dead; there the heart was weighed in the balances along with the Symbol of Truth, and so found wanting or vindicated. They believed that the spirit required food and comforts, and that is why embalmed food was placed in the tomb, along with many objects used by the deceased in his daily life. After three thousand years the jackal-headed Anubis came to carry the soul to judgment, and great pains were taken to make a comfortable and happy home. Certain things were inscribed on papyri to assist the deceased in repelling the attacks of demons. Hunting scenes and other activities in this life were faithfully depicted in the tomb in order that these decorations might remind him of his past exploits on earth and his *ka*, or genius, thereby be maintained. Many ceremonies were performed and services recited, and mortuary temples were built near the tomb where the spirit could go, after coming out on the east side to greet the sun, and where the friends of the dead could offer their devotions.

"So, you see, the safety of the tomb was a serious matter," concluded Professor Caron, "and was the subject of much thought by the Egyptian kings and their great men. It was the despoiling of tombs that led to the abandonment of the pyramid idea in favour of rock-hewn sepulchres, and it took many years, thousands of workers, and great wealth to prepare some of the great tombs of the Pharaohs. Every precaution was taken to house the dead securely and secretly, and to preserve the funeral furniture and other comforts

for the spirit. If a mummy were disturbed, and its tomb destroyed, it would be both without name and homeless. Sometimes terrible curses were inscribed to frighten away robbers; for some thieves are very bold indeed."

Alas, yes! Nothing was safe from a bold thief. Professor Caron went on to describe some of the known tombs of the Pharaohs. Five hundred feet into the hillside, then down into the bowels of the earth for one hundred and fifty feet or more these ghouls who pillaged the tombs had to go. In the tomb of Sety I, they first went far down a long flight of steps; then came a passage to another flight of steps; then another passage to another flight of steps; then another passage into a room that expanded into a large hall with four huge columns supporting the roof. With echoing footsteps, the thieves had to cross this hall to more steps, leading downward still into another long passage. This in turn revealed more steps down into two more passages, ending in a large hall of columns with four rooms opening off it. Then down more steps they came at last to where the mummy lay in its sarcophagus.

"A regular palace underground, through which the spirit was thought to be roving loose, mind you! And, all the way down, the walls covered with sculptured and painted gods and demons of the Underworld, and the figure of the king stirring up the wrath of the deities! Nothing but silence and mystery in that deep place, gentlemen, and your thieves coming along with flickering oil lamps, casting dancing shadows—bold, is it not? No, nothing is sacred to bold thieves! Nothing is safe!"

"These curses you refer to, Professor Caron—the

stories one hears about the revenge of ancient spirits upon those who disturbed them—do you put any stock in that sort of thing?" asked Kent with interest.

"There are many strange things that man does not understand," mused the little Frenchman, stroking his gray goatee reflectively. "It is well to keep an open mind on all things, my young friend. But these curses are not very plentiful and were for frightening away robbers."

"But the curse of the Pharaohs has come to be known all over the world from actual cases where harm has followed the meddlers."

"Why should harm come to anyone who entered ancient sepulchres to preserve the dead, not to destroy?—to renew their memory for posterity?" argued the Professor. "Even taking them seriously, they refer to robbers; but these actual occurrences of which you speak—usually there is a rational explanation for whatever happened."

"Not always," contradicted Malabar. "I knew a man who came into possession of a little bronze lamp——"

"Aladdin had one like it, and it brought him great wealth and happiness when he scratched it."

"The man I knew took sick—and died," declared Malabar solemnly.

"Pooh! pooh! Come, gentlemen, we must not grow sombre. I could recite many such stories; but let us go upstairs and I will show you one of these famous curses, inscribed upon a scarab."

As Professor Caron had intimated, his bedroom was commodious and elegantly furnished in keeping with all the other appointments in this house of luxury.

A small sitting-room opened off it. Alongside the entrance to this room two cases stood on end, enclosing figures swathed in bandages; the mummies were not exposed to view, but the shape of the ancient bodies immediately identified them. Upon entering the room, however, the gaze of the visitors became focussed almost involuntarily upon the startling wooden figure of a large black cat, which sat near the window.

"That case has never been opened yet; but it contains the embalmed body of a cat, wrapped in bandages like these other mummies. The Egyptians, as you know, regarded the cat as part household pet and part deity; it was a very sacred animal and, of course, poor pussy had to go along with his master! Now here, gentlemen——"

"Sacred to Bast, the Lady of Bubastis, wasn't it, Professor?" Malabar tapped the wooden figure with his finger-nails; it was hollow. He stood regarding the sombre image with interest. The light shone on the smooth, thick coating of pitch with which it was painted.

"Yes, yes—sacred to Bast," nodded Professor Caron. "Now if you will come over here to the table, Mr. Malabar——"

"What's this stuff that makes its eyes glare so? By Jove, Kent, look at the way those yellow whiskers bristle!"

"They used obsidian, rock crystal or coloured paste for the eyes," supplied Professor Caron, a little impatiently. "Now, here I will show you——"

"I remember reading something to the effect that when a cat died the whole household went into mourn-

ing and shaved off their eyebrows," volunteered Addison Kent. "I think it was Diodorus——"

"Yes, yes—Diodorus," agreed the Professor. "The same writer records a case where the Egyptians slew a Roman who had accidentally killed a cat—— Now here, gentlemen, is the scarab I mentioned; it was found on the breast of the mummy on the right over there, and this is how the so-called curse reads: '*Who trespasses upon my property the sun god shall punish him. I will leap upon him as a wild beast upon his prey.*'" He chuckled. "Doesn't look as if there was much leap left in him at this late date, eh?"

They examined the large scarab with interest while Professor Caron rattled on: "Nothing was more highly revered by the Egyptians of old than the sacred beetle—*scarabæus sacer*. 'Khepera' (He who turns) they called it in ancient days, symbolizing the return of the sun each day, and representing the everlasting progress of life. The likeness of the beetle was made into amulets and placed upon the mummies to ward off evil. It was made into signet rings and worn by the living, being prepared as a talisman by the priests of the different temples. This sign of immortality was constantly before the people, and was used in the Government offices, bearing the Pharaoh's cartouche—the oval in which his name was inscribed—and was worn by soldiers going into battle and, in fact, by the people at large for good luck.

"That hole you see was where the gold wire passed through—to hang it around the neck of the mummy. I have seen many finer scarabs than this; the colours have faded badly. Scarabs were not in general use before the middle of the twelfth dynasty, but they were quite plentiful by the time of Amemhot III, perhaps

most plentiful in the reigns of Thotmes III and Rameses II, because these were the longest reigns. This one belongs to the eighteenth dynasty; it is interesting and valuable on account of the curse——”

“And it was worn by that mummy against the wall there, you say?” The eyes of all three sought the silent figure as Kent spoke. “Who was he, Professor?”

“He’s a long way from home,” commented Malabar.

“Yes, gentlemen, and a long time dead,” smiled Professor Caron. “His name was Sethutnakt, and he appears to have been the High Priest of Amon-Ra. See, here’s his photo; it will not be necessary to unwrap him to give you a look at him. In the reign of Rameses II——”

An exclamation from Richard Malabar interrupted him. The journalist was pointing to another photo which Professor Caron held in his hand. It was also the photo of an exposed mummy—the most sinister of grinning faces; the mouth was open, revealing gleaming teeth; the hollow eye-sockets stared

“An ugly customer, eh, my friend?” Professor Caron smiled with a hint of condescension at their evident repulsion. “That is the other one, over there by the door. I cannot tell you much about him as he is one of the nameless who lost his tomb, or, rather, he never had a tomb, because he died with his sandals on, out in the desert somewhere on some expedition to the breccia quarries. It is my opinion that he came to his end by foul play. His body was dug up from the sand by accident, mummified by the sand and sun

in the Nubian desert; in that dry air exposure will mummify naturally."

"But he is all bandaged up——"

"The same as Seth? Quite so. We wrapped him up very carefully, for he is an odd and valuable specimen, and will be welcome in one of your American medical colleges. A vicious-looking person, I admit. But he has not bitten anything for some thousands of years!"

"You do not know who or what he was, then?" asked Kent.

"No. He may have been a great noble in his day in the palace of the king. He may have strutted in gorgeous raiment with all the pride of a peacock. But his day is long since done, and I sometimes think he is laughing at himself! That is what I call him—'The Laughter.'"

Professor Caron had stepped half-way across the room towards the mummies while talking, and now he turned and started back to the table, chuckling to himself.

From the high ceiling of the room there suddenly fell a large segment of plaster. It landed on the floor with a heavy thud—in the exact spot where he had been standing as he spoke!

I

THROUGH the thinning dust Kent and Malabar exchanged quick glances; but Professor Caron continued to smile. He merely raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders, remarking that it looked as if friend Lamont would require to see to his plumbing somewhere.

“Then you do not believe——?”

“The fall of plaster is undoubtedly due to some such simple thing as a bathroom leak, or, perhaps, a seepage from the roof at some time or other. Come, come, gentlemen! Association of ideas—that merely. We have been discussing this matter of ancient spirits exerting malevolent influence, and what more natural than that you should attach special significance to this simple incident? You must remember, however, that we are not robbers of tombs, and if one is reverent——”

“But you did not speak reverently a few moments ago, Professor, and look at that plaster!” pursued Addison Kent quizzically. “That might have injured you severely; perhaps it would have killed you! Why should it fall just when it did and just where you had been standing?”

“Pooh! Coincidence!” And again the little Professor shrugged shoulders with an air of indifference which, Kent fancied, was not quite genuine; in spite of himself, the Frenchman was disturbed and was trying

hard to conceal the fact. "You cannot frighten me, my friend. We archæologists could tell of many strange coincidences; but we have not time for foolish superstitions in the great work we are doing."

"Yet I know of instances where these 'coincidences' brought sickness and death," chimed in Malabar, rather enjoying the situation.

"So? Well, maybe, my friend. But I am not afraid. I have told you that these curses were but to frighten robbers from the tomb in order to preserve the mummy and the tomb from desecration. The threat of dire calamity meant only additional protection, and we do not believe the things the ancients believed. You see how it is? We— Ah, Kellani! Just some plaster that has fallen from the ceiling. Everything is all right. We shall be going back to the library directly, and you may have this mess cleaned up then."

Kent turned to find the silent Nubian in the doorway, regarding them with strange steadfastness. His tumid lips seemed to be muttering some voiceless prayer while his large black eyes, half shuttered by bronze eyelids, were fastened unwaveringly upon Professor Emil Caron. His scant beard, worn underneath the chin like that of the *Wawa* sculptured on Egyptian temples, disappeared among the powerful muscles of his neck and throat as he lowered his great, frizzle-haired head in obeisance.

"Allah is great! A command has been given to be obeyed, sidi." Another long look and abruptly he backed out of the doorway and was gone.

The sudden appearance of the huge brown servant on the threshold, following the thud of the falling plaster, was entirely logical; but something in the tone

of the Nubian's solemn voice, something in his look—Kent glanced sharply at his host and was startled at the sudden change that seemed to have come over the savant. His face showed pallor—or was it plaster dust? He was running one hand nervously through his scanty white hair, while the hand that rested on the edge of the table—Kent thought that it trembled slightly.

"I say, Professor, can you open this thing for us?" Dick Malabar was standing once more in front of the figure of the black cat, passing tentative fingers over the smooth surface, looking in vain for some indication of an opening. He half turned in surprise at a sharp ejaculation of annoyance from Professor Caron, who hurriedly crossed the room.

"No, no!" came his petulant refusal. "Away from there, monsieur! You must not touch that! Come away, please! I cannot open it yet. It has never been opened and there are many photographs to take of the different stages of the unwrapping—for the official records, you understand. Please, you must not touch it!"

His agitation seemed out of proportion to the simple cause. The journalist stole a look at Addison Kent behind the Professor's back and grinned cheerfully. It seemed to Kent that Malabar was taking a satisfaction in provoking their host that almost approached discourtesy, and he frowned and shook his head.

"We will go back down to the library, gentlemen, if you please. But first——"

He ran ahead of them to the doorway and looked out. Then, unexpectedly, he drew the door shut carefully and placed a finger on his lips for silence. He crossed

the room quickly and, from the entrance to the bathroom, beckoned them mysteriously.

"Whisky and soda, if you have it, Professor," grinned Malabar.

But when they had followed him into the bathroom and this door also had been closed carefully, they were astonished to find Professor Emil Caron extending for their inspection a large leather travelling-case in which were disclosed his safety razor and other toilet articles. He picked out a fat silver-plated case which he proceeded to open; it contained a large round cake of pink soap, perhaps six inches wide and three inches thick.

"Is this part of the exhibit——?" Malabar looked at Addison Kent quickly; for Kent had pinched his arm sharply, and there was an intentness in the novelist's face that commanded silence.

"It is my special bath soap, scented with jasmine in the Souk-el-Attarine at Tunis." Professor Caron spoke in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper. "I want you to note it carefully. See, I have divided it in the middle and hollowed out a cavity. Presently I will show you what I intend to hide in this simple cake of soap and then you will understand. Please, I am not crazy! I did not bring you here to-night, Mr. Kent, just to show you mummies and discuss matters of antiquity. I am in grave trouble and I need your help.

"We will go downstairs now, gentlemen, and when you have had some cakes and wine you must make your excuses and leave this house as soon as possible. No matter how greatly you are astonished, please control yourselves and do not speak loudly. You think me a very strange host, no doubt; but it is

best to be careful when danger lurks, is it not? What I show you must not be seen except by you, and what I tell you is for your ears alone. Come, time passes too quickly."

Without waiting for comment he led them out to the landing, and as they descended the stairs the little Frenchman was chatting animatedly of his belief that the much-discussed land of Ophir, mentioned in the Bible, was located at the southern end of the Eastern Egyptian Desert and why he thought the old workings there must be identified with "King Solomon's Mines."

II

It had been partly for the purpose of discovering proof of his theory regarding the location of the Biblical Ophir that Professor Emil Caron had penetrated deeply into the unknown wastes of the Upper Egyptian Desert. The great silver Nile, with its narrow strip of fertility on either side, was known to the tourist; but the hills of granite, sandstone, or limestone that for the most part walled it in were bare, and few there were who had dared the arid steppes that stretch endlessly beyond to the shores of the Red Sea. A half-dozen foreign Egyptologists had ventured along some of the known ancient routes in search of buried records—Lepsius the German, and Golenischieff the Russian, for instance. The explorer Sweinfurth, and Bellefonds Bey, Director-General of Public Works in Egypt under Mohammed Ali—these had surveyed and mapped certain sections, while a few prospectors had gone hither and yon. But, for the most part, it was a lost land, peopled with ghosts of ancient and forgotten days, given over to the sovereignty of the desert sun, which glared upon endless

sands that forever shifted under hot desert winds—a land of slinking jackal and circling buzzard.

Into this trackless region of hazards and uncertainties had the camels of Professor Emil Caron rocked away, daily plodding deeper towards the mirage-haunted horizon and daily leaving farther behind them the security of law and order and human habitation. But, with his mind upon hieroglyphics, and his soul expanding with absorbing enthusiasm for the life of other times and peoples, the little savant had concerned himself but slightly with the desert dangers of his day and generation. So that presently he had awakened to find himself in the midst of an adventure which very nearly had cost him his life.

Seated once more in the library—beside wine and cakes upon a silver salver from the grand mosque at Kairouan—he held the undivided attention of both his guests. After serving the refreshments, Kellani, the Nubian servant, had been dismissed for the night, Nevertheless, Professor Caron continued to speak in lowered tones and with suppressed excitement.

“You will find it hard to believe what I have to tell you, gentlemen; but I assure you that every word of it is true. Strange, indeed, are some of the secrets that lie buried in the sands of that great land of mysticism and ancient traditions. If only I might persuade myself that it was all just a dream! Alas! that I cannot do.”

He passed his hand nervously through his thin hair and glanced furtively about the room before proceeding. He would not weary them, he promised, with the details of his search among the rock inscriptions at the breccia quarries of Wady Hammamat, nor discuss the white granite of Um Etgal or the alabaster quarries or the

mountains of Gebel Dukhan where the Romans quarried the famous imperial porphyry. At Rizk Allah in the Wady Khashab topaz mines were worked under the Ptolemys and, until the conquest of Peru, the only emerald mines known were located in the hilly Zabara district in the Wady Sikait. Enough just to say that the country was known as a land of riches in olden days, and many expeditions at one time and another had sought its treasure; inscribed upon the rocks were the records of chief architects, master builders, artisans, scribes, ship-captains, etc., of the ancient dynasties. He had found much to interest him, and had made voluminous notes as he studied the rocks. Time ceased to exist for him, and he was content to wander about indefinitely.

Not so the cameleers he had hired, however. They grew anxious to get back to the Nile country, and began to give trouble. All arrangements for the caravan had been looked after by Kellani, the Professor's newly acquired body-servant, and it was the Nubian who undertook to pacify them from time to time by promises of doubled rewards. Professor Caron paid little heed to the discontent of the guides or to the heated arguments that took place around the camp-fires at night; all Arabs were great liars, and these thieving rascals had been utterly spoiled by tourist bakshish and were never satisfied. Then one fine morning he and the Nubian awoke to find themselves alone in the desert; with the men had gone the best part of their supplies, camels and equipment.

It was little use to rage up and down. There they were! It was not long before their predicament became so apparent that they grew very serious over it. They conned their supplies anxiously; the deserters

had left them two camels, two small tents and barely enough food to last them for a week. But it was the water problem that worried them. Professor Caron was helpless and forced to rely upon the Nubian; Kellani did not profess to be a desert guide. The only thing they could do was to follow the tracks of the fleeing deserters and to pray that these would not be obliterated by the shifting sands before they reached a well.

After journeying for a day without catching sight of anybody they pitched camp despondently. Even the Nubian failed to hide his worry as he hobbled the camels with thongs so that they could not get up and wander away. For during the day they had somehow missed the tracks they had been following, and Kellani confessed that they were lost. However, he proceeded cheerfully enough to knead dough upon his burnous, spread in front of the fire, and to bake it on the embers. Allah willing, they would find water to-morrow if it were so written.

But they did not find water the next day, or the next, or the next. Their camels surged onward, ever onward under the hot sun over sand marked only by desert creatures—the wiggly line where a lizard had made passage, the four prongs of a wagtail or a vulture's footprint, the short jumps of the jerboa, the light padding of jackal or fox and, once or twice, the heavier trail of a hyena crossing the tracks of a gazelle. The diminishing water in the goatskins grew grey and warm; it acquired the flavour of goat and tar. They drank sparingly in spite of the glutinous condition of their mouths and throats, hoarding every drop, more precious than diamonds.

It was Kellani's idea to give the camels their heads in

the hope that instinct would lead them towards water. Their general direction appeared to be south and east towards distant hills. In time they came in under the shadow of these hills, and about sundown found themselves in a strange valley where the wind indulged in antics among the rocks, causing mysterious whisperings to waft about as the drooping travellers penetrated the dry watercourse.

A sudden cry from the Nubian startled Professor Caron out of the stupor into which he had slumped, and he found Kellani pointing excitedly to sheep-tracks. It was the first sight they had had of any sign of human beings; for where sheep were would be at least a solitary and ragged Bedouin—and water somewhere near! Even the camels, ordinarily impervious to hastening influences, seemed to arouse themselves to the excitement of the moment and followed the sheep-tracks willingly.

Then, without warning of any kind, a sharp command to halt rang out, and in the wink of an eye the two camels were surrounded by a band of swarthy and rough-looking Arabs, brandishing guns. They seemed to rise from the very ground. It was evident to Professor Caron that the ambushade had been planned deliberately, and that from the moment the travellers had entered the valley they had been watched. Forbidding as these men were, and threatening though their attitude seemed to be, both the Professor and his servant welcomed the capture; for they were exhausted, and their tongues were swollen with thirst. Any relief was better than none.

They were led triumphantly into camp. When they had been given water to drink, and had recovered sufficiently to take stock of their surroundings and their

captors, Professor Caron realized that he had stumbled upon what appeared to be the secret retreat of a band of brigands. Although mostly garbed like Bedouins, he saw that this cut-throat aggregation comprised several nationalities, and he might have trembled for his immediate safety but for the fact that their leader was a man of some education, who spoke French with a slight German accent. This man assured the little Professor that no harm would befall him if orders were obeyed.

He even appeared to know something of Egyptology. At any rate, he was greatly interested in the Frenchman's notebooks, and asked many questions—in fact, became enthusiastic. He introduced himself as Ludwig Von Strom, and appeared to welcome the opportunity of discussing these things with Professor Caron; long after his men were wrapped in slumber they had sat, conversing of archæology.

The next day the discussion had been renewed, and finally Von Strom had brought out from his personal effects for Professor Caron's inspection a roll of discoloured papyrus, and asked him if he could decipher it. To his utter amazement, Professor Caron discovered it to be, apparently, the inscription of a scribe of the temple in the reign of Rameses IX, about 1124 B.C., dealing with the systematic robbery of the royal sepulchres by an organized gang of thieves. It appeared that this scribe had been the only one to escape the wrath of the ruling Pharaoh, all the other members of the conspiracy having been discovered, brought to trial and put to death. He alone, Hori-shere, through false testimony, had escaped, and later had found his way to the secret place where the ghouls had buried their ungodly treasure. There he had

gloated over his wealth, only to find that a wall of the unused tomb in which the treasure was hidden had collapsed and sealed him in beyond hope of escape. He had spent the interval, while awaiting death by starvation, in writing this, his confession. It was, the victim believed, the vengeance of Osiris, the god of the dead!

Amazed, excited, puzzled, Professor Caron had questioned the German closely as to where this document had been found and how it had come into his possession. At first Von Strom was reticent, but finally he claimed to know where the tomb was located and the treasure of Osiris buried. He had guarded his secret jealously against the day that it might be shared safely with some man of great learning in these matters, some Egyptologist of established reputation. Perhaps this meeting was "Kismet!"—as the Arabs say. Perhaps Professor Emil Caron was the very man, sent to him across the desert to this out-of-the-way valley by the gods themselves! If certain conditions were complied with, he might decide to take Professor Caron to the lost tomb and show him this treasure of Osiris that had lain buried deep beneath the sands for thousands of years. Then Professor Emil Caron could give the discovery to the world and win fame as well as fortune.

"Gentlemen, what was I to do?" Professor Caron paused in his recital and looked at them eagerly. Red spots burned in his cheeks, and his eyes were glittering with excitement. "These very tomb-robbers' trials, mentioned in this papyrus, already are known to us in fragmentary fashion—from the Abbott Papyrus which was discovered in 1857 at Thebes; from the Meyer Papyrus in the Liverpool Museum; from another frag-

ment in the museum at Turin, and so on. When I tell you that they make mention of this very scribe of the temple, Horishere—do you not see, gentlemen, how important this document might be? Do you not see that with it I should be able to amaze not only America, but the whole world? Would you have investigated it further if you had been me?—at any cost?”

Professor Caron relaxed in his chair and eyed first Addison Kent, then Richard Malabar, as if for traces of scepticism.

“A fine story, my friends, eh?” he chortled. “A clever tale, is it not? You do not believe, perhaps? You do not——”

He sat up in his chair with a start, a finger upraised for silence. Into his eyes leapt a sudden look of fear.

“Hush! What was that sound! Did you hear nothing?”

Chapter IV

The Scarab

I

THEY shook their heads. Nevertheless, Professor Caron got up quickly and went to the library windows, examining them one by one, and carefully drawing still closer together the heavy window-drapes. He came back to them on tiptoe, leaning towards them eagerly.

“A fine story, gentlemen—if it were only true!” he whispered.

"You mean——?" comprehended Kent.

"This papyrus of Horishere—I soon recognized it to be a clever fake!"

"And the buried treasure?" suggested Malabar.

"Ah yes, the treasure! That is different."

"You have seen it? Personally?"

"Yes!" he whispered, again glancing nervously about the room. "That is why I am in such trouble now. Wait! I will show you something."

In silence they watched him go straight to the fine safe which Armaund Lamont had installed in his library behind a panel of wainscoting. Although nothing of great value was kept outside of the burglar-proof vaults down town, the fact that Lamont had entrusted the combination of this library safe to his temporary guest was yet another proof of his complete confidence in the French savant. They watched with interest the process of opening the safe. Professor Caron finally accomplished it after many references to a little black notebook which he carried on his person.

He lifted out and transferred to the library table an oblong parcel, neatly wrapped in stiff brown paper. It was well tied with heavy twine and generously daubed upon the folds at each end with blue sealing-wax. Carefully the Professor got one of these ends open and drew off the outer wrapper like a glove. Working more rapidly now, he unfolded the inner layers of paper, revealing at last a sandalwood box. Producing a small key from his pocket, he unlocked the box and took out the contents, wrapped in white tissue paper. When this was removed, an oblong case of purple velvet was in his hand. Under their noses he finally snapped it opened with a dramatic gesture.

"Voilà!" he exclaimed with the pride of a connoisseur.

Kent and Malabar both started back in astonishment, then bent eagerly forward with subdued cries of admiration. Lying on its satin cushion was a beautiful scarab of pure gold, so exquisitely wrought in delicate design as quite conceivably to belong to an age of lost arts. Neither of the two marvelling guests had ever beheld anything like it before.

With a hand that shook in eagerness while his eyes shone with excitement, Professor Caron picked it carefully from its resting-place and turned the beautiful gold beetle over on its back.

They gasped. Speechless, they stared. Imbedded in a cunning setting lay a magnificent ruby, so large and pure it was breath-taking. It was carmine red with a slight bluish tinge—the colour which the Burmese compare to the blood of a freshly killed pigeon—"pigeon's blood red." The great stone caught the rays of the light; it lay shining and palpitating like a pool of blood! They could not take their eyes off it!

At last Addison Kent freed himself from the spell and stared at the smiling Frenchman with a sober face.

"Priceless!" he murmured. "And it is this which you are proposing to hide in your—upstairs?" He pointed to the ceiling.

"Assuredly. See, I shall remove it now and put back the empty case, re-sealing the outer wrapping. A burning match or two should soften the wax sufficiently."

"Professor Caron, it is not safe," protested Kent. "You must not risk such a gem as that here—not even for a single night." It was Kent's glance now which roved anxiously about the room. "I want you to let

me telephone and provide for its safe removal to a deposit box—now, to-night. I can arrange it."

But Professor Caron demurred. He had a reason for wanting it beside him for a little while. It was quite safe because nobody knew that he had it—except them; he had taken them into his confidence as an additional precaution. If by any remote chance his plans were interfered with, they—his friends—would know where to find the ruby and would be able to take charge of it according to his direction. They were alone, were they not? And Monsieur Lamont had provided this room with excellent blinds and drapes—

Addison Kent rose and stepped quickly across to the portières which screened the archway. His movement was sudden and silent. When he thrust his head into the hall he was relieved to find it empty; for he had fancied a movement of the heavy curtain. It must be just that his imagination had been keyed to special activity by the evening's surprises, he thought.

Turning back into the room, his glance fell upon Richard Malabar. The journalist was passing the scarab to Professor Caron with a hand that trembled visibly. All levity was gone now from Malabar's demeanour. Kent saw that he looked strangely excited.

II

"Professor, this so-called 'treasure of Osiris' you have been telling us about——" Malabar cleared his throat, a trifle impatient of his huskiness. "You say you have actually seen it?"

"Yes, I said that."

"This German, Von Strom, took you to see it?"

"Yes."

"To one of the unused tombs of the Pharaohs, where it was buried?"

"To an old and hitherto undiscovered sepulchre—yes. It was completely covered by the sand—deep down under the sands—hewn in the living rock."

"Was it located where the other discoveries have been made—in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings or the Valley of the Queens?—somewhere in the ancient Theban necropolis? Where was it located, Professor?"

"That I cannot tell you, Mr. Malabar. The secret of its location was carefully preserved by the German. I was blindfolded. We travelled for a great distance. But I do not think it was anywhere near other discoveries. It was not as elaborate as a royal tomb, and had been intended for some lesser personage."

"Blindfolded! Hm-hm! Did this bandaging of your eyes take place when you set out from this valley where the wind whispered among the rocks and where you encountered these brigands, or was it later in the journey that such care was taken?"

"From the first, Mr. Malabar, I was blindfolded."

"Then you do not even know where this wonderful valley is to be found, let alone the tomb where the treasure is buried?"

"Alas! That is so, gentlemen. You must accept my statements." He looked appealingly at Addison Kent.

"Of course," nodded Kent.

"And are we to understand that this remarkable scarab you have just shown us——?" Malabar hesi-

tated. "I am not asking these questions idly, Professor Caron. I am tremendously interested and only want to clear the air, as it were, of what appears a little confusing to me. This scarab, now. Are we to understand that it was a part of this ancient, buried treasure, taken from tombs of old by ancient robbers? Or did you purchase it from somebody? If so, what fabulous price did you pay for it? Just how did it come into *your* possession, Professor?"

It was their host's turn to hesitate. He stared at his inquisitor dubiously. He wet his lips, shrugged his shoulders.

"It was part of this treasure, was it?" persisted Malabar. "You found it at this lost tomb?"

"Yes."

"I have been in Egypt, Professor Caron. I know a little about Egyptology—not that I have given it the study you have, of course; but I know a little." Dick Malabar smiled in deprecation. "I know a great deal more, however, about precious stones. You surely are not asking me to believe that this beautiful ruby in its unique golden scarab setting is an antique, Professor!"

"No, no, Mr. Malabar—not an antique, of course. It is a cut gem of a much later period."

"Exactly. Yet you say you found it! Professor, do you realize that that ruby is almost the size of a pigeon's egg? Do you know that such large stones are very scarce? Even a fine, deeply coloured ruby of three carats is a rarity. One of nine carats is worth over £6,000. Do you realize the weight and value of that scarab stone? Rubies of that size are not left lying around carelessly. They are known—and traced!"

"Yes, yes, that is so, Mr. Malabar. The King of Ava was said to have a ruby, mounted as an earring, the size of a hen's egg!"

"The largest ruby found in Burma weighed 1,184 carats. Gustavus III of Sweden had a ruby as big as this one you have just shown us; he presented it to Catherine II of Russia."

"That was in 1777. Yes, I know about that."

"That ruby disappeared, Professor, long ago, and its present whereabouts is unknown. It has never been seen since."

Kent tapped Malabar's arm.

"Is it possible that this scarab stone——?"

"It may be the identical gem. Who knows? But whether it is or not, its discovery by Professor Caron as part of this so-called 'treasure of Osiris' proves that this buried treasure is not the loot of ancient ghouls but of modern thieves! He admits that the papyrus shown him by this German was a fake——"

"I think, Dick, if you will just hold your horses a bit, the Professor can explain everything," remonstrated Kent gently. "Am I right, Professor, in surmising that you merely have been leading up to the things you really wish to confide to us?"

Professor Caron, who had been fidgeting in his chair for some time, nodded and threw a grateful glance. His face was flushed with excitement, and it was evident that he was in an extremely nervous state. He was breathing rapidly. His hands fluttered uncertainly from his knees to the arms of his chair and back again. He dropped his voice so low that they had to lean forward to catch what he said.

"Not a word must you breathe of what I have to

say," he whispered hoarsely. " You have seen me close the safe on that empty package, after heating the sealing-wax upon the broken end; it is as if it had never been touched. This jewel in my waistcoat I shall hide as soon as you leave this house. I am in much trouble, Mr. Kent, and I seek your help because Mr. Lamont told me all about your great abilities in the detection of crime. He told me of your dangerous encounter with that most dangerous of all—that gentleman thief of thieves. You, at least, understand, and bear with me because you know that it is not possible to be too careful where Alceste is concerned, and I——"

" What !" exclaimed Malabar sharply. " Alceste ? Where does he come in ?"

" Hush ! Hush ! Not so loud, Mr. Malabar, I beseech you !"

" But Alceste is dead !"

" That is correct, Professor. He was cornered in England by the police and committed suicide," nodded Kent, as Professor Caron turned to him in surprise. " Rather a tame ending for such a clever international thief; but it is the only sort of finish to the kind of game he played. His capture was bound to come sooner or later. The official record of his death is on file at Police Headquarters. There is no question about it."

" Suicide !" murmured Malabar thoughtfully. " He was not the sort to be taken alive. He would at least have the satisfaction of turning out his own light."

" Well, well," pondered Professor Caron. Then his face renewed its former expression. " Dead he may be—then I am very glad of that—but, gentlemen, his

evil lives after him! Of that I can assure you. He has left a legacy of evil——” A shudder seized him, and he dropped his voice still lower. “Have you ever heard of a strange secret organization in the East, called the ‘Order of the Golden Scarab’?” he breathed anxiously.

Addison Kent doubtfully shook his head. Dick Malabar leaned closer, his keen, intelligent face full of eagerness.

“Go on, Professor. Tell us about it,” he urged.

“I will tell you. Yes. I—I——”

“Go on, then! Tell it! Tell it!” Malabar reached out and grabbed him by the shoulder. “In Heaven’s name, what’s the matter with you? TELL IT!”

But Professor Emil Caron’s tongue seemed to be sticking in his throat. His eyes opened wide in sudden fear. His face went as white as chalk.

“Mon Dieu!” he gasped. “Look! Look!” He pointed shakily. “Take it away! *Quick!*” He shrank, cowering, in his chair.

Both Addison Kent and Malabar sprang to their feet and turned in alarm.

Across the broad expanse of the huge round library table there crawled slowly, steadily, a great ugly black beetle!

I

WITH curiosity they leaned over the insect. Kent finally captured it and held it in the air with its legs clawing.

"I say, how do you suppose that thing got in here?—on that table?"

"Flew in through an open window, probably," smiled Kent, amused. He stepped across the room, opened one of the French doors and tossed the beetle outside. "Or, if you think it is getting rather late in the season for June bugs, Dick, and if you note further that not a single window in this room is open, let me suggest this explanation: It flew in through an open window during June or July when the decorators were at work and was a prisoner here ever since."

"And has been sitting up on yon curtain-pole till, becoming dizzy from the fumes of that pipe of yours, it fell from its perch and landed upon said table." Malabar chuckled. "How about it, Professor? Why all the excitement?"

But Professor Caron's chair was empty. He had slipped from the room, and even then was coming in from the hall, carrying their hats, coats, gloves and walking-sticks.

"You must go at once!" he decreed anxiously. "Please do not think me discourteous. I feel that it is best, gentlemen."

"But you did not finish telling us——" began Malabar, in protest.

"No, no! Not to-night, please. Not in this house! Not now!"

"But you were going to tell us—were you not?—until this harmless bug—— Why did it frighten you so?"

Professor Caron drew himself erect with some dignity.

"You ask too many questions, Mr. Malabar. It is the failing of the journalist, is it not? I shall answer nothing. It is enough for me to express the desire that we defer all further conversation upon these matters."

"Certainly, Professor, if you wish it," apologized Malabar quickly. "I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed this interesting evening, and I only hope that I may have the privilege of meeting you again soon——"

"By all means—to-morrow. Perhaps, Mr. Kent, we might take that drive you were good enough to suggest the other day. If you will call for me, we can spin away somewhere in quiet places, and then I promise to reveal to you everything that is on my mind."

So it was arranged. Professor Caron himself escorted them to the door. There was nothing for them to do but to take their sudden dismissal in good grace. They might smile at the whims of their host; but there was no question that he had been greatly upset by something. Keen as their curiosity was to know what lay behind the savant's strange fear, they forbore to question him further, especially as he promised to gratify their curiosity the next afternoon when they went motoring.

"I want you to feel that you can call upon me at

any time for any help I can give, Professor Caron," assured Addison Kent as he shook hands warmly. "You have given us an interesting evening, for which both of us are very grateful. I would be remiss in my duty if I did not ask you once more to let me provide a place of safety for that wonderful ruby. Will you not change your mind and let me arrange it—to-night?"

"No, no! Everything is all right. There is no hurry. It will be safe, never fear."

"I am well acquainted at Police Headquarters, Professor. If you are at all nervous, it would be a simple matter for me to have a couple of good plain-clothes men stationed——"

"The police! Oh, no, no, no! Please, Mr. Kent, do not worry, and do not tell anyone what I have shown you or told you. To-morrow afternoon I shall explain everything. Thank you all the same. And now, gentlemen, *au revoir*—until to-morrow."

With iron-grilled finality the great glass doors of the Lamont mansion forthwith closed behind them.

II

Once away from the big house and its grounds, both occupants of the car drew in the fresh night air with relish and relaxed upon the cushions. Neither was inclined to talk at first; each was busy with his own thoughts.

"Well, how do you feel now?" ventured Kent at last.

"As if I'd been down the rabbit-hole!" growled Malabar.

"To Wonderland with Alice?"

"No. To the cave of the Forty Thieves with the

evil spirit of Alceste!—a cave littered with dead men's bones! Damn Caron and his mummies!"

"Careful, Dick! We don't want to run into an accident before we get home!" warned Kent cheerfully. "Personally, I enjoyed it. The Professor interests me. Strikes me you are on the trail of a devilishly good story for your paper when you get back into harness."

"Your choice of adjectives is admirable."

"Devilish?"

"Hellish, perhaps, when we get to the facts. You don't suppose he was just frightened by that *bug*, do you? It's what lies beneath. That thing carried some warning to him by suggestion. The man was in positive terror. I tell you, Kent, I don't like it!"

"This 'Order of the Golden Scarab'—is that what you are thinking of?"

"Yes—and thinking hard! The East is the home of the secret society and the birthplace of more intrigue, more devilment——! It would be meat and drink to Alceste! 'His evil lives after him,'" quoted Malabar.

He gave Addison Kent a strange look, as if his mind were busy with half-forgotten horrors, and as they passed a street light the novelist noted how pale he was.

"Pshaw! Dick, you take it too seriously. Funny, though, that Alceste's trail should cross in such an unexpected quarter. I wonder how Caron—that ruby—it's the most beautiful stone I ever looked at, I think."

"Deadliest poison plants often bear the most vivid flowers," remarked the journalist sententiously. "Entrancingly beautiful women sometimes prove most dangerous."

" Another way of saying that the golden scarab is at the bottom of Caron's trouble ?"

" Yes."

" In what way ?"

" God knows !" replied Malabar in a low, tense voice.

" Well, there's no use in idle speculation when we'll know all about it to-morrow afternoon. Let's forget it until to-morrow."

As they turned through Times Square on the way to Richard Malabar's hotel, the clock recorded the midnight hour.

III

The first rays of the morning sun were warming the closed window-blinds of Minaki Annex when Addison Kent was awakened by the jangling of the telephone beside his bed. Responding sleepily, he was surprised to recognize the voice of his old friend, Detective-Lieutenant Donovan, of the Bureau. At first he did not grasp what the voice was saying; but presently he was very wide awake indeed. For Lieutenant Donovan's calm matter-of-fact tones were entirely out of tune with the startling nature of his words.

" It's a queer lay-out, Mr. Kent, and I thought it was something that would interest you. The police were called in an hour ago. The place is out in Westchester—Lamont's new residence. The servants are frightened half out of their wits; I can't make head or tail of it. There's a friend of Lamont's, a Frenchman by the name of Caron, stopping there. He has died very suddenly in the night !"

I

DETECTIVE-LIEUTENANT DONOVAN greeted them with evident relief. His recent promotion had been won solely upon merit, and he took his work seriously; hence he had found this futile hour at Westchester a poor beginning for the day, and therefore irksome. Word had reached the nearest precinct over the telephone; in response to the butler's frightened call a plain-clothes man, accompanied by a constable, had been despatched to the house. The detective's report had been turned in to Headquarters, and Lieutenant Donovan had come out to substantiate it. But beyond the fact that the two "niggers" were frightened and upset, and that the "collection" upstairs in the bedroom was a queer one, he could see no reason for calling in the police. Everything was in order. The man had just died suddenly as he sat in his chair, down in the library, sipping a glass of port and reading a book. Apparently, it was a straight case of heart failure. Nevertheless, he had thought it best to advise Addison Kent—if only because the thing had happened in Lamont's house; also, he had summoned Dr. Crossley, the medical examiner.

All of which was exactly what Addison Kent had forecast to Dick Malabar on the way out. Donovan's telephoned description of the details had prepared him for this very attitude of the police. Coming so closely

upon the heels of their evening with Professor Emil Caron, his sudden death naturally carried special significance to the two friends; but the police would base their conclusions upon the cold facts as revealed by their enquiry. Malabar agreed with Kent that this was just as well, and they decided that if nothing were missing—in short, if the golden scarab were safe in its hiding-place—it would be best to let things take their course. With the police off the scene, there would be better opportunity for a quiet and thorough investigation, unofficially.

In accordance with their prearrangement, therefore, Malabar presently slipped out of the library and went upstairs to the bedroom. He was gone but a few minutes and, upon his return, Kent was relieved to catch his signal that the golden scarab with its wonderful ruby was safely hidden inside the cake of pink bath soap, as planned by Professor Caron the evening before.

The body of the late savant was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair at the big round library table in the centre of the room. Its position was entirely natural, the head pillowed on one arm, as if he had dropped off to sleep while reading the book which lay open before him. Nothing had been disturbed, and it was like this that he had been found by his Nubian servant. On a silver tray stood a wine-glass and a decanter; there were soda-biscuit crumbs on an empty plate and some more on the surface of the table. The face of the dead man showed the calm repose of a sleeper; it was as if he had fallen asleep quite naturally, and had slept away into another world.

“There is a safe——” began Addison Kent.

“I have not overlooked that,” smiled Donovan,

stepping across to it and touching the spring that moved the panel in front of it. "You see, it is locked and shows no marks of having been tampered with. Everything is in order, Mr. Kent."

"The servants?"

"I have questioned them all closely. There's a big buck valet, who came here with the Frenchman; the others all belong to the place. The butler, as you know, is that Arab fellow that Mr. Lamont has had so long in his employ. Then there's a gardener, who looks after the grounds—a Scotsman, named Sandy MacLean; he's been with Lamont quite a while, too, and his honesty sticks out all over him. These two were alone here, looking after things till Mr. and Mrs. Lamont get back from Europe. Lamont bought this place not long ago, and the maids and all the rest haven't been hired yet."

"Then you've discovered nothing suspicious that would indicate anything unusual?"

"Not a thing. There's a chef and his assistant in the kitchen. They were hired on here just a few days ago from the caterer's—the Laidlaw people—but they seem to be O.K., for I called up Laidlaw's and these men have been with the firm for some time."

"Nobody heard any sound in the night?"

"No. Every one of them was dead to the world—slept right through."

"You said the butler and Professor Caron's man were both frightened. Did you find out the cause of that?"

"That don't mean a thing, Mr. Kent," declared Donovan with conviction. "You know how it is with a coon when anything sudden like this happens; they go right up in the air. They're scared stiff of being

haunted and carry rabbit's feet and all that bunk. Don't know's I blame 'em for gettin' the woolies, either, in this big house after dark and those coffins upstairs— Well, here's the doc at last, and we'll soon know if there's anything wrong."

Dr. Crossley, the medical examiner, arrived in a mood that matched the first five letters of his name. He was a very busy man with a morning so fully scheduled with places to go and things to do that he was in an exceptional hurry and cross because he was hurried. He listened carefully, however, to the detective-lieutenant's repetition of the situation, after which he proceeded with an examination of the body. He went upstairs to look over the "collection" of antiques, and came down, pulling on his gloves.

"Interesting, very interesting!" he commented with a slight smile. "I think what is needed here is an undertaker, Mr. Kent. The police appear to have been called in just because a negro servant thought the place was acquiring too many dead bodies, ancient and modern! Professor Caron was quite elderly, as you note, and appears to have passed away quite naturally. In my humble opinion, no inquest is necessary. Nothing missing, everything as it should be—you understand?"

"What time did death occur, doctor?"

"About two o'clock this morning, I would say—about six hours ago."

"And the cause of death?"

"Mm—natural, quite natural. Seems to have slept right away. No sign of any abnormality. Heart weak, evidently." He picked up a small round bottle from the table. "This was found on his person, lieutenant?"

"Yes, doc—in his vest pocket," Donovan replied.

"Digitalis, Mr. Kent. As you perhaps know, it is a heart treatment. He probably went off very peacefully—while sleeping. No relatives here, I understood you to say? So, we can't question them as to his past state of health and so on. Well, it is hardly necessary."

"Is there anything exceptional about the pallor of the face, doctor?" asked Kent.

"No, I don't think so. He is in a sitting posture. The blood drains out of the arteries into the veins, of course; but he has not been dead long enough for post-mortem staining to have set in, except in the legs perhaps. Well, I understand you were acquainted with the deceased, Mr. Kent. You will look after all the arrangements, I suppose. Here is my card, if there is anything further I can do. I am in a great hurry this morning, and if there's nothing else——?"

"That's all right, doctor. Everything will be attended to, thanks."

Five minutes later the medical examiner's runabout was speeding south, and the heavy doors had closed on Detective-Lieutenant Donovan and his men.

II

As soon as they had gone, Addison Kent's manner altered. He turned upon Malabar.

"Now, let's get at it, Dick. Come upstairs and show me that ruby first." When the golden scarab lay once more exposed in his hand he drew a deep breath. "Beautiful! Beautiful! Many murders have been committed for less precious prizes. To begin with, I am going to hustle this down town into

a safety-deposit box; we cannot feel easy till that is done."

"I've found out something about this sacred cat," offered Malabar, stepping over to the grotesque shell in which the mummy was enclosed. "These shells are usually in two longitudinal halves, sealed with adhesive gum and the whole thing thickly coated with pitch. Run your finger along there. Look closely."

"I see what you mean. Appears to have been resmeared," Kent confirmed. "This shell has been opened since it was found in its original state. Not very recently, though."

"Perhaps not. But why did Professor Caron pretend that it has never been opened? Why was he so nervous last night whenever I went near this thing? You must have noticed how he chased me away from it."

"He said the cat had not been unbandaged and had to be officially photographed in the process," Kent dismissed. "What we want to make sure of, as soon as possible, is whether this is a natural death or not. I am not satisfied of that yet. Come on down to the library."

On the big round library table were spread the articles which Donovan had found upon the person of the dead man, together with a pencilled inventory. Kent glanced at the list briefly, then picked up the little black notebook which contained the combination of the library safe. With this in hand, he proceeded to turn the dial slowly, and presently the door swung open.

Malabar joined him, peering inside. Last night they had watched Professor Caron replace the sealed package, after abstracting the golden scarab. There had been nothing else in the safe except a file of correspondence.

The novelist and the journalist looked at each other now mutely. The sealed package, containing the empty velvet case, was gone !

" He may have changed his mind after we left and removed it," Malabar speculated.

" The answer to that is in front of you, Dick. Look at that correspondence file. Quite evidently, it has been rummaged hurriedly. The professor was too systematic to leave it in a mess like that."

Malabar made no further comment, but stood aside and watched with interest while Addison Kent proceeded to make a minute examination of the big room. It was not every day that one was privileged to observe a " Super-Detective " at work—one of those " Master Minds " one reads about—picking up such tiny clues as threads and shoe-buttons, and therefrom, by process of ratiocination, arriving at the Terrible Truth ! But here was the creator of such exaggerated fictional characters himself at work on a real investigation ! Here, forsooth, was an author who joked about his own characters yet was personally attempting practical results in deduction ! If Dick Malabar had not had a great respect for Kent's abilities, he might have indulged in cynical amusement ; as it was, he watched with sober interest.

It was little things for which Addison Kent was looking, apparently, but he did not go about whining like a hound on a keen scent and making strange grunts and noises or anything like that ! He was merely the trained observer, silent and methodical, thorough. He did get down on his hands and knees, however, once or twice, and he did produce a magnifying glass before he finished ! A spot near the big library table seemed to interest him ; for he spent some time in

close scrutiny of the very thick pile of the immense plain taupe Axminster rug, finally placing a chair directly over it in order that it might not be disturbed. In a far corner of the library he also paused a while. The surface of the library table came in for a careful examination. He took the stopper out of the decanter and sniffed at the wine; he held the solitary wine-glass to his nose.

The body in the chair next received attention. After studying its position, he looked long at the wrists of either hand, passing his fingers lightly over them. He removed one of the house-slippers with evident interest and carefully felt the silk-clad ankle. The neck, also, he felt gently. He seemed puzzled; but said never a word.

When he had finished by examining the telephone and tracing the wiring, he sat down, thoughtfully filled his pipe and lighted it. He smoked for several minutes.

"I am far from satisfied, Dick. But if this is a murder, it is a diabolically unusual one. Call in that Nubian servant, and let's hear what he has to say."

III

Kellani was far from at ease as he stood before them in the presence of his dead master; but it was impossible to tell from his manner whether his diffidence was due to anything more significant than the natural superstitions of his race. He was not of the Nubas, but of the Barabra, he informed them as he drew himself to his full height—from the Nile country.

"By which he means that he is not a slave or the son of a slave," volunteered Malabar in English. "The

Nilotic branch dislikes the term Nuba because the pagan Kordofan Nubas were supplied to the Sudanese slave markets for years. He will be Mohammedan, but not fanatically so."

Kent nodded as he studied the giant figure before him. He was glad to have Dick Malabar beside him; if the man's French failed him, the journalist could come to the rescue with his knowledge of dialects.

"You know, of course, that the death of your master is a very, very serious matter, Kellani," Kent began carefully. "In this country the police are very quick to ask many questions when a man dies suddenly. We must know exactly what happened, and it will be best for you to tell the truth—all of it. You understand, Kellani?" Slow inclination of the head signified that he understood. He covertly shifted his position so that the body at the library table would not be within his line of vision so disconcertingly.

"When did you see your master alive last?"

Not since the night before, was the answer. After the gentlemen visitors had gone the master had summoned him to bring more wine to the library, where he was sitting up, reading books. When Kellani had taken in the tray he had not been needed further and had gone to bed.

"And you went straight to sleep, I suppose?"

"Certainly. That is why men go to their beds."

"And you heard no sound—no loud cry or other noises?"

"No, I heard nothing, sidi. The ears of Kellani go to sleep with the rest of his body."

"What time was it when you awoke in the morning?"

"At the hour of the first prayer."

"Just before sunrise—at daybreak, eh? And you

came down here to the library right after that? Was anybody else in the house up at that hour?"

"No. It is a habitation of dogs and sons of dogs!"

"He's not calling you names, Kent," interpolated Dick Malabar hastily, as he noted the look in the novelist's eye. "It's a slap at Mokra."

Kent nodded appreciation of the fact; but he continued to eye the Nubian keenly.

"Why did you come down to the library so early, Kellani? Professor Caron was a guest, and it was not your duty to look after the house, was it?"

"I am my master's servant, and my master would have no other attend to his wants."

"But your master was supposed to be asleep upstairs, and it was much too early for him to need you. Why did you go to the library at that hour?" persisted Kent.

"There was the tray and wine-glass to take away, and some dusting——"

"Glass, did you say?"

Again the slow inclination of the frizzled head.

"And you found him dead at the table, just like he is now? Look, Kellani!"

Kellani looked, hesitatingly. His gaze did not linger, but shifted uncertainly. Plainly, he was ill at ease.

"In the presence of your dead master, Kellani, I demand that you speak nothing but the truth," impressed Kent solemnly. "Are you telling us the full truth?"

"By the pupil of this eye! yes, sidi. By the beard of the Prophet——!"

"Why have you hidden the second wine-glass?" demanded Addison Kent sharply.

"There was only one wine-glass. By Allah! only one."

"You are lying!" cried Kent, jumping to his feet suddenly. "There were two! You served two people in this room early this morning—your master and the man who called to see him after midnight!"

"Yes, sidi," admitted the Nubian, shrinking from the accusing finger. "That is true."

"By Jove!" murmured Malabar.

"Well? Go on—explain. What about this visitor?"

Badly frightened, Kellani told his broken French of the stranger's arrival at midnight. The lights were out and Makra and the others had retired. Professor Caron, however, still sat in the library, reading. The caller had not rung the door-bell, but had tapped on the glass of the French doors that opened from the library directly upon the tiled portico outside. Professor Caron had admitted the late visitor himself through the library door. He had summoned Kellani almost immediately, ordering refreshment served. That was all Kellani knew about it.

"Who was the man? Had you ever seen him before?"

"No. I did not know him. I knew not his name."

"What happened after that? How long did the stranger stay?"

But Kellani was unable to say. His master had called him to bed, and he had gone there obediently, leaving the two gentlemen alone in the library.

"About the wine-glass—why did you hide it when the police came?"

His master had warned him that nobody must know of this midnight interview; that was why he had

removed the second glass and said nothing. Always he was his beloved master's obedient servant, even as he was now theirs.

"Rather an unusual hour for a social call," mused Kent. "What did this man look like? Was he a small man, like Professor Caron?"

"Yes, a very small man, sidi."

"The truth, Kellani!" warned Kent sternly. "Again, I have to correct you! The man was a big man, powerfully built, strong! Was he not?"

"Yes, a very big man, sidi."

Addison Kent looked over at Dick Malabar helplessly, then rang for the butler.

"I would advise you to pray earnestly *six* times to-day, Kellani. Allah is great! Ask Him to grant you wisdom other than the wisdom of the serpent. You may go."

As the Nubian strode to the door with alacrity, he almost collided with Mokra. The butler twisted quickly to one side, hastily thrusting out one arm, his hand closed except for the first and third fingers; it was as if, thereby, he would ward off some power to injure.

"See that!" whispered Malabar to Kent. "You note that he is resisting 'the evil eye'? Mokra belongs to the Kabyles—pure Berber stock—the original Numidian. Racial jealousy! Trouble brewing there, Kent."

IV

Mokra was agitated. Fear, anger, superstitious dread—all were written in his dark, heavy-boned face and anxious black eyes that looked restlessly about him.

It was a more intelligent face, a more trustworthy face than that of the stolid Nubian who, so willingly, had just left the library with its silent sleeper and magic inquisitor who knew the answers to his own questions !

As Richard Malabar had intimated, Mokra was of the pure Berber race that was in North Africa before the Arabs came—of the Haratin or " Black " Berbers of the southern slopes of the hill country. Also, he had belonged to the Zouaves and had fought for France, earning honourable discharge. Long association with such French gentlemen as his present benefactor, Armaund Lamont, had enabled him to become proficient in European ways. His spoken French was not the atrocious pidgin tongue which the Arab attempts. From his Berber blood he derived a natural attachment to home life and habits of labour, which the Arab lacks; but to this had been added the influence of his army training and the polish of long service. He was a loyal, faithful and efficient servant.

Addison Kent smiled at him. He had known Mokra for some time, and was aware of the confidence which Lamont reposed in him.

" You do not like Kellani ? " he encouraged.

" May Allah slice him in pieces ! Do not believe anything he says, Monsieur Kent. His tongue is without bones, and it moves in whatever way he chooses."

" I quite agree with you, Mokra. Did you hear anyone moving about inside the house last night ? "

" No, monsieur. I went to bed early, and I slept very soundly. I heard nothing until roused by that son of a slipper in the morning."

" What time was that ? "

"Not long after sunrise, monsieur."

"You missed the prayer at *fodjeur*, then?"

Allah forgive him! He had not slept so soundly for years. It was a *djinn* that had carried him away!

"Did you have anything to eat or drink before retiring?" asked Kent quickly.

"Only a glass of milk and a piece of cake, monsieur."

"The glass from which you drank—it has been washed?"

Assuredly. Mokra had washed it himself. He was not the "dirty dog of a Kabyle" which that mule of a *fellah* had called him. Allah demolish him! No Mussulman washed oftener than Mokra!

"I understand it was you who telephoned for the police. Why did you do that?"

"Because that whelp of the devil—that *fellah* with the eyes, ears, nose, teeth and tail of a dog's dog——!" Mokra paused, conscious that the excitement into which his words were leading him was out of place. "He said he would cut out my heart, monsieur, and I was afraid to be alone with him. I required some shiny buttons for him to see. That was why I called the police to come."

"Did you know that Professor Caron had a visitor here in the library last night after we left the house?"

No, Mokra had not known that. He was surprised.

"Kellani did not tell you?"

"No, monsieur."

"Very well, Mokra. That will be all just now—unless you have something to ask, Dick?"

"No. We'll ring if we need you again, Mokra."

As soon as the butler was out of the room, Melabar leaned forward eagerly. "That is true about the man

calling here in the early hours of the morning? You were not just inventing it to test Kellani?"

"Hardly, Dick," smiled Kent. "It is as true as the evidence written in this room."

V

"Come here and see for yourself. Whoever poured the wine did so with an unsteady hand; if it was Professor Caron, he was agitated by the presence of the caller at that hour, and if it was the stranger himself, he was probably already under the influence of liquor. One of the glasses overflowed slightly on to the tray. You can see the mark of the two glasses quite distinctly, and you note that one of them had a larger base than the other."

"But that is not all, of course. Here on the surface of the table—stoop down and you will get the light on it just right—the mark is quite plain. A very big man has leaned his weight upon his hand there. The fingers are outspread, you note. A man with a hand like that must be over six feet and built to powerful proportions. He wore gloves and was careful not to remove them while in this room—a fact that is suspicious."

"That is why the impression is somewhat indeterminate, then," commented Malabar with interest. "What else?"

"Over here in the corner— You may have noted that in the corners of any room, covered by a carpet or large rug like this, the pile is scarcely worn, but is of its original thickness. He evidently stood here for some time—perhaps while he held forth at some length upon the object of his visit. Note the size of the marks made by his feet. They match the hand."

"How do you know that these marks were not made by the feet of Donovan or one of his men—the mark of the hand, too, for that matter?"

"Because none of the police wore gloves, and because the police are not equipped with golf boots. You can see the impression of the rubber studs plainly. The boots were brand-new—perhaps purchased specially for this nocturnal visit."

Dick Malabar rubbed his chin reflectively and slowly nodded his head.

"This man, then, stole the sealed package from the safe, you think?"

"Either he stole it or it was handed to him by Professor Caron, but I doubt the latter."

"You mean——?"

"Professor Caron was bound, hand and foot! The marks on his wrists and ankles are not very noticeable; but they are there. What puzzles me is why the visitor removed the Professor's slippers."

"Wh-what?"

"In replacing them he put them on the wrong feet—the right slipper on the left foot and the left slipper on the right foot. Look for yourself. I tell you, Dick, something damnable happened in this room in the early morning hours; but what? What?"

He took a pace across the room and back, head bent in thought. He paused at the table and idly picked up the two-ounce bottle of digitalis that had been found in the deceased's vest pocket.

"We know that the Professor was in terror from something or other, Kent. The fact that he hid the ruby shows that he was afraid of this very visit, doesn't it? It does not look well—the whole thing. Everything points to foul play——"

Malabar paused at an exclamation from the novelist, who was staring at the little round bottle in his hand.

" You are right, Dick, and here is some more evidence under our very eyes. I am going to telephone my friend Doctor Harvey, and have him analyze this stuff. I believe he will find the contents of this bottle inert; for digitalis is not active after eighteen months or so. The label shows the date of manufacture to have been over two years ago."

" Which means——?"

" That this bottle was planted in Professor Caron's pocket by the murderer to suggest treatment for a weak heart; that his death is not due to that."

" How was he killed ?"

" It is not going to be easy to find that out."

" When the man who came here discovers that the jewel case is empty—that the golden scarab is missing——"

" It was that he was after ?"

" Undoubtedly. He will come back here for it."

" And waste no time in doing so, I would say."

" I expect him to make another attempt—possibly to-night."

" What are you going to do ?" Malabar looked up eagerly.

" When the gentleman calls to-night," stated Addison Kent quietly, " we shall be here to receive him !"

I

THE day grew oppressively hot and humid for the time of year; but that did not lessen the detail with which it was crowded for Addison Kent. There were cables to send to Paris and to Armaund Lamont in Switzerland. An undertaker took charge of the body of the late archæologist after Kent's own doctor had viewed it. Doctor Harvey carried away with him the bottle of digitalis, and also the spoonful of wine that remained in the glass upon the tray, promising to complete his analysis and report before night upon the desirability of an autopsy.

The thing which Addison Kent had planned to do first of all that day, however, had been erased from his programme through the arguments of Richard Malabar. Whoever was after the golden scarab, the journalist pointed out, was hardly likely to be alone in his quest. Professor Caron had intimated that nobody knew he had the gem in his possession; but this was disproved by the visit of the man who had walked off with the sealed package out of the safe. And, if one man knew of the ruby and its whereabouts, there was no telling how many more might be aware of the prospective "haul" and be on the watch. Whoever were after it certainly would be keeping a sharp eye open for its removal from the Lamont residence. Not only might it be dangerous to change the location of the jewel at

the present moment; to do so might also defeat Kent's very purpose in taking up temporary quarters in the Lamont house—to surprise the thieves in a second attempt to enter the place in search of the scarab.

"I am satisfied that the fellow who came here has confederates, Kent," Malabar declared with conviction. "They may be only hired 'look-outs,' set to keep close watch on this house and the movements of its inmates. This is big game, remember, and well worth big effort."

"You have some suggestion to offer?"

"Yes. I advise keeping the golden scarab right here—for to-night, at least, or until the enemy have shown a lead which we can follow up. I believe with you that they will try to enter the house sooner or later, thereby providing us with our opportunity. But they will do that only if they believe the ruby is still here."

"That sounds reasonable," agreed Kent. "Would you put it back in the same hiding-place, then?"

"I've thought of a better place—better for our purpose, that is. Let us bait a trap, as it were. You will sleep in Professor Caron's bedroom—in his bed—while I occupy the sitting-room that opens off it. There is a davenport, if I remember rightly, or we can fix up a cot of some kind."

"And where will the golden scarab retire for the night?"

"On the breast of one of the mummies. It will tuck out of sight, quite nicely, inside the bandages. That is the last place whoever is after it will be liable to look for it. They will have a natural tendency to shy away from the mummies and——"

"Remember what Professor Caron said last night, Dick: 'Nothing is safe from a bold thief! Nothing is sacred!' Remember the thieves who penetrated the tombs of the Pharaohs in ancient days. Nevertheless, I think your suggestion is a good one; for, if we get them inside that bedroom and fail to nab them, we deserve to be licked!"

"That's my idea exactly, old chap. We'll take turns in standing guard. I shall take the first watch—say till three or three-thirty a.m. Then I shall wake you for your trick. Is that agreeable?"

"Perfectly."

So it was arranged. Evening found Kent and Dick Malabar installed at the Westchester mansion, to the great relief of Mokra. It was evident that the butler had been afraid of being left alone on the premises, even although the solid Scotsman—Sandy, the gardener—had quarters above the garage, scarcely a stone's-throw from the big house. The removal of the body from the library and the arrival of Kent and Malabar afforded the simple Algerian much comfort, and only the presence of the Nubian prevented him from being entirely happy. As it was, he felt pretty cheerful, and went about the laying of the table in the dining-room with an assurance which finally sent the late Professor's manservant, sulking, to his room in the servants' wing.

All day long the coastal stations had been flying storm signals. At sundown thunder-clouds were shouldered high in the heavens, mountainous, black.

"Looks as if we were in for a bad storm before morning," was Kent's comment as he glanced at the sky. They had come out on the portico after dinner for coffee and cigars.

"The worse the better," responded Malabar, smiling a little at the paradox. "Under cover of the Stygian darkness and the uproar of the warring elements, the determined enemy crept stealthily upon the sleeping fortress—all that sort of thing!"

The air seemed to hang like a pall, sultry, pocketed, dead. Out on the highway the sound of motors rose to a passing hum—died away. From the river persisted the staccato of a launch, strangely loud, and somewhere the dull beat of turbine engines.

II

"The telephone wants to talk with you, Monsieur Kent, if you please," announced Mokra from the library doorway.

"It was Harvey, Dick," Kent informed as he came back to his chair. "As I expected, that digitalis is inert—an old bottle of it, entirely useless."

"You think it was placed in Caron's pocket to mislead?"

"I'm sure of it. He was no more taking treatments for his heart than I am! Whoever planted it has run across the bottle, standing on a shelf somewhere; he suddenly conceived the idea and acted upon it without noticing the old date on the label. That much is clear."

"What about the wine?"

"There is a slight trace of chloral hydrate, but not enough to do any harm—not more than would be required for a sleeping-draught."

"That is strange. Does Harvey recommend an autopsy?"

"He does. We ought to have a report on that to-morrow; but I doubt if they'll find anything to prove that a murder has been committed."

"Yet you are convinced——?"

"I am waiting for the report of the medical experts."

Sandy MacLean passed with a light ladder on his muscular shoulder. He nodded to them and grinned.

"Everything snug for the night, Sandy?" called Kent.

"Ay, that it is. We'll no be needin' the sprinklers, Ah'm thinkin', sir." He paused to wave a hand at the sky. "Them clouds wull be gaein' lawn-waterin' the nicht." He went on towards the garage, wagging his head wisely.

"I asked Sandy if he had noticed anybody hanging about the place during the day," remarked Kent.

"And——?"

"The answer is 'yes,' Dick. He saw two young fellows hanging about suspiciously, off and on, all afternoon. They were looking in at the gate, and once he caught them lounging on the grass, behind some bushes. He chased them off about their business. He had some tools stolen out of the garage not long ago."

"What did I tell you?" There was a note of satisfaction in Malabar's voice. "Well, let them come!"

"You had better see that you have a full clip in your automatic when you go on duty. You're sworn

in as a deputy now, remember. If you have to, don't hesitate to shoot."

"I only hope we are not taking all these precautions for nothing," was Malabar's prayer.

"It will not be very difficult to approach the house, anyway"—and Kent indicated the surrounding shrubbery—"or to get inside, for that matter."

The grounds of the Lamont estate stretched away into the gloom, the boundaries lost in the darkness, except for the gleam of lamps on the posts at the foot of the driveway, where the heavy iron gates were closed and locked for the night. There was a light standard near the garage, while two lamps glowed dimly in their frosted globes on either side of the *porte cochère*. In every other direction the shrubbery afforded concealment.

III

About ten o'clock Addison Kent decided to turn in for a few hours' rest. He left Malabar amusing himself in the billiard-room. But it was some time after he was undressed and in bed before the novelist could get to sleep. Long ago he had mastered insomnia by sheer mental control; but to-night his mind seemed full of vagrant thoughts. He blamed the failure of his efforts to relax at first upon the fact that it was not his regular bedtime; but perhaps the presence of the automatic and the electric torch under his pillow, with all that they signified, had something to do with it.

Or was it the strangeness of his surroundings? He was not accustomed to a bedroom in which mummies in their coffins stood on guard! That grotesque black cat——!

In spite of himself his eyes kept wandering in the direction of the upright cases. He felt uncomfortable in their presence—nervous, as if about them hung some malignant spell, an aura of malevolence—!

Rather sharply he took himself to task. Was he a child, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder in fear of the Bogy Man? Nonsense! These rumours of malicious spirits exerting evil influences—why, the dried-up bodies, enclosed in those upright cases by the door there, were over three thousand years old—harmless as the dust of the ages! As poor Caron had said, just last night: "Why should they harm anyone who sought to preserve their memory, who——?"

Just last night! Professor Caron was alive and well then. He had stood right over there. Kent could see the smile on his face. Right in this room—just last night! This was Caron's bed! Up there was the place where the plaster—— "I will leap upon him like a wild beast upon his prey!"

"Damn!" Kent punched the pillow irritably into a more comfortable position and kicked off the sheets. "Now, go to sleep, and be quick about it!" he apostrophised. "You've got to be up in less than five hours!"

Fitful blue light played into the dark room intermittently from the distant storm that was brewing. It would be sure to break in the night sometime, and if he did not get to sleep before that happened, the storm would keep him awake if nothing else did.

Queer how the cold blue light that came and went caught the shine of the pitch on the wooden figure that was the cat's coffin, sitting over there by the window. It gleamed on the rock-crystal of its staring eyes. He would not have much difficulty in imagining that

the grotesque creature was winking and grinning at him——!

Deliberately, he turned his back upon it—and propped himself promptly on an elbow. For, out of the darkness from the opposite side of the room——! He shut his eyelids impatiently; but when he slowly opened them again——!

Without removing his stare, he fumbled for the light switch—and could not locate it. There was no mistaking the fact that two great eyes—real eyes—were glowing at him out of the dark—great, burning orbs like live coals!

Kent shut his eyelids once more and found, upon reopening them, that the glowing fires were gone from the spot. With a breath of relief he sank back on the pillow, but jerked up again instantly. They had not disappeared! They had only moved to another spot, where they still blazed at him in the darkness!

He stretched out an impatient arm for the light switch, found it and flooded the room. There was nothing to be seen at the spot!—not a thing!

Sheepishly, he snapped out the light and rolled over. After a while he dozed—slept. So that he did not hear the first low, distant rumble of thunder—like the mutter of approaching menace.

I

CR-RASH!

Spasmodically, Addison Kent sat up in bed, blinking, only half awake. The first thing that was borne in upon his sleep-blunted brain was the fact that a terrific electrical storm was in full blast. Thunder-claps cracked overhead like exploding cannon. Lightning in long, vivid flashes for the moment lit the room like day—a moment of dazzling brightness, then utter blackness. The roll of the thunder rattled the windows in their casements. The rumbling was incessant. The rain was coming down in torrents, and he could hear the trees lashing in the gale that swept them.

Then suddenly Kent was wide awake as he caught again the glow of those two malignant eyes that had stared at him before. The balls of fire glowed from the far corner of the bedroom, low down, near the floor. In the next lightning-flash he got just a glimpse of something crouching for a spring!

R-ripple!—Crack!—ackle! came the thunder. He fumbled beneath the pillow for his automatic and sprang from the bed. Something struck him on the chest, as if launched from a catapult, and he went over backwards. He felt sharp pains as the clawing, yowling creature scratched the coat of his pyjamas to ribbons!

With a yell he fought it off. He leaped to his feet. In another flash of lightning he saw a dark form dashing away into the interior of the house. He lost sight of it before he could fire at it.

He ran to the wall at the head of the bed and slithered his hand about in search of the light switch. The button snapped under his thumb; but the room remained in darkness. The fuses were blown—probably throughout the whole house!

What had attacked him? He pawed the pillow till he got hold of his electric torch. He turned it on, playing the beam across the floor to the corner without finding there anything to indicate an answer. He swung the disk of light to the corner where the mummy of the Egyptian cat——!

With an involuntary cry of astonishment, Kent strode across the room to investigate. The coffin-shell, in which the mummy of the sacred cat had been so securely sealed, lay on the floor in two longitudinal halves!

The cat was gone!

II

Bewildered, Kent swung on his heel. A long, wicked flash of lightning dazzled him, and what he saw in that brief illumination of the bedroom brought a cry of horror to his lips.

He levelled the beam of his torch. The lid was off the coffin of the mummy on the right-hand side of the doorway! The linen strips in which it had been swathed were unwrapped—torn away! They hung in streamers from the upper portion of the shrunken brown body of the mummy!

It was "The Laugher," as the Professor had nicknamed him! The open mouth, the grinning teeth, the sunken sockets that had shocked Kent and Malabar the evening before in the photo they had seen—here they were now in horrible reality, glaring and gleaming back at him in the lightning's eerie blue flame!

"Damnation!" cried Kent in amazement.

But it was not in fear that the exclamation escaped him. He ran to the bed, almost in panic haste, slipped on his tennis shoes, grabbed his bath-robe from the back of a chair, snatched his watch from beneath the pillow and forced himself to approach the dire figure. Anxiously he played the beam of his torch about that awful face, down the naked brown breast, around on the floor—everywhere! For it was upon the breast of this mummy that he and Malabar, just a few hours before, had concealed the golden scarab beneath the bandages!

And the appalling truth was that the priceless ruby, in its golden scarab setting, had completely disappeared! It was gone!—successfully stolen!

III

For a moment Addison Kent stood there, dazed by the discovery. Automatically, he glanced at his watch. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

Then his brain began to function. The thief, or thieves, had broken into the house. They had been in this room—with him lying there on the bed! It could not have been very long ago. They had come under cover of the storm, and he knew by the intensity of it

that it was at its height right now. The thief could not be far away—might be in the house still!

He cast the beam of his light into every nook and cranny of the big bedroom. He looked under the bed, the only place that appeared to offer concealment. He shut off the light as he cautiously approached the door that led into the sitting-room.

It was Malabar's duty to be on guard for half an hour yet. He had not wakened Kent. Why hadn't he? Where the devil was he? This thing had been done right under his nose!

Raging inwardly, the novelist nevertheless very carefully entered the sitting-room, first flashing his torchlight into every corner. Nobody was there. Malabar's cot was empty—had been unoccupied. Where was he? Perhaps he had been eliminated by the thieves!

As this thought took possession of Kent he grew suddenly calm. There was no telling what dangers lay before him in that great house of darkness. He must investigate. Automatic in hand, ready for instant use, and with jaws grimly set, he crept from the bedroom and made his way out into the upper hallway.

He reached the banister and peered over into the wide hall downstairs. The glare of the lightning came and went; it gleamed on the clusters of ancient weapons that hung on the walls, here and there, flashing from halberd and battle-axe, broadsword and shield, with cold fire; it shone on the suits of armour in the corners—shone and went out, shone and went out. The lower hall appeared to be empty.

Where was Mokra? Where was Kellani? Was he alone in the house? He listened long and carefully;

but he soon realized that the infernal reverberations and roar of the storm effectively drowned out all ordinary noises. He doubted if even the bark of an automatic would be heard with that pandemonium going on.

As he drew back from the banister, his heart skipped a beat. Again he saw those fiery eyes glowing at him in the darkness of the upper hallway. They were approaching him now! Tense, he waited, his gun advanced.

Then he lowered it with an inward laugh at himself as a huge black ball of fur rubbed softly against his leg.

"Meow!" greeted Aristophanes lonesomely.

IV

Satisfied that the way was clear, Kent slipped noiselessly down the carpeted staircase. He did not show his light, and he held his automatic ready; but nobody was in the lower hallway.

Nor in the library, when at last he reached the archway and slowly parted the portières that hung there. He advanced into the room, and with the idea of catching a glimpse of the grounds at the next flash of lightning, he made his way cautiously towards the French doors that opened upon the tiled portico. He flung the heavy partly-drawn window drapes aside, and as the lightning came he flattened his nose against the glass and, with his hands at the side of his face, peered out.

He started back in astonishment. He was staring straight into a face on the opposite side of the glass!—the face of someone who, in turn, was trying to see into the room where he stood!

Quickly he dodged to one side. But there was no gun-play. In the lightning glare he saw the figure out on the portico recoil in equal surprise. He saw the look of terror in the wide-open eyes. As the head turned, he caught a glimpse of the face and gasped amazement.

It was a young woman who stood there! Just for a moment she stood—a young woman in a mackintosh, dripping wet! The hood of it was over her head. Raindrops gleamed on fluffy hair where it protruded. Then the glare went out, and everything was black. By the time he could get his electric torch into play—she was gone!

And, even in that dramatic moment, Addison Kent realized that it was a very beautiful face.

V

He grabbed the door-knob, struggling with the catch. The bolt stuck!

In exasperation he dashed for the front door; but, by the time he felt the blast of the wind and rain, he had given up all hope of overtaking her. Like a frightened deer she had fled.

A woman! What was she doing there in a storm like this? In no period of calculation had he allowed for the possibility of a woman thief appearing upon the scene!

Up and down the portico he raged. The wind tore at his bath-robe and flapped it about his wet legs, to which his soaked pyjamas were already plastered. Outdoors, the uproar of the storm was deafening. The tall bushes were bent almost to the ground by the boisterous gale; they tossed about like maddened

creatures. The turmoil of the thunder was incessant, while the torrential rain was drummed in gusts against windows and went swishing along the ground. It drove in slanted sheets; in the blue blaze of the lightning it looked like pelting silver.

Kent ran around the house to the rear, in the direction he imagined the girl would take. But she was nowhere in sight, and he swore impotently. He ran along the garden walk that ended at a small gate in the high brick wall which skirted the rear of the garden—and stopped with a jerk as a blinding sizzle of lightning seared the sky, followed instantly by a terrific rip of thunder.

For, on top of the garden wall, loomed a huge figure! Just a glimpse of it he got—a big man in a felt hat, the brim hanging limp about his ears, shedding rain!

Blackness! Glare again! The man was gone! Blackness! Glare!

“Dick!” shouted Kent at the top of his voice.

Skirting the wall, white shirt-sleeves vivid in the bright flare, one arm extending his police automatic, ran Richard Malabar in pursuit of the man on the wall!

VI

Kent dashed after him. By the time he got to the spot, Malabar had disappeared. Kent shouted; but his voice was torn to shreds and tossed away on the fling of the storm. He stumbled about in the shrubbery for a while, but failed to see further sign of pursuer or pursued.

There was nothing for it but to go back to the house. He could accomplish little out there in that maelstrom with no definite objective. He began to wonder what

had happened to the household—the servants. Where was Sandy ?

He stopped at the garage and shouted several times without response. There was no light in the garage. The lamps were all out on the driveway and about the grounds. The house was lost in darkness, except when the lightning flares limned it, a glisten of streaming windows.

Kent let himself in at the front door and stood, listening, in the hall. After the hurly-burly without, it seemed almost quiet indoors now.

“Mokra !” he called. “Kellani ! Ho, you Mokra !”

But there was no answer to his shouts.

Then he thought he heard a sound at the kitchen entrance and went cautiously towards it. He heard a stamping of feet, a gruff oath, the scratch of a match, the yellow flicker of a candle—then shuffling footsteps, advancing along a passage.

“Air ye a’ recht, Maister Kent ?” came Sandy MacLean’s anxious enquiry.

He was coming along the kitchen corridor, the candle throwing a grotesque black shadow of him on the wall.

“The dommed fuses hae blown oot an’ Ah’m thinkin’——”

He stumbled. The burring voice was silent. Then Addison Kent heard his low-breathed, horrified exclamation.

“What’s wrong, Sandy ?” he called, hurrying into the passage. The beam of his electric torch preceded him.

It was Mokra ! He lay sprawled across the narrow corridor. He had been struck from behind, and the haft of the knife protruded from his back !

The two men stared at one another, their faces blanched in the uncertain light. The din of the storm beat about the house with fury unabated.

Upstairs, in the bedroom of the late Professor Emil Caron, the mummy laughed in silent fixity as the cold weird light came and went on its awful face.

Chapter IX

Missing!

ADDISON KENT'S look was grim as he stood up from examination of the Algerian's body. Here, at least, was no room for doubt. It was murder in the first degree—cold-blooded, treacherous, a stab in the dark from behind! These men with whom they had to deal were ruthless. No woman's hand could have driven that powerful blow; the knife had been wielded with vicious force.

"I swear to you, Sandy, that whoever has done this shall pay for it!" vowed Kent bitterly. "He was a faithful, loyal fellow—Mokra—and, by Heaven! they are not going to get away with a crime like this. I am going to begin by searching this house from cellar to roof. You have a supply of new fuses in the garage? Well, go for them while I'm getting dressed. I want lights at once. And bring a lantern with you."

"Aye, sir. Ah'm thinkin' a hurricane lamp——?"

"The very thing! Get it! Every minute counts. Hustle!"

There was a quality in the tone of the command that sent the gardener outside on the run. He was back in a remarkably short time and soon had located the blown fuses and replaced them.

"Turn on every light in the place as we come to it," ordered Kent. "We'll start in the cellar; but first——"

He glanced about the kitchen. An empty peach-crate stood on end in a corner, and he picked it up. He lifted down a dish-pan from a nail above the sink. Crate and pan in hand, he made his way to the front door and out on to the portico while the gardener switched on the library lights and drew the window-drapes aside, so that the light streamed out on the tiles.

As Addison Kent expected, he found several wet and muddy footprints; the marks of new rubbers were distinct—the small, narrow footprints of a woman. He covered the clearest of the imprints with the upturned pan and the shallow peach-crate. The marks were close enough to the windows of the library to be protected to some extent by the overhang of the roof; while the rain was still coming down heavily, it was not driving in against that side of the house.

"Now for the cellar, Sandy," directed Kent with satisfaction.

A draught of cool, damp air struck their faces as they descended; one of the cellar windows was wide open. The windows swung inward on hinges; the hook of the open window was in its eyelet on the joist overhead. Sandy swore that every cellar window had been closed when he made his rounds.

"You can see where it has been forced, of course." Kent pointed, then waved the gardener back as he made a close examination under the ray of his electric

torch. "See if you can rustle me a couple of small boxes, Sandy."

One of these he turned upside down on the cement floor directly under the window; the other he passed through the window and upturned alongside the torn screen, which had been unhooked and thrown aside.

"Golf is a great game, Sandy," commented Kent irrelevantly.

"Ay, sir," agreed Sandy MacLean solemnly.

"Let's try the first floor now."

The novelist went systematically through every room without finding anything of importance apparently. It was not until they reached the bedroom he had occupied on the second floor that he showed particular interest.

"I should think there must be some good bargains in golf outfits at this time of the year, Sandy. Noticed any bargains lately?—boots, for instance?"

Sandy did not answer. Sandy was not there. He was not within earshot. In fact, he was not on the second floor at all. He was down in the dining-room—at the buffet, pouring from the decanter which stood there a glass of whiskey, swallowing it neat. He had need of it; for one look into that bedroom—one look at that mummy—! With reckless generosity he played host to himself by pouring out a second man-sized drink. Thus fortified, he marched doggedly back upstairs, the look of fighting ancestors upon his rugged face.

"It's a braw, bricht, moonlicht nicht, the nicht!" he chanted, testing his speech as advised by Harry Lauder. "Hoots, lad! Noo, ye maun bring on the de'il himsel'!"

In the servants' quarters they found the chef, sound asleep in his bed and snoring. Kent awakened him, without sympathy, to thunder, lightning and murder; but he might better have left him to his snores for all the information he could give, as it was evident that the fat Gaston would have slept through the battle of Waterloo and probably could be awakened only by the smell of something burning!

Not so his assistant Henri, in the bed alongside, however. The youth had his head buried in the bed-clothes, and when these were pulled away, it was a wide-awake and startled young Frenchman who blinked at them in the bright light. His face was pea-green and he looked positively ill; at each peal of thunder he quivered in fright. The storm had awakened him, he said; he was always terrified like this in a bad storm.

"Where is Kellani? Have you seen him? Where's his room?" demanded Kent brusquely. "Come and show me."

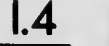
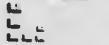
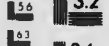
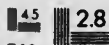
The room the Nubian had occupied was at the end of the upper hallway. There was no need to ask questions; it told its own story of hasty departure. The drawers of the dresser were open and empty. Discarded clothing was littered here and there, and an old suitcase in the corner was half packed, as if the owner had been interrupted in his preparations or had decided suddenly not to hamper himself in his flight.

Addison Kent's face was stern as he considered. It had not been the Nubian he had glimpsed on the wall; for the face of the big man had been white. Mokra! There was bad blood between Kellani and Mokra. It might well be that the Nubian had done the deed. He belonged to a treacherous breed. Dick Malabar had said——



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By the way, where was Malabar all this time? He ought to have returned to the house before this! Suddenly concerned, Kent turned to the gardener.

"We must search the grounds thoroughly, Sandy, at once. Mr. Malabar is out there somewhere, and he may need us. You fellows go back to bed, and be sure that neither of you attempts to leave without permission. Come on, Sandy."

The first fury of the storm had lessened considerably. The rain was pelting down still, but the velocity of the wind had fallen off, and the intervals between the lightning-flashes and the following thunder-peals lengthened steadily. The high brick wall at the foot of the garden, where Malabar had been seen in pursuit of the figure on the wall, was the logical point from which to start the search; but, of course, the deluge of driving rain had obliterated all footprints from the sward and had puddled the softer ground hopelessly.

Nevertheless, Kent sent the gardener off to the left while he went to the right, and they quartered back and forth, examining every piece of shrubbery and every stretch of lawn. The beam of the novelist's electric torch was like a finger, probing in the dark, and as the search progressed without discovery of any clue to what had taken place out there in the storm, Kent's anxiety grew. He was fast reaching the conclusion that Dick Malabar had carried the pursuit outside the grounds altogether, when he heard a halloo from Sandy, and saw the signal swing of the hurricane lamp, down at the foot of the driveway.

Kent joined him on the run. Sandy was pointing to a huddled heap near one of the big stone gate-posts, and Kent ran forward with a mutter of fear as the light revealed mud-stained shirt-sleeves.

Malabar was lying, face down, in a small puddle, his head just out of the water. A red gash was visible where his wet hair was plastered to one side, and Kent turned him over anxiously. There was a great bruise on his forehead; his face was scratched and bleeding; his shirt was ripped in several places, as if bullets—

"Dick! Dick!" cried Kent, shaking him gently by the shoulder. "Thank God!" he breathed as he noted the flutter of the eyelids. "Quick, Sandy, we must get him to the house as fast as possible."

Malabar opened his eyes.

"Ch—cheerio!" he murmured.

"How badly hurt are you, old man? How are you feeling?" asked Kent as he made a hurried examination for bullet-wounds without finding any.

"Top—top-hole!" came Malabar's voice weakly. "Beggar got—clean away!"

He fainted. They carried him quickly towards the house, bright now with illuminated windows.

Chapter X

Plus and Minus

I

RICHARD MALABAR'S escape might well be considered to savour of the miraculous. He had been fired at several times at close quarters—point-blank, he said—and his bullet-torn shirt provided powder-stained evidence. He had come through unscathed, except

for the bruises, cuts and scratches—painful, but not at all serious. With a raw beef poultice bandaged across his forehead, he lay back in an easy-chair in front of the library grate, sipping a stiff toddy while he eyed the flaming coal. The sudden drop in temperature that had ridden in on the back of the storm made the fire welcome in the coolness of the dawn hours.

For it was almost daybreak. The rain was over. All thought of further sleep had been banished from the Lamont residence while its inmates awaited the arrival of the police. Addison Kent had telephoned a full report to Inspector Lowry, Chief of Detectives. Already Police Headquarters had ordered a drag-net for the missing Nubian, and confidently hoped to have him brought in within a few hours. It would not be easy for one of his exceptional description to escape notice very long. Every underworld haunt where sanctuary might be sought would be combed, Kent knew, for two men of giant physique—one brown, one white.

As he had listened to Malabar's account of what had happened, the novelist had marvelled at the simplicity with which the theft had been accomplished in the face of the precautions taken to prevent it. It seemed almost as if Fate had conspired against them. If Malabar had turned out the last lights earlier and retired to the sitting-room for his vigil; if he had not stepped out on the portico for a breath of air; if he had not felt the need of stretching his legs by taking a final turn around the house to make sure that everything was securely fastened!—

He had not reckoned on the closeness with which the house was being watched or the boldness of the thieves. Apparently they had spied upon him as he sat, reading, in the library; no doubt, they realized that he was on

guard, and when he had gone outside for a moment they had been quick to seize the opportunity of eliminating him. He had not known what struck him. When he recovered consciousness he had found himself in a far corner of the grounds, tied to a tree, hand and foot, with a gag in his mouth !

As simply as that the way had been cleared for entry. When the storm broke and the deluge of rain had revived him, Richard Malabar had fought the nausea of dizziness from the blow on his head, and finally had succeeded in loosening his bonds. His first instinct had been to get back to the house for his automatic, find out if Kent was all right and see what the thieves had accomplished. He let himself in through the French doors of the library.

"Very foolish of you to have gone outside unarmed, Dick," had been Kent's comment.

"It never occurred to me that they would be on hand at that early hour. It was not yet midnight. Yes, it was a fool thing to do."

By the time Malabar had secured his weapon, which was in the side pocket of his coat, the storm had been in full blast. He was about to start for the stairs to see if everything was in order——

"Had you done so, things might have been—— Well, never mind. Go on."

"But, Kent, it was right then that I saw the bally fellow in the flopped hat. I saw him in a flash of lightning, making for the bushes from the direction of the house. He had the tail of his coat wrapped around something, and tucked up under his arm——"

"The mummy of the cat !"

"——and I went right out again after him."

"Through the library ?"

" Yes."

" Leaving the door slightly ajar behind you ?"

" I th-ink so."

" Otherwise, being a spring lock, you would have locked yourself out."

" Quite so."

" I wonder who closed it after you. When I came down and tried to get out through that door in a hurry, I found it not only closed but jammed so tightly I couldn't budge it."

" Hold on, now ! I am not so sure that I left it open. I seem to remember giving it a yank to shut it as I sprang outside. No doubt it slammed shut behind me. There was such an uproar going on you couldn't hear a thing, and I was thinking only of stopping my man before he got away."

Apparently the thief realized that someone was after him; for he had hidden in the shrubbery and for a time had not made a move. Malabar had stalked him, and had been rewarded at last by sight of his quarry, making for the garden at the rear of the house. The man was clambering the wall by the time the journalist had got within range; but at the first shot dropped back and opened fire on his pursuer.

The duel had been fought out with only the lightning to reveal the whereabouts of each opponent. They had ducked about and stalked each other for some time, and had come together unexpectedly at the foot of the driveway. Malabar was unable to say whether any of his own bullets had found their mark; certainly, they had not stopped the final onslaught of the desperate giant. Each had emptied his weapon by the time they had come so suddenly to grips, and out of the dark the man had dealt Malabar a blow with the butt-end of his

gun on the forehead. That was all Malabar had known until Kent had found him.

The awakening had been a very humiliating one for Richard Malabar when he had been told that the priceless golden scarab was gone and Mokra murdered. He seemed still dazed, and had refused to believe until Kent had shown him the evidence. Malabar then had clenched his fists and knotted his jaw muscles in angry mortification.

"They've made a bally monkey of me, Kent! I had no business going outside the house; I should have gone on guard up in the sitting-room, as we planned. It was upon my recommendation that we kept that ruby here——! I say, I wonder that you don't give me hell for the jolly old mess I have made of the thing! I shan't put up any defence, if you do; because, don't you know, there is nothing to say." He squared his shoulders. "Fire!"

Addison Kent smiled.

"If nobody ever made mistakes, Dick, the world would be a pretty unprofitable place for some of us. Forget it! I am to blame for risking the golden scarab in the first place. It is for me to recover it and get to the bottom of this whole affair. Cheer up, now! The first skirmish goes to the enemy; but the fight is only starting. And I have an idea that we shall find it not without interest."

II

Kent gave the fire in the grate a poke or two, drew up a chair opposite the despondent Malabar and cheerfully proceeded to fill and light his pipe. The journalist studied the other's keen face for a moment, noting the

lines of determination, the firm mouth, the square chin.

"Would you mind telling me just where we are to head in?" he asked dejectedly. "Outside of the fact that it looks as if Kellani killed Mokra, and may have taken the scarab when he fled—I confess that is about as far as I can get, Kent."

"I'm afraid that is not far enough, old man. If you dismiss it so simply, you eliminate the man who attacked you——"

"No. He was outside, waiting for the Nubian to hand over the scarab and the mummy of the cat—in league with each other and all that sort of thing. I say, what about that cat business, anyway? Why should they want to steal a thing like that, do you suppose?"

"How do you know it was stolen? How do you know there was any mummy of a sacred cat inside that case? The thing sounded hollow when you knocked on it, didn't it?"

"By Jove! Yes, it did."

"And it had been opened some time ago—since its original discovery. It was resmeared with fresher pitch along the joint, you remember?"

"Then why should they smash it open like that?"

"How do you know that it didn't just burst open of its own accord?—change of atmosphere, humid weather, wood swelling?"

"Come to think of it, why not?" agreed Malabar, with interest. "The thing may have been empty without Professor Caron knowing it. Then you eliminate the cat, to start with?"

"I did not say so, Dick. But the cat seems to have worried you from the first, and I suggest the possibility

so that you can clear it out of your mind as a triviality or, at least, of secondary importance.

"Let us lay down the facts, as we know them. Professor Emil Caron, a gentleman of standing in the archæological world, comes to New York with certain antiques for distribution to American museums. I receive a letter from Armaund Lamont, asking me to look after his guest, who, forthwith, is installed at the Lamont residence. He seems anxious to see me, and hints that he has a special reason for this; later, when we call on him, he states openly that he is in trouble, and that he seeks my help because Lamont has told him about my alleged ability in the detection of crime. He even mentions the name of an infamous gentleman cracksman, Alceste, with considerable apprehension—says that even though Alceste is dead, his evil lives after him; then he asks us if we ever heard of the 'Order of the Golden Scarab,' a secret society or something of the sort in the East. He is proceeding to tell us what is on his mind when he becomes frightened by something—"

"The scarab beetle, crawling on the table!"

"—and he was by refusing to say anything more at that time and in that place. He promises, however, to give us his full confidence the next day, and practically dismisses us.

"Prior to this, he has shown us a large and very valuable ruby, set in a golden scarab of exquisite design, removing it from a sealed package in the library safe and resealing the empty case. He has prepared a quixotic hiding-place for the gem, and refuses to have it removed from the house to a place of safety. We do not know how it came into his possession, except that he got it at some buried tomb in Egypt, the location of

which he does not know, he having been taken there, blindfolded, by a German named Von Strom.

"The Professor has told us a strange story of becoming lost in the wastes of the Upper Egyptian Desert, and of encountering unexpectedly this Von Strom, the leader of a nomadic band of brigands. Caron is shown what purports to be a genuine relic of ancient Thebes—a chronicle, written upon papyrus in Egyptian hieroglyphics, dealing with ancient treasure buried in a lost tomb. The Professor deciphers it, but is suspicious of its authenticity. Nevertheless, he pretends to be convinced, and allows himself to be taken to this tomb and shown this buried treasure by the German.

"Again we are at a blind end; because, undoubtedly, Caron intended to reveal to us why he believed the document was a fake, and it is evident that it was because of what took place between him and the German at the hidden tomb that Professor Caron was in the present trouble to which he referred, and on account of which he was seeking our aid.

"That much seems clear. But while we are waiting for our second interview with the Professor, at which the full matter is to be laid before us, the unforeseen happens, and he dies suddenly in the night. That effectually silences him, and leaves his half-told story clouded in mystery.

"Subsequently, we discover that Caron was visited that night by a stranger, who was secretly admitted to the library by the Professor. This stranger took away with him the sealed package out of the safe. We surmise that it was the golden scarab he thought he was taking. In the morning Caron was found dead. The scarab we find, safely hidden, on the premises. Foolishly, we allow it to remain in the house to trap

the thief, whose return we anticipate. He comes back, he succeeds, he vanishes—and so does the gem! I think that about covers it, Dick?"

"Yes, and what I want to know is this: How did this man know where to look for the scarab? He must have had a confederate inside the house."

"Undoubtedly."

"The Nubian?"

"I think it very likely."

"He spied on us in the library, then—when we were with Caron."

"I think that Professor Caron was afraid of that very thing."

"Kent, the Nubian threw that beetle into the room," cried Malabar, with sudden conviction.

"Quite likely," smiled Kent. "And, if so, does that suggest anything else to you?"

"That the thing was a message—a warning?"

"Yes—from this 'Order of the Golden Scarab' perhaps."

"Oh, I say! They were both members! What?"

"And it was Kellani who looked after the hiring of the cameleers and all the preparations for the Professor's expedition into the desert. And it was Kellani who argued with them around the camp-fires——"

"I know," nodded Malabar. "I know what you are getting at. The thing was prearranged!"

"Exactly. Professor Caron was duped from the first. The guides deserted when the word was given, and instead of being hopelessly lost, the Nubian led the Professor to the valley where Von Strom awaited him."

"He was one of the German's own gang?"

"Yes. And instead of being his master's obedient

servant, as he stated so unctuously, he was virtually his master's warder—to see that he obeyed instructions and carried out whatever damnable purposes Von Strom had ensnared him to accomplish here in America !”

“ By Jove ! Kent, I believe you have hit the nail on the head.”

III

The novelist raised his hand in a gesture of protest.

“ It is never wise, Dick, to nail down a lid until sure that everything is in the box or to rope a trunk until it is fully packed. In the detection of crime, shrewd guesswork and even pure chance often play a part. I doubt if any great criminal investigation, conducted by the finest police organization in the world, was ever worked through to a successful conclusion without the investigators, at some stage of the enquiry, thanking their ‘ lucky stars ’ for some fortuitous turn of circumstance—some discovery that was purely a ‘ piece of good luck.’ Preconceived theories are just so many handicaps to start with; the tendency is to try fitting the facts to the theory instead of the other way about. There is nothing more misleading than the by-paths of false premises.”

“ But when you have a straight case of addition and subtraction—seven and seven are fourteen every time.”

“ Except when $7+7=x-y$,” corrected Addison Kent. “ It is the unknown quantity in any equation which must be established.”

“ Mathematical truths are beyond dispute, I always thought,” ventured Malabar doubtfully. “ For instance, if you accept the first axiom of Euclid—that

' things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another '——"

" Then I must not misapply it. Otherwise, I will be proving to you that red is a colour and blue is a colour; therefore, each being the same thing, red is blue !"

" Oh, but you cannot mix red and blue that way because——"

" If you mix them, you will get purple."

" I certainly shall—purple in the face in a minute ! What are we arguing about, anyway ?"

" There is no argument. Even the mathematical Mr. Euclid had to establish certain things as facts before he could prove his problems. That is exactly what has to be done in this situation we are facing. We are hanging Kellani without evidence in court. We both feel sure that he killed Mokra; but, unless the Bertillon expert from Headquarters finds his fingerprints on the handle of that knife, we have no proof to offer."

The motive is clear enough; he and Mokra hated each other. Also, he has made a getaway."

" Granted. It is quite legitimate for us to cast about in the dark for clues, and it is because I want your angles on the situation that we are reviewing the possibilities. But we must not forget that it is facts we are seeking. I merely point out that we do not know yet that Professor Caron did not die from natural causes and, if that were so, might it not alter greatly our attitude toward his whole story ? Perhaps the Egyptian sun affected his brain, and the queer story he told us will become nothing more than a hallucination."

" All I have to say to that, Kent, is to suggest that perhaps we did not see the golden scarab or the ruby, and perhaps it has not been stolen, and perhaps the Nubian is upstairs now, sleeping like a little child, in

his bed, and—finally and completely—perhaps I have no bump on my head as big as a goose-egg! But I am forced to contend that some things transcend imagination!” Malabar groaned.

“I think we may admit the bump on your head as an established fact,” conceded Addison Kent gravely.

“Well established!”

“Also, there are one or two other facts which the night has brought to our threshold for consideration.” Kent paused deliberately to give the fire another poke.

“What are you referring to?” asked Malabar, intrigued by something in the novelist’s manner.

“You were not in a condition to observe closely when we carried you in here, Dick. You probably did not see the dish-pan out on the portico. Ordinarily, I do not put much stock in footprints——”

“Footprints!”

“Yes. You did not know that we had a beautiful young woman visiting us during the storm, and——”

“What!” It came from Malabar explosively. He sat up in his chair with a jerk.

“She looked in at the glass doors there, just as I looked out. I saw her quite clearly in a flash of the lightning. In fact, we were within a couple of feet of each other.”

“Oh, the devil!” gasped Malabar with a note of exasperation.

“It’s a fact, Dick. Come out and see the neat mark of her rubbers.”

When they re-entered the library, Richard Malabar sank into his chair again. In his amazement he had hurried outside to examine this fresh evidence of further

complications, and apparently the effort had set his head whirling. His face was white, and he closed his eyes weakly.

"All right—in a minute," he reassured. "Awful crack I must have got—from that bounder."

IV

The dizzy spell lasted but a moment, and presently Malabar was questioning Kent eagerly. What did the woman look like? She was young? Was she beautiful? What did she do? Had Kent followed her? Where did she go? What under the sun was she doing out in such a storm at such an hour? In fact, for one who openly had confided to Addison Kent that he was not interested in women in the slightest degree, Mr. Dick Malabar seemed to be surprisingly thirsty for information.

"I did not know that you had a romantic streak in you, Dick," said Kent in amusement.

"Rot!" denied Malabar. "But, good heavens, man, the thing is so— Well, it is like one of your own novels!" he finished amusedly.

"The question is: what connection had this girl with the theft that has taken place?"

"None whatsoever!" Malabar declared emphatically. "I refuse to have it spoiled by anything so sordid. I prefer to think of her as a beautiful young lady whose car broke down, somewhere on the neighbouring driveway, and who was seeking help. And, instead of gallantly coming to her rescue and proffering help, you frightened her away!"

"Seriously, though, Dick——"

"To let her get away like that!" Malabar reproached.

"Our stars were not in the ascendant this night! You realize that she's gone, do you not?—vanished? You will never see her again. You cannot go all over New York, examining the rubbers of every pretty girl you meet. There must be a thousand girls wearing new rubbers of that exact size and shape."

"That is true," admitted Kent. "I do not put much stock in footprints as being of practical use, as I said before. I make use of them in fiction, legitimately enough, because there I can make it snow or rain whenever the need arises, and read a whole book of misdeeds out of the tracks conveniently left for my detective. But I am not foolish enough to try that sort of thing in this case. The fact of the matter is that most footprints look alike, and very few people walk so flat on their feet as to make distinct impressions. I covered those marks outside, chiefly to convince you of the lady's presence.

"However, once in a while a footprint carries some significance, even in a real case, Dick. We learned a little from the footmarks over there on the corner of the Axminster rug—that the man who visited Professor Caron wore golf boots."

"I fail to see the significance of that."

"Perhaps not in itself; but it remains for me to tell you that in the soft earth, close to one of the cellar windows which Sandy and I found wide open, I have under cover of a box a very perfect print of a large golf boot with every stud showing distinctly. And up in the bedroom—in the corner where the mummy-case of the cat stood—there is a second clear imprint of the same boot."

"Well, by George! That proves conclusively that the same man who visited Caron is the thief who got

away with the golden scarab to-night and—eh? Why, it is as clear as——”

“Mud!” finished Kent. “In fact, the very clearness with which the muddy tracks have been made prove differently.”

“That it was not the same man, you mean?”

“Yes. I measured very carefully the marks on the rug and made a drawing of them. The new footprints are three sizes smaller, for one thing, and for another, the rubber studs on the soles are a different make altogether!”

Malabar stared blankly. He rubbed his chin in perplexity.

“I fail to see that that proves the point, Kent,” he objected. “The man may have changed his boots. Lots of men wear boots too large for them, or too small.”

“The imprints have been too carefully placed to be genuine!”

Chapter XI “Miss Rockwood, of the ‘Mercury.’”

THE electric call of the front-door bell rang loudly through the silence of the great hallway.

The windows were bluing with daylight. From the distant kitchen came the sound of an egg-beater in a bowl and the aroma of coffee.

“Donovan,” murmured Kent as he arose to answer the summons in person. In the vestibule he switched on the lights.

But it was not the police. Kent paused in surprise before opening the outer doors; for through the grilling he saw the tailored figure of a young woman, standing upon the tiled threshold. She turned at his approach.

"I have called to see Mr. Addison Kent," she began. "I understand he is here. Inspector Lowry said——" She hesitated, then smiled brightly. "Perhaps I have the honour of addressing Mr. Kent?"

The novelist bowed politely, conscious of a lyric quality in the well-modulated contralto voice that was particularly pleasing to his ear. He held the door open for her to enter, which she did with a murmur of thanks.

"I really must apologize, Mr. Kent, for intruding upon you at such an unusual hour; but in my profession no distinction is made between night and day when the call comes. May I introduce myself? I am Miss Rockwood, of the *Mercury*."

A newspaper woman! He might have known! He eyed her doubtfully; but before he could say a word, she had sensed his hesitation and had smiled at him. It was a smile of unusual appeal, and the charm of it affected Kent strangely. He did not want to talk to any newspaper representative. He did not want to hand out a story to the Press before the police investigation. Whatever possessed Lowry——! Yet he found himself smiling back at her.

"You see, Mr. Kent, I live out here in Westchester, and my paper called me as soon as they heard. The *Mercury*, as you know, has a reputation for enterprise."

"But, my dear Miss Rockwood!" protested Kent, at last finding voice. "This is such quick work that I am afraid it defeats itself. We hardly know what has happened ourselves. The police are not here yet, and until they take charge it would be inadvisable for me to

give you particulars of robbery and murder——" He noted her sudden alertness at the word. "How much did Inspector Lowry tell you?"

"I only know that there is a good news story here, and that I was told to get enough of the facts for an extra. Who has been murdered?"

"Come into the library, Miss Rockwood," suggested Kent. "I must ask you to wait until the police arrive. They should be here at any moment now."

As he held aside the portières Kent saw her hesitate when she caught sight of Richard Malabar in front of the fireplace.

"Allow me to present a fellow-journalist, Miss Rockwood—Mr. Richard Malabar, of the London *Daily World*. Do not be alarmed by the bandage; for he bears a charmed life——" He paused, suddenly conscious that she was paying no attention to him. He looked at Dick Malabar, who had risen to his feet in evident embarrassment, a slow flush coming to his white face. Kent beamed upon them.

"Not *the* Richard Malabar—the famous correspondent? Oh, Mr. Malabar, this is a very great pleasure to me—to—to find you alive and well and to meet you. Some of us here on the New York papers have missed your articles for some time past, and a rumour got into circulation—that you had been killed by bandits in Morocco somewhere—— You know how such rumours travel."

She sat down in the chair which Malabar drew up for her without taking her eyes off him—large, lovely brown eyes. Kent felt the fascination of those eyes. They were remarkable. In fact, as the novelist stole the opportunity of studying the visitor more closely he needed nobody to inform him that Miss Rockwood,

of the *Mercury*, was a very beautiful young lady with a special charm of her own. It was not hard to imagine that with such personality and evident gifts she must be successful in her chosen work; yet his inability to recall where he had met her before made him feel annoyed with himself. At some social function or other, no doubt; but where? His memory refused to answer.

"You are not badly hurt, I hope, Mr. Malabar. You must tell me what happened. I want to know all about it, please. I would have telephoned; but the storm must have interfered with the wires somehow, for I could not get the connection, and was told the telephone here was out of order."

"The wires were cut, Miss Rockwood," Malabar informed her. Now that his first embarrassment had worn off, he seemed eager to talk to her—as eager as she was to listen. He looked across at Kent with a certain defiance in his grin.

"I have just told Miss Rockwood, Dick, that we cannot possibly give out a story for publication until the police arrive. It will be all right for her to remain here until the police take charge and get her story from them."

"But what a waste of time, Mr. Kent!" she protested. "I am quite willing to promise not to use the information Mr. Malabar gives me until the police confirm it. Is my promise not acceptable?"

Kent was conscious of a challenge in her smile as she turned the full appeal of those fascinating eyes upon him. There was amusement in them, and it required Malabar's understanding grin to stiffen his resistance.

"I have always been taught from earliest youth, Miss Rockwood, that only half of the letters in the

word 'beauty' can be used in 'duty.' I fear that Mr. Malabar in his weakened condition—— Why not ask me the questions you would ask him?" he bantered.

"Can a writer of popular fiction be trusted to handle facts?"

Kent acknowledged the thrust with a lift of the eyebrows.

"Judging by what one sees in the newspapers!——" came his countering drawl; but the sentence did not require finishing. Besides, with the utmost daring Dick Malabar had suddenly leaned over, captured one of the lady's little gloved hands, and patted it reassuringly.

"The events of the night, Miss Rockwood, naturally have upset my friend Kent. You will make allowances for him, I am sure. He used to be a newspaper man himself; that's how he got cynical, and ever since then it is his constant delight to obstruct honest, hard-working newspaper folk like you and me and prevent them from carrying out their orders. Now, get out your notebook and I'll tell you just what happened to me, and if he objects to us sitting in front of this nice fire, we will go outside and I will tell you what I know out there."

During this surprising speech the girl turned impulsively towards Kent, and again he was conscious of her eyes. Any resentment he might have felt at Malabar's assumption of authority was utterly submerged in the realization that she had allowed Dick to fondle her hand for a moment. She actually seemed to *like* it! To his further disturbance, Malabar proceeded at once to give her an account of his night's adventure which varied not a jot from the actual facts as Malabar had related them to Kent. He did not attempt to spare himself; rather, he enlarged upon his

negligence. He glanced at Kent once or twice, but the novelist's head was turned resolutely away; if Malabar were playing for her sympathy and thought that Kent was going to come graciously to his rescue with words of deprecation, he was sadly mistaken. Let him take the blame! He *was* to blame! It would look fine in print! Serve him right!

But as the recital progressed and Kent stole a glance at Miss Rockwood scribbling notes with her gold pencil, he failed to discover any abatement in her evident admiration. In fact, the pair were becoming so absorbed in each other that neither paid any further attention to him, and he began to feel foolish and a little piqued. He knew that she was eager to get the story, and that she would not abuse the privilege of this advance information. Her promise was perfectly good, as his own would have been in like circumstances. He had only succeeded in appearing boorish! He felt strangely awkward and angry with himself for feeling so.

He glanced across at her again. Her neck was beautifully formed. The tailored costume she was wearing was becoming; it suggested the elegance of a perfectly developed and sylph-like body. There was a strength of character in her round, delicately modelled chin. The profile of her straight nose, the softness of her mouth with its suggestion of the sentimental without weakness, the proud carriage of her head—here was quality as well as beauty, refinement as well as daring. What a girl for a heroine in his next book! he thought as he studied her.

Then he realized, all at once, that Malabar was removing the bandage to show her the bruise on his forehead! He saw the solicitation in her expressive

eyes; he heard her little gasp of commiseration, and caught the womanly tenderness in her low-spoken words. She reached over impulsively and patted Malabar's hand.

Addison Kent quietly stood up and left the room. He was not wanted. He was completely out of it. Maybe if he had had a sore toe to show like Tom Sawyer!—or was it Huckleberry Finn? *Where* had he met this girl before? One thing was certain: he was going to see that he met her again—just the two of them. Nonsense! What was the matter with him, to be going on like this? It was just that he was interested in her as a type to study—for story purposes. Type? No, hardly that. She was in a class by herself.

So he told himself as he wandered towards the kitchen quarters. The fragrance of coffee was very appetizing, and he would have Gaston prepare a nice breakfast-tray and bring it into the library beside the fire. Perhaps she would be glad to join them in a cup of coffee at least. On second thought, why not take in the tray himself when it was ready? That was why he had got up and left the room, wasn't it?—to be a thoughtful host? She would appreciate it, he felt sure, and he fussed about in the dining-room, carefully selecting the finest tray-cloth and napkins—the daintiest cups and saucers he could find.

"Get a move on, Gaston. We have a lady guest for breakfast, and she's famished. Are the eggs on? Toast done? Good!"

Finally it was ready, and he wheeled in the wagonette triumphantly—and nearly upset the whole thing. There was nobody in the library but Dick Malabar!

"Where is Miss Rockwood?"

"She left a moment ago—out the library door. Said she had to telephone her paper right away——"

"But, great Scott, man! She didn't have to go out to do that! Didn't you tell her we had the cut wires repaired now, and that the 'phone here was working again?"

"Well, by George! I am a silly ass and no mistake!" cried Malabar, his face twisting in disgust. "I clean forgot that for the moment!"

"Hmph!" grunted Kent. "You say she went out this way? What was the idea? Why didn't she use the front——?"

He stepped across to the French doors with a quick stride. He opened them and went out on the portico.

"Hey!" called Malabar. "Shut the door! The breakfast is getting cold!"

"Come here!" snapped Addison Kent, so sharply that Malabar started. "She stepped in that little mud-puddle there. And here is an almost perfect imprint of her left rubber at the edge of the tiling." He pointed. "Compare it with this imprisoned footprint under the dish-pan."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Malabar. "Identical, eh?"

"In size, shape—even the crisscross marks! Brand-new rubbers!"

The look on Dick Malabar's face was a study in comical dismay.

"You think——? Oh, rot!" he cried. "Fancy Miss Rockwood out in that bally storm and looking in through those glass doors at three o'clock in the morning! You cannot expect me to swallow that, Kent. Preposterous!"

"I told you before that I did not put much

stock in footprints. Rather an interesting similarity, though."

Malabar searched his face keenly as they re-entered the library; it was mask-like, with a touch of grimness about the mouth.

"Look here, Kent, remember what I said a while ago: there are a thousand women in New York, wearing new rubbers of the same size and shape. You'll have to examine the feet of a thousand——"

"No. Only nine hundred and ninety-nine now!" He wheeled the wagonette alongside the two chairs in front of the fire.

Malabar chuckled.

"This cures me of any ambition to be a 'Sherlock Holmes'! Too much worry over a lot of little things that do not lead anywhere. Wait till I tell this to Miss Rockwood as soon as she gets back——"

"She will not come back here," asserted Kent seriously.

"What? When she is through telephoning? Don't be an ass!"

"And when the police get here we shall find that Inspector Lowry did not send the lady to us at all—has never met her, in fact. That is why she departed so hurriedly."

"Are you crazy?"

"What is more, when we presently call up the managing-editor of the *Mercury*, we shall find that there is no 'Miss Rockwood' on his staff!"

Malabar stared at him.

"Do you mean it?"

"Absolutely."

For Addison Kent thought he knew now where he had met her before. A certain poise of the head, the

straight nose, the haunting familiarity—it was undoubtedly the girl in the hooded mackintosh who had peered through the glass doors in the midst of the storm about five hours before!

“You are all wrong, Kent,” scoffed Malabar, with a laugh. “I shall continue to believe in Miss Rockwood. She’s a mighty attractive girl. Charming!”

“Hmph!” Kent looked at him steadily. “She certainly pulled your leg, my boy!”

“Our leg,” corrected Malabar complacently, his mouth full of toast.

“Try hard not to be an utter fathead!” growled Kent, as he poured coffee into two of the three dainty cups.

Chapter XII

The Frightened Face

I

Two weeks sped by. It was a busy time for Addison Kent, and an interval of disappointments for the official police so far as making any definite progress in their search for the murderer of Mokra was concerned. Although many notorious underworld haunts had been combed and certain marked denizens thereof had gone through a grilling at Headquarters, not a single trace of Kellani, the huge Nubian servant of the late Professor Caron, had come to light. The big city had

swallowed him as completely as if he had ceased to exist. In fact, the police machine having failed, the belief was growing on Centre Street that the river was the place to look for him.

The newspapers were tiring of the case. At first they had revelled in its possibilities, playing up in headlines the sudden death of Professor Caron in the Westchester home of his friend Lamont—making much of the mummies and antiques he had brought from Egypt, and of his notable record as an Egyptologist and scientist. But the inquest upon the slaying of Mokra had been exceedingly short and disappointing, owing to the lack of evidence and the scarcity of witnesses. Similarly, the enquiry into the death of the archæologist had led nowhere, and the medical evidence of the autopsy was full of learned medical terms that boiled down into the fact that Professor Caron was undeniably dead—probably from natural causes. The doctors were in disagreement on some points; but that appeared to be the prerogative of doctors, anyway.

As Addison Kent listened to the evidence, he marvelled at the skill with which the coroner refrained from asking questions that were liable to upset the mere formalities. For official reasons the police desired to keep certain facts from the public for the present. Neither Kent nor Malabar were afforded opportunity for telling all they knew, even had they been so disposed. Their statements had been made without reserve to the police; but no mention of the valuable ruby which had been stolen, nor of the story the late savant had told them, nor of the nocturnal visitor to the library—none of these things found their way into the newspapers. Even the details of what happened on the night of the storm were very incomplete and

centred upon the flight of Kellani. Kent was allowed to tell how he was awakened by the storm and with Sandy, the gardener, discovered Mokra's body; but all reference to the big man who had stood on the wall was carefully eliminated from Malabar's story.

Of course, all this was done in order that the work of the police investigation might go forward unhampered. It suited Addison Kent perfectly; but he had never been more impressed with the farcical nature of this preliminary legal formality by means of which the law established the fact that a man was dead and "person or persons unknown" had killed him!

The results of the autopsy in the case of Caron interested Kent greatly. As he closely questioned his friend Dr. Harvey, in the latter's office, the novelist's mystification grew. There seemed to be something queer about the whole thing.

"You say, Harvey, that there was evidence of anæmia of the brain. Just what do you mean?—that it was a chronic condition?"

"No, not chronic—if by that you imply that it had been a constant condition, extending over a period of time. It is my contention that the anæmia was forced, though what would bring that about in this case I cannot imagine."

"Forced!" echoed Kent thoughtfully. "You are telling me, then, that there should have been more blood in the brain than you found. Would not the fact that he was in an upright position?—"

Dr. Harvey shook his head with a touch of irritation.

"That is what the others seemed to think, but I know better," he affirmed. "I disagreed on that point positively. The blood does drain out of the arteries

after death. Quite true. But not enough for the brain to press against the skull—— ”

“ You found that in this case ? ”

“ We did—at least, *I* did. I stick to that. Nor does the upright position of the body account for the engorgement of the splanchnic bloodvessels of the abdominal area and—— ”

“ Their condition was abnormal ? ” asked Kent quickly.

“ Decidedly so. You have studied anatomy, Ad., and you will recall the fact that the splanchnic vessels are easily dilated; they act as a blood reservoir. After eating, for instance, more blood is required by the digestive organs—but I need not go into all that.”

“ Did you find the stomach full of food ? ”

“ No. It was almost empty.”

“ Then the swollen bloodvessels were not due to the natural digestive processes ? ”

“ No. That is what makes the condition so puzzling to me. Kent, I am blest if I can account for it! I never saw anything like it before. Even the vessels in the legs were dilated ! ”

“ Abnormally ? ”

“ Yes.”

The novelist pondered, his brows drawn in a frown of perplexity.

“ I understand the chloral hydrate found in the stomach was not enough to cause death ? ” he offered at length.

“ Not at all. He had had a normal dose—only enough for a harmless sleeping-draught.”

“ Then, what *was* the cause of death ? ”

“ Brain anæmia; ruptured bloodvessel; some kind

of stroke—take your choice! But if you ask me what brought it about—frankly, I do not know!”

“There was nothing organically the matter with him, then? No heart trouble or anything like that?”

“Not a thing!”

“Thanks, old man.” Addison Kent held out his hand and reached for his hat. His lean, tanned face was thoughtful. “What you tell me definitely confirms a suspicion I have been entertaining. Now I am positive that Professor Caron has met with foul play. But, until we can discover the diabolical manner of it, the fact cannot be proved. And until it is established that a crime has been committed, the murderer could dine with the District Attorney and the Police Commission without a qualm. It is the damndest thing I ever bumped into! Well, so long! Keep you posted if there are any developments.”

II

From Dr. Harvey's office Kent swung past the Knickerbocker and made for the subway kiosk. He wanted a word with Inspector Lowry, Chief of Detectives at the Bureau. As the train roared away with him, however, his thoughts switched back to the beautiful young woman who had stepped into the case out of the storm. Where was he to place her in the tangle? As he had surmised, Inspector Lowry knew nothing of her; neither did the *Mercury*! Never before in his life had Addison Kent been so completely baffled, so keenly absorbed in a girl for her own sake; but when he allowed his mind to dwell upon the appeal of her personality, he was brought to a rude halt by the facts of the case. The two did not fit at all, and the result

was a double-barrelled interest—professional on one hand; entirely personal on the other!

He and Malabar had argued about it for half an hour. She certainly had bowled old Dick right off his feet! He persisted in refusing to admit that "Miss Rockwood" was anything but a jolly fine girl, and he didn't care a tinker's damn whether she was really a newspaper woman or not, or whether she had looked in through every glass door in New York in the middle of every bally storm that had blown along for a year or more. So far as he was concerned, she could make a regular habit of it, and he would still say that she was all *right* and probably had good reasons of her own for everything she did, and it was nobody's bally business!—

Regarding Miss Rockwood, there was no sane argument in him. Malabar could be as reckless as he liked and be as big a fool as he liked; but, decidedly, it *was* Kent's business to find out who this girl was and why she had masqueraded as a member of the *Mercury* staff and why— She must have had some reason for spying upon them at that early hour of the morning. Had she forgotten something when she came to the house in the storm and returned to find it? Was she concerned in the theft of the golden scarab? If so, that theft having been successfully accomplished, why did she run the risk of coming back on the scene right on the heels of the robbery?

On the other hand, if she were not in league with the gang, what on earth was she doing there at that hour under such weather conditions? Her motive must have been a strong one, and Kent was entirely at a loss to find the answer, whip up his imagination as he might.

He had been afraid to make his questions to Lowry and the *Mercury* other than casual for fear of arousing

too much curiosity. He would follow a lone trail in his search for the girl, he decided. Where could he pick it up? It appeared to be a hopeless quest.

III

He emerged from his absorption in the problem just in time to leave the Underground at the Canal Street Station. He made his way up the stairs and turned into Centre Street, where was to be found the old brick-and-stone structure of the Criminal Courts building, joined to the Tombs Prison by the Bridge of Sighs, and where also was located the gray stone Police Headquarters. Towards the latter building he directed his steps.

Inspector Lowry greeted him with a very-man-we-want-to-see heartiness. Kent was popular at Police Headquarters; it was generally known that he stood high with the Commissioner, the District Attorney and the Washington authorities. A well-thumbed set of the detective novels he had written was to be found in a reading-room bookcase. The practical work he had done for the Bureau at different times was appreciated, particularly the fact that Addison Kent was always ready to step aside and allow the police to take most of the credit for the work he did. In his hob-nobbing about he had made friends in every department of the service.

But just now the inspector was glad to see him because Jerry Donovan had been trying to get Kent on the telephone all afternoon to inform him that they had decided to raid a certain place upon which suspicion had fallen in the hope of discovering a clue to the disappearance of Kellani.

The Café Belgique on lower Third Avenue was a cheap restaurant which sought to cover its deficiencies by a gaudy show of ornate front. As an eating-place it was not as clean as it might have been nor was the food uniformly well cooked. The class of patrons for whom it catered, however, did not appear to be over-particular in regard to these things, which were overbalanced by the smoothness of the dancing floor, the excellence of the jazz orchestra and the general gaiety of the place. The cabaret, the police knew, was merely a blind for the real business carried on—upstairs, at the back of the café, where were hidden various questionable devices by which one might lose as much money in an evening's play as one happened to have available.

This fifth-rate gambling dive was run by a shifty-eyed individual of doubtful antecedents, known as "Singer" Lieb, who stoutly maintained at all times that he was a Belgian. A police raid upon the Belgique was no new thing; whenever the police were at a loss, a strong-arm squad descended upon Singer's place on the chance of netting somebody who was "wanted": for odd were the fish who glided in and out of the troubled waters of this notorious "joint." More than once had gunmen of rival gangs demonstrated the quickness of their trigger-fingers upon the premises. It was no "show-place" for curious visitors, seeking underworld "sights." It was the real thing!

Kent indulged in a slow smile, therefore, at mention of "Singer" Lieb, so called because of his habitual sing-song flow of talk when presiding over a gambling game which required announcement of its movements. Singer was a tin-horn who in his day had toured the fairs with various crooked wheels of fortune; he had been confidence man, race-track tout, shell-game artist

and whatnot in his younger days. Now that he was fat and bald and "wealthy," he played for bigger stakes in equally questionable ways on the edge of the underworld. The fact that the police had decided to raid the *Belgique* indicated to Addison Kent how completely at a standstill was their investigation.

For nearly an hour the novelist and the inspector were closeted together. When the interview was over Kent went straight to his rooms in Minaki Annex, just off Riverside Drive; he remained there the balance of the afternoon, going through his mail and poring over certain volumes and folders from his very complete files. He studied his medical charts on anatomy for a while. The street lights were on when he finally took a bus, sitting lost in a world of his own all the way down town. He came back to realities in time to transfer to a taxi at Forty-Second Street, and dismissed it at a point on lower Fourth Avenue. He walked briskly around a corner or two, and vanished somewhat suddenly from sight down a flight of steps to a basement entry where a crude, half-hidden sign announced that S. Pomerkeski cleaned, pressed and repaired while you waited.

"Good evening, Pom," nodded Addison Kent to the lean, white-faced, big-nosed Polish proprietor who sat cross-legged, plying his needle industriously.

The shop was empty, and the novelist passed or through the curtains that shut off the back apartment, where Pomerkeski promptly joined him.

With the dropping of his needle and thread, the Pole seemed to acquire new personality. His eye gleamed with interest as Kent threw aside coat and vest. He bustled in and out with various garments, exhibiting the enthusiasm of an artist. For that was what

Pomereski was—an artist in transformation, a master of theatrical make-up, but as well a past master in the art of street disguise so clever that it could stand the closest scrutiny under the strongest light.

And of all his patrons this handsome young man was his favourite, his confidant and friend of long standing and proven worth. For S. Pomereski had not always been S. Pomereski the tailor. He spoke several languages; he was one of the most valued lieutenants of Mr. Addison Kent on occasion.

“I will have none of this theatrical clap-trap,” Kent had stated in the beginning of their association. “We’ll leave the wigs and false whiskers, grease-paint and all that to Monsieur Lecoq and the pages of Gaboriau. I want only *natural* appearance, a change of expression—watch my face!”

And at the demonstration of facial mobility Pomereski’s eyes had shone with appreciation and understanding. He was an artist, and here was a client after his own heart.

Perhaps half an hour after Addison Kent had entered the inconspicuous little tailoring shop, there departed a nondescript young man of very ordinary appearance, somewhat shabbily dressed in a wrinkled and grease-spotted sack suit which at its best had been a cheap “hand-me-down.” He walked with a slouch of fatigue, as if he had trudged many blocks that day, looking for work. His hair was uncombed, and his neck none too clean above the greasy collar of his coat.

Opposite the Café Belgique, over on Third Avenue, this tired and hungry individual came to a hesitant halt and looked across at the brightly lighted and garish front of the restaurant. His hand came slowly from his pocket, and he counted the coins on his palm with

anxiety. Finally, having watched for a pause in the flow of traffic, he crossed the street, noting as he did so that a taxi was drawn up at the curb, directly in front of the entrance to the café. It was empty, but no "vacant" sign showed on the indicator.

Kent crossed the side-walk, and as he stepped into the entrance he almost collided with a young woman who was hurrying out. He felt her staring at him intently. Just for an instant he looked her full in the face; then she had brushed past him quickly, was across the intervening space and into the taxi.

The slam of the door galvanized him into action. He started to run towards the taxi, but was too late to stop it as it spurted off up the street. He stood at the curb for a few seconds, staring after it uncertainly. Then he saw the girl's face peering back at him through the rear window—startled, anxious.

Kent's eyes roved quickly about him. There was no taxi in sight which he could hail; but on the opposite side stood a shabby little Ford runabout, and he darted across to it, blessing his good fortune as he heard the low beat of the running engine. The owner had just disappeared through a shop door nearby. There was no time to explain; so Kent slid in behind the wheel, planted his feet into position, and was off in pursuit.

For that frightened face at the rear window of the taxi—those wide-open eyes!—In spite of the heavily rouged cheeks, the gaudy clothes, the giddy little hat, Kent recognized her!—recognized the same startled look that had been indelibly printed on his memory in a long flash of lightning. It was the girl of the hooded mackintosh who had looked in at him out of the storm! It was the "Miss Rockwood" who had posed as belonging to the *Mercury* staff!—dressed

now like a chorus girl in some cheap burlesque show!

With a thrill of elation, he stepped on the accelerator and gave chase.

Chapter XIII A Gentleman in an Awkward Position

ADDISON KENT pulled the runabout around a corner on two wheels just in time to see the white body of the girl's taxi flash out of sight, two blocks distant. It had gained on him down the comparatively quiet street into which he had just turned, and with horn honking he sped along as fast as the little runabout could go. The driver of the taxi knew his business, and, urged by his instinct, no doubt was making for streets where there was greatest freedom from traffic congestion. Unless Kent could catch up with him before the chase resolved itself into a test of speed, it would be hopeless; for the taxi could outdistance him on a straight-away stretch. Kent's one hope was that the pursued would be held up somewhere in a temporary blockade of traffic.

As he turned the next corner, therefore, he peered ahead anxiously, and was elated to note that he had gained. The white taxi was just a little over a block ahead now; but, even as he was congratulating himself, he heard a traffic policeman's shrill whistle and saw the cab dart forward again, boldly passing between two trucks, dodging in and out in an effort to get to the front before the whistle blew again. Kent realized

that he himself was going to be stopped by that next traffic signal, and he instantly put on his brakes, backed around the corner and fairly flew down the side-street to the parallel avenue. Up this he turned and made steady progress.

He had this manœuvre to thank for the sight he presently caught of his quarry, crossing less than half a block away. The driver seemed to be trying a similar move. Then he saw the white cab pull in to the curb unexpectedly; the girl stepped out and walked rapidly away. The taxi swung out again and was gone.

"Thinks she's given me the slip," chuckled Kent, as he brought the runabout to a standstill on the side-street, jumped out and went after her on foot.

It was soon evident that the girl was anxious to make sure of her escape, however; for she turned every corner she came to, and once she crossed the street and doubled back on her trail, slipping into a dark doorway and remaining there for some time, watching passers-by. It was fortunate that Kent had divined the stratagem in time to get under cover or he would have been discovered. At last she seemed satisfied, and started out again, still laying a zigzag course which presently brought her to a cross-town car-line. With a sharp glance over her shoulder, she boarded the first surface car that came along.

Kent hailed a taxi and trailed along at a safe distance. When she left the street-car, he dismissed the cab and was not half a block behind her when she stopped at a corner and was joined by a man—large, heavily built, dressed in rough tweeds and wearing a loud purple tie. The man raised his hard, black hat, and they appeared to greet each other like old friends.

Kent puckered his lips in a soundless whistle and got

as near to them as he dared. He could not overhear what they said, and he was rather relieved to see them bid each other good night and go in opposite directions; for he did not like the looks of the man. The girl turned back and passed on the opposite side of the street. The novelist strolled casually across and followed discreetly, wondering what she had said to her uncouth acquaintance and where she was going now.

He was not long left in doubt; for presently he realized that their course along Eleventh Street was bringing them directly towards a district of second-class apartment houses on a curving street in the neighbourhood of Seventh Avenue. He was not surprised to see her mount the steps of a large apartment house, and it was with some satisfaction that he waited to follow and obtain the address; no doubt this was the end of the chase.

He was about to step boldly across when he was disconcerted to observe the big man in the tweed suit and the purple tie come striding around the nearest corner and make for the apartment house, entering without hesitation. Kent lost no time in getting after him, and was rewarded by the sight of the girl shaking hands with him. Together they entered the elevator, fortunately with their backs to the entrance, and they did not observe him on the outer steps.

He backed down, perplexed. What should he do now? He strolled a few paces on the side-walk, gazing up at the front windows, floor upon floor of suites. For a moment he was convinced that he had made a mistake in identity—that she could not be the girl he sought; that perhaps, after all, this was a cheap little actress, meeting her "gentleman friend" by appointment. Yet he shook his head impatiently. He had

a strong memory for faces, and it was not often that his intuition was at fault. No, he was not on any wildgoose chase, no matter how appearances might point.

What name would she be using here? Without that knowledge, he could not enter the place and boldly locate her. They must not see him, and it looked as if there was nothing for it but to stay outside and wait till they came out, a rather unpromising prospect. Unless——

Unobserved, he slipped around to the rear of the place and surveyed the building anxiously. With two exceptions the windows of the rear suites were lighted. One suite on the ground floor was dark, and another, directly above it, on the fourth floor—— Even as he looked, the light came on, and with satisfaction he saw the unmistakable figure of the girl as she pulled down the blind.

What luck! He had them located! Still, what good did that do him? He stood there, watching that oblong of light, four floors up, and turned over the possibilities. He might enter the building through the front, go up to the fourth floor and reach their very door; but then?—— Was he justified in eavesdropping, even allowing that he could hear their conversation? What was this man to her?

The huge shadow of the subject of his speculation just then moved into the yellow oblong of light. The fellow was standing there, legs outspread apparently, and his arms raised in angry gesticulation. For all Kent knew, this "sport" might have the girl in his power and be threatening her! Manifestly, it was his duty to get into a position where he could be of assistance to her, if she needed him.

The fire-escape captured his attention now. Could he negotiate it without being seen? If he could get up to that window——

He was underneath it in a couple of strides. The reflection from the lighted windows was all he had to risk; the dim globe above the tradesmen's entrance was around at the side. Here at the back was an area of clothes-lines, stretching across from each suite to pulley-wheels which were fastened in a blank brick wall of the neighbouring building. There was a possibility that the janitor might come out or that some tenant might begin manipulating a clothes-line. Well, he would have to chance that. His greatest danger would be in passing the lighted windows on the second and third floors.

The first platform of the escape was twelve feet above his head; but, by standing on a huge ashbin, he was able to reach a ground-floor window-sill and from there swing off to the grating and pull himself up. It took muscle; but he managed it without noise and sat down to remove his boots.

With these in his hand he crept cautiously and slowly upward. A noisy wrangle that was going on in the second-floor suite favoured him, and with redoubled care he edged past the third-floor windows. In each case luckily the blinds were drawn, and he climbed soundlessly, although his heart nearly stopped beating once as he almost stepped on a saucer of milk, evidently set out for the family cat!

At last, with a deep breath of relief, he found himself on the platform at the fourth-floor window. He almost exclaimed aloud in the joy with which he noted that the blind had not been pulled down all the way; there was a crevice of light showing at the bottom of it, and he

would be able to see into the room. For a moment he lay at full length beneath the window, scarcely daring to breathe; he must make sure that his passage up the fire-escape had not attracted unwelcome notice before he risked the shadow of his head against the lighted window.

But nothing happened. A man came out somewhere below, whistling a jazz tune, and potted about, his boots scraping on the granolithic pavement; he went away again, still whistling. A door banged in the basement. A cat in the area was meowing, meowing. A window opened somewhere, and loud voices reached him in heated argument, mingled with the blare of a phonograph, playing "Mamma loves Papa!" Then the window slammed shut again, and these sounds were cut off.

Very slowly he raised himself to his knees and looked into the room. The girl was standing on one side of a small table near the centre, talking rapidly in a low voice; he could not distinguish a word she was saying, but he could see that she was making some sort of earnest appeal to the big man. The latter was listening with head to one side and a smirk twisting his coarse, wide lips, while his eyes never left the girl's face; those eyes in their smallness seemed lost in the gross expanse of his beefy countenance. The bulging muscles of the thick shoulders ended in a short bull neck. At the edge of his blonde hair a wen protruded from his forehead. Teutonic was Kent's prompt appraisal as he took in every detail with instant antagonism. He would know this person again whenever and wherever he saw him.

The novelist's ear already was pressed close to the window; but the musical murmur of the girl's voice was still indistinct. If only the window were raised a

fraction of an inch!— But he dared not experiment; his position was too precarious, and the least sound would lead to instant discovery.

Then, unexpectedly, a sharp exclamation reached him, startling him beyond measure. It was loud with astonishment and came from the big man involuntarily—just one word; but it set Addison Kent's pulses wildly, madly racing.

"Alceste!"

Kent's eyes clung eagerly to the streak of light beneath the blind. His ears strained to catch what followed.

"Ssh!" warned the girl with sibilant anxiety. She glanced quickly towards the window, then upward to the suite above, while the watcher held his breath.

With a quick nod of approval her visitor acknowledged her wisdom and obediently lowered his voice. The expression on his face was an open book of excited interest in something the girl had been saying. There was sudden craft and a mingling of suspicion in the small animal eyes. He plucked a pencil from his vest pocket and held it out to her, at the same time reaching into an inside pocket and withdrawing a huge brown leather wallet, fastened by a rubber band. With a quick pull he yanked this off and opened the wallet, fumbling among its papers with thick fingers. Presently he threw one of these out on the table and watched while she proceeded to draw a little sketch upon the blank side of the sheet.

Addison Kent looked hungrily at that wallet, fat with papers. It fascinated him. What might a search of it reveal? They had brought the name of a notorious international thief into their conversation! What did these people know about that old enemy of his? There

was only one "Alceste"—one who had borne that dread name in the underworld—and now he was dead and buried! But "his evil lives after him" poor Caron had warned, and—could it be that this girl, this man, were connected in some way with the theft of the golden scarab? The girl had been on the scene during the storm! He felt sure he was not mistaken in her identity. And this brutal hulk of a man—what if he, too, had been there? The man he had glimpsed on the garden wall had been big, at least. Was it possible that the clue to the whole thing was inside this room—within ten feet of him?

The thought set his pulses hammering and parched his throat. Breathlessly he watched—noted the extreme interest with which the fellow was following the movements of the pencil in the girl's hand—noted the forgotten wallet, pressed by the left hand against his thigh, gradually tilting as he leaned farther forward across the table—saw the bits of paper that slipped out and fluttered to the floor beneath the table.

"Good! That's enough, mademoiselle. I believe you now!"

It came booming in excellent French with a slight German accent. The big man and the girl were both laughing—with relief, Kent fancied, in the case of the girl. Her companion's laugh was entirely one of comradeship as he shook hands heartily, picked up his hat and stepped towards the door. He made an elaborate bow over her hand, which she permitted him to raise to his lips.

He was gone. Kent sat back and considered. Should he hurry down and follow the man or should he wait and get those pieces of forgotten paper under the table? Very likely the fellow would be gone by

the time he got down and around to the front of the building. He looked under the blind again; the girl was yawning and reaching for the light switch. The light in the sitting-room went out and a moment later came on in the adjoining bedroom. He got a glimpse of her passing into the bathroom beyond and the door closed behind her.

That decided him. The opportunity was too good to miss—if only the window-catch were not fastened!—He pushed at it gently and firmly and thrilled as he felt it give. His fingers were soon under the bottom of the window, and very quietly and carefully he raised it. Warm perfumed air flowed upon him. After a hasty survey he put one leg over the sill and in a moment was standing in the room.

On hands and knees he crossed the intervening space to the table, and his groping fingers soon located the fragments of paper. He thrust them into his pocket and rose to his feet.

“Don’t move!—except as I tell you! Up with your hands! Quick!” The snap of the electric switch brought a flood of light. “Now, you may turn around!”

Addison Kent slowly turned, his hands above his head. The girl, tense and cool, was standing within a few feet of him. In her hand was an automatic, pointed steadily, straight at him!

How do you do, Miss Rockwood?" Kent grinned at her cheerfully. "We appear to be constantly meeting, 'face to face' as they say in the novels!"

"You followed me, then?"

"Evidently."

"I thought I had got rid of you——"

He smiled as she lowered the automatic and restored it to its holster, slung under her arm, inside her waist. Slowly his arms came down from their elevation.

"I cannot tell you how anxious I have been to meet you again, Miss Rockwood."

She eyed him coldly.

"You seem to be very sure of yourself, Mr. Kent."

"May I return the compliment, Miss Rockwood—at least, I hope it is a compliment. I am glad to see that you do not deny your identity."

"Why should I?"

"Your rôle this time is so—so different," he suggested.

"So is yours, Mr. Kent—entering a girl's room through the window! Excuse me while I wash this stuff off my face."

Before he could think of anything to say, she had calmly turned her back upon him and walked into the bathroom, deliberately closing the door behind her. He sat down on the nearest chair, twiddling his thumbs, his eyes crinkling with appreciation of her equanimity. Then he remembered that he was in his stockinged feet, repossessed himself of his boots and put them on.

She rejoined him presently with the thick rouge no longer disfiguring her cheeks.

"Am I looking more like my real self now?" She turned her glorious eyes upon him; but there was no coquetry in their depths—only a patient boredom.

"Decidedly," he approved. "Now, if I only knew who that real self was——" He looked at her appealingly.

"I introduced myself when I saw you last. I am Miss Rockwood——" She paused at his look of disappointment. He was shaking his head reproachfully.

"Not 'of the *Mercury*,' please! You see, Pulver—the managing-editor of that reliable paper—is a very old friend of mine, Miss Rockwood!"

"How interesting!" Her brows arched with polite attention.

"He denied all knowledge of you!" continued Kent regretfully.

She looked at him steadily for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders.

"It seems too bad to have a good story spoiled like that, does it not?"

"Yes? But there are always others to tell. I am wondering what new one you are going to tell me now!"

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"Surely you need not quibble with me, Miss Rockwood! You know to what I refer—your running away from me this evening, your make-up, the man in your room!"

"You seem to be taking a lively interest in me, Mr. Kent!" she retorted with analytical eyes.

"I do, indeed!" He spoke with an intensity that surprised himself.

"I am afraid I am not going to tell you much. There is not a great deal to tell."

"Oh, but I wish you would, Miss Rockwood!" he urged impulsively. "I really want to believe in you—very much."

She glanced up quickly at his earnestness, and as she studied his serious face—handsome in spite of the smudge on one cheek, so artfully placed to fit the clothes he wore—she dropped her long lashes suddenly and coloured.

"What is it you wish to know?" she asked.

"Who was that man who just left this room?"

"If you were listening at the window, Mr. Kent—as I have no doubt you were—you heard nothing, at least, that would suggest any interest on my part in the man—other than in a business way."

"I saw him meet you on the street. I did not like his looks. He seemed to be a rough specimen, Miss Rockwood. I did climb the fire-escape, as you intimate. I felt that I might be of service to you."

"So kind of you!" she murmured. "If you heard all that was said it will not be necessary for me to tell you so much." She smiled at him innocently.

"Unfortunately, I heard very little. The window was closed——" He stopped short, realizing the blunder of his admission even as he spoke.

"All I can tell you about the man, Mr. Kent, is that he is a danger to someone I love——"

"Another man?" It was blurted out before he thought. He metaphorically kicked himself!

"Yes." Then she added quickly: "But do not misunderstand me, Mr. Kent. I have no time for love affairs."

Kent realized all at once that his intense question and

his feeling of relief at her reply indicated a susceptibility that was both strange and disconcerting. He took himself in hand sharply and cleared his throat authoritatively.

"I have no desire nor any right to pry into your personal affairs; but there are some things which I want you to clear up for your own good."

"Yes? What are these things you wish to know?"

Kent took a breath and ticked them off on his fingers as he enumerated.

"I want to know all about that man who just left you—who he is, what he does for a living, if anything, and so on. I want to know why you meet him so secretly and go to such pains to throw me, your sincere friend, off your track to-night. I want to know why I find you masquerading like a cheap actress and frequenting a place like the Belgique. I want to know if you ran away from us at Westchester because you were afraid of the police!—"

"Understand, I am your friend, trying to help you. I want to know why you passed yourself off as a newspaper woman in order to call at the Lamont residence—what the object of that early morning visit really was. I want to know what you were doing there, even earlier that same morning—in the middle of that terrific electric storm when you looked in at me through the glass doors of the library—at nineteen minutes past three a.m., to be exact. It is important that you explain your actions that night in some detail, Miss Rockwood; as you know, there was a murder committed and a very valuable gem stolen. If I am to help you, I must have your full confidence; otherwise, the situation is liable to become very awkward for you.

" You note that I am not accusing you of being connected in any way with what took place that night at the Lamont residence; I am hoping for an explanation most earnestly, Miss Rockwood—one that will satisfy the authorities. At the same time, you must admit that your actions to-night scarcely remove you from suspicion; that is why I must have a complete answer to all my questions regarding this man who was with you. While I did not hear all of your conversation with him, I did overhear enough to require explanation; it is better that you make that explanation here and now to me, as a friend, than to make it under other circumstances which might not be so—well, let us say, comfortable."

" You would hand me over to the police ?"

Through it all she had sat quite silent, listening to the arraignment with a faint smile; but the smile was gone as she asked this sudden question, reading his face intently.

He shook his head.

" That is something which need not be discussed, Miss Rockwood. For one thing, you are much too sensible to force an issue when the way out is so simple."

" Simple !" She laughed shortly.

" Yes—the simple truth," he urged gravely.

" Is there anything that you have left off your list of questions, Mr. Kent ? Please make it complete, so that I will know exactly what ground you want covered."

" Yes, there is another item—a big one. I heard a name mentioned in this room by your visitor—a name that stands for everything that is bad—the name of a notorious criminal, known to the police of Europe as

well as America. I refer to Alceste! I want to know how that name came into your conversation. What do you know about Alceste? You imply that you were having a business interview with this man here in your room. I want to know why you brought the name of Alceste into it. I want to know exactly what either or both of you have to do with—*the Order of the Golden Scarab!*”

The novelist leaned forward as he spoke, his keen eyes seeking penetration of her expression. Slowly and with significant emphasis he enunciated the last six words. But she looked back at him blankly, a little frown of puzzlement on her brow. The words apparently meant nothing to her.

“Are you trying—to frighten me, Mr. Kent?” A smile started uncertainly at the corners of her pretty mouth, then dodged back again. “You are so terribly solemn!”

He reached impulsively for her hand, and she suffered him to pat it reassuringly.

“Pardon me if I seem too serious, Miss Rockwood; but it is a very serious situation for me as well as you, and I want you to clear it all up for me. Do not be afraid to confide in me fully; I really do want to be your friend.”

She gave a breath of relief and smiled at him brightly.

“Very well; but it is such a long list of things——! It is going to take much longer than I thought.” She glanced down at her exceptionally short skirt and looked at him with a delightful twinkle in her eyes. “You will be good enough to excuse me for a few moments while I get into some decent clothes, Mr. Kent? Then if you would let me make you a cup of tea?——”

He thrilled with the allure of her.

"Delighted!" he smiled back at her, and at once she left the room. "Great!" he exulted to himself as the door of the bedroom closed.

Everything was going to be all right, he felt sure, and was conscious of a pronounced feeling of relief. No girl who was guilty could behave as she was behaving. There would be an adequate explanation of all the mystery that had surrounded her in his mind. Malabar had been right in his blind loyalty to her. "Charming!" he had said. She was—and more!

"If Dick could only see me now!" he chuckled. "Well, it's my turn!"

Then he gazed in sudden dismay at his grimy hands and eyed his spotted, wrinkled clothes with distaste. He straightened his dirty collar and his threadbare green tie, brushed his filthy fingers down his soiled trousers, and decided that when she came out he would ask her if he might wash.

His eyes took in the sitting-room, every detail of it; but he was not impressed. The pictures on the wall were cheap prints; the furnishings, while adequate, had a used look, and the room somehow seemed severe. It lacked those little feminine touches which he would have associated with the apartment of a girl like Miss Rockwood. If this were her home——

He impatiently dismissed the thought that obtruded. It was true that this place seemed to fit the character she had been playing that night, rather than the well-dressed, perfectly poised "Miss Rockwood" who had paid the early morning call out in Westchester. It was hardly likely that she would have two homes! It was hardly likely——

He fidgeted in his chair and cleared his throat loudly.

He wished she would hurry. Women were so confoundedly fussy about their clothes and how they looked! If all the hours they spent in front of a mirror, preening and fooling around!—

A glance at his watch apprised him that fully ten minutes had gone by. He got up at last and tapped diffidently on the bedroom door. There was no response. He tapped again, louder.

"Miss Rockwood!" he called. No answer. "Oh, Miss Rockwood!"—louder this time. Still no reply.

He wondered for a moment if she had fainted or anything like that. He listened; but could hear no sound of running water nor any movement beyond the door! It was then that Addison Kent began to realize the truth. After another loud knock on the door, he turned the knob and opened it, calling out to her as he did so.

He swung the door wide. The bedroom was empty. He strode across to the bathroom door and rapped on it sharply. Not a sound! He opened it then. The bathroom was empty! He looked in the clothes-closet; not a stitch of wardrobe! It was empty!

A door at the end of the bedroom caught his eye, and he made for it. When he opened it he found himself looking out into a corridor. He could see the elevator shaft at the far end.

"Well, I'll be damned!" He snapped his fingers in annoyance.

He went back to the sitting-room for his cap, let himself out of the apartment and made for the elevator. The manager of the building had quarters on the ground floor, and was much surprised to find himself being questioned very fully in a voice of authority, backed up by a police badge.

"The apartment was rented yesterday by a young woman—a Miss Rockwood, of—of——"

"Of the *Mercury*?" Kent smiled grimly.

"That's it! She said she was a newspaper reporter. Yes, the *Mercury*; I remember now. She rented that furnished apartment for just one night, and as it was vacant——"

"What? For just one night?"

"Yes. But she had to pay something to get it," assured the manager, wagging his head sagely. "We ain't givin' nothin' away here! Nor we ain't trustin' nobody!"

"You are an exceedingly wise man," commended Kent.

Chapter XV *Mr. Addison Kent Takes Off His Coat.*

I

THE young man in the greasy cap who slouched off down the street exhibited no outward sign of the fires of resentment which smouldered within him. If there was a hint of hardness about the set lines of his mouth, it was no more than the usual handwriting of Poverty's private secretary, Ill-Luck. He turned into the first decent-looking restaurant he came to and ordered a full-sized steak; when it was placed before him he attacked it with the relish of hunger.

As he ate, the novelist's mind was busy with the

scenes through which he had just passed—the uncouth man, the refined girl; above all, with Alceste. What did this strangely assorted pair know about that clever crook who, upon another occasion, so nearly had written “Finis” to the career of Addison Kent? The introduction of his name into their conversation held some significance, if he but had the wit to grasp it.

Yet Alceste was dead, officially and completely—and buried! Scotland Yard had said so, and Scotland Yard did not make many mistakes! The New York police had welcomed the news. So had the police of Europe, no doubt. There had been an exchange of congratulatory telegrams. Kent had accepted it without question. Only his friend, Armaund Lamont, the wealthy Fifth Avenue jewel expert, had shaken his big head doubtfully.

What was it Lamont had said one time about this unique cracksman? “He is here—there—nowhere! Jewels, rarest of gems, always the precious stones that he takes, and nothing else! He knows the fine ones—always the very finest he takes. The police run after him like hens after food. But he is always—gone! He has wings! He sinks under water! He buries himself in the earth! He strikes, disappears, is dead, forgotten; then, when least expected—*voilà!* he is alive, takes what he wants and is gone again! He is *le diable!*”

They had smiled at the excited Frenchman at the time, Kent remembered; but the subsequent events had been far from a smiling matter. Dead and forgotten, then alive again when least expected! Was it possible——? Kent shook his head in smiling scepticism as he lingered over his coffee and ashed his cigarette on the edge of the saucer. Yet, if such an unheard-of thing could be true—if Alceste, by some necromancy,

should prove to be alive and here in New York!—then indeed would the situation become suddenly fraught with unimaginable dangers to everybody concerned, but particularly to one named Addison Kent, his sworn enemy!

The novelist sat for a while, head bent, absorbed in these speculations. When he looked up he was startled to see a man, wearing dark-coloured glasses, gazing in at him through the restaurant window. Impelled by something—a flash of something untoward—a flicker of subconscious warning—Kent half rose from his chair and reached for his cap.

At his first motion the man was gone, and the author sat down again, feeling foolish. Was the mere thinking about Alceste enough to raise visions? Surely he had not got to that point—seeing things! Some hungry loafer, attracted by the food displayed in the window! He had come along just as Kent had decided that, supposing Alceste *could* reappear in New York, he would have to wear smoked glasses to hide those tell-tale eyes of his; the operation Dr. MacMurrough had performed upon them would make it doubly necessary now for Alceste—if he were alive—to conceal his eyes. No wonder those dark glasses on the loafer at the window had startled Kent for the moment!

Laughing at himself, he felt in his pocket for a match, and his fingers came in contact with the three bits of paper he had picked up from beneath the table where he had seen them slip from the big man's wallet back in the apartment. The girl had not noticed them, or she would have questioned him. With a gleam of interest he now smoothed them out on the table. All were irregularly torn scraps of print—two from a newspaper and one on the better grade of paper used by illustrated

magazines. The two newspaper fragments he laid to one side after a brief glance—one a patent medicine advertisement, the other a typical sporting-page report of a boxing bout.

The tearing from the magazine page was more interesting. It was evidently taken from an article upon aviation, and this paragraph explained that flyers doing stunt flying keep their eyes fixed in the cockpit or on some designated point in order not to be confused by the revolving landscape.

"Three blanks—a bad draw!" muttered Kent resignedly, as he idly turned it over and began to read what was on the other side.

He leaned suddenly forward, reading eagerly, and a thrill shot through him. He brought his fist down on the table with a thump that made the dishes jump. He felt the texture of the paper between thumb and forefinger.

"S.C. Book—45 lb. stock," he appraised. He studied the type face. "There's an article I must find and read."

He shoved from the table. At the door he paid his check and departed without waiting for change. Outside he hailed the first taxi he saw.

All the way back to Pomerkeski's he sat lost in thought. He scarcely spoke to the Pole as he changed into his own clothes. He took the Third Avenue elevated and was roared northward through the city. At Minaki Annex Mrs. Madden, his housekeeper, heard him unlocking the door of his apartment and came across the hall from her own quarters, following him in.

"There was a gentleman called to see you this evening, Mr. Kent. He seemed very disappointed you

were not here and wanted to be let in to wait for you——”

“ You know the rule, Mrs. Madden.”

“ I do, sir. I did not let him in, of course. I told him I did not expect you to return for some time.”

“ Did he leave his name ?”

“ No, he would not do that—said he wanted to surprise you as he was an old friend of yours and happened to be in town——”

“ An old friend ? Where from ?”

“ That he did not say. He would give me no information about himself. He said he would call again sometime.”

“ What did he look like, Mrs. Madden ? Can you describe him ?”

“ Well, the only thing that made him any different from ordinary was his glasses. His clothes were neat and well pressed. He was wearing dark-coloured glasses as if he had something the matter with his eyes.”

“ Dark glasses !” echoed Kent with interest.

“ Yes. I couldn't make much of his face on account of them and the light being kind o' dim in the hall. I put the mail on your desk, sir, as usual.”

“ Thanks—and, Mrs. Madden !” She turned at the doorway. “ On no account whatsoever are you to let anyone into this apartment during my absence. Yes, I know you know that and I am not finding fault, of course. I merely want to impress it on you that just now, particularly, it is vital to adhere to that rule. Don't open this door for anybody—not even for the police or the President of the United States !”

“ Yes, sir, I understand. Is there anything I can do for you, sir ? You have dined, of course ?”

“ Yes. No, there is nothing, Mrs. Madden, thanks

—except to see that I am not disturbed for an hour or so.”

He toyed with the paper-knife on his desk for a few moments after the door closed. Dark glasses again!—an old friend—from out of town—who could it be? Impatiently he called Inspector Lowry on the private wire which connected the apartment with Police Headquarters.

“ Jim, this is Kent talking. Jerry’s expecting me to show up at the Belgique to-night; but I find I can’t make it. Tell him to keep an eye open for a big German—blonde, beefy, wen on the forehead—a little lump. Have him brought in without fail, if he’s there. I’ll stand behind whatever charge Donovan lays. Tell him it’s important; I’ll explain when I see you.

“ And, Jim, listen. Have your file clerk turn up that Alceste dossier—right now, please; I’ll hold the wire. Run through the last of the Scotland Yard correspondence, and let me know if there is any mention of the measurements of that man they buried as Alceste—his height and so on. Eh? No, I haven’t gone crazy! Never mind, I want to know.”

As he waited with the receiver to his ear, Kent tried to recall the announcement of Superintendent Brownlee, of Scotland Yard, concerning the death of Alceste. With the police of several countries co-operating to capture him, this notorious cracksman had had the temerity to revisit England. He had been cornered at last in a lonely cottage on the edge of a moor and, when escape proved impossible, he deliberately had set fire to the place and committed suicide. Upon his charred body the police had found such articles as his watch and a tin case containing various papers which identified him beyond question as the famous Alceste for

whom they had sought so earnestly for a long time. A tame ending for all his cleverness, but the only sort of finish to the kind of game he had played!—a brilliant mind, gone wrong! It had been, so patently, the thing that Alceste would do—commit suicide rather than be taken to stand trial——

“Hello! Yes? Not a thing, eh? No, it’s all right, Jim, thanks. That’s all just now. I’ll call up later after Donovan gets back. So long.”

Kent reached for the code book and proceeded to write out a cablegram to his old friend, Inspector Arthur Thompson, of Scotland Yard. His face was grave as he put in a call for a messenger.

II

The next twenty minutes Kent spent searching through his files for magazine clippings which compared in paper and print with the particular bit of paper which was intriguing him. At length he slipped on his overcoat, picked up his hat and hurried out, knocking on his housekeeper’s door and handing her the cablegram for delivery to the messenger.

His destination now was the Lambs Club. As he expected at that hour, he found his publisher, Charlie Baxter, in his favourite corner of the lounge. Baxter laid aside his newspaper and judiciously felt the fragment of paper which Kent placed in his fingers.

“I make it 45 lb. S.C., Charlie. What magazine would you say that was from? I think I know; but I want to be sure. Note the type face and the spelling of such words as ‘fixt’ and ‘prest’—*Literary Digest*, isn’t it?”

“That’s what I’d say. Why all the excitement?”

"No excitement. Everything calm and serene. Just want to read the article of which that's a part."

"Well, Cowan's here somewhere. Why don't you ask him? He might recall——"

"Good!"

"Hey, come back here! I want to talk shop a minute. We'll have the proofs of that new jacket to-morrow——"

"See you later, Charlie. Don't hold me up just now."

Cowan was a member of the *Digest* editorial staff, and Kent located him playing snooker pool. He tapped the bit of paper reflectively when the novelist had explained the situation.

"Can't say offhand," he frowned. "We publish so many items about aviation in the course of a year and, for all you know, this may be out of a back number—away back. I don't seem to remember—but that doesn't signify. I'd say it was *Digest* print all right, but—— Leave it with me, Kent, and I'll see what I can do to locate it in the morning—or are you wanting it to-night? Have you tried to trace it through the *Reader's Guide* at the library?"

Kent did not need to go to the reference library for a copy of the *Reader's Guide*; he had one at home. But his own very comprehensive files would provide the shortest route to the information he sought; he did not pay clipping agencies for nothing, and now that he was sure of the magazine from which the item was torn, the search was narrowed. Under the subject of Aviation, with its various sub-classifications, there was a formidable array of folders which bulged with data.

He returned direct to Minaki Annex and settled down to the task of sorting and reading. Without the title

of the article or the name of the author, it promised to be a weary search; but fortune favoured him, and it was only a little while before his eye encountered the actual paragraph which had aroused his interest. It was in the review of an article in the *New York World* by an Army Medical officer concerning the speed at which human beings could fly through the air and live. As Kent read it carefully, his elation grew.

"By the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated.

He reached for the telephone and, after a few moments' delay, got connection with the Lamont residence out in Westchester. Dick Malabar, however, had been out all evening and had not yet returned.

Kent grabbed his hat and coat, switched out the lights and for the second time that evening hurried away from his apartment.

III

As the result of a specially cabled request from Armaund Lamont in Switzerland, Addison Kent continued to live at the Lamont mansion in Westchester, although over two weeks had elapsed since the tragic happenings which had first taken him there. The residence of the wealthy jeweller was full of valuables, and Kent could understand how disturbed Lamont must have been over the sudden death of his guest, Professor Caron, and the murder of his trusted servant Mokra. He naturally would feel easier in his mind if he knew that a friend in whom he had utmost confidence was actually upon the premises until he returned home. There was no reason why Kent could not meet the request, and he had agreed, particularly as Dick

Malabar seemed quite content to remain with him for company.

Nothing that would add to their comfort had been overlooked. Lamont's office manager, Dunlop, had *carte blanche* instructions. Under Gaston's skilled direction, the cuisine was all that could be desired. He had promptly discharged Henri, his assistant, for incompetence and had a new man in the kitchen. Dunlop had also hired a new butler, who seemed entirely competent, and altogether the menage was highly satisfactory.

When Richard Malabar returned late that night, however, he was not prepared to see the mansion bright with lights. There was evident activity in the kitchen quarters; the lights were on, and he could see busy figures coming and going. Through the dining-room windows he saw with amazement that the butler had the table set with snowy linen and an array of silver and crystal; it could mean only one thing—a supper-party. As he let himself in Malabar heard a strange pounding emanating from the library.

Overcoat still on and hat in hand, the journalist paused in the archway and looked into the room with increasing astonishment. The place was topsy-turvy seemingly. The huge round library table that had stood in the centre was in three pieces; one of these had been backed against the far wall, another segment on the opposite side of the room, while in the middle—

“My word!” cried Malabar at last. “I say, Kent, what the devil are you up to?”

For Addison Kent, in his shirt-sleeves, lay sprawled on the floor at full length—on his back with his head out of sight beneath the centre portion of the table.

He hunched out from beneath this and looked up with a cheerful grin.

"Just in time, Dick, to give me a hand before our guests arrive." He got up, dusting his trousers.

"What's it all about? What guests?"

"Well, there'll be some medical men and Fraser of the Metropolitan Museum—who took charge of Professor Caron's collection for his estate, you remember—and then there is Inspector Lowry, Chief of Detectives at the Bureau; he's bringing along one of his Bertillon experts, and I expect Detective-Lieutenant Donovan will be here also. Dunlop, from Lamont's office, is coming—and—oh, yes, Doc. Harvey, of course."

"What's happened?" Malabar's blue eyes were alive with quick interest.

"You'll know all about that presently. You may have noticed, Dick, that all evenings are not of the same size; this happens to have been one of the large ones—the largest evening I have met for quite some time—"

"Now, don't stand there staring! They'll be here in a minute. Give me a hand with this table; I want to get it together again before anyone comes. Get busy, man!"

I

HALF an hour later Addison Kent was facing a small but intent audience in the library of the Lamont residence—an audience which had assembled at that unusual hour only upon the novelist's urgent request. That he had not called them together merely for social intercourse they were well aware. They waited with the keenest interest for him to speak.

“In the early morning hours of the twenty-seventh of last month, gentlemen,” he began, “there occurred in this very room a thing so hellish as to be almost past belief! The annals of crime are replete with examples of transcendent cunning; but I propose to uncover to-night something entirely new—a crime so simple in its ingenuity, if I may be permitted the paradox, as almost to defy detection. But for the good fortune which attended me this evening it very likely would have been added to the long list of undiscovered crimes. I shall prove to you conclusively that Professor Emil Caron, on the night in question, did not die suddenly from any process of nature, but was foully murdered in this room!

“Before proceeding with the demonstration of how the crime was consummated, I must ask the medical gentlemen present to bear with me while I draw your attention for a moment to a few scientific truths which

are pertinent. I would ask you to consider the subject of motion and the reactions of the human body to movement. The subject is one which is occupying the minds of those interested in aviation tests. You may recall that Lieutenant Williams, of the Navy, who won the Pulitzer Trophy races with a speed of 243.67 miles an hour stated that in turning the pylons he 'went out cold'—that is, he lost consciousness temporarily. This is by no means an uncommon experience of aviators in stunt flying, and more than one novice has been killed while attempting air stunts because of this temporary vertigo in making sudden turns at high velocity. With the maximum speed which may eventually be attained by human beings in the air we are not concerned. I do wish, however, to lay before you the causes of this temporary dizziness experienced by stunt flyers.

"If I appear to assume the rôle of a professor of anatomy, talking to pupils entirely ignorant of the subject, I crave the indulgence of you professional doctors, and would be grateful for your correction if I make any misstatement of facts with which you long have been familiar. Circulation of the blood in our bodies by means of heart and bloodvessels is controlled by nerves; so that the bloodvessels contract or expand according to the amount of blood required in any particular part of the body at any particular time. Our digestive processes, after eating, call for a special supply of blood; similarly, when we are undergoing special mental activity the brain telegraphs for more blood. The splanchnic bloodvessels in our abdomen are specially elastic and easily dilated as a blood reservoir.

"If we lie down or stand up—whatever position the

body assumes—adjustment of blood circulation takes place immediately. If we jump too quickly from our beds to an erect position, we feel dizzy and things blur before our eyes because sufficient blood has not yet reached our brain for the sudden change from the horizontal to the perpendicular. Riding in a fast train which hits a curve to the left, our bodies sway to the right—the direction in which the train had been travelling; if before the train curved, we had leaned to the left, our bodies would have been pulled to an upright position. This is due to what is known as centrifugal force. It is to overcome this recognized force that railroad tracks and automobile speedways are elevated on the outer side at the curves to avoid accident; it is because of this centrifugal pull that aviators bank their machines in making a turn.

“But while these precautions offset the centrifugal pull upon the vehicle of travel, they do not prevent that pull upon the human body and its fluid content. Aviators, though strapped into their seats to keep their bodies in place, experience the pull upon their blood, which rushes into the easily enlarged splanchnic vessels of the abdomen and even into the legs; this creates a condition of anæmia, as you medical men call it, in the brain—a lack of blood which causes vertigo and loss of consciousness, as experienced by Lieutenant Williams.

“Equilibrium, gentlemen,” continued Addison Kent, “is a complex matter which we human beings with our wonderful bodies are accustomed to accept without analysis. Our bodies automatically adjust themselves in constantly changing relationship to space. Eyes, ears, skin, muscles, joints and tendons—from all of these we derive impressions; so that instinctively we

know whether we are standing or sitting, where our legs and arms are, in what direction we are moving and whether our head is tilted to one side or not.

"Our common experiences of motion are those of the horizontal plane or, as in riding in an elevator, the vertical plane. Circular movement, however, human beings experience only to a minimum extent. Some of us are more susceptible to the reactions of motion than others; the up-and-down pitch and the side-to-side roll of a boat, for instance, will make some of us sea-sick more quickly than others. In passing, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the late Professor Caron was confined to his berth all the way across the Atlantic because of sea-sickness, proving that he was extremely sensitive to motion.

"It is hardly necessary for me to pursue the line of thought further. The part which our ears play in the matter of equilibrium we may leave to disputing physiologists, whose opinion is divided as to the functioning of the endolymphatic fluid in the canals of the internal ear. Suffice it to say that it is possible to establish a condition of motion which would have fatal effects upon the delicate organism of the human body.

"May I cite the experiments of Dr. Garsaux, of France, in this connection? He rotated on a wheel a number of dogs at speeds varying from four to six turns per second—— I beg your pardon, Dr. Harvey?"

"Go on, Kent! Go on!—— Nothing! Only I see what you are leading up to. Splendid!"

A murmur of approval ran round the room, and with a smile the novelist continued:

"Dr. Garsaux found that only a few of the dogs survived the experiment. In some cases the brain had

been injured through pressure against the skull. The autopsies showed brain anæmia and *an engorgement of the vessels of the abdominal area!*

"Gentlemen, I use the same words which my friend Dr. Harvey used in describing to me the condition which he noted in the autopsy that was performed upon the body of the late Professor Caron! It was Dr. Harvey's opinion that this anæmia of the brain and the engorgement of the bloodvessels was *forced*, inasmuch as there were no digestive or other conditions to account for it. He was not prepared to state at the time what could have brought this about, and he was justifiably perplexed.

"It is the cause of this condition which I have been fortunate enough to discover, and which I shall now proceed to demonstrate. I have to inform you that the late Professor Caron was killed in this room by application of the principle of centrifugal force—killed by dizziness—sustained brain anæmia, forced with astounding ingenuity. He was murdered as deliberately as if he had been stabbed like the Algerian butler Mokra, or as if he had been shot through the heart!"

II

Regarding the effect of this startling announcement upon his audience, Kent stepped forward and laid his hand upon the library table.

How was this splendid thing accomplished? Take a look at this cumbersome piece of furniture. As a library table it is unique—entirely adequate, although somewhat unwieldy. You note that it is very substantially built—rather a striking affair. It is one of

the most highly prized antiques in Mr. Lamont's collection. But it is not the table as you now see it which makes it so valuable; it is what it conceals. This is merely the outer shell. All right, Dick, if you will be so good as to take hold of the side next you—— ”

With Malabar's assistance Kent pulled the table apart, turned a screw beneath and wheeled aside the two larger segments. There remained a centre section, oblong in shape, upon a solid pedestal. Kent had loosened the screws before the guests assembled, so that he and Malabar were able to lift off the top and side panels of this centre section in one piece. Revealed now was a huge and solid-looking roulette wheel which brought the guests out of their chairs with exclamations.

“ I regret that I am unable to detail the history of this remarkable contrivance, gentlemen. I believe it has quite a history, and I am sure that if Mr. Lamont were here he could entertain you for some time with its story. I believe that Mr. Lamont regards this roulette wheel as one of his most cherished possessions because of its history; for undoubtedly it was one of the first roulette wheels constructed in France a very long time ago, and there is no other just like it. I had heard of its existence but had not seen it, and it did not occur to me to look for it in concealment here until this evening when my mind was directed along certain channels, as presently I shall explain.

“ Note that the wheel's rim is of solid steel and that it turns as part of the wheel itself, unlike the improved type of roulette wheel, which turns within a bowl, as it were. Note also that the pedestal upon which it finds a solid base is likewise of metal and that, cumbersome

though it seems, the wheel revolves very easily. As nearly as I have been able to discover in the brief examination I have given it, this wheel revolves upon a conical pin in a smooth socket. It is really a large spinning-top. You note how fast it travels and how long the motion is sustained when I give it a single twirl with my hand. It has been recently oiled for use. Driven by an electric motor, you can imagine how efficient an instrument of death it became in the early morning hours on the twenty-seventh of last month."

A babel of questions arose, and Kent waved his guests back to their seats.

"If you will let me finish, gentlemen, I will be glad to answer any and all questions. Upon and under the rim of the wheel I find marks which could only have been made by the screw clamps which were used to hold in place the board upon which the body of Professor Caron was laid. As you may remember, there was a trace of chloral hydrate found in his stomach, but only enough for a harmless sleeping draught. This was administered to him in the wine which he drank; so that he was entirely helpless and could offer no resistance. I like to think that he did not know what was happening to him—that he was already unconscious when he was bound to the board, hand and foot, and was whirled to his death without either terror or pain.

"I have been unable to locate the board which was fastened in place across the wheel; no doubt it has been destroyed. A hole was bored in it—as proven by the sawdust I have collected in this envelope—so that it fitted over the central pin, which helped to hold it in position. It is likely that Professor Caron's body was laid out horizontally with the head at the exact centre

and the feet extending outward and that a weight was placed on the opposite end of the board as a counter-balance. An electric motor was used to spin the wheel at the required velocity; I have located unmistakable traces of this and also of the transformer used to convert the current. With the doors closed the subdued hum of motor and wheel would not be noticeable; in fact, I doubt if it could be heard at all in the servants' wing, where the only persons in the house at the time were sound asleep.

"That is how the deed was done, gentlemen. The traces of it were easily obliterated—the table top put back in place, the transformer removed from the wiring, the motor taken away, the body of Professor Caron placed in his chair at the table as it was found the next morning—with an open book before him as if he had fallen asleep while reading and had passed away quite naturally. The murderer even placed an old bottle of digitalis in the vest pocket to suggest that his victim was in the habit of taking treatments for a weak heart. No doubt the murderer let himself out of the house early that morning, hugely satisfied with his own cleverness.

"And, gentlemen, but for this fragment of paper which I hold in my hand, we might never have known the truth!"

III

The novelist looked around at the intent faces of his audience as he paused. Every person in the room was listening eagerly to this amazing revelation. Inspector Lowry and Detective-Lieutenant Donovan were leaning forward, completely absorbed; Addison Kent was un-

folding for them a case which would become renowned in police circles if only the police could bring the guilty person or persons to trial. The doctors sat with "Quite so" expressions of approval upon their sober, professional faces.

"You are naturally wondering how I stumbled upon this truth," Kent went on. "As a student of anatomy, my mind has been busy with the problem revealed by the autopsy; but it was this bit of print—torn from an article in the *Literary Digest*—which set me upon the right track. This article, I may say, proved to be a review of another article which appeared not long ago in the *New York World*—written by an army medical officer, Major L. H. Bauer, Commandant of the School of Aviation Medicine at Mitchell Field, Long Island. In it Major Bauer predicts that the human element must be taken into account as limiting increasing air speeds, even if mechanical difficulties are overcome; in fact, it is his argument which I have presented in outlining the effects of motion upon the human body. His article even makes mention of the experiments of Dr. Garsaux, of France, and it is the paragraph dealing with these experiments which I hold in my hand.

"This clipping—or rather, it is torn out roughly from the *Digest* page—came into my possession this evening in a manner which may provide a clue to the identity of the murderer and perhaps lead to his immediate apprehension. The man from whom I got this excerpt had the clip-it-out-and-save-it habit and carried around with him all manner of clippings of things that had interested him; it may prove significant that in the present instance the part of the article which he preserved was this paragraph giving the details of the Garsaux experiments. This, of course, is something

for special conference with my friends of the police who are present

“Also, I shall make no more than passing reference to the fingerprint clue which I have discovered upon the mechanism of the roulette wheel. That is something for the Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Mr. Smythe, the Bertillon expert, who is with us. It is enough for me to say merely that this clue has led me to make some enquiries which point to immediate action on the part of the police.

“How the murderer came to know of this concealed roulette wheel we have not learned yet, but that he had an accomplice in the house is certain. That would seem to indicate premeditation. From facts already in possession of the police I would say that the motive will be found linked to certain past events in the life of the late Professor Caron. I am at liberty to divulge nothing further until I have had opportunity of conferring with Inspector Lowry and Lieutenant Donovan.

“This much only I can add by way of warning to you all. The criminals who could conceive and carry out a deed such as I have described are dangerous in the extreme, and inasmuch as this case grows deeper the further we go with it, and the establishment of Professor Caron's death as murder in the first degree is likely to bring things to a head very quickly—because of this I must ask each and every one of you present to-night to keep secret what I have told you and shown you, for through such secrecy only will the police be able to work unhampered.

“So impressed have I been by these discoveries, and some others which I may not mention, that I am being led to a conclusion which at first seemed an impossible one. I have cabled Scotland Yard for verification of

my suspicions, and if the reply is what I expect it to be—then, gentlemen, I must doubly warn every one of you to forget that you have been present here this evening and to be on your guard constantly. For this case will assume new and positively dangerous aspects for everyone connected with it! The hand of Alceste——”

“*Alceste!*”

Inspector Lowry was on his feet. Detective-Lieutenant Donovan gripped the arms of his chair and leaned forward with eyes narrowed. Richard Malabar, startled and suddenly alert, half rose—then dropped back in his seat, his face troubled and anxious. For of those present these three realized most fully the significance of that dread name.

“Kent, what do you mean?” demanded Lowry. “Do you mean to say that Alceste has a hand in this affair?”

“I am beginning to believe so, inspector.”

“You say that, knowing as well as I do that the police records show that crook to have been dead and buried for nearly a year!”

“You have only the word of Scotland Yard for that.”

“The word of Scotland Yard is not a thing to be passed over lightly.”

“Granted, inspector. But neither is the ingenuity of this Alceste. Your own records at Headquarters contain ample evidence of the lengths to which this paranoiac will go; we had a visit from him—you recall the Radcliffe case, of course? His sojourn in America, I believe, proved very profitable and, in fact, altogether enjoyable to him; he left us with considerable regret that he was obliged to cut short his stay!”

" I had nothing to do with that case ! "

" He walked away scot-free, inspector, by undergoing a painful eye operation—a special tattooing process—which changed the colour of his eyes ! I mention this merely to show that in a tight corner the man's wits are at their best. Scotland Yard is sincere enough in the belief that the charred body they buried was all that was left of Alceste—as indicated by the evidence found upon the body. I earnestly hope they are right."

" But you doubt it ? "

" Yes ! "

" The evidence found was conclusive."

" The more conclusive it was the more I would doubt it. It is no new thing for evidence to be left around conveniently for the police to find. Until I have the measurements of that body Scotland Yard buried, and have checked them against the true measurements of Alceste, procured by me personally and now in my own files—until then I shall be unable to free my mind from the growing suspicion that Alceste merely has added one more smart hoax to his list ! "

" And is alive to-day ? "

" Very much alive to-day ! "

" And here in New York ? "

" And here in New York ! " repeated Kent with conviction.

" Will someone kindly lead us in prayer ? " suggested Dick Malabar, attempting to relieve the sudden tension in the room.

But his levity fell flat, and he welcomed the butler's announcement that supper was served.

I

RICHARD MALABAR paced about the library restlessly, his brows gathered in concentrated thought. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning. The supper guests had gone; but neither Malabar nor the novelist felt like retiring. The night had been too full of surprising interest to leave them otherwise than wide awake.

"You look worried, Dick. What's on your mind?" questioned Kent at last, slipping his pen into his breast pocket and closing his notebook. "I thought everything went off very nicely, didn't you? Everybody seemed to be duly impressed——"

"Impressed? Of course they were impressed! Who wouldn't be? It was a marvellous bit of work; but instead of complimenting you, I am going to give you my frank opinion, whether you like it or not."

"Well?"

"Kent, you are a damned fool!"

"Well?"

"The thing that impresses me about this whole business is the personal danger into which it is heading you!" Malabar's lean face was full of concern as he stopped and laid a hand on the author's shoulder. "My dear old fellow, take the advice of a friend who has knocked about the world a great deal more than you have, and drop this case right now! It is a matter

for the police. Let them handle it. For God's sake keep out of it! I have no fondness for funerals, and I certainly do not want to be buying flowers for yours! That's what it is going to mean if you go on with it!"

"Oh, I don't know. I have at least a fifty-fifty chance of buying a lily for the other fellow!"

"Why not go up to Canada after big game?" persisted Malabar. "We've talked about it enough. Let's do it. You go on ahead and make the arrangements, and I'll join you within the week—as soon as I have disposed of one or two business matters here. What do you say, old chap?"

"You mean well, Dick; but it cannot be." Kent smilingly shook his head. "It would never do to disappoint Alceste after he had come back all the way from the dead!"

"Oh, damn Alceste!" cried Malabar irritably.

"Then, there is the young lady——"

"I thought so! You are going to remain here and risk your life for a woman of the underworld!——"

"That'll do, Malabar! We'll leave her out of the discussion, if you please! You noted that I made no mention of her to-night?"

"It was sporting of you," conceded Malabar, "but——"

"I'm telling you straight that her connection with this affair must not reach the police, no matter what happens to me. You understand? I mean exactly that, and, as a friend of mine, I expect you to keep quiet, Malabar!"

"What are you going to do if——"

"There is to be no 'if' about it. I am going to get

her! It may take till Christmas; but I am going to get her myself!"

"You lose sight of the possibility that Alceste may have something to say about it, Kent. By the way—those measurements you have on file—I am curious to know how you will spot the gentleman if he does turn out to be alive. How will you know him?"

"He is about three inches shorter than you are, Dick. His eyes originally were blue like yours, but lacked the expression that goes with a warm-hearted personality like yours; he was the coldest proposition imaginable—a man devoid of soul, and it showed in his hard eyes. You read up the Radcliffe case, didn't you?"

"Yes, I was interested in it because of your connection with it."

"Well, then, you will remember that Alceste escaped from the police in a daring manner, fooling them by changing the colour of his eyes from blue to dark brown by a special tattooing operation, performed by his accomplice Dr. MacMurrough, who was shot and killed by the police while trying to escape from the house in which the pair were cornered over on Long Island.

"Tattooing of the eye is done on the cornea in front of the iris; so that it would mark those eyes of Alceste for all time to come. I fancy he will find it a handicap for the rest of his days; for while the pupils of his eyes in a dim light will dilate as usual behind the cornea, he will have but the fixed orifice left in the tattooing through which to see. Under a strong light the pupils of his eyes will contract to pin-points, and it is then that he would be easily recognized by the tiny rim of blue that will show about the pupil—the original, natural blue behind the artificial colouring on the cornea.

Do you follow me? Well, that is why Alceste will require to wear glasses that conceal his eyes—probably smoked glasses of some sort."

Malabar smiled and nodded his head.

"I see. It would appear, then, that you are not the only foolhardy person in the world! Well, I don't wish you any bad luck, old boy; but I still think the wisest thing you can do——"

"Is to go to be——*ed-uh!*" yawned the novelist.

II

As Addison Kent had predicted, action by the police followed close upon his demonstration of how Professor Caron had been killed. The thumbprint he had discovered upon the socket of the roulette wheel was clearly defined in oil—a small, almost womanishly slender thumb—and if not the tell-tale mark of the murderer himself, it was at least the mark of an accomplice—the mechanic who evidently had assisted in fixing the wheel, attaching the motor and so on. Reasoning that the murderer must have had an accomplice in the house, it had only required elimination of all thick-thumbed inmates to send Kent straight to Gaston, the French chef, with searching questions in regard to the discharged Henri, who, at the time, had acted as kitchen help. The young man, as Kent remembered him—cowering under the bed-clothes in fear of the storm the night of the robbery—had been of slight build. From Gaston Kent had learned that Henri was ambitious to become an inventor, and had been for ever tinkering around a motor in his room, experimenting with an improved attachment for which he hoped to secure a patent!

From the moment the Bertillon expert reported that the thumbprint on the wheel and a thumbprint found in Henri's room were identical, the drag-net was out for the former cook's assistant, who seemed to have vanished since his dismissal the week before. Then Donovan discovered that one of Singer Lieb's croupiers likewise was missing suddenly, and on a lucky inspiration he put Smythe to work on a thumbprint of the "St. Boniface Kid," with highly satisfactory results; for the thumbprint of Singer Lieb's missing croupier, who had presided over a roulette layout in that worthy's gambling "joint" on the Bowery, was identical with the thumbprint found on the roulette wheel at the Lamont residence!

Here was something definite at last! At once Singer Lieb was on the carpet again at Headquarters, and the police redoubled their efforts not only to locate the St. Boniface Kid, but to find Kellani, the vanished Nubian manservant of the late Professor Caron, and also to unearth a certain large blonde man with a wen on his forehead.

But their search proved singularly abortive. Although care had been taken to keep from the newspapers any inkling of Kent's disclosures, it was Donovan's opinion that the news had leaked into underworld "grape-vine" channels. Even before this—on the night Addison Kent had found his scrap of paper—so peaceful and serene had the police found things at Singer Lieb's place that the intended raid had been postponed. Apparently due warning had been given by somebody. It looked suspicious.

A period of watchful waiting followed.

III

It was during this lull that Addison Kent quietly disappeared from his customary haunts. The mail accumulated on his desk in the apartment at Minaki Annex, and enquiry of Mrs. Madden, his housekeeper, would have elicited the information that he was "off on a holiday trip." Even Richard Malabar could have given no information as to his whereabouts, had any enquiring friend sought the novelist, while the only information obtainable at the various clubs to which he belonged would have consisted of three words—"out of town."

But the comings and goings of a popular author among the exclusive clubs which he frequents are lost in the kaleidoscopic affairs of a metropolis—of no more consequence than the arrival of a new tenant in a cheap tenement a few streets south of Washington Square. And the comings and goings of a young plumber, looking for work, are even less to be noticed in a great city—as inconspicuous as the greasy peak of his cap, or the spots on his "hand-me-down" clothes, or the smudge on his cheek. Departure of the one; arrival of the other—what matter? The world is full of authors; it is fuller still of young men out of work!

The despondent young mechanic who had ordered a full-sized beef-steak in a restaurant over on Seventh Avenue a week before, and who had departed without waiting for his change, was still job-hunting without success. It must be confessed, however, that his method of looking for work was somewhat unique, inasmuch as he spent most of his time—had anyone taken the trouble to follow him about—haunting cabarets and pool-rooms, chiefly in the Eowery district.

Strangely enough, also, he seemed always to be able to pay for the food he ordered, although often he merely picked at it without appetite. Once or twice he had left hurriedly before his order could be served, paying for it at the door and complaining of not feeling very well.

These sudden exits in pursuit of possible leads, however, had not advanced Mr. Addison Kent one step forward upon the quest which lured him. At the end of several days he had uncovered not a single trace of the girl who had flaunted him or of the massively built man, to meet whom she had hired a special apartment for one night. The sum-total of his perambulations had been to attain the toleration of a few doubtful characters who would as soon use their "black-jacks" on him as not, if it were made worth their while.

True, he had learned a few things at first hand about bootlegging operations—which just now, as never before, appeared to occupy the attention of gangland—and about the "hijackers" who were finding it extremely profitable to rob the bootleggers of their illegal gains. Gunmen bragged openly enough of the "jobs" they had "pulled" ashore or afloat, and Kent heard tales of bloody fights that had been waged by the boldest of the hijackers outside on the open seas, beyond the limit set by the Supreme Court as the "deadline"—the distance from the American shore which liquor-carrying craft must stay to avoid seizure under the Volstead Act.

Some of these sea-fights were almost past belief. Vessels of "Rum Row" had been the stage for violent gunplay between rival factions, comparable only to the most desperate clashes of old-time pirates! The coroners were reporting an astonishing number of "floaters" as the result of these battles, and Kent was

quick to sense the undercurrent of unrest and suspicion that was abroad in the underworld. The bootleggers were living in terror of the hijackers, and the hijackers who preyed upon them were in mortal fear of each other; hates and jealousies were leading to treachery, which in turn was breeding new feuds constantly.

All of this was very interesting to Addison Kent as a student of criminal psychology. It was interesting to know that Prohibition had provided the gangsters of New York with such a golden opportunity for predatory descent upon the bootleggers, who could not call upon the police for protection because they themselves were outside the law in their very profitable undertakings. It was interesting to speculate on the length of time which must elapse before the gunmen hired by the bootleggers for protection and the gunmen who turned to hijacking would exterminate each other.

Interesting, certainly. But was it going to help Mr. Addison Kent find Miss Edith Rockwood, "of the *Mercury*," or the man with the wen who carefully kept a record of how Dr. Garsaux, of France, had killed dogs scientifically by spinning them on a wheel?

It was this question Kent was asking himself as, with neck hunched in the turned-up, greasy velvet collar of his old overcoat, he swung off Broadway into Astor Place. His pace slackened as he advanced. It was not difficult for him to maintain an air of listlessness with the realization that probably he was looking for the proverbial needle in a very large haystack.

And supposing he did find her, what was he going to say to her? What was he going to *do*? Well, he would give her one more chance to answer that list of questions he had put to her the night she had calmly walked out on him and left him to whistle for his answers! What

he would do would depend upon her. Confound her ! She was a deceitful crook, hob-nobbing with criminals of the worst type ! It looked like that, and he was trying all the time to believe in her and help her. Why ? Just because she was beautiful ? What was the matter with him that he should be so obsessed by a girl no matter how beautiful ?

He crossed the street and went on down the Bowery. It was after eleven o'clock, and back on Broadway the theatre crowds were surging out and making for the popular eating-places. The novelist had as his objective the Casa Loma Cabaret. It was over in a quieter section, several blocks away ; but it was worth the walk, for it was fairly clean, and they served a rarebit there that was not half bad, while the coffee was excellent.

Shortly after turning the next corner Addison Kent threw a swift look over his shoulder and swept both sides of the street behind him with a keen glance. He saw nothing to justify the intuition which warned him ; yet he was almost positive that someone was following him !

IV

The Casa Loma was not as crowded as he expected to find it, and he had no trouble in getting a table in a corner which commanded a view of the front entrance. On either side of the dancing-floor were ranged boxes, or small compartments, partitioned from each other and designed to seat two couples ; the balance of the long room was an open restaurant, the space filled with round tables. Kent had chosen a table at the end ; so that with his back to the partition of the first compartment he was well placed to observe without becoming conspicuous.

He gave his order to Tony, a waiter with whom he had scraped acquaintance during the past few days, and allowed his careless glance to rove through the room. The Italian trio at the upper end—harp, violin and piano—was getting ready to play; but the tuning was lost in the general chatter and laughter. Then Kent forgot everything else but the two men who had just entered and stood near the door, eyes flitting from table to table. One was thin and tight-lipped, with deep-sunken eyes; the other had a thick neck and a flat nose and looked like a professional prize-fighter. A single quick glance assured the novelist that their faces were entirely unfamiliar to him.

As the new arrivals advanced in response to Tony's lifted finger, Kent became suddenly absorbed in close scrutiny of the menu card. He kept the menu in front of his face until the men were seated—in the very compartment alongside his table. He did this on impulse; for he had no reason to believe that the pair were interested in him. In fact, it was soon apparent that they were absorbed in each other's confidences as soon as the waiter left them. Their voices were pitched too low for Kent to hear what they were saying.

Tony had brought him his rarebit, and he was well started on it when above the mumble of conversation in the neighbouring compartment he caught mention of a name that keyed him to instant attention—the name of the St. Boniface Kid! With jaws motionless and head back against the partition, he strained his ears. With growing satisfaction he caught the name of Singer Lieb. Then, in a pause of the music:

“I tell you de Kid's gotta beat it! The dicks is onto him, see? Dis here big guy wid de lump is a friend o' Singer's an' everyt'ing's hunky. Get me? Dere's a

skirt—a friend o' Wasserhaus—dat's de big guy, see?
An' I'm to meet de bunch in half an hour, an'—— ”

“ Can it, Kayo! This ain't the Grand Central an' you ain't callin' trains ! ”

That was all Kent could hear; for the voices again reverted to a mere mumble and the orchestra was playing again. But Kent finished his rarebit with an elation which he was careful to hide. Unhurriedly he got up at last and put on his coat, called his waiter, paid his bill and sauntered leisurely past the groups of laughing men and women to the front entrance.

Once outside, he walked briskly for a block, crossed over to the other side of the street and came back until he stood nearly opposite the entrance to the Casa Loma. In a dark doorway he waited and watched. When the two men he had overheard came out he intended to follow them; it looked as if they might lead him straight to the very quarry he was seeking.

Not far down the block a taxicab was drawn up at the curb while the driver refreshed himself at a lunch-counter. Carefully Kent studied the street.

V

There they were now, just coming out! Would they walk or ride? If they got into that taxicab—it was the only one in sight! Ye gods! that was exactly what they were going to do. And there was the chauffeur, just coming out from his coffee and doughnuts!

Anxiously Kent scanned the street both ways for some vehicle in which he could trail them. Not a thing he could hail! Was he to lose this opportunity—the first that held promise of definite results?

He stared out at the taxi, his eyes on the rear of it.

Would he be able to hang on behind? The men were climbing in now.

Then just as Addison Kent was about to make a dash for it, to his great joy around the corner up the street came a ramshackle brass-bound limousine of ancient vintage with a bearded driver in front. The impression the novelist got as he ran out into the street was that here was some old Jewish merchant, all dressed up and returning from a joy-ride—an unprepossessing old codger who apparently had been the guest of boot-legging friends.

"Follow that taxi just ahead there!" Kent commanded brusquely. "I'll pay well. Here's a V in advance, and there's another coming if you keep 'em in sight."

Without more ado he yanked at the door and leaped inside the closed body of the limousine, shutting the door behind him with a solid slam. But the driver had no intention of disputing the gifts of the gods; the money was in his hand, and with a jolt the car lurched away so suddenly that Kent was pitched bodily into the back seat. He only laughed with relief. What a godsend this old "bus" was! And the fact that he had found it unoccupied—what luck!

Eagerly he peered ahead through the front glass and saw the taxi turning out of sight. His man was right after it, however, and soon it was in full view again, less than a block ahead. Fine! Kent picked up the speaking-tube and cautioned his driver to keep his distance.

"Twenty bucks if you do this job right," he encouraged, and, with a wave of the hand to signify that he heard, the owner of the commandeered car bent over his wheel.

For perhaps ten minutes they twisted and turned at

a moderate pace in the wake of the taxi. Kent continued to sit forward, watching for the first evidence of alarm on the part of the pursued; but the occupants of the car ahead did not appear to notice that they were being trailed, and no effort was made either to dodge or to speed away.

Kent's head presently gave a little bump against the glass through which he was looking. It bumped a second time and almost subconsciously he realized that he felt drowsy. This was no time to fall asleep! He roused himself impatiently. What a stuffy old "boat" this was! He blinked foolishly—then grew conscious of a peculiar, penetrating odour that sickened him!—

Snf! Snf! He sniffed at the thick, sweet air and with a thrill of alarm realized what it was.

Chloroform! But where?—how?— Then he saw it—in the roof of the car—a dark, wet patch, spreading rapidly and dripping—raining! Drops were falling upon his head, his shoulders!—

The windows of the car were tightly closed—all of them!—heavy plate-glass windows! He reached for the handle of the door as the pungent fumes beat at his senses—the handles had been removed from the inside!

He snatched the speaking-tube and shouted—at least he thought he shouted! Two glittering evil eyes looked in at him through the glass in front!

Trapped! Frantically he put his shoulder to the door and tried to smash a window with his fist. The fumes grew overpoweringly strong! He fought to get out his automatic—head singing, senses reeling!—

The automatic was in his hand. With a last desperate effort he raised it and tried to pull the trigger; but the weapon fell from his paralyzed fingers and everything went black!

MANY miles away waves were booming on a rocky coast. Boom! Boom! Boom! No, it was the surf hissing up a gravel beach—pebbles swishing back in the undertow. Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Ah, he had it now—a voice talking—a heavy bass voice talking, and a lighter, quieter voice answering? That was it.

Very slowly Addison Kent came back through a dream valley to realities. He tried to open his eyes, but he felt too weak and sick. He could feel a cool draught on his face. It was heavenly, and he gasped it in—life-giving, blessed air.

“—came damn near finishing him!”

“Which would have been a matter of great regret, *mein herr*, I admit,” said the more unctuous voice. “But it looks as if the pleasure of doing it yourself in your own way was not to be denied you after all. Ssh! He is coming to.”

Through half-closed lids Kent slowly examined his surroundings, feigning semi-consciousness as long as he might. He lay prone upon a dirty floor. The walls were bare and none too clean; they furnished no clue to the nature of his prison. For that he was a prisoner was evident; his hands were tied together behind his back, and his ankles also were bound. Recollection came slowly but steadily to him, and as the full memory of the circumstances which had brought him to this

pass took possession of his mind, the nausea he felt was not all due to the anæsthetic. A sickening apprehension of impending menace held him.

What a fool he had been! How easily he had been lured by the deliberate conversation of the two men in the café! How opportunely the ramshackle limousine had come along just when he needed it—a carefully prepared trap to capture him, with springlocks on the doors, handles missing on the inside, windows specially thick-paned and compact! And in his blind eagerness to follow the men ahead he had noticed nothing! What a fool! With chloroform, a gallon of it maybe, in a rubber container right over his head to drench him at a single rip—one pull on a string by the driver out in front— Was that how they had done it? Well, how it had been accomplished did not matter now; it had succeeded! Knowing the resourcefulness of the men with whom he was matching wits, he should have been on his guard!

He groaned in self-condemnation—then opened his eyes in an access of interest. A huge face—a beefy, red face—was bending over him; but it was the lump on the forehead upon which his gaze fixed. It was the big man with the wen for whom he had been seeking!

The big face with its ugly leer was suddenly withdrawn and another took its place. As Addison Kent stared back in fascination a thrill prickled his spine. For he was looking straight into the face of a man in dark glasses, and the mocking voice in his ear was none other than the voice of his arch-enemy—Alceste himself!

“Ah, my dear Kent, welcome back from the Elysian fields,” it purred. “I was afraid that perhaps you were too busy plucking flowers in the Garden of the

Hesperides to return to this wicked world even to meet such a very old friend as I. That would have been very disappointing, eh?—after my old college chum here, Otto, had arranged a ticket straight through to the Pit of Acheron! It would never do to send you to Heaven when a special reception is being planned in your honour down in Hell, would it? I am so sorry to see you looking so ill; but you will soon feel all right. Let me help you to sit up—ah, that's better! Here is a cushion—there, is that comfortable?"

Kent shook off the dizziness that threatened him when he sat up. Then, as his brain cleared, every faculty sharpened to meet the desperate plight in which he found himself. For Addison Kent was quite aware that his chance for life in the hands of these men was pretty slim. He was completely in their power, and could look for no mercy. They were capable of anything! To bluff it out to the end—that was all that remained.

"Well, well! So we meet again, my dear old chap! Let us see, how long is it?— But that doesn't matter, does it? Much has happened. You knew, of course, that I had died over in England—ah, yes, very sad!—'the lone couch of his everlasting sleep,' as Shelley puts it. I was glad to see that you were not as stupid as the police over that convenient event. Your cables from Scotland Yard—how nicely they confirmed your suspicions! Really, it would have distressed me greatly, my dear Kent, had you lost faith in me! You remembered that our last little game ended in stalemate, and that I had promised you another game, and you remembered that I always keep my promises. In many respects you are admirable! Sorry to say, though, that it will have to be checkmate

this time, old fellow—business affairs, you know. They require so much of one's attention these days that one has to curtail one's recreation. So this will be the last time I can play with you, much as I should like to continue to amuse you."

Kent said nothing. His eyes fastened upon those sarcastically curling lips. The cap which was pulled well down on the forehead seemed ludicrously out of place with the immaculate evening clothes. A white silk scarf was around the neck, the ends tucked inside the collar; in the loose folds of it the chin was buried deep in concealment. With the dark glasses covering the eyes, those smiling, moving lips were the only part of the face that seemed alive.

"By the way, I do not believe you have been formally introduced to Otto—a thousand pardons! Come here, Otto. Allow me to present a very old and esteemed friend, Mr. Addison Kent, the novelist—Herr Otto Wasserhaus, Kent, King of the Rum Runners! Even now his sea-going clipper, the *Albatross*, lies in the offing, laden to the Plimsoll marks——"

"*Ach himmel!* you introduce too much!" interrupted the German. "I am to meet you, Mr. Kent, so damned delighted! I have too much of you heard! So I invite you on board my ship and we take a little trip—*hein?*"

"I have not had opportunity of discussing the details, Otto; but I hope you are planning to treat Mr. Kent with the consideration due to a guest of his intelligence?"

"*Ach, yes!* We will not make matters mincemeat. *Nein!* We make the mincemeat out of him and feed the hungry fish!"

"Interesting, Otto, interesting; but, if you will

permit me to say so, much too crude. Do you not realize that Mr. Kent is a man of learning? He knows all about a great many things—the circulation of the blood, for instance. He can tell you all about anæmia of the brain, Otto, and engorgement of the splanchnic bloodvessels, and why you get dizzy! He knows all about the up-and-down pitch and the side-to-side roll, and all about centrifugal force and——”

“*Du lieber Gott!*” cried Wasserhaus, his face paling. “You will please to shut up!”

The laugh of Alceste turned Kent’s blood cold. There was a deadly menace in its tone. How had this devil learned——? Was it possible that a dictaphone——?

Like a bird fascinated by a snake he watched that mobile mouth. Every detail of it was being printed indelibly upon his memory—the shape of the lips, the irregular edge of the red membrane, the tiny indentation just below the centre of the lower lip—the teeth, and in particular one tooth that was revealed only when the mouth drew down at one side sneeringly—a tooth with a thin band of gold across its middle!

“One would almost think, Wasserhaus, that you were not quite sure of your prisoner—that in the back of your fat head was some wild notion that our friend here was going to slip through your fingers!” The voice grew instantly colder. “If I thought that, Herr Wasserhaus—I would take this whole matter out of your hands at once! Do you understand? This man must die! If you let him escape—you go straight to Sing Sing—and there they will sit you in a chair much wired and strapped——”

“*Ach*, you fool! Shut up! We kill him now and make sure!”

“I thought so!” sneered Alceste. “You would let

him off with a mere knifing, would you? You have him here, tied and helpless, and you imagine yourself back in your father's slaughter-house, sticking pigs! Bah! Now, listen to me, you ass! This man has got to get what is coming to him, but nothing as quick and easy as that, *mein herr!* It has to be something slow and lingering! He has to be made to squirm! Do you hear? *Squi-irm!*"

"So-o?" The German grinned slowly as he rubbed the white bristles on his chin, and he looked at the other with approval in his evil little eyes that seemed almost lost in his bovine face. "*Ach*, that iss so, my friend! Squirm it iss—like worms! We drop nicotine in his eyes. Ha! Smart man, iss he? Well, we make him smart, the swine!"

"I must apologize for Otto, my dear Kent. I am sure you will feel as sorry for him as I do; but we must not be too harsh in our judgment. He has not had our opportunities for education——"

"You promise, then, Otto, that if I leave this in your hands there shall be no hasty action? Get him aboard the vessel. Get him out to sea and then—eh? You promise? Very well. How soon can you run him out in the launch?"

"Before daylight the launch leaves."

"Splendid! Then I entrust him to your hospitality, Otto. But remember—no action here! It is too risky, and too much is at stake—— You see, Kent, how solicitous I am for your welfare?"

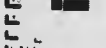
Kent yawned deliberately.

"Pardon me," he apologized politely. "It is very kind of you, of course. Would you mind telling me where I am at the moment? You will concede a natural curiosity—not that it matters at all, but——"



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"Forgive my thoughtlessness!" and there was a note of admiration in the suave voice. "I must ask you to overlook the lack of accommodation here, but we did not expect you quite so soon. The bareness of this room indicates nothing as to its location; but the dampness may have conveyed the fact that you are in a cellar, dear old chap—beneath a perfectly honest shop—Sprechenberg's—boots and shoes, clothing and so forth—in the heart of New York's most vicious section——"

"Not very far from the Café Belgique perhaps?" drawled Kent coolly.

"Excellent, my dear Kent! It is right back of this—over on the next block. Why, were you wanting a cup of coffee or something? How would this do?" and to Addison Kent's amazement Alceste drew from his hip pocket a silver flask, unscrewed the top and extended it solicitously. "It is bootleg liquor, but good stuff. You need have no hesitation in sampling it—eh, Otto? You would not refuse such a very old friend a farewell drink?"

"Farewell! *Ach!*" grunted the German in disgust. "You want maybe to kiss him good-bye yet!"

"That is decent of you!" acknowledged Kent gratefully as he returned the flask after a long pull at it. "It has bouquet."

"For you a big bouquet we pick soon!" leered Wasserhaus meaningly. "Come, we waste already too much time!"

"The Lord High Executioner speaks to some purpose. It is hardly likely that I shall see you again, much as I shall miss you. You are up to your old tricks of meddling in other people's business, Kent!" Again the voice had grown frigid, merciless. "This time—*God help you!*"

With a mocking bow he turned and followed the run-runner out of the room. He stopped in the doorway, beckoning to someone, then stepped back inside, followed by one of the two men whom Kent had attempted to trail from the Casa Loma; there was no mistaking that brutal face.

"This is Mr. Kayo MacGonnigle, Kent—the coming champion at his weight anywhere in the world. He will sit at the top of the stairs here in case there is anything you need. That cushion you are resting on is off his chair, but he has kindly consented to let you have the use of it for the time being. If you want ice-water, or anything like that, just ring for it, and Mr. MacGonnigle will give you a new idea of service!"

With a loud guffaw MacGonnigle withdrew. The heavy door through which they passed closed. Kent counted the bolts thudding into sockets—five of them!—and the finality of the sound was ominous.

As his eyes travelled the bare walls of the low-ceilinged room, realization of his utter helplessness surged upon him. The place was empty—not even a wooden box to sit upon. There was but the one door, through which his captor had disappeared, leading up a short flight of stairs to the shop above. Not even a window— Yes, in the wall opposite, at the top, was an oblong window for ventilation purposes presumably, for it looked out on the dark interior of the open cellar. It was tight closed and, judging by the accumulation of dirt and cobwebs which grayed it, its existence long since had been forgotten.

Caught like the proverbial rat, with no more than a rat's chance of survival! Despondency settled upon Addison Kent like a heavy blanket as he lay stretched on the dirty, damp floor. His own careful preparations

for his sojourn on the East Side precluded all hope of interference on the part of his friends; he was supposed to be away on a holiday trip somewhere, and no alarm would be felt at his prolonged absence for some time to come.

A holiday trip!—yes, an ocean voyage, no less!—a long voyage from which for Addison Kent there would be no return! They were going to take him away from here to a launch some time during the night, and the launch would run the gauntlet of the revenue officers somewhere along the coast and land him eventually on board a rum ship, named the *Albatross*, owned by the man with the wen—Herr Otto Wasserhaus. This much he had gathered from the conversation; the very fact that Alceste had been so careless in his talk in front of Kent indicated how sure he was that the prisoner could not escape!

Alceste never made mistakes—unless for a purpose! Was it intended to mislead him? Was that it? Those references to the electric chair at Sing Sing—the German's face had shown agitation in spite of himself! And then Alceste had mentioned centrifugal force!—

So interested did Addison Kent become in the speculations which opened before the probe of his keen analytical mind that for a space he forgot his immediate surroundings. Time passed—how long he did not know; as nearly as he could judge, it must be about midnight. Voices in heated argument occasionally came from a distant part of the shop overhead. Now and then there was a scrape of boots on the grit of the landing where the pugilist MacGonnigle sat on guard.

It was useless for him to strain at the cords around his wrists; it only increased the pain with which they cut into his flesh. He had been bound with practised hands,

and there was no evidence of any loosening of those knots, no matter what pressure he brought to bear or how he twisted. He was still weak from the effects of the chloroform—still a little sick; but the whiskey had helped. The nausea was passing, and if he husbanded his strength he would be a lot better by the time they came to take him to the launch—if they did not give him another dose of it then!

He lay inert, motionless. The unreality of it all! Out there on the Bowery—just a block away—the sidewalks were crowded with denizens who turned night into day. Even a few ragged urchins of the quarter still played about the pushcarts of the hawkers under gasoline flares; women of many nationalities in multi-coloured shawls talked and gesticulated in groups; swarthy-faced men, dapper-dressed gunmen, slinking figures out of dark questionable alleys rubbed shoulders there. Noise!—loud laughter, loud talk, giggling! Sibilant whisperings from the corners of mouths! Lights blazing in front of moving-picture theatres lurid with posters—lights glittering in front of garish establishments—tinny pianos banging away at jazz tunes, boisterous cafés with hurrying waiters in spotted aprons—life!—jostling, jumbling, noisy life!—just over on the next block!

The solitary gas-jet in the cellar room sputtered feebly to maintain its sickly flame. Addison Kent lay back with aching head pressed against the damp cool plaster of the wall and closed his eyes. The only sounds were the distant murmur of voices somewhere overhead and the occasional scrape of the guard's boots on the landing outside—that and the movements of a rat somewhere in the cellar beyond.

The movement of the rat was persistent, irritating.

Then Kent heard a new sound—so faint as to be almost indistinguishable except to straining ears in the throbbing silence of that cellar room. The gnawing of the rat had ceased—had been replaced by a slight scraping sound, a dull faint rubbing sound, equally persistent.

It seemed to come from—where? The novelist turned his head and listened. His hearing was acute, and at last he located it; it was not under the flooring, but in the wall that faced him—no, not in the wall, but at the window near the ceiling!

Gaze riveted now, he lay still, breathlessly watching those dirty panes of glass. Was it to be ended here after all? Was someone presently going to shoot at him through the window? It would be easy enough! It would—

A spot on the glass? He had not noticed it a moment ago! Was it growing larger—widening? Yes! Slowly it widened, a black spot. Kent watched it, tensely. Then he saw something glisten in the middle of that spot from which the dirt had been rubbed—something that caught the light from the gas-jet—just a glint. A human eye! Someone, with extreme caution, was spying upon him!

Addison Kent wet his dry lips. He wanted to cry out, but made no sound. His pulse was hammering at his temples as his ears caught the faint scrape of the sash and he saw the right-hand edge of the window slipping outward. The window was being steadily and noiselessly opened!

Still he lay silent, fascinated. Now he could see the darkness of the cellar beyond beginning to show, a black streak—wider, wider—!

A face appeared, the lips puckered, a slim finger upon them, admonishing silence! With a little gasp,

smothered in his throat, Addison Kent stared, breath bated. There sprang into his eyes a quick light of understanding, of wild hope!

He recognised that face—that smile of encouragement. It was *she*!—the girl who had flaunted him!—the girl he had known as Miss Rockwood!—his elusive Lady of the Storm!

Chapter XIX

Naida

OBEYING her signal, Kent slowly and without noise rolled across the floor until he was directly beneath the window; then sat up, knelt, stood erect. She had disappeared for a moment; but now he saw the end of a long narrow box being carefully eased over the sill upon her upturned palm, and at once he took a position which would enable him to receive it on his back. With hands tied behind him and feet fastened, the matter of balancing that box to the floor without sound was not easy. Finally, however, he managed it; but beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead before he finally sank with it to the floor and got it gently on its side with only the faintest of scratching contacts.

He stood up again, exchanging a cheerful smile for her delighted pantomime of approval. She held a jack-knife in her hand now and motioned for him to stand on the box. This, again, was a process requiring slow

and careful movement, and he heaved a breath of relief when at last he accomplished it.

Edging slowly through the window—head and shoulders, waist—she hung down towards him and in a moment had severed the cords about his wrists and pressed the knife into his right hand. The faint perfume of her hair thrilled him. Her anxious whisper was at his ear:

“Quick! There is not a moment to spare! As soon as you are able you must climb through this window. I will help you. There is an underground passage—Oh, Mr. Kent, be careful not to make a noise; but hurry!”

He was already chafing his benumbed wrists—rubbing them back to life and feeling. He got down off the box as soon as he had freed his ankles and, removing his boots, tiptoed noiselessly to the door. He could see nothing through the keyhole except the steps of the stair. A rustling of paper, however, indicated that MacGonnigle might be reading a sporting extra.

Back at the window, he passed up his boots to her. They had left him the old overcoat he had been wearing, and now he quickly tied the sleeves of this into a fast knot and passed it up also. She divined his purpose at once and, twisting the coat into a roll, thrust it across the sill with the tied sleeves downward. Then, while the girl hung tight to the coat on her side, Addison Kent from the top of the box carefully put one stockinged toe into the loop of the sleeves for a purchase and gathered his muscles. He could reach the window with arms at full stretch, and, taking hold of the sill on either side of the coat, he slowly drew his body up until his head and shoulders were through the window.

He saw now by the light of the pocket flash in her hand that she was standing on a large packing-case. There was room for both of them upon it, and with her assistance he wormed cautiously through the window and slid down to it on his hands. She gripped his ankles, and he slipped over on his back soundlessly.

For a moment they both remained there, motionless, listening; but all that could be heard was their own breathing.

"Great!" he exulted in her ear. "You're a brick!"

She cautiously closed the window while his fingers flew at his shoe-laces. He got down off the packing-case and reached up for her; but she was already beside him, and he felt his hand caught in hers, pulling him gently forward. His pulses quickened at the touch of her fingers.

The ray of her flashlight danced ahead of them through the open cellar over a litter of empty packing-cases, excelsior, cardboard strips and general rubbish. She made directly for a pile of broken boxes in the far corner, leading him around behind this with a whispered word of caution. Then it was that Kent noticed a small opening in the masonry, barely big enough for passage. He crawled through at her direction and waited while she noiselessly lifted the lid of a packing-case across the opening behind her.

For a few rods they crept on hands and knees over what appeared to be the bricking of an old drain; then abruptly the girl got to her feet. He stood beside her and peered about with interest; but the dancing white disc served only to indicate a passage about a yard wide, stretching ahead of them between dark walls of dirt-encrusted brick. It sloped downward for a short

distance, then twisted abruptly to the left, then to the right, as if to avoid some underground conduit or a sewage pipe.

"We can talk now," she intimated over her shoulder.

"This passage brings us out at the Belgique over on the next block, I suppose?"

"Yes. How did you guess that? In her surprise she paused, turning the beam of the electric torch against the wall beside them and appraising him quickly in the reflected glow.

"The gentleman in the dark glasses——"

"Dryden? He told you about this passage?"

"Hardly!" smiled Kent. "Dryden, he calls himself, eh?"

"He comes occasionally to see Wasserhaus—some business associate, I believe."

"Miss Rockwood, how did you know I was back there—a prisoner?"

"I saw them carry you in."

"Where were you? What are you doing here? You cannot be a member of this rum-running gang or you would not be helping me to escape."

"I would not leave a yellow dog in the clutches of Wasserhaus if I could help him to get away," she responded bitterly. "This is no time for inquisitions, Mr. Kent!" she reproved sharply. "Come, we must hurry. We—you are not safe yet."

"In helping me you are running risks——"

"They would shoot both of us without a moment's hesitation!"

"Then why are you doing this for me?"

"Your life is in danger, Mr. Kent. I can hardly stand by and see you murdered in cold blood, can I?"

Think of the disappointed public, waiting in vain for your next novel!" She smiled at him with attempted whimsicality, and he shook his head at her reproachfully.

"You ran away from my questions that other night, Miss Rockwood! I am here because I set out to find you. I want to help you in whatever difficulties you may be placed——"

"Then forget all questions—forget everything but escaping from here as quickly as possible! We are both in great danger! Come!"

They went on again silently. Addison Kent closed his lips firmly on the crowding thoughts that clamoured for expression. She was right; it was no time for questions at the risk of their lives. At any moment his escape might be discovered by MacGonnigle, and, knowing of this passage, they would realize at once where he was and telephone Singer Lieb to block exit at the other end.

As if divining his thoughts, she spoke to him again in guarded tones:

"There is telephone communication between the shop and Lieb's private quarters; but I cut the wire!"

"You are wonderful!" he commended.

"The passage forks just ahead of us. The left branch finds outlet in a Chinese tea-shop—Loo Ling's—several doors down the street from the café; the other comes out in the basement of the Belgique——"

She clutched his sleeve in sudden alarm. At the same time she extinguished the flashlight. It was nothing more than a puff of air that smote their faces, but Kent realized its significance even as the girl crowded close to him and whispered in his ear:

"Someone coming! Quick! We must run for it—the left passage."

She had pressed an automatic into his hand, and at the comforting feel of it he drew in his breath and was after her. He put his arm to her waist and ran just behind her in the dark.

It was not far, and fortunately the passage was straight and unobstructed. She stopped him suddenly, and they listened. Above the thumping of the blood in his ears, Kent sensed rather than heard a slight sound ahead of them.

They were in motion again now, walking swiftly. The girl had taken his hand. He felt her pull to the left and turned after her into the branch tunnel that trended to the left towards Loo Ling's. He collided with her unexpectedly and felt her warm breath on his cheek as she warned for silence.

They were not a moment too soon. The sound of a softened impact reached their ears, followed by rapid footsteps. The footsteps broke into a run, and there grew along the damp bricks of the main passage a little glisten of light.

Kent crowded her deeper into the branch tunnel. She was wearing a bright-coloured sport sweater with scarf and tam to match, and, as he realized the hazard of the advancing light, he shifted his position to shield her from discovery. With his arms around her, they waited, motionless as statues, a blot of darker shadow against the tunnel wall.

The light grew—the beam of an electric torch, dancing, dancing. The running footsteps pounded towards them. Suppose the men should suddenly turn into their retreat! Kent gripped the automatic and poised on the balls of his feet for a quick whirl into action.

Passed! The runner had passed, and they were safe. The footfalls receded along the main passage. The girl had peered out beneath the novelist's arm as the man swung by, and now her bated breath drew in sibilantly. She moved gently for release.

Instead, Addison Kent's arms suddenly tightened about her. His blood was racing madly through his whole being. That dark tunnel, the running man, the danger—he had forgotten everything except that his arms were around this beautiful creature who had eluded him—his mystery girl! What mattered anything but that he had found her again?—but that he loved her madly! That was what was the matter with him—what lay behind his anxiety to help her—to keep her out of this infamous tangle of events in which she seemed enmeshed—to keep all knowledge of her from the police! He loved her! He knew it now! And it overwhelmed him!

"Edith! Edith!" His voice was low and vibrant. "I know you by no other name!"

"Mr. Kent! Are you mad?" She struggled to release herself.

"Yes!—for you! I do not know who you are—what your name is—what you are. But I do not care if only you will understand and believe that I love you, love you! You have grown to mean everything to me, and I am not going to let you run away again! Tell me who you are—where I can see you—your real name—"

"Please! Please, Mr. Kent!" she entreated in desperate anxiety. "That man who passed was the Badger—one of Berlin Harry's gang—the worst—"

His kisses stopped her.

"—worst gang of gunmen—hirelings of Wasserhaus!

Something must have gone wrong!— *Please!*— oh, my dear, if you love me!—”

Again he kissed her fervently. Abruptly her arms went about his neck, and he felt her warm, moist lips on his in sudden sweet abandon. Out of that ecstasy he struggled with difficulty to his senses.

“Your name, dear—what is it?” he pleaded.

“I cannot—tell you!” She was trembling. “Oh, this is madness!”

“Your first name, then—at least tell me that!”

“Naida—that is all I can tell you.”

“Naida!” he repeated tenderly. “Naida!”

“Quick, let us go! They have discovered that the telephone is out of order! The Badger has gone to investigate. They will be upon us in a moment!”

“You will come with me—now—out of here?”

“No, no!” she protested hastily. “I cannot. You must go alone. I will get out through the tea-shop. Don’t worry about me. Quick! There is not a moment to lose.”

“You will meet me later, then?”

“Later—when I can—I will send you word—when it is safe.”

“Naida, listen! Are you quite sure you will be all right? I will not leave you here exposed to danger—”

“I will be all right—I know what to do—oh, if you would only hurry!” she implored.

“Promise me that if anything goes wrong you will get a message to me at once—to the Westchester address. *Promise!*” he insisted, his arm about her shoulders.

“Yes, yes, I promise. You must get out by way of the café. It is best to separate. Here, put on these

glasses. They will think it is Dryden, and you can slip through. You will have no trouble with the cellar door—— Now, please, for your own sake—go !”

With one last embrace he pressed the automatic into her hand, turned and ran. At the fork in the passage she stood for a moment, casting the beam of her pocket flash to light him on his way. It was not far, and with the door in sight he waved back to her, and the light swung away as she darted for Loo Ling’s tea-shop.

Kent reached the heavy wooden door which marked the entrance into the basement below the Café Belgique, and listened. It occurred to him that perhaps she in turn was waiting to hear the door close behind him; so he opened it cautiously and peered out. The cellar was in darkness. He closed the door with a little thud, and again crouched in the passage, one ear bent to catch any sound out of the cavernous blackness. Silence!—heavy, throbbing, complete. She was safe.

With a breath of satisfaction Kent slowly opened the basement door, slipped out and drew it shut noiselessly. For a moment he crouched to one side on the cement floor in the dark, listening.

Then his heart stood still! Loud and shrill rose the summons of a police whistle! Heavy blows of an axe and splintering wood!—the crack of a police automatic and hoarse shouts, followed by a growing tumult overhead—shrieks and yells and oaths and running feet!

I

A DOOR crashed open at the head of the cellar stairs. Pandemonium! A band of yellow light! *Slam!* Blackness again—blackness, heavy breathing, tense whisperings!

Kent dodged across to a barrel and crouched behind it. In the momentary streak of light he had seen three dark figures scramble down the stairs. The round disk of an electric torch floated about the basement. Then feet scurried across the cement floor for the entrance to the underground passage.

“Aw, dis is a swell joint—dis is!” a voice growled in disgust. “Why’n’t dey tip us off? Harness bulls! If de Badger hadn’t got wise to dat fly cop——”

“Close your trap, Nifty!”

“Well, wot’s de lay? Dey ain’t got not’in’ on us! Why de fade-away?”

“We ain’t takin’ no chances, see? Dem’s de orders! Beat it!”

“Some snitch!——”

The passage door closed upon them. Berlin Harry’s gang! Kent knew them—notorious gunmen, every one of them! Hirelings of Wasserhaus, Naida had said. Unarmed as he was, there was nothing he could

do to stop them. No doubt the Badger had already warned the rum-runner and Alceste!— She would be safely out through Loo Ling's before this. He must get some of Donovan's men around to that shop—

With these thoughts racing through his head, Kent was already stumbling up the cellar stairs. He yanked open the door at the top and burst out—right into the arms of a burly policeman.

"Here he is! Loot'nant, I got him!—ah, ye would, would ye!"

"Let go, you fool!" cried Kent angrily, plucking away the dark spectacles the girl had given him to wear. "Donovan! Quick! Get a couple of men down in the basement—there's an underground passage between here and Sprechenberg's shop right back of this, one block over! Hustle! The men you want are there, but they've been warned—"

A whistle shrilled. Detective-Lieutenant Donovan roared his orders and dashed after Kent, who was already making for the front entrance of the café. Side by side they ran around the corner with a section of the strong-arm squad at their heels. Kent glimpsed the patrol-wagon, backed up at the curb and crowded with a huddle of complaining humanity guarded by a knot of blue uniforms.

"For the love o' Mike, Mr. Kent! What were you doing with those glasses? We got a tip on a guy with dark specs and your friend with the lump on his forehead; so I pulled the raid—couldn't find you to let you know—"

"Didn't get him, did you?"

"We got *seven* of him!" exploded Donovan—

every one of 'em wearing black spectacles! What the devil!—"

"Save your breath, Jerry. Speed up!"

They swung the second corner and bore down on the Sprechenberg clothing shop, which was surrounded at the double-quick. The place was in darkness—not a chink of light showing anywhere—and the peremptory ratta-tat-tat of Donovan's pistol-butt on the door panels echoed hollowly. The door was locked, and in response to the detective-lieutenant's command, one of his men smashed the lock and forced an entrance.

The place was deserted. In the office a chair was overturned and a drawer, yanked from the desk, lay upside down on the floor, which was littered with bills of lading and invoices. The chair MacGonnigle had occupied out on the landing had tumbled down the short flight of steps. The door to the room where Kent had been held prisoner stood open, and as Donovan's flashlight scoured the bare walls, Kent gave a brief account of what had happened.

"Hello! What's this?" interrupted Donovan, striding abruptly back to the open door. "Something for you, maybe."

Over a wire nail in the middle of the door had been jabbed a folded telegraph blank, and straddling the nail hung a pair of dark-coloured spectacles—large round glasses in cheap rims with side-shafts that curved to fit the ears!

The paper was addressed to "Mr. Addison Kent," and the novelist knew what was in it before he unfolded it—another of those characteristic taunts of Alceste. He read it with a slight smile at the corners of his mouth, then passed it to Donovan without comment.

It was in bold, backhand script—evidently a disguised hand:

“MY DEAR KENT,

“Congratulations! You really interest me at times. I thought we had you ready for the sacrificial altar and that the game was played out; but apparently not! Well, better luck next time, old bean!”

“I feel very sorry for you. So, with my compliments, I am leaving you my spectacles. Perhaps if you wear them you will be able to stop this blundering about. Hoping that with these you will be able to look the shining truth in the face and at last make some progress, believe me always, in youth and piety,

“Your own

“ALCESTE.”

“What do you know about that!” cried Donovan in exasperation. “Maybe he thinks we’re a pack of fools! We’ll show him! He can’t get away with that in this burg! Say, do you know what he did?—passed out specs like these to a dozen guys back there—Heaven only knows what he told ‘em!—and when we bust the joint wide open, looking for a guy in black glasses we pinch *seven* guys in black glasses! And while we’re doing that, he *takes his off* an’ goes for a stroll!”

“But this party ain’t over yet; it ain’t no more’n started, an’ we’ll show this bird—— Come on, if you want to see the fun!”

II

It was no idle flare of disappointment, those words of Detective-Lieutenant Donovan. Ever since the night that Addison Kent had established the death of

Professor Caron as cold-blooded murder, the police net had been drawing steadily tighter. Every outlet from the city was guarded, every known underworld haunt, liable to furnish a clue to the whereabouts of the three men who were "wanted," was under surveillance. Descriptions of the St. Boniface Kid, the big German with the wen, and of Kellan had gone out through official channels, and the story of the hunt reached the newspapers through City News Association bulletins from Police Headquarters; more than one ambitious young reporter was out "digging" for a "beat," while theorists at the Press Club held forth in comfort.

Now to this much-wanted trio would be added a fourth—now that Addison Kent's suspicion had blossomed into certainty; now that Alceste was known definitely to be loose in New York. To lay this internationally notorious cracksman by the heels would be a feather in Lowry's cap which that worthy inspector would spare no resource of the department to acquire. And behind the Bureau would stand the Commissioner, the District Attorney, the Washington Service itself.

Kent realized that Alceste's taunt was entirely personal—a mere gesture for the fun of the thing. He wanted to see some real progress made, did he? He might find his challenge accepted with results altogether outside his calculation! He could not win always, clever though he was; for pitted against him would be the cleverest brains of an efficient police organization, guiding the full machinery of its far-reaching resources. There were few well-known crooks within the confines of the city whom that machine could not lay hands upon at discretion; whose goings and comings could not be secretly detailed to Headquarters upon order. How long could Alceste hope to escape the drag of such an

efficient fine-tooth comb? The one thing he had to rely upon was lack of description—double identities; who was he and what did he look like? But that was an advantage which could not last indefinitely; sooner or later someone who knew him would fall into the toils of the police and furnish a clue.

Who did know him? Kellani, the Nubian, who had fled the night of Mokra's murder? The police were satisfied that Kellani, if still alive, was not in New York, and their search for him had gone afield. Wasserhaus? Undoubtedly Wasserhaus knew something, and with the additional information which Kent could supply it would be a matter of time only before Wasserhaus would be doing his explaining at Police Headquarters—if he could be prevented from putting to sea in his rum-running ship, the *Albatross*. All that was necessary was to tail Berlin Harry and his gang; Wasserhaus was paying them well, no doubt, for protection from hijackers in his bootlegging deals. Berlin Harry, Nifty Dean, the Badger and the rest—all were known to the police, and through them it ought to be possible to get in touch with the German rum-runner, and even to discover the location of his vessel beyond the deadline.

The smoke curled from Addison Kent's pipe and shot in a blue stream from the corner of his mouth as he sat at a table in the deserted café and puzzled it out while waiting for Donovan.

Yet the problem was not as simple as all that. There was Naida to consider; at all costs she must be protected. Was he ready yet to make full report to Inspector Lowry? Not until he had seen her again and learned from her own lips the answers to all those questions he had asked her—not until he knew just

how she fitted into the picture. That she hated Wasserhaus and was ready to work against him—was already doing so—Kent was positive. He was equally sure that when she was able to tell him everything, much of what now appeared confusing would be explained; not for an instant would he permit himself to doubt her no matter how incriminating the circumstances appeared.

And it did look as if the girl was in the thing up to her pretty neck! That was why he must not be in too great a hurry to turn the case over completely to the police; his work was not yet through, and he must continue independently until he had her story in full. He had realized this even as he had led Donovan through the underground passage and up into Loo Ling's tea-shop. It was evident that it was through this outlet that Berlin Harry's men had made their escape, and even as Donovan's squad searched and questioned the smiling Loo Ling, Addison Kent had kept silent about the three gunmen he knew to have passed that way.

For his discovery that Wasserhaus was a rum-runner and that these men were his hired gunmen had steered Addison Kent's thoughts along a new channel. It deepened the significance of information which had reached him that day through his own particular friend and underworld lieutenant, Pomereski, the Polish tailor. According to that astute barometer of secret activities, there was a big break coming in certain underworld circles—a carefully planned coup that was to set one Slipper Dagg and his following upon velvet cushions for the rest of their days—a break that was being nursed to fruition in the folds of secrecy. For Slipper Dagg was a gunman who was of the élite in gangland, and who took no back seat for Berlin Harry or any

other rival; and of late the Slipper had carried a "deep heel" and so had every member of his gang.

"Hijacking!" had been Pomereski's terse explanation of this sudden wealth. "De Slipper's de King Pin of dem all, Mr. Kent, an' dere's de biggest break yet on de way."

Was there a connection between the plans of Slipper Dagg and Berlin Harry? Were those two notorious gangsters in collusion or at enmity? Was the cargo of the *Albatross* the stakes in the game, or, rather, were the hijackers preparing to descend upon the vessel after the cargo had been disposed of and walk away with the proceeds at the point of the gun? The possibility was at least worth considering; if the surmise should prove correct, Wasserhaus would have enough trouble on his hands to keep him busy for a while, and he would have to fight out his own battle without any possible appeal to the police for protection.

Another question: Was Alceste dipping into this rum-running game? It was profitable enough; but somehow Addison Kent could not bring himself to think that his enemy would get mixed up in anything so entirely outside his own line. It was too sordid—too far beneath that finesse which had come to be associated with the name of Alceste. He might know Wasserhaus—evidently did know him—might even have business dealings with him—

Wait! Might those business dealings concern other things than bootleg liquors?—a certain wonderful ruby, for instance?—the golden scarab itself? Was Wasserhaus the big man who had visited the Lamont residence the night the scarab disappeared? Was it he who had murdered Professor Emil Caron? What was it the late Egyptologist had said about Alceste:

"Dead he may be, but his evil lives after him." And then he had asked if they had ever heard of a secret Eastern organization known as the "Order of the Golden Scarab"! What was the connection? Always it came back to Alceste!

Kent shook his head impatiently. The thing was a muddle, or else he was not thinking as clearly as usual. His eye fell upon the two pairs of spectacles that the night's events had thrust upon him. They lay on the table before him now as he smoked—the glasses with which Alceste so brazenly had presented him and the spectacles Naida had given him. They were identical! "They will think it is Dryden, and you can slip through," she had said. How had she obtained them? Had she known that in wearing them he would be aiding Alceste to escape?

"Confound her! She's a witch!" He smiled sentimentally, remembering the moist sweetness of her lips. He could do nothing, he suddenly realized, until he saw her again and learned all she could tell him. It would simplify the whole problem. Once he knew her story, he could act intelligently; until then mere speculation was futile. His hands were tied hopelessly.

He looked up as Detective-Lieutenant Donovan joined him.

"Well, that's that! We're cleaned up here. Now for a snack at the nearest beanery and we're ready for the next point of call."

"And just where might that be?" enquired Kent with interest.

"The St. Boniface Kid!" There was a gleam of satisfaction in Donovan's resolute eye. "We've got him dead to rights—backed into a corner he can't get out of in a hurry. By daylight he'll be behind the bars!"

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Chapter XXI

The Message

I

THE first gray finger of dawn was feeling into the sky above the East River when Addison Kent reached the side-door of Pomerkeski's tailoring establishment and noiselessly let himself in with his latchkey. He slipped upstairs to the room that stood always awaiting him and, after scribbling a note that he was not to be disturbed and pinning this to a panel of the door, softly shut himself in and turned the key with a sigh of weariness. Removing his boots only, he stretched out on the bed and in a moment was sound asleep.

It had been an exciting and fatiguing night. To be sent to the very borderland of death by an anæsthetic route; to be awakened to the immediate prospect of direst peril; to escape from this into the arms of an emotional ecstasy; finally to spend the rest of the night keyed to high pitch in a police man-hunt—all within a few hours! Little wonder that even the novelist's exceptional physique felt the strain—that he slept like a log!

Detective-Lieutenant Donovan's prediction had come true; daylight found the St. Boniface Kid in the hands of the police. Harried from cover to cover, deserted at the last by his "friends," the young French-Canadian from St. Boniface, Manitoba, had been driven into a

corner. Hysteria more than anything else had led him to put up a finish fight against overwhelming odds; only "strict orders" to take him alive had saved him from being riddled with bullets. Even so, he had to be removed, unconscious, to a hospital cot instead of a cell, and it would be forty-eight hours at least before he would be in condition for "grilling" at Headquarters. He probably knew who had murdered the late Professor Emil Caron, and his wisest course would be to turn State's evidence. Altogether, Donovan had every reason to feel satisfied with the night's work.

The afternoon was well advanced before Addison Kent awoke, greatly refreshed. For a while, hands clasped behind his head, he lay luxuriating in the feeling of well-being that tingled through his six feet of muscular manhood and allowed his mind to dwell upon his love for Naida. What a girl she was!—as clever and brave as she was beautiful! And she had risked her life to rescue him! She must care for him a little—no, a lot! She had not been able to resist his kisses, and oh, the tenderness of her when she had yielded him her lips!—"Oh, my dear, if you love me!—" She had called him "my dear"!

His face sobered. Where was she now? If she were still in danger, how could he go to her? He was no farther ahead than before—did not know who she was or where to look for her—knew only that her first name was Naida! He should have insisted— Then his anxiety cleared as he remembered her promise to communicate with him as soon as it was safe—to send him a message if anything went wrong—

His eyes fell upon his neat tweeds on their hanger by the door, reminding him that it behoved him to get dressed and be about his business. For one thing he

must call on Inspector Lowry. And he must get out to Westchester as soon as he had finished his business down town; supposing already she had telephoned him there!

He was across the room, fumbling for his watch, before he remembered that he had handed it to Pomereski to put in the safe. He went to the window and raised the shade; as nearly as he could judge, it must be after four o'clock. By the time he had had a shave and a good meal at a first-class restaurant over on Broadway——

Someone was talking in the next room—to Pomereski. Setting down the water-pitcher and pausing above the wash-basin, Kent listened. The tones were not so guarded but that he could hear an occasional sentence—something about “a dozen blue jerseys and a dozen sailor’s caps.” Pom was stocking sea-togs—drummer for some Yidd factory likely——

He plunged his face into the cold water with relish and scoured and spluttered. Dozen blue jerseys; dozen sailor caps—dozen jerseys; dozen caps—jerseys; caps! It was an idle refrain that kept time with the rappings of the towel—an unattached thought——

The movements of the towel on Kent’s ruddy cheeks grew slower and slower. Pomereski was not placing a buying order; he was being instructed to make delivery by someone who seemed very anxious about the dozen blue jerseys and dozen sailor caps. It was Pomereski, the confidential costumier of the underworld—not Pomereski, tailor and clothier—who was swearing by all the gods he knew that delivery would be made without fail.

“All you gotta do is tell de Slipper I say dey’ll be dere.”

Not long after the caller had departed Addison Kent was standing in Pomerkeski's little back office, receiving his gold watch from the safe. He eyed the pale little Pole in whimsical mood.

"So Slipper Dagg, with a dozen men disguised as sailors, is putting to sea, eh? Does he know where the *Albatross* is, or is he on a scouting trip? Take it from me, Pom, a lot of those jerseys and caps of yours will be gone for good—unless Berlin Harry— Say, are he and the Slipper on friendly terms?"

"You know t'ings, eh!" cried Pomerkeski, with a grin of admiration. "It's de big break, Mr. Kent—to-night—to-morrow—I dunno. It not good to speak 'bout. No, de Slipper an' Berlin Harry—dey too jealous 'bout each odder to be frien'. Dey fight—*pst-pst!*—tom-cats!"

"Then, listen carefully, Pom. I know Slipper Dagg personally—that Acheson affair, you remember? I was able to get him out of a rather nasty hole that night, and I think he will remember me. I rather like the Slipper—for his sense of humour, I guess. Well, I want you to wish him *bon voyage* for me if it's the *Albatross*— It is? Well—this man Wasserhaus, who owns the vessel, deserves everything the Slipper can hand him, and inasmuch as the police are not concerned in the Slipper's seafaring ventures, I personally wish him luck. But warn him to watch out for Berlin Harry's gang; Wasserhaus has hired them for protection. Tell him I told you to warn him, though probably he knows all about it." With a wave of the hand, he made his way out to the street.

Half an hour later Addison Kent was on his back, with his cheerful pink face obliterated by a creamy lather of shaving-soap. Half an hour later still, looking pinker

and more cheerful than ever, he sat behind a disk of snowy linen and lifted the silver covers from sundry well-cooked and appetizing viands while an attentive and immaculate Swiss waiter hovered near to anticipate his every need.

And by the time the big hand of his watch had completed yet another half-cycle he was sitting at that same round table—cleared now except for a hammered-brass finger-bowl and an untasted *demi-tasse*—sitting there, staring at an entry which he had made in his morocco-bound notebook. His fat red fountain pen was still in his hand. The ashes from his cigarette feathered unheeded down his vest.

For upon Addison Kent's face was something very like consternation. And the colour drained slowly from his cheeks.

II

"Is—there anything I can get you, sir?"

"No! Just leave me alone!"

His voice sounded strangely dry and flat. He was unconscious entirely of the impatient gesture which banished the observant waiter to a discreet distance.

It was not what he had written—a simple entry of details—that disturbed him; it was the subconscious impression that welled upon him as he wrote—a stirring in the recesses of memory, as if what he were recording found echo somewhere in past experience—a sense of familiarity so elusive that it had required this mechanical tabulation to give it birth. Then out of it, like groping mental fingers suddenly closing, that gleam of intuition—that thought which crystallized as a blind conviction in the face of reason!

Deliberately he combated it—probing, analyzing, marshalling cold facts in review, weighing discrepancies. He forgot his surroundings—lost track of time. When finally he arose from the table the colour was back in his cheeks and an exaggerated calmness was upon him.

He went straight to a telephone booth and called Inspector Lowry, at Police Headquarters.

“If you can make it on such short notice, Jim, I’ll buy you the best dinner in town. I want to talk to you.”

“You’re on!” accepted the inspector promptly. “I want to go over things with you myself. Seen the papers? Sitting pretty, eh? Say, before I forget, your friend Malabar was calling up this afternoon, enquiring for you—seemed tickled to death over the capture of the Kid. Where’ll I meet you? Canadian Club, did you say? O.K. for—say, seven o’clock.”

Kent put in a Westchester call and presently heard the voice of Gridley, the new butler at Lamont’s.

“Is Mr. Malabar there, Gridley?”

“No sir, ’e’s not at ’ome, sir. Is this Mr. Kent? Beg pardon, sir, but I was to tell you as ’ow ’e’d ’ardly be ’ome till rahnd abaht midnight, sir.”

“Do you know where I can get in touch with him, Gridley? I wanted him to join me right away.”

“Sorry, sir, but Mr. Malabar didn’t leave no hother word, except as I knows as ’ow ’e’s dinin’ hout, an’ I’ve taken the liberty, sir, of lettin’ Gaston hoff duty for the night——”

“That’s all right, Gridley. Have there been any telephone calls for me today? Any messages or letters?”

“No, sir. Nothink, sir.”

Kent glanced at his watch. He hardly knew whether to be disappointed or relieved at the lack of any communication from Naida; if she had not yet found it safe to make an appointment to meet him again, it was no less evident that nothing had gone wrong sufficiently to justify the message she had promised to send him. Comforting himself with the old saying that no news was good news, he hurried out and swung along Forty-Second Street, past the library and down into the congestion of Broadway. He had just time to get in a call upon the management of the MacAlpine.

With the information he sought duly recorded in his notebook, Addison Kent was back at the Belmont, opposite the Grand Central Terminal, and stepped out of the elevator at the second floor into the select quarters of the Canadian Club just in time to greet his guest. It was evident that recent developments had put Inspector Lowry in good humour, and that he had arrived fully prepared to do justice to his dinner and to enjoy a quiet evening with the novelist in the comfort and seclusion afforded by the club.

The discovery that his host had dined already and proposed to content himself with a dessert in no way disconcerted the inspector's appetite or stopped his flow of reminiscence. He was there for the evening, and so interested did both participants in the succeeding private conference become that it was well on towards midnight before Addison Kent finally bade Lowry good-night and took an express for the Bronx.

He mounted the steps of the Lamont residence, key-ring in hand, but found Gridley still on duty and opening the door for him with a welcoming smile.

"Mr. Malabar is hin, sir!" he greeted, in what seemed to be an unnecessarily loud voice, and as soon

as he had received the novelist's overcoat and hat he hurried ahead down the hall to the library, calling out:

"It's Mr. Kent, sir!"

Kent smiled after him. Gridley certainly was beginning to lose some of his professional pomposity. Malabar's voice was in earnest conversation at the telephone; the disconnecting click of the instrument was simultaneous with Kent's first step down the hall.

"Hello, there! Back again, eh?" The journalist jumped up with extended hand. "Congratulations, Kent—St. Boniface Kid, you know. I read about it in the early editions—tried to get hold of you, but Lowry couldn't tell me where you were. By Jove! splendid work! When I read—— I say, why are you staring at me like that? Collar on upside down or something?"

Kent's intent gaze remained upon him in silent analysis. Behind Malabar's exuberant manner was a nervous tension which defied concealment.

"What is the matter?" Kent asked quietly.

At once Malabar shrugged his shoulders and dropped into the nearest chair. The face which he presently raised was lined by unfeigned anxiety.

"I've had some awfully bad news, old chap," he confessed. "Just getting ready to take a train for Newark. An aunt I am rather fond of—just got word she's dying—serious automobile smash——" He stopped short, biting his lip in aggravation. His face whitened.

For in two strides Addison Kent had reached the library table and was stooping to pick up from the floor a piece of yellow paper, torn from an ordinary manilla paper bag. From where he had been standing he had seen the name at the bottom of that hasty message—

boldly written in heavy black with what must have been an eyebrow-pencil. Kent's startled eyes raced over the lines:

"W. knows truth. Held prisoner—73—3—
top floor, rear—act quickly.

"NAIDA."

III

"My God!" breathed Kent. "When did this come?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"How? Messenger?"

"Yes—a ragged newsboy."

Kent turned upon him, eyes blazing.

"And you——! You were trying to keep this from me? You were planning to sneak out of here without me knowing—that cock-and-bull yarn about your aunt at Newark!—— By Heaven, Malabar! I'll give you just one minute to explain yourself! This message was for me, and I won't stand for!——"

"Message for *you!*" cried Malabar, in genuine amazement. "You are crazy! It is *my* message!"

"I tell you, it's *mine!* It's from Naida. She told me——" He checked himself abruptly. White with anger, his eyes narrowed. "Since when have you known her right name, Malabar?" he demanded sharply. "To you she was supposed to be merely 'Miss Rockwood'!"

Kent stepped quickly across to the other's chair, gathered the top of his vest into one fist and yanked him to his feet. Just as swiftly the journalist freed himself from that clutch with one sweep of a muscular arm.

"Keep your hands to yourself, Kent!" he warned in strident resentment.

They glared at each other.

"I want to know how far this thing has gone, Malabar."

"How would it be if you minded your own business!"

"That's what I'm doing!"

"You are not!"

"I repeat: Since when have you known her as 'Naida'?"

"Suppose I throw that question back in your face! When did she become 'Naida' to you?"

"Answer my question!" commanded Kent in ominously quiet tones.

"You answer mine!" retorted Malabar with spirit.

"What right have you to question me?"

"I discovered only this evening that you have been meeting her—clandestinely—at your hotel!——"

"Well? And supposing I have?"

"Now I find you trying to double-cross me, your friend, by sneaking——"

"*Sneaking!* A mean word! I'll swap you one for it—*snooping!*"—and Malabar's mouth drew down sneeringly.

Addison Kent stared at him for a moment speechlessly. With an effort he controlled himself. His face was as white as chalk with rage, but his voice when he spoke was coldly calm. Like one in a daze he began to talk quietly:

"Since I left this house a few days ago things have been happening. I came in contact with the criminals involved in this Caron case—fact is, they had me in a tight corner from which I escaped only through Naida's intervention. The danger she is in now is due to that.

She made me leave her down there because she thought it would be safer for her! She promised to send me word here if anything went wrong.

"So much for that. I have met Alceste! He is very much alive! They had me tied up, and he taunted me to my face. He was wearing black spectacles, and he had a cap pulled down over his forehead and a white silk scarf around his neck; in the folds of it he kept his chin well buried. All I could see was his mouth and the end of his nose, you understand; but I had a good look at them——"

He got slowly to his feet and crossed the room, drawing a white silk handkerchief from his pocket.

"Here, let me show you how he wore the scarf—around his neck—so!" He laughed a little. "No, up around the chin—that's better! And the beggar afterwards made me a present—of these glasses!"

As he spoke Kent held them upon Malabar's nose and leaned back in amused contemplation. Angrily Malabar struck them off, and they smashed on the tiles in front of the fireplace.

"There now, you've broken my souvenir, Dick!" protested Kent. He smiled. "Rather a clever disguise altogether, don't you think? Surprising how completely one can cover up the face, and how hard it is to recognize any single feature in detail when it is isolated from the rest."

"Don't be an ass, Kent!" Malabar at last found voice. "What has all this got to do—— For heaven's sake, let's drop it! Let's go together and rescue that girl!"

"Ah, now you talk like my good old friend Dick Malabar!" cried Kent. "I knew all we needed was something to distract our attention until we both

cooled down; hence the little demonstration. I was only going to add that one's memory is such an unreliable thing after all that it requires some definite reminder, such as——"

"Stop! Keep away from that drawer!"

Addison Kent's casually extended hand was arrested in mid-air. He moved not a muscle. For as the words pinged the room he divined, rather than saw, the lightning movement which accompanied them.

Even before he slowly crooked his head to look, he knew that Alceste's automatic was trained upon him point-blank!

Chapter XXII

A Mask is Removed

I

"CREDIT me with paying you the compliment of taking precautions, old bean," drawled the cool, insolent voice of Alceste. "You surely would not expect me to leave the cartridge clip in the magazine of the gun you keep in that drawer?—particularly when I have been rather expecting this show-down at any moment?"

He favoured the novelist with the condescending smile one might bestow upon a blundering child; but it was a smile of the lips only. Behind the levelled weapon were alert eyes, cold, hard. Kent met them with a strained look.

"You see, you have such an unfortunate habit of

making a nuisance of yourself—a bad habit that has been growing upon you of late. I had decided it was time for us to part company, and was planning to leave our happy home this evening. That was why I instructed Gridley to tell you I would not be home before midnight; I hoped to be gone before you arrived, and had you given me another twenty minutes—but, pardon me—you may sit down, of course. I said—*sit down!*”

Obediently Addison Kent backed into a chair without altering the focus of his steady gaze. He spoke no word.

“Make yourself comfortable, my dear fellow. Now that you’ve put your foot in it, we may as well have this thing out and be done with it. There are quite a few things to say—I beg your pardon, but were you trying to speak?”

“You, Malabar! Of all men—*you!*”

“I do hope you are not going to indulge in sentiment and all that sort of rot, my dear Kent! Let us drop pretence. You did not come here to-night to greet your old friend Dick Malabar, you already suspected the truth when you stepped into this room. Your real object in provoking a quarrel over that message was to uncover proof of your suspicions—playing for a look at that molar of mine with the gold band around it! Very clever of you! But although you were about to reach into that drawer for your automatic—just to be on the safe side, as it were—you were none too sure of yourself. You are not sure, even now, that I am not playing a wild prank upon you!”

“I wish to God I could think so!”

“The intensity with which you say that betrays a degree of sentimentality which I find distressing in one

who has so much cleverness to commend him. It is one of your weaknesses——”

“To have given you my honest friendship—to have trusted you—a weakness? What manner of man are you?”

“At least one who can keep his head in an emergency. Let us proceed to analyze this so-called friendship over which you are inclined to become maudlin. Let me put some straight questions to you, and I want straight answers. Is what I have surmised correct? Did you come here to-night, expecting and believing that I was Alceste?”

“Yes.”

“Very good. You are sufficiently satisfied of that to pull a gun on me?—to hand me over to the police?”

“Yes.”

“In spite of the fact that Dick Malabar’s eyes are blue, with no sign of the tattooed brown which you expected had disfigured the eyes of Alceste for life? How do you account for that?”

“I do not know. It is one of the discrepancies which I cannot explain—unless the tattooing dye has faded——”

“Well, we may put that down as one point scored on you, my dear Kent. If you will recall, the tattooing operation performed by the late lamented Dr. Mac-Murrough was by a special process of his own which enabled him to perform the operation quickly. You apparently lost sight of the fact that intentionally he might have used a special dye which would fade out and leave no trace after the lapse of—say, some months. You should have known me better than to think I would ruin my eyes for all time to come, just

to escape a momentary inconvenience. Yes, you were rather disappointing in that item!

"Suppose we try another. Take the matter of my height. According to your measurements of Alceste—carefully ascertained by you, I believe, on the former occasion of our meeting—measurements by which you seemed to set great store—well, according to those measurements, Dick Malabar is over three inches taller than Alceste! What about that? That, too, has been difficult to account for, has it not?"

"Yes—until I remembered that you stop at nothing to obtain your ends."

"Go on. You interest me greatly."

"There is an apparatus on the market for stretching the body, of course—a system of spinal treatment that allows the articular and intervertebral cartilages to expand. By gradually thickening the twenty-three rubber-like cartilages which act as cushions between the vertebral bodies in the spinal column, it is possible to increase the height by natural growth—a matter of approximately two inches. You could probably gain another inch or two through correction of posture."

"Capital, my dear fellow! Splendid! It took me just about six months to obtain the desired result, and it is permanent. When you pass maturity and your spinal shock-absorbers begin to wear thin, I recommend you to try a little systematic stretching; it will make a new man of you!

"So it was your concentrated study of my mouth the other night which gave you a glimmer of the truth, eh? I rather expected it would, you know; but it was a risk I was forced to run in order to duly impress my friend Otto."

"I—do not understand. I am in no mood for cryptograms!"

"Nor in any position to resent them!" reminded Alceste incisively. "There are so many things you do not understand! If I told you that Wasserhaus was so far from being any friend of mine that he was my worst enemy—not even excepting present company—would you believe me?"

"I have seen no evidence of it," said Addison Kent wearily.

"And if I told you that Naida rescued you the other night because I instructed her to do so, and that I kept Wasserhaus and MacGonnigle otherwise engaged while she did it—would you believe that?"

"No!"

"I thought as much! Which brings us back to where we started, you see—this wonderful friendship you have for Dick Malabar! If I put that friendship to the test by asking you to let bygones be bygones—by asking you to believe that things are often not what they seem—by pleading with you to trust in Dick Malabar, even though you now know him to be Alceste—what would you say? If I appealed to that wonderful friendship you throw at me as a reproach, and asked you to believe that in due course I could explain everything to your satisfaction—asked you to forget that I was Alceste and to join me to-night in the rescue of Naida—would you trust me, Addison Kent? Answer that! Would you?"

For a long moment the novelist looked at him steadily, seeking to fathom this new and unexpected tack, while the other watched him closely—studied every inflection of the tense face.

"There are some things which wound too deeply to

be readily forgiven—some things which are beyond explanation," answered Kent at length, in a flat voice.

"Quite so! Your boasted friendship is but surface sentimentality, incapable of any acid test! Knowing me to be Alceste, you have room in your generous heart only for enmity!" There was a tinge of bitterness in the accusation.

"Alceste has placed himself outside the pale, Malabar—if that is your real name. My duty is clear before me—to hand you straight over to the police! How dare you expect any other treatment from me, you damned scoundrel! You——"

"At least we know exactly where we stand, old bean! Now, kindly drop all sentiment and let us proceed——"

"*Gridley!*" shouted Kent at the top of his voice.
"*Gridley!*"

II

"A most unseemly bellow!" protested the mocking voice. "If there is something you are wanting, why not allow me to ring?" He reached out and pressed the push-button that summoned the butler.

Gridley was not far away, and he came on the run, checking his haste abruptly at the archway.

"Ah, Gridley, Mr. Kent wants you, I believe. It would be in order for you to sing for him that beautiful thing of Cadman's, 'Call Me No More'!"

For a moment only Addison Kent regarded the grinning servant; then he waved his hand hopelessly.

"Permit me to make you acquainted with a very good friend of mine, Kent—Mr. Bert Gridley, the well-known character actor. You have heard me speak of Mr. Kent, of course, Gridley. You might see that that

rope of yours is handy. Much as I regret it, I find we are going to need it—what's that, Kent? Oh, I thought you said something!

"You will understand that we are quite alone in the house—just we three. Gaston was anxious to get off to-night to attend his grandmother's funeral or something, and I sent Sandy away with a letter which it will take him all night to deliver. About Gridley—the opportunity of having his companionship here was too great a temptation for me to resist when the vacancy occurred. He's really a splendid fellow—reliable, strong and *willing*—aren't you, Gridley? Alongside him, Barkis was a mere beginner in willingness! You will take good care of Mr. Kent when I leave, Gridley. Better go for your rope now and hang it over that chair——"

"It's out in the dining-room, Dick."

"Then, get it. *Sit quiet*, Kent! You are much too fidgety. I hope you are not planning to try anything foolish! I would strongly advise you not to!"

"What do you propose to do?—if I might be so bold as to enquire."

With smouldering eyes the novelist tallied the net result of his sarcasm—a faint, cynical smile at the corners of that mouth.

"Well, now, I have been considering. Inasmuch as you seem so anxious to rush me to the police-station, and as that is something which undoubtedly would interfere with my night's activities and my future plans—to tell you the truth, dear old chap, I thought we would tie you up tight to a chair in here in the library where it is so cosy and warm. Gridley will remain with you, of course, for company, and will keep the fire replenished so that you can gaze into the flames and

conjure mental pictures to your heart's content—think out the plot of a new detective story, if you like. If you behave yourself, I have no doubt that Gridley will get you something to eat before morning, and perhaps he might even read you a bedtime story——”

Quick as a flash of light Addison Kent acted. Nothing was to be gained by attempting to secure the automatic from the table drawer; with the clip of cartridges missing it would be utterly useless. Equally futile would be any effort to overcome Alceste by sudden assault; for the powerfully-built Gridley would bring the fight to a termination no less sudden than unsatisfactory. A single chance only lay open—a slim one—of flight. If Kent could dodge out through the library archway without being shot down, there was a chance that he might reach the front door before Gridley reappeared. The pointing automatic was too great a risk to wrestle with the catches of the glass doors which opened on the tiled portico; he would be shot to pieces! No, the only chance was to duck and run for it—a dangerous hazard. With apparent weariness, Kent yawned prodigiously, stretching wide his arms and knotting his muscles. The moment his right hand came in contact with the little onyx table beside his chair his fingers darted for the neck of the heavy Venetian vase that stood upon it.

With that backward grip came his sudden forward leap—one single movement—the overhand fling of his arm that sent the vase hurtling through the air with the full weight of big muscles behind it—the cat-like side-spring which threw his body low and landed him halfway across the space separating him from the archway.

He did not wait to note the accuracy of his aim. The loud crash of the vase was in his ears as he lunged for

the portières with a desperate energy which he had never surpassed in the wildest Rugby rush of his college days.

"Get him, Grid!"

Through the archway catapulted Kent. To the left he dashed—down the wide hall where the polished floors and panelling caught the sheen of the lights. He wondered why Alceste did not fire. He was conscious of the startled Gridley behind him, near the archway, with a coiled rope in his hand. Then, just as hope was lending wings to his flying feet—just as he was straining for the vestibule—

Hiss-ss-ss-ss! Along that smooth, slippery, well-waxed floor, like a long black snake, shot Gridley's rope. The next instant Addison Kent was jerked on his face—flung prone with a force which whacked the breath out of his body!

Chapter XXIII "For You the Game is Ended!"

LIKE a roped steer the novelist was dragged ignominiously along the hall, feet first, through the archway into the library. Half stunned, he was placed on a straight-backed chair around which flew coil after coil of the lariat until he was pinned there, as helpless as if he were encased in a strait-jacket.

"'Western stuff,' I believe they call it," was Alceste's amused comment as he slid his automatic into his hip pocket. "Good work, Grid! Tie his feet to

the front legs of the chair, and I guess we may come to the conclusion that the gentleman is in for the night and guaranteed a quiet evening at home among the friendliest of companions—oh, not you, Grid! I refer to good books—such as you see lining the walls of this beautiful room. It is hardly likely that Mr. Kent will be feeling any too kindly towards you for that nasty bruise on his head and—*jt!*—*jt!*—his lip is cut! Wipe that trickle of blood off his chin—ah, that's charitable of you, Gridley. You may go now and finish packing; I'll ring when I need you."

As he spoke he tapped the end of a cigarette vertically upon the silver case from which he had taken it. Carefully he inserted it in an amber mouthpiece, methodically lighted it and exhaled a cloud of blue vapour at the ceiling.

"I warned you not to try anything silly, Kent. Perhaps I should have told you that Mr. Gridley at one time was a motion-picture star—the original 'Pinto Pete' in a series of famous cowboy pictures—and throws a lariat with the best of them. I don't know what your friend Lamont is going to say to you for smashing that rare vase of his! Just look at it! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

He lolled back in a big leather chair and regarded the prisoner quizzically. Then his eyes narrowed, and he leaned forward quickly.

"You fool! Do you think this is some five-o'clock tea-party? Lucky for you that Gridley's lariat got you, or I should have been under the painful necessity of potting you from the portico!"

Addison Kent rolled his head impatiently.

"Are you man enough to answer three questions truthfully?" he challenged bitterly.

"What is worrying you, dear boy?"

"Is that message from Naida genuine?"

"Why, of course it is!"

"Am I right in supposing that you claim to love her?"

"Yes, she is very dear to me indeed!"

"Then, in God's name, why are you wasting time here when you ought to be flying to her rescue? What happens to me doesn't matter; but for God's sake, go to her at once!"

There was no doubting the sincerity in the husky voice, the honest anxiety in his eyes.

"You believe me to be a—shall we say, rival?—for the lady's favour? And, believing that, you would send me to her to become her hero?"

"Quit your everlasting gab! What do our differences matter when she stands in need of help? Good heavens! man, don't you realize that her very life and honour——" He paused at the other's raised hand, at the strange smile that warmed the face for a moment—the smile that for just an instant revealed the old Dick Malabar he had known with affection.

"You are worrying unnecessarily, old chap. Forgive me for not advising you at once that everything is being done for Naida that can be done at the moment. Already I have taken action—over the telephone—and she will be protected. She was removed from the address given in that note very shortly after she despatched it; so it would be useless to go there. I know where she is; you do not. I know how to rescue her in the surest way; you do not. But I cannot make the final move in the matter for a few hours, and I swear to you that I am telling you only the truth.

"With so much at stake you may begin to understand why I would have shot you down without hesitation had you escaped from the house! Affairs of which you have no inkling are coming to a swift and dangerous culmination, and I can brook no interference with my movements from you or the police!" Alceste paused, and the flinty lines repossessed his lean face. "Understand this, Addison Kent; so far as you are concerned the game is over; the pieces presently will be laid away in a wooden box and the chessboard folded on you. You are going to be put where your interference with me will cease. At last it is *checkmate!*"

"Must I remind you that a cut lip is hardly the right condition for laughing," drawled Kent contemptuously. "Your tragic theatricality is passable comedy; but when so long drawn out it becomes a boring performance. If you seek to entertain me, I am more interested in these affairs of which you say I have no inkling. I hope you are not going to tell me that you are going in for bootlegging! It would be so *déclassé* after your artistic activities in acquisition of the treasure of Osiris!"

"Ah, I can see that you are feeling better, my dear Kent," purred Alceste. "You ought to do more public speaking! Yes, it has been rather a pretty little game, although you have been too easily fooled for it to have been very exciting. Shall we hold a post-mortem on it? Would you care to have me point out your bad plays!"

"It was you who took the golden scarab ruby from the breast of the mummy that night!" accused Kent bluntly.

"Something you certainly should have found out long before this," admitted Alceste coolly.

"And the mummy of the cat—you stole that also?"

"Assuredly, old top! Inasmuch as the cat was the hiding-place for a fortune in precious stones—diamonds, rubies, pearls, sapphires and so forth—you would scarcely expect me to overlook it! Besides, had I not taken possession of these trinkets somebody else would have got them that same night."

"The man I saw on the wall in the rain, of course."

"Of course."

"Wasserhaus!"

"Gridley's lariat seems to have jarred some of the cobwebs out of your brain! Your perspicacity amazes me!"

"So your story of the supposed fight you had with the intruder out there in the midst of the thunderstorm—that was a pure fabrication!"

"As a writer of fiction you should be able to appreciate it."

Kent studied the sardonic smile of his enemy with disturbing realization of the extent to which he had been duped.

"We found you lying in a rain-puddle near the gates—Sandy and I—with a gash on the top of your head, a bad bruise on your brow and sundry bad scratches. At least your wounds were real!" declared Kent caustically. "You had to have an alibi; so you inflicted them upon yourself."

"Really, my dear fellow, the light of understanding is making you quite bright to-night! If you want to know, I bashed my head against one of the stone gateposts—ran at it full tilt like a jousting knight. It was a simple matter, of course, to shoot holes through my shirt with my automatic, and when you and the gardener arrived I promptly fainted. The only difficulty

I experienced was to keep from laughing while you were lugging me to the house."

"It was typical of you who never do things by halves," muttered Kent. "Instead of trying to capture the big man, you passed the jewels to him—your accomplice!" He looked up quickly. "Why did you go to the trouble of faking those footprints outside the cellar window and again up in the bedroom?"

"A clumsy piece of work, I concede. I wanted you to think it was the man who had visited Professor Caron and left the imprint of his golf boot in the library."

"That was Wasserhaus!"

"Was it?"

"You know it was! You know it was he who killed Caron!"

"Excuse me, Kent! I know nothing about the murder of Professor Caron."

"Nor who killed Mokra?"

"I do not know."

"You lie!"

"I tell you, my hands are clean!" surged Alceste. He controlled his anger with an effort and reached abruptly for the push-button.

"What was Naida doing there that night?" demanded Kent suddenly.

"I believe you are the only one who insists that she was there at all!" was Alceste's surprising rejoinder.

"Is everything ready, Gridley?"

"All set," replied the butler, who had just stepped into the room.

"At least it was she who called here early that morning, passing herself off as a newspaper woman."

"Yes, she called then to see if I was all right," answered Alceste coldly. "My time is up, and I am

leaving you now. It is quite possible I may not see you again, Addison Kent. In parting I have only this to say to you: It is unfortunate that a man of your ability should mix so much folly with his cleverness. You should have stuck to your impossible detective stories and left actual police work alone. You are a bungler who succeeds only in making himself an annoyance. You have been a mere child in my hands, and I could have killed you times without number. But I chose to let you live in the hope that you would see the error of your ways and mind your own business! It was partly with the idea of studying you at close quarters and perhaps influencing you to drop your meddling in things outside your legitimate field that I used your acquaintanceship with Richard Malabar to work from the inside on this adventure."

"You did not play fair! You struck below the belt!" cried Kent furiously.

"Remember what I said about sentiment!" reminded Alceste in sharp reproof. "I have no stomach for friendship which will not stand the test of faith. You have chosen your own bed and you are going to lie in it. As for Naida——"

"As for Naida, she is mine! I do not believe she loves you!"

"Yours!" laughed Alceste. "Well, well! How pretty a conceit! You seem to lose sight of the fact that for you the game is ended, as I have already pointed out. Shortly after three o'clock this morning—it is now just 1.23 by my watch—a closed car will call here for you. Gridley will go with you, of course, to see that you are safely delivered at the other end of the journey. Every provision will have been made for taking care of you and preventing any further activity on your part.

Meanwhile, you will remain right here, just as you are, with Gridley to see that you behave yourself. Much as I would like to loosen that lariat and trust to your word of honour—you would not give your promise as a gentleman, I suppose, to make no attempt to escape or communicate——"

"No!" refused Kent vehemently.

"Quite so. It is purely a matter of your comfort, dear old chap; but it is just as well. And now, I must go; but first, with your permission——"

He stepped across to the library table and from a drawer—the same drawer for which Addison Kent's hand had been reaching when Alceste stopped him—he lifted the automatic which the novelist kept there. Fascinated, Kent watched him coolly extract *a full clip of cartridges* from the magazine of the weapon!"

"It is unfortunate that our automatics are of the same make and calibre, is it not? You see, old bean, you came in on me before I had quite finished my preparations, and my own gun was empty. So, if you don't mind, I will just transfer this full clip now and"—bowing elaborately—"bid you a fond farewell!"

At the archway he paused and bowed again. Then across the room drove the full-throated mockery of Alceste's laugh. And for Addison Kent it left an echo of derision and a sense of utter defeat.

THE hush of the night hours mantled park and boulevard. Winding driveways were deserted; only at long intervals did a belated automobile speed loud passage through quiet streets or a footfall upon pavement knock onward with solitary emphasis.

The Lamont residence was in darkness except for dim light in one spot. The mellow chime of the huge old clock in the lower hall was followed by two slow strokes—*whirr-rr-boom-m-m!*—*thirr-rr-boom-m-m!* The momentary resonance rode arrogantly forth upon the stillness of the house; the stillness came back. In the library the coals rustled softly in the grate as the red heart of the fire settled closer to its thin bed of gray ashes. Through the great room restless shadows tossed, reaching blindly about the rich woodwork—miserly fingers which groped for elusive glints of firelight reflected upon polished surfaces. The heavy curtains were drawn across the French windows; but beyond the glass doors the dimly lighted library doubled itself indistinctly against the lurking blackness outside.

Two a.m.! One more hour of discomfort and monotony to endure! Shortly after three, Alceste had said, the car would call. Addison Kent found himself looking forward to its arrival with a degree of eagerness which he would not have thought possible. Any kind of action which would bring this torture to an end was to be welcomed. His limbs were growing numb from

the stricture of his bonds. He had ceased to plead for relief; the callous Gridley sat slumped in a leather chair, feet sprawled toward the fire, lost in the pages of a book while he abstractedly munched, munched, munched—*sslup!*—apples!

The champing of Gridley's jaws irritated Kent. The odour of the apples irritated him. The whole situation was getting on his nerves. He tried to doze; but thought was piling, coiling, in his mind, and for once he could not bring on that blankness which he had trained so carefully to answer to his call when he wanted to cease thinking and go to sleep. There was nothing for it but to mount the black beast that obsessed him and give rein.

The thoughts which swooped upon him in the bitterness of that dark hour were sable-winged. Defeat and derision jeered at him in the laughing echoes Alceste had left in his ears. Humiliation dragged at him. Self-reproach pointed a scornful finger. He had failed—miserably! As his enemy had said, for him the game was over, and he had lost!

The first ten minutes had been sufficient to satisfy him that there was nothing he could do except to await the will of his captors. Bound to the chair so securely, the hope of working free from the lariat with its Western hitches soon expired. If he moved, the chair would have to go with him. It would be possible to overbalance it; but what advantage would be gained by lying prone upon the floor? Even if it were possible to hunch along toward the telephone over in the corner, Gridley had taken care to plant himself beside it. To tumble on to the fireplace and burn the lariat somehow?—Gridley would be after him at the first move! Shout for help?—They were alone in the great house that

stood back in its grounds, well away from the deserted highway. Use some pretext to get the butler out of the room?—Gridley was alert, suspicious.

So Addison Kent sat on, his head sagged in pretence of sleep; but behind his closed eyelids he was busily going over and over the situation from every possible angle—and finding no loophole of escape! His memory retraced the conspiring hours which had led to this cul-de-sac—back over the entire stretch of events to that first night when he and the pseudo-Malabar had called upon the late Professor Caron.

Only a few weeks ago: Yet what a change! Professor Caron was dead—murdered! Mokra, Lamont's faithful Algerian butler, was dead—also foully murdered! The mummies and relics of the archæologist were gone. The golden scarab with its startling ruby was gone. Kellani, the Nubian servant of Caron—that silent brown slave out of the *Arabian Nights*—was a fugitive! "Dick Malabar" had vanished! Kent alone remained, and, according to Alceste, soon he too would be—gone!

What were they going to do with him? The closed automobile would arrive presently. Where would it take him?—to what fate? Was he to be spirited to some out-of-the-way spot and deliberately murdered like the others? Alceste had been free enough with his talk. How much of it was mere bluff?

Bluff! The man was a dare-devil! All through that tense scene between them he had sat there, smiling and bluffing, relying upon an empty gun to enforce his commands—aware all the time that if Kent had reached into that table drawer and possessed himself of the loaded weapon, the whole situation would have been altered in an eye-wink! Yet Alceste had made no

move to eliminate the danger; he had been content to bluff it out, as if he revelled in hazards which another man would have hastened to avoid!

Or was it that because he was a past-master of psychology he trusted to mental control? For Alceste had not lied. He had not said that he had removed the cartridge-clip; he had merely *suggested* that Kent would hardly expect him to leave the gun loaded under the circumstances. He had been confident that Kent would accept the suggestion because no normal individual would act otherwise; to disarm an expected opponent was so palpably the thing to do, if possible. And, like a big fool, Kent had not reasoned clearly; he should have realized what was now very apparent: the fact of Alceste trying to stop him from opening the drawer was *proof* that the gun was *loaded*!

As the novelist's mind skipped back nimbly over the weeks during which Alceste had lived close to him under the guise of friendship, it was to marvel at the man's audacity. The masquerade at times had been edged with difficult situations which had been carried off in convincing manner. Not once had Alceste's resourcefulness failed him or his sang-froid weakened. Even granting that the thing had been accomplished only by taking unfair advantage of Kent's trust and friendship, nevertheless it had been a daring venture, boldly piloted to success. Only by assuming an identity which would be unquestioned by his enemies dared Alceste return to New York. The heart of the enemy's camp he had chosen as his safest retreat! He had forestalled suspicion by living and working with the very man he most feared! That had required nerve, and Kent conceded reluctant admiration.

The strategical advantages of the situation were at once apparent. Everything had played right into his enemy's hands! The visit to Professor Caron, as Kent's sponsored friend, had put him at once in touch with the object of his visit to America—the priceless golden scarab ruby and the other jewels. To plan the theft had been easy; it was Alceste who had suggested that the scarab be kept on the premises instead of being placed at once in a safety-deposit vault—that it be placed on the breast of the mummy, nice and handy for him—that he should stand guard during the first half of the night! No wonder he had said Kent was easy to fool and was nothing but a bungler!

And with what consummate skill throughout the man had played the rôle of Richard Malabar! To assume a warm, friendly personality so foreign to his real self had required histrionic talent of a high order. He had made himself very agreeable, a charming companion, a clever conversationalist, a man of taste and refinement! The kindly expression of his eyes——

Eyes! Not brown but blue! Alceste was not fool enough to ruin his eyes for life! Of course not! Kent should have had sense enough to suspect the truth—the use of a *fading* ink by Dr. MacMurrough for the tattooing operation! And right over there in that chair the impudent beggar had sat, calmly asking Kent how Alceste was to be recognized if he did show up in New York, and never batting an eye when Kent had explained in detail just why Alceste's "damaged" brown eyes would require to be concealed behind dark-coloured spectacles!—explained that Alceste was three inches shorter than Malabar——

Something else Kent should not have relied upon—those carefully acquired measurements of Alceste on file at the Minaki Annex apartment! He should have remembered that this paranoiac stopped at nothing to obtain his ends—had once changed the colour of his eyes, had left charred evidence of his death to mislead Scotland Yard and, through them, make the world safe for a fresh start. A man who would knock his head against a stone gatepost to inflict wounds when wounds happened to be necessary to deceive—such a man would not overlook the advantage of increasing his height. It was so simply acquired by therapeutic stretching that Kent should have foreseen the possibility.

“It’s just as he says; I have been the veriest child in his hands!” muttered the novelist in self-abasement. “He has played with me at will from the first! He was meeting Naida——”

Naida! Wildly Kent’s mind raced down this new avenue of surmise. In an agony he wrestled with the problem of the girl’s part in the puzzle. Only for one heart-stopping moment did black doubt assail him; then he swept it aside impatiently. No matter what Alceste declared—no matter how appearances might point—he must believe in her. It was the one thing to which he clung. He *knew* she was all right—true blue. Those devils who had her in their power—any part she had played in the maze of events she had been *forced* to play. He must not allow crafty suggestion to mislead him a second time.

Those words of Alceste—“Affairs of which you have no inkling are coming to a swift and dangerous culmination!” What had he meant? Some drama altogether outside this Caron case?—a dire something,

the evil roots of which reached backward into the past—into the East? Had it to do with that nebulous "Order of the Golden Scarab" which poor Caron had mentioned with bated breath? Alceste was involved in that somehow. "Dead he may be; but his evil lives after him!" had been Caron's comment—in the presence of Alceste himself! And Caron had been murdered within the next few hours!

Yet Alceste had denied angrily all knowledge of the murder, declaring that his hands were clean. Suppose that were true. Suppose Alceste himself were in the dark. He had been pale with worry that night when they rode homeward after their visit to the excited Professor. They had talked of Caron's evident fear and its cause; Alceste had admitted his belief that the golden scarab was at the bottom of it. In what way? "God knows!" had been his solemn reply to that question.

But Alceste's mystification explained nothing. How had that magnificent ruby come into the Frenchman's possession? As with all such outstanding jewels, no doubt the shadows of dark deeds lurked upon the path it had travelled through time and distance. Here in New York it had come unexpectedly to light, and here in New York—almost immediately—its evil influence had been manifested. Had Alceste's interest in it been other than the mere theft of a valuable gem? Had he known it was on its way across the Atlantic and dared everything for some deeper purpose? And now the event—whatever it was—was coming to this "swift and dangerous culmination."

If it was an affair of which Addison Kent could have no inkling, what was the use in attempting to speculate upon it? He was travelling in a circle. Yet it

intrigued him—worried him. Alceste was concerned in it; who else might be involved? Wasserhaus? Kellani? *Naida!* There was no telling what—no tell—

For a moment Addison Kent's thoughts came to a full stop. He sat there in blank astonishment, staring straight before him. He listened—listened for the slightest sound—listened for a repetition of the queer thing that had obtruded upon his vagrant attention. He was entirely alive to his immediate surroundings; for he was almost certain he had caught a slight sound that belonged outside that room.

Slowly he turned his head till he had full observation of Gridley. But that phlegmatic individual gave no evidence of having heard anything. He was still engrossed in the book—still munching apples. The plate was empty, Kent noticed, and Gridley's great teeth were just biting into the last red apple. No, *he* had heard nothing.

Yet Kent's ears were acute, and he was sure he had heard a sound out there on the portico somewhere—like the soft scrape of a boot upon the portico tiles—a heavy boot, placed with infinite caution. He watched the glass doors keenly, unwaveringly; but all he saw was the dimly red reflection—

No! Beyond that—out there in the blackness beyond—what was that point of light?—two points—three points of light—as if something out there caught gleam from the room? Scarcely breathing, he watched, watched. Then he realized that slowly these points of light were creeping closer and—in a moment—

His thrill of excitement increased. He knew now what it was—a pair of eyes and a row of white teeth beneath! But they seemed to be disembodied—to be

floating in the dark without a face to make them human!

Then he saw the face! It was coming nearer. Presently it was being pressed against one of the little bevelled panes of glass. The eyes rolled as the man quickly surveyed the room within. And the face was swarthy—black—negroid! Upon the large head was an old hat such as seamen wear.

Astounded, Kent stared. He could not believe his eyes! Was he dreaming? Yet there was no mistake. *It was Kellani!*—the huge Nubian who had fled from the house the night Mokra was murdered—the man for whom the whole police machine had combated the city in vain!—Kellani himself, widely grinning now—grinning in at him and suddenly signalling him in warning silence!

Chapter XXV

Open Sesame

I

KELLANI!—alive and in New York!—back here at the very scene of the murder for which he was "wanted" by the police! They were searching for him everywhere. How had he escaped them? Why did he come here in the night to the Lamont residence, of all places? Was he friend or foe?

The sight of those large rolling black eyes in that negroid face out there in the dark had startled Addison

Kent. It took him a few minutes to recover from the sudden thrusting upon him of an identity so unexpected and almost uncanny. From the first this mountainous bronze creature had seemed like some slave from the *Arabian Nights*—a genie—bizarre, theatrical. He had vanished the night of the storm as if upon a magic carpet; he reappeared now as if summoned from the air by the rubbing of a magic Aladdin's lamp!

After his first astonishment Kent began to think quickly. The friendliness of the Nubian's grin seemed genuine enough. At a glance he had taken in the situation, and it was evident from his actions that he intended to do something about it. Hence his warning for Kent to remain silent. The novelist waited, not a little curious as to the procedure Kellani would adopt.

The swarthy face had vanished. Not a sound revealed the presence of an intruder. The Nubian was familiar with the Lamont mansion, and it was likely he would attempt to gain admittance through a basement entry in the deserted servants' wing. In that case he might be expected to approach the library silently from the inside.

Kent yawned noisily. Without seeming to do so intentionally, he managed to shift his chair slightly, so that the archway into the hall came within his line of vision. At the movement Gridley looked up from his book and grinned across the white apple-core poised in his hand.

"Gettin' tired, Kent? We won't be on the move till about an hour from now, I guess; so there's time for another of those nice naps of yours. Say, those apples were great! You don't know what you're missing——"

"Might poke up the fire a little, Gridley, if you don't mind," Kent suggested.

"Not a bad idea at that," conceded Gridley as he rose, luxuriating in a satisfying stretch. "Beats a how cramped a fellow gets, just sitting, don't it?"

He stepped to the fireplace and with the brass tongs stirred the coals and added a lump of fresh fuel.

Kent threw a swift glance towards the archway. Yes, Kellani was there! Leaning out from the concealment of the portières, the Nubian flashed a signal which Kent answered with a nod of understanding.

"I have been studying that wonderful painting up there above the mantel, Gridley," he remarked in an intimate, interested way. "I've looked at that Turner many times; but I do not believe I fully appreciated it before. Perhaps the subdued lighting is just right for it. Come here. Take a good long look at it— No, stand over there and you'll get it at a better angle! I want you to tell me, now, if you don't agree with me that the colour tones of that sunset are simply marvellous. They seem almost the real thing, don't they?"

Flattered by the respectful tone in which Addison Kent was deferring to his judgment upon this artistic matter, Gridley cleared his throat importantly and stood with legs apart, gazing up at the canvas with his head inclined critically to one side.

But his judgment was never pronounced! Creeping with the stealth of a leopard, the Nubian crossed the intervening space—and was upon him! Not with a rush and a jump—just a quiet contact of his body against his victim's back, followed by a quick double twist which interlocked the two bodies in an immovable embrace.

Gridley was no weakling. His amazement, however, was so complete that for a moment he just stood there. Then when he summoned his muscles to action he found

himself as helpless as if wedged in a vice. About his legs were twined legs more powerful than his; his arms had been drawn up behind his back and interlocked there as by a bolt of muscular iron. He could not move! He had been grasped in such a way that any increased pressure produced sharp, penetrating pain, as if a nerve centre were impinged. Perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

Then he saw the great brown hand, with fingers spread, advancing up his chest towards his throat, and he opened his mouth to voice his panic. But the fingers darted in, closing his windpipe in a throttling grip, so that only a mere gurgle escaped.

Kellani looked over his shoulder and grinned reassuringly at Addison Kent. There was so much calm confidence in that grin—the mahogany countenance was so impassive that for a little Kent scarcely realized what was happening. Gridley's eyes were protruding and his face had blackened before the novelist perceived that the man was being slowly but surely choked to death!

Kent's cry of protest was ignored. Kellani continued to grin. Not until the big body of the butler went limp did the Nubian remove his strangling clutch. With the untangling of the limbs Gridley's body slumped to the floor and rolled over inertly like a sack of meal.

"You've killed him!" gasped Kent, staring down in horror.

"No, sidi," murmured Kellani quietly, already busy with the knots of the lariat. "Soon the breath of life will come again into the son of a dog! There is need for haste, master."

II

He spoke in Arabic, a language Addison Kent understood better than he could talk. Kellani's French, on the other hand, was poor, Kent remembered, although the Nubian seemed to understand well enough what was said to him in that language. Between the two, they should be able to get along satisfactorily.

There was a lot of talking to do. Kent had many questions to ask, and Kellani seemed to evince anxiety that no time be lost. He already had lifted the unconscious Gridley from the floor to the chair Kent had just vacated and, using the same lariat, was rapidly trussing the plastic butler securely while the novelist stamped about the library, kicking his legs and swinging his arms to restore them to normal state. By the time Kellani's task was completed, Gridley was showing signs of coming back to a full knowledge of life's vicissitudes. The Nubian lifted the chair with its human freight as if it had been a roped bundle for a camel's back; he stood with it perched high on one powerful shoulder and looked enquiringly at Kent.

"Where do you want this viper put, sidi?"

"We'll stick him down cellar—in the furnace room where he will be out of earshot," was the novelist's prompt decision, and forthwith the human package was transported there like a sack of apples and deposited with a thump.

"There is much to say, sidi, and many things to do before the coming up of the sun," Kellani began as soon as they were back in the library. "This night is possessed by deeds of black devils! Allah save us from evil! I have come far and by shadowed ways to bring you my message, master. I come from the Daughter of the Morning—from the Little Lady who is as beautiful

tiful as morning light across the sands. She bids you make haste to join her."

"What—what the devil are you trying to say?" puzzled Kent. "Where have you been hiding? On some vessel? Is that why you are wearing these sailor togs? How did you get here? What brings you?"

"Allah is great and good!" smiled Kellani. "I have been held in bondage, *sidi*. I have escaped by swimming through troubled waters. See, I have been very wet! The Little Lady, whose face of beauty is the reflection of a beautiful heart, was kind to me and helped me to escape. She sent me here to find you, master. She is known to you as Naida, and may Allah preserve——"

"What!" Kent seized the Nubian's great arm and regarded him with imperative eyes. "Naida! You say *Naida* sent you? You know where she is? Speak, man!"

"Her eyes that are like the morning star——"

"Speak!" commanded Kent impatiently. "Where is she?"

"——will be clouded over, *sidi*, unless we reach the ship before the day falls," finished Kellani composedly.

"The ship? What ship?" Then he knew! "You mean the *Albatross*?—Wasserhaus?—he has taken her there?"

"Yes, *sidi*, even so has it come to pass."

For just an instant Addison Kent eyed the Nubian keenly, searching the inscrutable brown face for possible trickery. But a few direct questions dispelled all doubts; Kellani knew the facts of Kent's narrow escape from his enemies through the underground passage with Naida—things which only Naida could have told him.

"Let me get this straight, Kellani. You saw her

brought aboard the *Albatross* by Wasserhaus himself. You have been on that vessel ever since the night you ran away from this house. You had been seized by Wasserhaus and his gang because you knew too much and you were taken out there for safe-keeping—locked up—a prisoner. Naida was considered safe, once on the ship, and was allowed to move freely about the vessel. She found out you were a prisoner and assisted you to escape. She sent you to me, and you got away from the vessel and were picked up by a tug and brought to the waterfront. There you boarded a river boat and came up the Hudson to a point above here, landed and came down to Westchester from the north after dark. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sidi."

"You know the location of the *Albatross* now?"

"Yes, sidi."

"And can take me there?"

"Yes, sidi."

"Why did you run away from here the night Mokra was killed? Do you know that the police are trying to find you, and that if they do, you will be arrested for—murder?"

The Nubian's eyes looked frankly back at him.

"I did not kill Mokra," he stated evenly. "I went away because it was so commanded and I was afraid, sidi, to disobey. Knowledge had not been opened to me then; but I have learned since." A flicker of hate gleamed in his eyes—and was gone again. "By the grace of Allah, I go from here, master, to bring punishment upon the man who killed Mokra! Time presses, sidi."

"And who is that, Kellani? Wasserhaus? It was Wasserhaus who killed Mokra that night?"

"Yes, sidi. But the man's real name is not Wasserhaus. In the East he is known as Von Strom—Ludwig Von Strom!"

III

As Kellani said, time was pressing. Questions would have to wait. Action! Action! Tingling with the prospect, Addison Kent sprang to the telephone. Already his clear-thinking brain was canvassing the situation swiftly—gauging the hazards, discarding, deciding. The sudden turn of the wheel which had lifted him out of dark despondency had elevated him to pinnacles of hope. Naida had sent for him, and he was going to her! Youth sang in his veins as he responded to the call.

In a fever of impatience he fumed at the delay in getting telephone connection. He wanted Pomereski, and he wanted him at once. Pomereski might be asleep—might be out—might be— Ah, the luck had changed! Pomereski's voice came over the wire communicating with the Pole's personal quarters—his bedroom.

Rapidly Addison Kent made enquiries and issued instructions. No, Slipper Dagg and his men had not left yet; but they would be starting in an hour from now. Yes, Pomereski knew where to find him. Yes, Pomereski thought it could be arranged.

Kent swung from the telephone.

"The servants are all away, Kellani. Out in the garage—the Sedan—I'll drive it myself. It is the quickest way—and safest. You can tell me the rest as we travel. Are you armed?"

With a slow smile the Nubian thrust a hand under his jersey and produced a long dagger with a curved

point. It gleamed wickedly in the fireshine. Ken shook his head.

"You'll need a gun. Wait!"

Upstairs to his room he raced, three steps at a time. He slipped on a sweater, kicked off his shoes, pulled off his golf boots and snatched a cap from a hook. He strapped on a loaded police automatic in its holster, thrust a spare revolver into his pocket and, with a large package of cartridges in his hand, plunged downstairs again.

Down to the cellar to take a look at Gridley! The butler had recovered consciousness, and glared sullenly up at him.

"Your friends will be along soon, Gridley. You will hardly be able to attract their attention down here. The servants will look after you later on. I am leaving a note for Sandy, who will hand you over to the police in due course. You are too full of apples to need anything to eat!"

He slammed the furnace-room door behind him and locked it. Out in the garage he measured the gasoline in the tank of the Sedan, scribbled a note to Sandy in explanation and pinned this to a post where the gardener could not fail to see it as soon as he opened the door.

A moment later they were rolling out between the stone gate-posts—and shot away with roaring engines, splitting the night.

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Chapter XXVI

From the Valley of Whispers

THE hands of the little clock under its tiny electric bulb beside the speedometer pointed 2.40. At 3.45 Slipper Dagg and his men would be pulling out to sea. Fastest going by the shortest route to the rendezvous mentioned by Pomareski would take at least three-quarters of an hour. Twenty minutes away—that was all!

Adesso, Kent tapped on the accelerator as they swung a corner onto Westchester Avenue. They tore across Watcher Creek. At that hour the streets were deserted and through Westchester Square they sped without check. If a policeman stopped them, the novelist had only to show his badge; Kent explained this to the Mexican and instructed him to drop the floor of the car if necessary, and cover up with the plaid rug. The danger of recognition was not great but it was well to take no chances of the delay which a argument would entail. They rolled swiftly over the Bronx Bridge and headed south-west towards Third Avenue at East Hundred-and-Fiftieth Street.

Now talk, Kellani. I want the whole story of your connection with this man Wassernaus, or Von Strom.

In the Arabian's large black eyes glowed quiet admiration for his friend at the wheel of the flying car—the man who knew how to get to places quickly, how to handle policemen, how to command the situation and bring them both out of all difficulties. The beautiful

"Daughter of the Morning," as Kellani had named her, had said this gentleman was good and brave and Kellani was glad to obey him. With straightforward simplicity the brown giant from the distant Nile country told all that he knew.

Nor in the telling did he attempt to spare himself condemnation for the evil ways into which he had fallen through association with low companions in Cairo. He had drifted so gradually from one thing to another that he had come under the power of Ludwig Von Strom before he realized what it all meant—when it was too late to turn back; for Von Strom had seemed to take a special delight in bringing about Kellani's final subjugation. Perhaps he had coveted the Nubian's great physical development as an addition to the fighting strength of his robber band.

That was what they were, as Kellani soon discovered—brigands who waylaid and robbed and sometimes killed. As a mere recruit in crime the brown giant had not been admitted to the inner circle of his new associates; he had first to be tested and to prove his qualifications for such honour. So it came about that, as his initiation, the Nubian was assigned the task of getting Professor Emil Caron into the toils.

What Von Strom's object was in approaching the inoffensive archaeologist, Kellani did not stop to enquire. He did as he was told—blindly, intent only upon pleasing Von Strom. His instructions were to obtain employment with Professor Caron, making himself so useful that the preoccupied little Frenchman gradually would come to rely upon him more and more for the execution of bothersome details.

So efficient had Kellani proved himself that by the time the Frenchman was ready to undertake his planned

journey into the desert in search of rock inscriptions, the Nubian was entrusted with most of the preparations. This included the hiring of the cameleers and all caravan arrangements.

Von Strom had told him to bribe the guides to run off with all but two camels and most of the equipment, leaving Kellani and Professor Caron alone in the desert, to all appearance lost. Kellani had desert experience, and, while pretending not to know his way, he was to "wander" to a certain valley where Von Strom and his men would be waiting.

No harm was intended, the German had assured Kellani. It was merely that the leader of the brigands had important business to transact with the archæologist—business so very confidential that none must know of it. The clever lies he told were not discovered to be lies by the trusting Nubian until long afterward.

The valley which Kellani was to seek was difficult to find—a dire, far-off place of unknown voices which for ever whispered among the rocks—echoes which cried and groaned and fell suddenly silent, only to break out again in mad laughter. A place of terror in very truth when the blue shadows crept into the hollows while the barren hilltops stood out black against the red dusk—most terrible of all when the stars burned big and bright in the deep cavern of the night and bats fluttered and flopped, and gloomy owls hooted answer to wailing hyenas on distant ridges of the desert! Kellani had been to this Valley of Whispers once before, and he was afraid.

Yet he tried to find it. But for a time they had been actually lost; so that the supply of water gave out, and the last of that journey had been a nightmare for both

Kellani and the archæologist. When only a drink was left in the goatskin water-bottle, Professor Caron had insisted upon Kellani taking it; Kellani was a big man who needed more water than a little man, he argued, and also it was upon Kellani that hope of rescue depended. In that extremity the two men—the white and the brown—had looked long into each other's faces, and it was then that there had been lighted in the breast of the simple Nubian the fires of an undying affection for the Frenchman who was at once master and friend.

More by good luck than anything else, Kellani finally discovered the right direction, and, half dead with thirst, they had reached the Valley of Whispers and had been taken to the camp of the brigands, where Von Strom hastened to allay the fears of Professor Caron by overtures of friendship. When they had rested and recovered from the effects of their experience, long talks took place between Von Strom and the Frenchman. Then one day the two of them rode away from the valley alone, the archæologist with a bandage over his eyes. Kellani was ordered to remain behind; but did so with some misgivings.

At the end of seven days both rode back into the valley, and Professor Caron's eyes were still bandaged, as if to conceal from him the location of the valley. Kellani was overjoyed to see him again. Where they had gone he did not know; it was enough that his master was back again, apparently in his usual good health.

Yet there had been a difference which, after a few days, began to puzzle Kellani. He thought that his master was afraid of something. There was a hunted look in the little Professor's eyes at times—a look which

he hastened to conceal. Apparently he was in the best of spirits, and his merry laugh rang out in Von Strom's tent frequently. Nevertheless——

Then Kellani learned that his master was about to leave for America—that far-off country of which so much was heard from the American tourists who flocked about the bazaars of Cairo with so much money to throw around. To his great delight Kellani was told by Von Strom that he was to go along with Professor Caron to the wonderful new land far across the ocean. The news filled him with so much happiness that all things suddenly appeared good, and he only half listened to what Von Strom told him in secret regarding his special duties of watching that Professor Caron made delivery of certain things that were to be entrusted to his care.

After several days of preparation came the transfer of some strange bundles to the shores of the Red Sea, and one night they were conveyed in a felucca to an Arab dhow, which had waited off a lonely section of the barren coast. Silence and secrecy were maintained, for fear of revenue men; but no interruption occurred, and they finally sailed away in the dhow. Von Strom went along with them—to see them safely aboard the liner, he announced.

This did not take place for some time, however, as they had to beat down the coast. In leisurely and somewhat stealthy fashion they eventually reached their destination and took passage to America. All the way over Professor Caron had been ill with seasickness and Kellani had noticed again at times the strange fear in his eyes, particularly after they reached New York. Kellani himself had begun to feel afraid without knowing why, and the sudden appearance of

Von Strom upon the scene—calling upon his master in the middle of the night—had terrified him. Von Strom secretly had boarded the same liner after bidding the Nubian good-bye! Why? Kellani had become afraid of him.

Next morning he had found his master, dead. Kellani was sure that Von Strom had something to do with it, but in what way he could not understand. In this strange country the Nubian had distrusted even his own people, and he had not been truthful when questioned by Addison Kent because in his fear he did not understand that Kent was the friend of his master and was only trying to find and punish the one guilty of his master's death.

Von Strom had come again the next night and had threatened Kellani with death if he did not do exactly as he was told. Von Strom was in an ugly mood, and he ordered him to leave the house at once and join his master. The Nubian had been afraid to disobey, and he had carried out instructions, only to be seized and chloroformed by the German's men and hustled on board the launch. When he came to his senses they were on their way to the *Albatross*, which was anchored well out to sea, off the New Jersey coast. Once on the ship, Kellani had been roughly handled and promptly locked up in the forepeak of the vessel, where he had been held prisoner and treated like a dog.

After Von Strom—or "Wasserhaus," as he was now calling himself—left the vessel Kellani had been more kindly treated by the crew in the matter of food; he had been allowed even out on deck to stretch his limbs, being taken back to the paint-locker whenever a boat approached within hailing distance.

Thus had the days lagged, until Von Strom unexpectedly returned to the *Albatross*, not long after sunset.

rise, bringing with him the beautiful young lady. Through a grating Kellani had observed them, and from the closeness with which the German was watching her and the haughty manner in which she disdained his overtures, it was evident that the young woman was not there of her own free will. The captain argued over the arrival of this new passenger; but he was in the pay of Von Strom, and a cabin in the waist was allotted to her. She dined with the officers in the saloon and afterwards seemed to be allowed the freedom of the vessel, inasmuch as she could hardly plunge over the side and escape in broad daylight.

All that day activity on board had increased, as if the *Albatross* would up anchor shortly and put to sea. By this time Kellani had learned, among other things, that the vessel carried liquor in her hold, and from the air of expectancy aboard, he was satisfied that an effort to land this cargo was about to be made.

Under cover of the general preoccupation the Little Lady, who already had discovered him and had talked to him secretly through the grating, carried out her plans for Kellani's escape. Shortly after nightfall, when a lighter hailed them and drew in on the leeward side, she reappeared and slipped him a key which she had obtained somehow from the steward. During the confusion of transferring cargo to the lighter, and while interest was centred on the "hams" of liquor-cases passing over the leeward side, Kellani had escaped, leaving the key on the outside of the lock, as instructed, in order that the Little Lady could secure it and return it to the steward.

Silently he lowered himself by a rope over the bow, where a sail had been stretched to hide the name of the vessel. He swam quietly along the windward side to

the stern, where a quarterboat which the deck boys had been using while red-leading the hull still swung under the counter by a painter. To climb into the cut adrift and float off into the heaving blackness of the water had required but a minute. Presently he had paddled far enough from the *Albatross* to unship the oars and start on his fifteen-mile pull for the shore.

When he set out it was still comparatively early in the evening. The sky was overcast, and after about an hour's steady rowing he was almost run down in the darkness by an inbound tug. The quarterboat had fouled a trailing cable from the stern of the tug, and Kellani had been quick to make fast to it; so that he had been towed in most of the distance, thereby gaining much valuable time.

Such was the Nubian's recital, prompted by occasional questions from his interested auditor. He was unable to give Addison Kent further particulars as to the plans of Von Strom or the activities aboard the *Albatross*, except to say that he believed the vessel would weigh anchor not long after daybreak. For what port she would lay a course he did not know.

"Am I to understand, then, that you have not known at any time, and do not know even yet, what it was that Von Strom entrusted to Professor Caron for delivery in New York, or where it was to be delivered?"

"I know not, sidi."

"Neither Von Strom nor your master ever made mention to you of the place to which they journeyed from this Valley of Whispers, or what happened between them to make your master so afraid?"

"No, sidi."

"Did you ever hear of the golden scarab Kellani?"

"Yes, sidi. It is the sign of the secret council to which only the elect gain entrance."

"Sort of secret society?"

"Yes, sidi. In the East it is talked of only in whispers by a few who know of it."

"Why in whispers?"

"Because it deals out death, sidi, to those whose tongues become loose."

"Von Strom was a member; and your late master—did you ever suspect that he had become a member of this ring of thieves, Kellani?"

"No, sidi. He was a good man."

"Of course. And you are telling me the full truth now—not holding back anything because you are afraid to speak?"

"No, master. You are my friend, and I have nothing to fear. I have told you all I know. I seek only to avenge my beloved master's death."

"You are sure he was killed, then?"

"Yes, sidi. But how it was done—that I know not."

"By Von Strom?"

"His hand is red with wickedness! He is a shaitan!"

"A live beetle, Kellani—what does that mean to the members of this golden scarab society?"

"It is the warning of the death decree, sidi."

"Quite so. Did you know that a live beetle dropped on the table in front of your master not many hours before he was murdered—while we were visiting him, in fact?"

"No, sidi, that I did not know!" A sharp intake of breath was the only sign the Nubian made that he was disturbed.

"You did not—well, throw it into the library your then?"

"By Allah, no! Does my friend think that Kellani is lying?"

"No, Kellani. But it is very strange—a large J bug on the table! Your master was badly frightened by it, Kellani."

"Allah have mercy! I do not associate with b sidi! Does a servant who loves his master send a sentence of death? Allah! Allah!"

"It must have fallen from the curtains," nodded Kent thoughtfully. "One other thing is puzzling Kellani, and there is little time now for explanation that you can understand why I ask these questions. Later I will tell you. Von Strom must have known there was a roulette wheel at the Lamont place; how could he have found that out? You understand what I mean by a roulette wheel?"

"Yes, sidi—the spin of fortune by which men lose many *mithcals* of gold. I heard talk of it when my master met Lamont Effendi in Cairo—a roulette wheel not like those used now, sidi—very old but very strong."

"Ah, so that's it! Lamont told Professor Carrington all about this wonderful old roulette wheel he had here in New York? And you reported this to Von Strom?"

"Yes, sidi. The devil's dog asked many questions about this meeting between the two gentlemen, and I told him what was said."

"Kismet!" muttered Addison Kent as he bent over the steering-wheel.

Chapter XXVII "Yo-ho-ho and a Bottle of Rum!"

I

THE sea-going tug *Nancy B* churned steadily through the darkness, outward bound. The lights of New York threw a luminous penumbra in the sky eighteen miles astern, where Bartholdi's statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World" on Bedloe's Island held her tall torch against a thin mist that was drifting in from the Atlantic. Just ahead the white blaze of Sandy Hook Beacon smeared the black water at the entrance to the lower bay, and beyond Ambrose Lightship the ocean swell heaved slowly in out of the night.

Dawn was not far off, but as yet it was pitch dark and cold. The spray which occasionally flew at the bow as the tug dipped and rounded Sandy Hook Point froze where it struck. Except for her running-lights, red, green and white, and an occasional glow in the engine-room, the *Nancy B*, with a plume of black smoke trailing from her funnel, was but a shadow, headed south-west. With the stealth of a thief in the night she slipped to sea and vanished into the darkness that walled in every coast light from Sandy Hook to Fire Island.

Innocent enough her appearance—a tug setting forth to pick up an early morning tow. But beneath the tarpaulins, heaped so carelessly abaft the deckhouse, lay a shivering huddle of cursing humanity in blue jerseys and sailor caps—masquerade seamen—ten

carefully picked gunmen from the New York underworld, friends of Slipper Dagg, eager to join in any hazard which promised sufficient return for the risk and discomfort. And piracy on the high seas—nothing less!—was the mission on which the *Nancy B* was tossing away into the blackness towards open water.

As Addison Kent watched the lean, alert face of the Slipper, standing in oilskins beside the man at the wheel, he marvelled. Addison Kent, forsooth, a writer of popular detective stories, sometime associate of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, friend and confidant of the Police Commissioner himself, of the District Attorney! Here was he on board this turbulent companion of notorious gunmen, outward bound on an expedition that belonged in the repertoire of the legendary redoubtable Captain Kidd!

Madness! Under the excitement and strain of the night's events he had not realized fully into what he was heading. True, he had made it very plain to Slipper Dagg that his presence must not be misconstrued as offering either official approval or police protection in the lawless venture upon which Dagg and his men were embarking. The matter was entirely personal. He had explained frankly the urgency of his visit to the *Albatross*; he could not seek help through official channels without involving the young lady he was trying to rescue in an awkward tangle with the authorities. Forced to act independently and secretly, and knowing of the expedition which was setting forth for the very destination he must reach in the shortest possible time, he had asked merely to be taken along as a passenger who would attend strictly to his own business once aboard the rum carrier.

That had been how he explained it. And Slipper

Dagg, wise in his day and generation, had listened with a faint smile at the corners of his wide, humorous mouth—had looked at the huge Kellani, just ashore from the very vessel they sought—had then studied his watch and grinned widely as he nodded assent. For he knew that Addison Kent would keep his promise not to interfere, and Slipper Dagg was not unmindful of past favours. Besides, if "the rib" was "wanted" and Kent was trying to save her from the police—that was enough!

A hand pulled at the novelist's coat-sleeve, and he found the Nubian beside him.

"We must reach the ship, master, before the day falls," spoke Kellani with a trace of anxiety. He pointed. "More over that way—and faster. We are still far from the ship."

Addison Kent's face cleared and his jaws set resolutely. This had been the only way to reach Naida in time, and it was not for him to hesitate, but to go through with it without questioning the means to the end. Naida must come first. He stepped forward and repeated to Dagg what Kellani had said.

Promptly the *Nancy B* swung off two points to starboard, and the rhythmic beat of her engine quickened to the signal for full speed ahead.

II

Braced against the side of the deckhouse, Kent pulled his sou'wester tighter upon his head, restless under the enforced inactivity. Out there somewhere across the tossing water in the blackness she was waiting—waiting for him—depending upon him—Naida! She had sent for him in the hour of danger and difficulty, and he was coming—coming closer to her with every throb of this

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Slipper

fast, strong tug. But there was need for speed. G alone knew in what extremity he would find her or where the next few hours held in store!

Pomereski had met them with oilskins and sea-boots. He had wanted to come along; but Kent had ordered him back. Following their raid on the *Albatross*, Dag planned to be set ashore with his men opposite the scene of the operation; the gangsters would scatter finding their way back to their New York haunts one by one or by twos and threes. So that, if everything went all right, Kent, Naida and Kellani could return safely on the *Nancy B* without attracting unwelcome attention.

If everything went all right? That was just it! On a desperate adventure like this any number of things might go wrong, and Addison Kent wanted Pomereski in reserve for emergencies. If the Pole did not hear from Kent by a given hour he was to report immediately to Inspector Lowry at Police Headquarters and start official action.

For there was Wasserhaus—Ludwig Von Strom—to consider. The man was a criminal of the worst type who would hesitate not an instant to go to any lengths for revenge if the cards played into his hands. Out here at sea, beyond territorial waters, he could laugh at United States revenue cutters and coastguard boats. Boarded by modern pirates—hijackers—he would be free to fight with every gun at his command. The problem of bringing him within reach of the New York police on a charge of murder seemed insurmountable—unless Kent kidnapped his man without regard to complications.

But Naida first! Nothing mattered so much as her safety. If Von Strom had dared— Kent gritted

his teeth as he fought torturing thoughts. Aboard that vessel there must be some real men who would not permit—good Canadian sailor men—men of Lunenburg—salt-bitten young Nova Scotian fishermen, long-limbed, fearing neither man nor devil, yet holding womankind in respect—Kent knew them, and he found solace in the thought that the *Albatross* was manned by such a crew. They would turn on the German and his gunmen if need arose—laugh in the face of any odds.

A Canadian vessel, the *Albatross*—steel coaster, 24-foot beam, 2,000 tons—chartered by Von Strom, *alias* Wasserhaus, upon the recommendation of Singer Lieb. That much Kent had learned from Slipper Dagg. Apparently the proprietor of the Café Belgique had joined the German in some sort of deal for this cargo of liquor which was being run ashore. But, aside from all financial speculations, Addison Kent knew that Von Strom's real reason for chartering the vessel was to provide a base from which to carry out the special object of the visit to New York.

Why had Von Strom followed Professor Caron from Egypt? Why had he killed the Frenchman? He had been after the golden scarab ruby and the other jewels, of course; but where did he stand in connection with those "affairs of which you have no inkling" which Alceste had intimated were coming to a "swift and dangerous culmination"?

Deliberately Kent drew mental rein. He had been over that ground already without result, and just now there were other things to consider. The next hour or two would be crowded with very definite action—a serious fight between rival gunmen, certain to result in bloodshed. No quarter would be given on either side.

In his slow, humorous way, Slipper Dagg had admitted that he and his men were gambling their lives on the issue. What concerned them most was the strength of the enemy. Dagg mustered enough men to take care of the rival gunmen unless, as he half suspected, Berlin Harry was planning to "double-cross" his employer. In that case, it would be quite within the possibilities that additional men had been smuggled aboard the *Albatross* when the rum-running lighter had gone out for its cargo of liquor.

"You mean that Berlin Harry would turn hijacker himself and rob Wasserhaus after the money was paid over for the cargo?" Kent had asked with interest.

"You've said it!" the Slipper had confirmed tersely. "There's on'y one guy that bird ain't double-crossin' an' that's himself! An' knowin' him for what he is, I can't seem to see him sittin' around, suckin' his thumb beside a hundred grand, when all he's got to do is to reach out an' grab the dough!"

"But this man Wasserhaus—what about the crew?"

"Ain't likely they'd butt in on what ain't any of their funeral. An' out here on the blue an' boundin' deep there ain't nobody goin' to holler 'Cop!'"

"One hundred grand"—you mean one hundred thousand dollars? Would there be that much money on board?"

"Thinkin' we was comin' out here for our *health*?" grinned Dagg. "This ain't no piker's game o' penny ante we're sittin' in on, brother! We takes our chances o' gettin' plugged; but not for a nickel! Why say, a hundred grand ain't more'n half what some of these birds sails away with. Figure it out. Booze is sellin' at fifty a case out here on 'The Row,' and the guys runnin' it ashore gets another twenty on top o'

that. How many cases in a shipload? Say, I know some guys——" and Slipper Dagg spoke feelingly of certain hijacking windfalls which were breath-taking.

For not yet had the magnitude of the trade in illicit liquor attracted the powerful cliques into whose hands it was destined to pass; not yet had it been organized, systematized and financed for protection on a scale which insured against depredation. The business was done cash down on the spot; huge sums changed hands at times, and quick fortunes were being made. With so much money lying around it was an opportunity for "stick-up" men which was too good to be overlooked; so that the hijacker, as he was called, was soon preying upon the bootlegger who handled the liquor, in spite of secret service men, Federal Prohibition enforcement officers, and all the machinery hastily organized to cope with the situation.

Desperate running fights between the opposing forces were of daily record in the newspapers. Across the Canadian border high-powered automobiles sped madly along the highways, heavily laden with liquid contraband, while automatic pistols spat death and defiance. Drivers of seized truck-loads were waylaid and knocked on the head. Trickery, treachery, open bribery and murder kept company with the penetration of the traffic from seaport to the farthest interior; liquor could be obtained by anyone with the price, anywhere, at any time. Lured by huge profits, "easy money," young men who might have hesitated to break a law which they respected were carried away by the "adventure" and excitement; there were always men ready to hazard the trip, just as there was always a supply of liquor off shore—just as always ships floated on water and grain grew in the sunshine.

At seaports "times" were "good." Poorest fishermen, oystermen and beachcombers were finding profitable employment unloading the "rum" ships. Volunteer excise men became easy victims of the "fixers" who accompanied the drivers of the trucks which loaded whiskey along the waterfronts. Powerful motor-boats with airplane engines equipped with special mufflers spent the day in isolated rivers and coves, tuning up for their trip to the nearest "Rum Row" in the night, ten miles outside the three-mile limit fixed by the Supreme Court as the deadline. Government patrol boats with sharpshooters on the look-out sought to intercept the rum-runners inside the prescribed area in their dash for shore.

It was warfare in grim earnest. Addison Kent had been aware of the conditions; but he had not realized fully the cold facts that underlay the newspaper stories. He remembered the vessel which had been found recently with her decks splintered by machine-gun fire and littered with rifle-shells, her cabins battered and disordered, her hold looted and a notebook found which recorded liquor sales—nearly four thousand cases, valued at \$190,000. She had been raided by hijackers and her crew ruthlessly slain!

It was real!—as real as those murderous, callous gunmen aft within a biscuit toss of where he stood even now crawling out from concealment of the tarpaulins and examining their weapons with muttered curses! It had been a night of unbelievable realities. What was to be the climax that awaited fulfillment within the hour?

And as the gravity of the situation was impressed upon him more fully, Addison Kent was thankful that he was on board this piratical tug—thankful that he

was there to protect Naida from the dangers which were about to break loose on all sides of her. His face was set and resolute as he carefully examined his own automatic.

III

A light off the port bow! Dim, blurred through the mist it showed—the riding-light of some anchored vessel. At once aboard the *Nancy B* the tension grew—low-spoken orders, and all lights on the tug were obliterated; she changed her course slightly, slipping through the water with undiminished speed, merely a blacker shadow in the darkness.

"That'll be one o' them Gloucester fishin' smacks on Rum Row," Slipper Dagg vouchsafed confidently. "They carry two thousand cases apiece for a syndicate that has 'em under contract. We're due to be alongside them about now. Keep well off to the right, cap. There's a flock o' them schooners anchored within half a mile o' each other, an' they're layin' south right along the coast to about twelve miles east o' Seabright. We got to kick free o' them, an' the big bird we want ought to be off by itself a couple o' miles farther on."

It was evident that Slipper Dagg knew what he was about. He stepped aft to look over his gang, and Kent could hear him carefully emphasizing instructions. The deliberateness of the whole thing was appalling—vicious rats of the underworld, stealing in upon their victim to kill or to be killed—for a raffle of ill-gotten money! It seemed good to Kent to note the great bulk of the simple Nubian from the far-off desert spaces presently looming beside him at the rail.

"The day is not long away, sidi," muttered Kellani.

Kent peered eastward and did indeed imagine a faint change in the depth of the blackness.

"We are getting close to the *Albatross* now," reassured.

"Yes, sidi."

"Kellani!"

"Yes, sidi?"

"Remember what I have said about Von Strom—the law must take its course. I want him——"

"Yes, sidi."

"*Alive*, Kellani! You understand? Answer me!"

"Yes, sidi."

"And we are not concerned with this murdering rabble. We keep out of the fight—unless attacked. We are here to rescue the Little Lady."

"May her day be blessed!" murmured Kellani.

They fell silent. It was quiet now on board the *Nancy B*; the only sounds were the swirl of the water at her bow and the dull regular beat of the propeller churning under the counter. Time passed. Occasionally off in the mist a faint speck of light swam in view for a moment or two and passed astern. Presently the Nubian's hand touched the novelist on the shoulder and over the port bow Addison Kent saw dim lights that floated slowly towards them out of the distance—a green light, a red light, a white anchor light on a foremast, a black mass of shadow that blotted out the vague grayness eastward.

The tug's propeller stopped, then resumed—a slow beat that was scarcely audible. It stopped again. Not a sound as they floated in the dark, lifting slowly to the ocean swell—nothing but the faint washings of the black water.

"His Nibs is sure about that sea-ladder bein' down,

is he?" Kent was startled by Slipper Dagg's hoarse whisper at his elbow. "We'll stop right here an' send the skiff ahead to give her the once-over. We got to put a crimp in the look-out before we can make a break, an' we got to work fast, believe me." He was gone in the dark before the novelist could reply.

Whisperings aft where shadowy forms clustered. The skiff that had ridden the comber behind the tug was drawn alongside. Three men stepped in, the painter was flung free and they vanished into the gloom.

During the wait that followed Addison Kent strained his eyes towards the vague outline of the *Albatross*, riding at anchor not far away; but all he could discern was a deeper blackness that bulked on the water. She was, he knew, a steel freighter of 2,000 tons—the usual type, with well-deck fore and aft, two steel masts, a single funnel and deck cabins in the waist; storage rooms in the forepeak and "fo'c'sle" quarters for the crew under the poop-deck astern. Kellani had described her adequately, and, according to him, a sea-ladder was down on the port side of the for'ard well-deck—left for the convenience of the men who were red-leading the hull and whose quarterboat Kellani had stolen while making his escape.

Kent listened; but there was no stirring of life aboard the vessel. It was almost uncanny. The crew? Asleep, of course—all but the morning watch—one man, probably, as she was at anchor. She carried a crew of twenty-five besides the captain—first and second mates, steward and mess-boy, a bo'sun, a ship's carpenter, four A.B. seamen, and two deck-boys; also there would be a chief engineer, a second and third engineer, an oiler, a donkeyman and eight firemen. Were they *all* asleep? Where was Von Strom and the Berlin

Harry gang? And where in that black shadow was Naida?

In a fret of impatience Kent sought out Slipper and Dagg.

"See here, Dagg——" he began.

"Close your trap!" whispered the Slipper fiercely.

Kent saw that the gunman was leaning forward, his anxious gaze riveted on one spot. Presently he drew back with a sigh of relief as three quick flashes of electric torch winked in the darkness.

"They got'm!" came his exultant whisper. "Set, Ben! Easy now! Kick her straight past the drift in alongside on the right."

"Keep close to me, Kellani," admonished Kent tensely.

Noiselessly the tug approached. The black bulk of the *Albatross* towered slowly in upon them.

Chapter XXVIII

Nemes

I

THE deckhouse of the tug was almost on a level with the after well-deck of the coastal steamer, and like shadowy wolves the hijackers swarmed aboard. They crouched by the bulwark while their leader received the murmured reports of the three scouts he had sent ahead. They had experienced no trouble in surprising the lookout watch on deck. The fellow proved to be one of Ber-

Harry's men, and had been more interested in what was transpiring in the engineers' messroom than in attending to his duties; they had black-jacked him without a sound while he looked through a porthole into the messroom, and——

"What's the lay?" cut in Slipper Dagg impatiently.

"Dey's countin' de coin on de table an' de gang——"

"How many?"

"Fourteen, countin' de big guy wid de bump on his bean."

Dagg swore.

"An' the crew?"

"Beat it somewheres. De bunkhouse is empty——"

Addison Kent waited to hear no more. With a warning squeeze of the Nubian's arm he slipped away and, Kellani at his heels, lost no time in climbing the ladder to the waist. There was no sign of anyone about the engine-room deckhouse as they slipped past, and Kent was in a fever of anxiety. What was going on—had already happened? Where were the crew if their fo'c'sle bunks were empty? It could not be possible that they had deserted the ship while Berlin Harry and his thugs——

"Go, Kellani! You know your way about. Search! Do not stop searching until you find some trace of her. Then you are to rejoin me here at once. Make haste! Hell's breaking loose in a minute!"

Beyond the engine-room two alleys divided the rest of the waist into three sections—officers' quarters and staterooms to port and starboard, while the centre comprised engineers' messroom, steward's pantry and stores, the main saloon and above that the bridge, chartroom and captain's cabin. The engineers' mess-

room was directly in front of Kent as he crept forward to look through one of the portholes which faced the engine-room deckhouse. The portholes were closed but through the thick glass he could see clearly enough to take in the lighted room and its occupants.

It was packed with men, all craning their necks to look over one another's shoulders. At the table, directed by a swing lamp, sat Berlin Harry and Nifty Dagg, both absorbed in counting a litter of greenbacks into neat piles, each secured by an elastic band. So startling was the sight of that cluster of avaricious faces, all circling that great pile of money that for a moment Kent's gaze was fixed.

Then his eyes roved eagerly in search of Von Stralder, *alias* Wasserhaus. Even more startled, the novice located him in a corner of the room, entirely ignored and trussed up by his thumbs to a beam in the ceiling. Only by standing on tiptoe could the German release himself from the torture of his position, and it was apparent that he was suffering a physical agony that matched the mental distress of his financial losses.

For Slipper Dagg had prophesied well. Berlin Harry was running true to form—even now counting the loot—hijacking the man who had hired him to safeguard the very fortune which lay on the table! And it was so because they believed that the German was holding them out on them—had still more money in concealment—that they were ill-treating him in this diabolical manner.

Kent drew back from the porthole, thinking quickly. It was a matter of moments only before the door of the deckhouse would close in. The opportunity of bottling up the enemy inside the messroom would be apparent at a glance to the keen-witted Slipper; but would Dagg

stop at that, or would he and his men proceed to convert the messroom into a charnel-house by shooting down the helplessly crowded occupants in cold blood? It could be done easily enough through the skylight and portholes and at the single door that opened on the port alleyway; it would be wholesale murder! On the other hand, once let those desperate thugs of Berlin Harry out of that messroom and the decks of the *Albatross* would run red in a gun-fight to the finish! They must be taken prisoner somehow—disarmed—Von Strom must be captured. How? How?

There was Dagg now, creeping around the corner of the engine-room deckhouse on the starboard side, followed by one of his men! Another was sticking his head out on the port side. They were shadowy and indistinct in the growing grayness of the dawn. Kent started towards Slipper Dagg with warning hand upraised—

A stumble in the darkness on the port side of the engine-room deckhouse!—the sharp accidental discharge of an automatic pistol as the man went sprawling over the saddle-bunker hatch!—a bitter oath as Slipper Dagg leaped like a cat for the cover afforded by the saddle-bunker hatch to starboard!

It was on the knees of the gods now! One breathless moment of utter silence—then wild commotion in the engineers' messroom! The light went out. The door was being opened with stealth.

Addison Kent jumped for the starboard alleyway that gave him free access through to the for'ard well-deck. He had barely time to crowd in behind the heavy iron door. Automatic in hand, he watched through the crack.

II

Two flashes of red darted in the gloom; the bang of the pistols was like a single shot. The hijacker had given the alarm inadvertently by stumbling pitifully again across the saddle-bunker hatch opposite the alleyway, and this time lay there inert. But he had got his man—the first to come out of the messroom; the latter lay in a huddle across the iron coping of the alleyway door-sill.

With an involuntary curse, the fellow crowding behind him tripped over the body and fell headlong into the open. As he picked himself up in a panic, Slipper Dagg got him from a crouched position behind the starboard saddle-bunker; the shot spun him to the right. Then he suddenly crumpled, his boots thumping on a brief tattoo on the deck; he lay still.

Dead silence followed. The faint lap of the water against the sides of the vessel was audible to Kent's straining ears. Behind the iron door, eye glued to the crevice, he stood, tensed.

Again the report of Dagg's automatic was like the crack of a snake whip—three quick shots. *Smack!—tinkle!* That would be the glass of the nearest porthole. *Crack! Zut! Zip! Whi—i—ne!*—a fusilade in reply and a choked cry of pain from the direction of the starboard saddle-bunker! The hatch was within Kent's line of vision; but he knew that Dagg had hit one of his men had been hit.

Silence once more—so complete that his heart throbbed. The water gently slapped. Somewhere aloft something or other creaked as the *Albatross* listened to the slow ocean swell.

After an interval he caught a new sound—a sli

rubbing as if someone very carefully were slithering along the wall of the engineers' messroom, closely hugging the shadow. There was the drag of a boot—a hoarse whisper, alarmingly close. With bated breath the novelist realized that the Berlin Harry gang were crawling out from the dangerous trap in which they had been caught like foolish flies lured by sugar to indiscretion.

Dagg's last quick shots, then, had been a bluff to cover his retreat to the after well-deck, where he had commanded his men to remain while he and two of the scouts reconnoitred the position. That must be it. The Slipper had seen the wisdom of getting his men under cover and the enemy into the open, because objects rapidly were becoming more distinct in the first cold blue of the daylight.

Not a muscle did Addison Kent move. His very life depended upon what happened in the next minute or two. Would these thugs search the alleyways toward the for'ard well-deck, or would they locate the position of the Dagg gang and concentrate aft? If they looked behind the door which concealed him, he could hardly hope to shoot his way through; he would be riddled!—

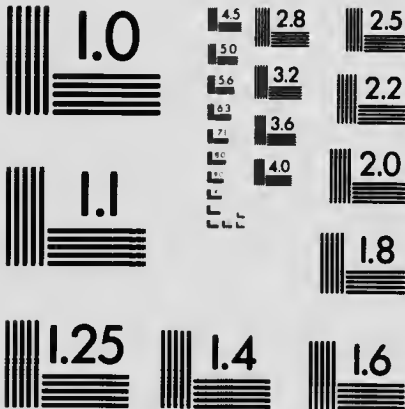
A sharp exclamation came from the direction of the port saddle-bunker where the unfortunate stumbler lay across the hatch cover. They had recognized him as one of Slipper Dagg's men, and a stream of blasphemy greeted the discovery. At the same instant the morning breeze brought a vagrant swirl of acrid black smoke curling in on them, and at once the tug alongside the after well-deck drew their attention.

A shrill whistle through a pair of fingers was followed by the shuffle of crowding feet and a murmur of hurried



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instructions. Kent saw the figures within his vision slink beyond the corner of the engine-room deckhouse on the port side. His tense muscles relaxed. With a breath of relief he passed the sleeve of his sweater across his moist forehead.

That had been too close for tranquillity! It was not more than ten minutes since hostilities had opened but it had seemed an age. The Berlin Harry crew had not known who was attacking them. Where was the crew of the vessel? What was Kellani doing? He must waste no time— Ah! the battle had begun in the after well-deck!

The staccato of the automatic pistols was incessant now. Kent slowly swung the door—then hastily recovered it and crowded back behind it. Up the alleyway, against the oblong of light at the other end of the passage, he saw three black figures entering. They came towards him on the run, pistols in hand—some of the gang who had gone forward to investigate up the port alleyway and were coming back on the starboard side to get into the fight. It was to recall them that the whistle had been given.

Had they seen him? With finger on the trigger of his automatic, Kent crouched. The pound of boots echoed loudly in the narrow passage. Here they came! The novelist's quickened pulse seemed suddenly to stand still. They had stopped short just as they reached his hiding-place! His teeth set grimly—

A cautious movement—the creep of feet! Kent raised his automatic and watched the inner edge of the door like a cat, ready to pounce. At the first swing of that door he would fire and leap!—

“Aw, ain't nobody out dere but de stiffs, Badger!” complained a voice. “Get into de scrap!”

With a rush the trio was over the door-sill and leaping for the engine-room deckhouse. Again Kent's sleeve dried his forehead in relief. The pause had been merely for cautious survey of the open deck before them! The Badger, eh? He seemed fated to be crowding to one side in concealment while the Badger went past on the run! Not very long ago, in the underground tunnel with outlets at the Café Belgique and Loo Ling's tea-shop, it had been the Badger who passed while Naida—

Naida! He must find her without further delay. Quietly Kent closed the heavy door and bolted it. He turned and started along the passage towards the bow of the vessel—then halted with a jerk and quickly threw up the muzzle of his weapon as the oblong of light in front of him was suddenly blotted out—

"This way, sidi," reassured the even accents of Kellani.

III

Up on the bridge abaft the chartroom—in the captain's cabin with door barricaded and shutters closed, with the woodwork freckled and splintered by bullets!—

"My God!" cried Kent, aghast. He made for the bloodstained rungs of the ladder; but the Nubian reached out and pulled him back hastily.

"The night has been black with evil, sidi," he cautioned. "It is well to go slowly. If she be alive, she will shoot everyone who approaches by the ladder. Call out, master, and give knowledge of our presence."

"If she is alive!" echoed Kent thickly. "Naida!

Hello, there! *Naida!* It is I—Kent—Addison Kent and Kellani! Thank God!"

The slats of a shutter had opened. With her glad cry in his ears, Kent fairly ran up the ladder, calling out to know if she was hurt. He could hear her tugging at the barricade inside. When the door finally opened he was there with arms outstretched for her—

But she was standing back, smiling glad welcome, cool and collected! It was unnecessary to ask if she was all right; that fact was apparent in her self-possession. The anxiety went out of Addison Kent's hungry eyes as he looked—was reborn as he took in the disordered condition of the cabin and the bruises which clutching fingers had left upon that beautiful white throat—

"*Naida!*" He stepped towards her. "Thank God, we're in time!"

"I am almost out of ammunition," she laughed, and held out her hand.

He grasped it and eagerly drew her towards him; but she held back, looking beyond him expectantly.

"Where's Dick?" Then, as he did not answer, a sudden look of alarm filled her beautiful eyes. "Did you not come together? Oh, Mr. Kent, what has happened?"

Dick? It was Malabar she was asking for! Malabar she was anxious about! Had their kisses, then, meant so little? *Mister* Kent! He was only a "*Mister*," while Malabar was "*Dick*." Sharply Kent took himself in hand—and smiled back at her reassuringly as he explained his presence and what was transpiring on the after well-deck.

At once she was serious, practical. Rapidly she sketched for him the story of the night—just the

essentials for him to understand what they must do. The hirelings of Wasserhaus had run amuck! Shortly after midnight the lighter had gone with the cargo of liquor, heading out to sea; but more gunmen had come aboard to join Berlin Harry in his plans to hold up the ship. They had smuggled drugged liquor into the fo'c'sle and got the crew stupefied. They had black-jacked the officer of the watch and overpowered the others. The first mate and the captain they had chloroformed in their bunks—

"And you?" urged Kent.

She had been awakened by Wasserhaus forcing the door of her stateroom. The German had been celebrating and was half drunk. There had been a struggle, abruptly terminated by Berlin Harry and Nifty Dean, who had promptly seized Wasserhaus and carried him off.

"It's all right, sister," they had assured her. "You're under our protection. You stay right here."

But she knew the breed, and she had lost no time in gathering her ammunition and fleeing to the captain's cabin, where she barricaded the door and waited, automatic in hand. Later they had come back, and when she had refused all their invitations to come down and join them they had tried to force her. Not until she had wounded several had they left her alone, promising that they would attend to her in due course.

"What have they done with the crew? Pitched them overboard?"

"No, they've locked them up—down there in the storeroom. We must hurry and release them. Captain Head is a gentleman and—oh, come, Mr. Kent! Hear that!"

It was Kellani forcing in the small, tight door in the

forepeak that gave access to the paint-locker. I stood aside with a silent bow as they joined him. The air that smote their nostrils was thick with nauseating odours—the stench of vitiation, the sickening sweetness of chloroform.

Kent waved Naida back, beckoned to the Nubians and plunged inside. One by one they brought them out into the open air and laid them on the deck, where Naida, with a bucket of cold water beside her, made hurried ministrations. Some of them were in worse condition than others; not all of them were unconscious. The second mate was able even to assist in reviving his brother officers; the fresh air quickly restored Captain Head and the first mate, although their faces were yellow with pallor beneath the tan of their weather-beaten skin.

“How long have they been in there? Since midnight? It must be well over six hours since they were drugged liquor——”

Kent shook the shoulder of a burly young seaman who was sleeping peacefully, and watched his ready response with interest. The deck-boy sat up, blinking. He appeared to be wide awake, suffering no ill-effects, and the novelist smiled up at the anxious faced girl.

“Paraldehyde,” he explained. “Its action is quick on the knock-out, but ends in natural sleep after a couple of hours, with little after-effects; it is used to quiet inebriates and in severe cases of chorea. If they had used chloral——”

He paused as the firing broke out with renewed vigour among the combatants aft. The noise brought most of the sleeping sailors to a sitting posture. The captain was on his feet now, his pallor rapidly giving

place to ruddy anger as he administered some well-deserved kicks.

"Get up, ye blithering fools!" he commanded harshly. "Devil take ye if I dinna wallop ye m'sel' unless ye drive yon scum off the ship! Ochan, dae ye want to lay there an' be murdered? Dinna ye know there's a fight gaein' on?"

In a few words Naida had put the facts of the situation before Captain Head, and with kicks and blows and castigations he rallied his crew to full recovery. The steward, who had scouted aft, returned with the grave report that the gunmen had broken into the saloon and had taken the stand of small arms and all the ammunition. This was bad news; for even the officers had been disarmed, and without weapons they were helpless against the thugs. Even so, the mounting rage of the men of Lunenburg as they realized what had happened to them and their vessel would have carried them into the fight with bare fists had the command been given. They shifted uneasily while the officers conferred.

It was just then that a seaman stepped up and drew attention to a speeding launch which was bearing down on them to port out of the thin mist that narrowed vision upon the expanse of heaving water. All eyes watched the rapid approach of the small power-boat which was cutting the water in a streak of foam. The craft was equipped with mufflers; her engine gave out only a subdued vibrant hum as she came down on them at high speed. In the uproar from the after well-deck the new sound was scarcely noticeable.

Red dawn was in the sky, and it was Addison Kent who first caught the glint of the machine-gun, mounted in the bow of the oncoming launch. At his shout of

warning everybody dropped below the bulwarks except Naida. She was too absorbed in peering eagerly at the stranger to heed anything.

Kent seized her and carried her bodily across the deck as fast as he could go with the idea of getting her within the shelter of the paint-locker. But at the door she protested so vigorously that she struggled free and deliberately ran back to the rail. Before anyone could prevent it, she climbed up in full view; hanging on to the ratlines and waving her hand.

"Dick! Dick!" she called.

And at that Kent halted in his tracks. One quick glance satisfied him that it was indeed Richard Malabar who was standing up in the launch and waving back to her. He came up the sea-ladder, hand over hand, with the agility of a monkey. He was no sooner over the side than Naida threw herself wildly into his arms!

A bullet whanged against the steel foremast and whizzed overboard!

IV

"You appear to be having a little excitement aboard, captain," smiled the newcomer. "I regret that we are so late; but certain necessary formalities caused an unavoidable delay. If it is not presumption, may I express the hope that we are in time, nevertheless, to be of service?"

"And who the devil are you, sir?" demanded the astonished Captain Jabez Head with a dignity befitting the other's unctuous diction.

"The gentlemen below, sir, are attachés of the British Embassy at Washington, and with your permission——" He stepped to the side with a beckoning

gesture, then glanced aft as a second stray bullet zinged off the foremast. "May I enquire, Captain Head, as to the position of affairs? Just before setting out we learned that you were liable to be boarded by hijackers, and we ventured to bring along some sawed-off shot-guns and two machine-guns——"

At that they surrounded him eagerly. Explanations were as brief and incisive as the occasion demanded.

"Allow me to present Colonel Wetherby and Captain Wilcox. We are here to arrest a man known as Wasserhaus, but who is really Ludwig Von Strom, wanted by the Egyptian Government upon evidence supplied by the British Secret Service, represented here by this young lady. The matter is before the Canadian authorities at Ottawa, captain, and everything is in order. First, however, you will want to stop that nonsense aft."

While the machine-guns and ammunition were being hastily hoisted aboard Richard Malabar slowly approached Addison Kent, who had listened dumbly.

"Ah, my dear fellow, there are times when you really do show some ability," was the suave admission with that mocking inflection of Alceste. "Your presence here ahead of me is indeed a delightful surprise, although you will hardly expect me to approve of your travelling companions. I trust you left my good friend Gridley in the best of health?——" A dig in the ribs!—a sudden grin! "Come to life, old top!" and it was the old Dick Malabar who now shook him by the shoulders.

"Wasserhaus——" began Kent stupidly.

"You can have what is left of him when I get through with him!" Malabar's face sobered quickly. "I say, I want you to keep out of this show. It is not going to amount to much; but I want you to escort my sister

into that launch and take her out there beyond possibility of stray bullets. God knows, she's run enough risks already!——"

"Escort—your—*what*? Your *sis—sis!* ——" stammered Kent.

"—*ter,*" supplied Malabar. "Bravest and best sister in the world, dear old bean!"

V

From a safe distance they watched the progress of affairs aboard the *Albatross*. The bitter fight between the rival gangs of gunmen was in full swing still; completely absorbed were the feudists that they were entirely unaware of what had been transpiring in the fore part of the vessel. Events had moved so swiftly that the actual time which had elapsed since Slipp Dagg and his men had stolen aboard was short.

"Look!" exclaimed Naida. "No, over to the left—the man running. See, he's just starting up the ladder to the bridge! Isn't that Von Strom?"

The crew already had crept aft through the alleyway to take up position for the attack on the gunmen in the after well-deck; for the moment the fore'ard well-deck was deserted. Kent picked up the binoculars from the plush seat beside him.

"Yes! Von Strom, with Kellani chasing him!" a second figure came into sight, climbing after the first. "And I told him——!"

"I know Kellani's story," murmured Naida. "He has great cause to hate Von Strom."

"I told him he was not to take the law into his own hands notwithstanding——"

Captain Jabez Head's stentorian bellow through

megaphone was punctuated by a warning ripple of machine-gun fire. At the whistle of the bullets overhead a yell of dismay arose from the surprised gunmen. There was a wild scramble for cover from this new and unexpected menace.

"He is firing at Kellani!" cried Naida anxiously. "What madness for Kellani to expose himself in that way! He seems to be unarmed. He will be killed!"

"Possibly," was Kent's interested comment. "Kellani has that curved knife of his in his hand. I supplied him with an automatic; but evidently he has lost it or distrusts it—there! See that? There is method in his madness; he is deliberately drawing the other's fire—to empty the gun! God help that German if they ever get to grips! Here, take a look and see if you can make out what Von Strom is clutching in his left hand."

"It looks like—money!"

"That's it!—a huge bundle of greenbacks! In the general excitement trust him to think of the swag!"

Kent searched for a second pair of glasses, found them in a locker and focussed them eagerly upon the *Albatross*. The machine-guns were in deadly action now; the rattle of them drowned out the popping of the German's gun.

At a cry from Naida the novelist switched his glasses back to the bridge just in time to see Kellani tumble behind the chartroom. In a flash Von Strom was off the bridge, sliding unseen down the ladder. With a breath of relief Kent saw the Nubian crawling cautiously on hands and knees, stalking his enemy.

Across the well-deck fled Von Strom. He was making for the ratlines and was half-way up the foremast by the time Kellani missed him.

Down the ladder raged the swarthy giant, looking to right and left like a black bloodhound who momentarily has been thrown off the scent.

Deliberately the huge German paused to level his pistol. He fired—and missed! He fired again twice in quick succession, then climbed madly upward as he felt the Nubian's nimble feet on the ratlines below him.

There was no stopping Kellani. On he came, hand over hand, the knife held in his teeth; in the red sunlight it gleamed athwart his dark face. Von Strom flung his empty weapon downward. Kellani merely turned his frizzled head as the pistol sped past his shoulder—and climbed without a pause.

The terrified German had reached the crow's-nest at the foretruck, which was as high as the ratlines were. Against the red haze eastward the steel mast etched thin and straight; beyond the foretruck it tapered to a mere black whip with the wireless yard near the top—a flimsy stick which seemed scarcely strong enough to carry the threads of the aerial. Below it the light yard from which the signal halyards descended to the bridge seemed flimsy also in its slimness.

Throwing one desperate glance aloft, Von Strom knelt at the foretruck and held out the great pack of money. Ignoring this plea for his life, the Nubian climbed steadily closer. Again the German looked aloft; again he pleaded. He left the money at the crow's-nest and shinned up the mast till he got one leg over the signal yard. Once more the gesture of supplication!

At the foretruck Kellani paused to pick up the bundle of bills. Never before in his life had the simple Nubian seen so much money at one time in one spot, let alone actually held it in his hands. He took the knife from

between his teeth long enough to throw back his head in open laughter. The attitude was eloquent of a magnificent derision.

Suddenly he hurled the money at the man above him. It struck Von Strom in the face and hit against the mast. The impact broke the bank-notes loose; they scattered and flew, the paper bills caught by the freshening morning breeze, which showered them in a cloud, fluttering, wobbling. Against the bright sky it was like a flock of black swallows which soared and dipped, sailed, dropped—down into the sea!

Hastily Addison Kent swung his glasses aft. The firing had ceased abruptly, and the captain was bawling through a megaphone. At that distance it was impossible to hear what was being said; but apparently the fight was over. The tug was pulling away at full speed!

Was there time yet to stop Kellani? Had nobody aboard noted the pair on the foremast? It was useless to shout—useless to attempt to speed in the rescue of the German. Whatever was to happen would have happened before—

It was happening even now! Breathless, the watchers in the launch gazed helplessly at the drama. Von Strom was straddling the signal yard. He dared go no higher! Yet relentlessly the Nubian was climbing and reaching for him! Panic-stricken, completely obsessed by fear, the German began to back out on the signal yard, his full weight bearing upon the starboard guy that held the yard in a horizontal position.

The result was inevitable. Under the strain the guy snapped! Instantly the yard flew up on the starboard side and down like a pump-handle on the port

side of the mast. Unprepared for that swift knife closing to the vertical, Von Strom spilled backwards!

Like a plummet he plunged headlong to the deck below!

For a long moment Kellani gazed downward. He slid to the foretruck and stood erect, facing the horizon where the morning sun hung just above the horizon as a blood-red ball in the haze. Slowly and solemnly against that blood-red disk the Nubian's arm was raised aloft. Thus he stood.

And it seemed to the white-faced watchers that the silhouetted figure symbolized the fatalism of the Nubian which ever bows its forehead to the sands before the mystic decree of the stars and the wisdom of the Infinite.

Chapter XXIX *The Singular Truth of the Matter*

I

CONSIDERABLY more than the day's sensation was the arrival of the death ship *Albatross* in New Harbour. As she sailed up the bay with her battered spattered deck and her bullet-splintered woodwork the vessel herself was a sensation; for thus did her doubting skipper deliver her in confirmation of the remarkable story he had to tell the United States authorities. It was when it became known that he brought with him eleven dead bodies and almost as many prisoners, many

wounded; that among these were numbered some of the underworld's most notorious gunmen; that dead on board lay the self-confessed murderer of the late Professor Caron and of Armaund Lamont's faithful servant, Mokra—it was little wonder that the newspaper extras set New York agog! The fact, too, that the vessel had been taken in charge by representatives of the British Embassy from Washington, and that startling revelations might be pending concerning contraband liquor operations—here was splendid background upon which to spread lengthy and lurid descriptions of the battle at sea, rich in imagination!

It was a hectic day for all concerned, particularly for Mr. Addison Kent. He had reached the dying Von Strom just in time to get from him a confession of his guilt in the Caron case—that he was responsible for the death of both victims; but the German had passed away without revealing anything except the bare fact of his guilt. However, the details of the crime, as reconstructed by Addison Kent, were substantiated by the statement of the St. Boniface Kid to the police; in every particular the novelist had surmised the truth. Only the motive remained a mystery.

To the best of his ability Kent piloted his friends through the tedious formalities and stood between them and undue annoyance by newspaper reporters, who clustered like flies around a honey-pot. At the end of the day he was glad to relax, and he set out for Westchester with pleasurable anticipation of the quiet evening they had planned—just the three of them—Dick, Naida and himself.

And as they sat in front of the library fire after dinner it seemed to Addison Kent that he had never felt so completely contented. His cigar had never had such

flavour and fragrance. The dinner itself had been a pleasantly cheerful affair—a conversational triumph as well as a culinary triumph for the painstaking G. The service—considering that Kellani was just initiated to his new duties—had been quite satisfactory. He had the makings of a fine servant, Kellani, and he had sent the poor fellow into the seventh heaven of happiness by his words of commendation. But had there been cause for complaint, it is extremely doubtful if Addison Kent would have been aware of it—not acutely, at any rate; for in the presence of Naida Malabar!—

He looked across at her and smiled, and she smiled back at him—for no particular reason at all; she smiled. She had managed to get some much-needed sleep during the afternoon and had awakened glowing and refreshed. Kent thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, although he had not seen her very often—never before in a dinner gown. She was positively stunning!

“Even to you, Kent, whose business it is to weave the bright threads of romance on the loom of a seductive imagination—even to you the facts I am about to state before you will seem wellnigh incredible.” R. Malabar’s tones were weighted with solemnity. He spoke without preamble; he had been sitting in silence for some time, staring at the grate and finding in the red coals long avenues of retrospection. “Yet I shall state to you that I shall state only the plain, honest facts in every particular. Naida agrees with me that you are entitled to know the full facts from the very beginning, and they will be given you without reservation, in order that you may judge my case upon its merits. That is all I ask.

"It is fitting that my 'confession'—if such it can be called—should be made in this room, where so much has happened during the past few weeks. My life has been replete with sudden changes and more than an average share of hazards and excitements; it is no new thing for me to appreciate the extent to which circumstances alter cases or the swiftness with which those circumstances may occur. I think you will agree with me, however, that since last night—

"Last night, Kent, quite justifiably, you were prepared to turn me over to the police, knowing me to be a notorious crook, Alceste, whom you had every reason to regard as your most dangerous enemy and a man who was a menace to society! Last night my sister was defending herself behind a barricade at the point of a gun against a gang of thugs on board the *Albatross*! Last night the man from whom both of us had most to fear had Naida in his power, and with that weapon he had me at his mercy! Last night, in short, the stakes were on the table, and the ball was spinning in the wheel for a number of people!

"Do you begin to understand why I was forced to eliminate you from the game—as I thought—by leaving you tied up and guarded?—why I dare run no risk of police interference with my plans by exposure as Alceste? There was no time for lengthy explanations which, no matter how true, would be discounted and distrusted. I do not know whether you believe in a 'destiny that shapes our ends'; but after what happened during the night I do not see how you can help believing in it!

"For to-night—what a difference! Here we sit, safe and sound, and can talk of the thing calmly in the past tense! Von Strom is dead, his power to injure unjustly

—gone! I am able to reveal the truth to you, and do so gladly, knowing that you will be fair in your judgment of the strangest predicament which an honest man has ever called upon to face. For, like poor Caron, I turn to you, Addison Kent, for advice and help. God alone knows what lies ahead!”

And Richard Malabar told his story.

II

Mud banks and nipah palms, wooded hills and beyond the jungle of the interior! Tall trunks of trees with giant creepers that matted overhead and shut out the blazing sun! Chattering colonies of monkeys in the tree-tops, and at the water-holes huge beasts of the jungle! Flat lands and miasmatic vapours! Coast and shores of islands, washed by a pea-green sea. Ceylon, Borneo! The Malay archipelago! India! The coast of Malabar! Pirates! Iniquities! Tropical storms! Wreckage, adrift in dangerous waters! . . .

Waifs of the sea were Richard and Naida Malabar, lost children—little nobodies from nowhere!—was washed ashore on the coast of Malabar, on the west side of India, after a severe tropical storm! They were found washed to a fragment of wreckage from some unknown vessel—the tiny baby girl tightly held in the arms of an unconscious boy. In spite of the best efforts of the best whites who finally took the foundlings in charge, the children were and where they came from remained a mystery. Without family and without name, they were given the name of the coast upon which they had been cast; they grew up under the name of “Malabar” in England, where they were sent by their foster parents to be educated.

The mystery of his birth remained with Richard Malabar through life as a tantalizing quest, luring him with beckoning finger upon a trail that had no end. After leaving school the boy gravitated into journalism, which had for him a strange attraction; also it enabled him in the course of his professional activities to wander about the earth, always seeking, always studying—hoping that some day he would chance upon the answer to his question: "Who and what am I?" Mastery of languages came easily to him. His newspaper commissions took him into many strange ports. There he mingled with the underworld flotsam in the belief that in such surroundings he was most likely to find some derelict of the sea who had the information for which he hungered.

But it had been without avail. Thus, Richard Malabar, the British journalist, war-correspondent, world traveller, had lived his life, well and favourably known, the qualities of a gentleman inherent within him. And at times strange penchants and whims had obsessed him—a mad urge to be up and away to Somewhere Beyond—restless as the sea which had cast him ashore, figuring in many an adventure, broad-minded, talented, brilliant—a strange mixture of kindly impulses, keen enjoyments, artistic appreciations and spells of sadness and loneliness.

In the whole world was but one who knew and understood and shared—his sister, Naida. She was his *Al* in love and tenderness. At all times he had safeguarded her—through those terrible beginnings of memory—those jungle years when they had romped together upon the sands and threaded dire tangled paths. He had taught her all his boyish skill, and together they had learned secret modes of communica-

tion; so that like children of the wild they had lived those first hard years—had lived by their wits!

Later, during schooldays in England, they had seen so much of each other. The girl, however, grown to young womanhood with an ingrained love of outdoor life and, in many respects, with almost a man's outlook. Delightfully feminine, she nevertheless had too much independence of spirit to be content with a "clinging-vine" existence. Like her clever brother she had exceptional intellectual powers and abilities. It was almost foreordained that she should find in the British Secret Service the work for which she was peculiarly adapted.

Then without warning had come that strange break in Richard Malabar's life, leading directly to the present trouble in which he was enmeshed. His paper had sent him to Morocco to look into a disturbance which threatened to develop into serious disagreement between the Riffs and the French. Having discharged this commission, he had drifted to Algiers, and there one night in a dark alley he was set upon by a band of thieves who coveted his purse, and received a blow on the head which laid him out in the gutter, where his assailants left him for dead.

And as good as dead was Richard Malabar the journalist from that night on! As if the earth had opened and swallowed him, he vanished. Even his paper, with all its great resources, failed to locate him and, after a year had gone by, regretfully ceased to regard him as "missing." Time passed. Even his sorrowing sisters at last gave up hope of again seeing him alive.

III

North beyond Le Pas—north beyond Sturgeon Lake, where a trail across the ice led into the country of Canada's latest goldfields—a crude prospector's cabin, banked with snow! Inside, blazing logs in an open fireplace, and a grizzled "sourdough" stirring at a steaming pot! Across the single room another "old-timer," industriously mending a broken snowshoe! The skin of a huge timber wolf stretched on the wall, and a pack of pelts in a corner! Steel traps! Rifles! A line of drying socks! Samples of quartz! Mining tools! A coloured calendar!

Upon these things did Richard Malabar the journalist open his eyes. So did he return to his world—to the memory of his life, his sister, his profession—to the memory of sudden attack in a dark alley-like street in Algiers! He lay in a rough bunk, beneath red blankets—warm Hudson Bay point blankets—and wondered to find himself so. His head hurt, and he felt weak. As a man whose mind wanders in a fever, he talked of Arabs and desert sands and rebellion in the hills!

They brought him hot soup to drink and asked him if he felt better. They related to him strange things—that he had spent the night at their cabin three nights ago and had told them then that his name was Bob Elliott, and that he had been up at Rice Lake; that he was anxious to get away before the spring break-up made travelling impossible by dog-team; that he had left the next morning with six huskies and a carriole; that he had met with an accident—got off the trail and fell into a crevice, severely striking his head; that the noise of his dogs had attracted the attention of Bill

Davis, who had turned aside to investigate and rescued him and brought him to the cabin; that he had been lying on the bunk for many hours, unconscious.

But, strangest of all, the calendar showed that nearly two years had elapsed since that night in Algiers. *Two years!* He had sense enough to conceal from his rough but kindly hosts the sudden problem which this startling fact threw at him. Behind closed eyes his mind groped for the solution, and he strove to turn over pages of memory for answers to the questions that throbbled upon him. But there were whole pages missing, and he realized that for two years his mind had been a blank as to his identity, and that during that time Richard Malabar had ceased to exist and another had taken his place!

Amnesia!—a straight case of amnesia!—the thing he had so frequently read about in the news columns—men, through accident or a sudden blow, losing completely their identity and wandering away—sometimes for many years! It was a common enough experience, he knew: Many cases were on record of these wanderers suddenly coming back to their former life and occupation—usually with memory restored by a second accident. That was what had happened to him!

Bob Elliott! He had told these prospectors that his name was Bob Elliott and that he had been at Rice Lake! Had he, then, become a mining man? Obsessed with an eager desire to probe for information about this life that he had led during the interval, he nevertheless obeyed the instinct which prompted him to conceal his worry, and he said never a word of trouble to his present companions.

He was soon able to get up and move about. He awaited an opportunity to overhaul his dunnage-

without interruption; it came one afternoon when both prospectors set out together to visit their trap-lines. Eagerly Malabar examined everything that had been in the possession of "Bob Elliott," and as the search progressed his perplexity grew, until at the last he had sat in a daze, white-faced with apprehension, overwhelmed by what he discovered.

It was evident that he had not lacked the "means" to equip himself with a prospector's outfit which represented the best quality that money could buy. In fact, among the first things he found were several books of "traveller's cheques" in favour of several different names. To his amazement he discovered that the signatures for all these names were in his own unmistakable handwriting! He got out a sheet of paper and signed them, one after the other, finding the signatures facsimile! "Robert Elliott," then, was but one of the names by which he had been known? That was strange!

But not as strange as what was to come! He found a secret pocket in the lining of the leather case in which his military brushes were enclosed, and the little lumps which had aroused his curiosity turned out to be diamonds!—a dozen of them, none of them exceptionally large, but all of them of pure water and valuable! He found no less than eleven keys to safety-deposit boxes in various cities of Canada and the United States! He found a booklet, entitled: "How to Increase Your Height"! He found certain other papers which mystified him, and a little amulet or charm of curious design—made of pure gold, wrought in the form of a scarab, with the Egyptian symbol of Osiris, the god of the dead, engraved upon its flat side!

Finally, carefully hidden away, he came across the

little black book. It was small enough to go in a cigarette case; but the information it contained was as dangerous as dynamite! On the surface it was innocent enough—a simple record of business transactions and general trade conditions; but, concealed cleverly within the report, was a cipher. Intuitively Malabar seemed to realize this fact and, having set to work to discover the key to it, was not long in learning the hidden information—secrets of criminal organizations, passwords, records of theft—information which convinced the journalist that during the period which was now blank in his memory he had played the part of a magnificent crook!

Imagine it! He, Richard Malabar, late of the *London Daily World*! Where had he been? What had he done? With whom had he been associated? What was this secret society, the "Order of the Golden Scarab," to which he evidently had belonged? To what depths had he sunk?—what crimes committed? The police of New York, London, Paris!—What was he to head in? Above all, was this criminal "throw-back" the result of some sinister strain in his blood?—out of the blank beginnings of his life? Was his excursion into the criminal ranks but the natural result of the close study he had given for years to underworld types and criminal psychology—the drift of a mind which had suddenly lost its rudder?

Was ever an honest man placed in such a devil's predicament?

IV

After the first panic into which the discovery threw him, Richard Malabar bent every wit to the decision of what he must do. There must be no mistakes made

A single misstep and his fate might be sealed! He allowed his beard to grow during the time he remained at the prospectors' cabin, and he felt reasonably sure that the silent and unsociable man who finally came down out of the north country would pass unrecognized. At Winnipeg he found a room in a quiet lodging-house, and there settled himself to await an answer to the cable he had despatched to his sister Naida.

This cable he had sent in their own secret code. He told her that he was alive and well, but in grave trouble, and he must see her as soon as possible; either he would go to her or she could come to him. When her overjoyed reply reached him at last he found that she was in New York, where her work had taken her. This was highly satisfactory, and he wired her that he would join her there within a week.

They met, as arranged, and together went over the strange situation carefully. It seemed to them, then, that Fate was playing with them—treating them like pawns in a game, as indeed Fate had done in the beginning; for the work upon which Naida was engaged—the case which had brought her to the United States on behalf of the Egyptian Government—concerned the theft of certain valuable antiques from the museum at Cairo and the bold activities of a secret organization of criminals in the East, known to the underworld as the "Order of the Golden Scarab." She was in New York to await the arrival of a French Egyptologist of undoubted standing but known erratic tendencies—Professor Emil Caron. She had been assigned to keep an eye upon him in America, certain suspicion having fallen upon him in secret-service circles. According to the papers in her brother's possession, Malabar had had

dealings of some kind with the very group of criminals in which Naida was interested !

Brother and sister had stared at each other in dismay ! There was only one honourable thing Richard Malabar could do, of course—join his sister in an effort to get to the bottom of the situation; help her to recover for the Egyptian authorities as many of the stolen antiques as possible; run this "Golden Scarab" crowd to earth and, if he found out what his connection with them had been, do his best to redeem himself.

It was just at this time that Malabar had renewed his acquaintanceship with Addison Kent, immediately becoming interested in the work the novelist had been doing for the police. Their mutual hobby—the study of criminology—brought them together quickly in common interest, and Malabar had been astonished to find that Kent had had an encounter with Alceste— a notorious jewel thief who had been creating something of a stir internationally in police circles.

In the little black book which Malabar had found in his dunnage-bag the name Alceste was mentioned several times in such a way that it seemed to be the name Malabar had used in his nefarious dealings during the black period which he was now trying to penetrate. As he studied the Radcliffe case, in which Kent had encountered Alceste, Richard Malabar was conscious of faint stirrings of memory—an elusive sense of familiarity which made him wonder if he were indeed Alceste himself—the very man with whom Kent had matched wits !

What a dangerous position ! How long could he hope to avoid recognition by a man as keen as Addison Kent ? Very carefully he began to throw out questions

—to lead Kent to talk of this Alceste—and there had been comfort in Kent's description of the cracksman as "a sardonic individual, Dick—the very antithesis of your own genial personality—three or four inches shorter than you. . . ." Malabar now understood why that booklet, "How to Increase Your Height," had been found in his dunnage-bag.

Then came Kent's casual revelation of the fact that at Police Headquarters Alceste was recorded officially as dead and eliminated! The novelist little knew the difficulty Richard Malabar had experienced in restraining himself at this tremendous news. It meant the removal of his greatest worry. He saw at once that as Alceste he had made a clean getaway from the burning cottage on the edge of the moor where Scotland Yard had closed in on him, and he was filled with thankfulness and a certain admiration for the diabolical cleverness of that other and sinister individual who had taken possession of him temporarily.

Later that same night, at the Lamont place in Westchester—when he heard Professor Caron's strange story and held the golden scarab itself in his hand—again Malabar had glimmers of memory. He realized that he was on the trail of important discoveries in connection with the case upon which his sister was working. After Kent had left him at his hotel he had rushed to Naida with the news, and to them both it seemed like a gift of the gods—the opportunity of getting Caron's story from the inside.

That, however, was not to be. The death of the Frenchman brought things to a climax more rapidly than was expected. From the first Naida had been positive that the Professor had been put out of the way by

criminal associates. Already she had investigated passenger-lists of all recently arrived transatlantic liners, and had got a lead which tallied with her records—a description which had put her at once on the trail of Wasserhaus, who was none other than the notorious Ludwig Von Strom.

The strategical advantage of her brother's position on the inside as Addison Kent's friend had enabled her to foil Von Strom in his second attempt to secure the golden scarab and the other jewels which, she was satisfied, had been in Professor Caron's possession. Her brother's relation of the evening's incidents had convinced her that the precious stones had been smuggled into the United States, concealed within the case which contained the mummy of the sacred cat. It was arranged, therefore, that they should act with a certain delay, Malabar securing the jewels and passing them out to his sister, who thereupon would lose no time in placing them in official hands.

Not a moment too soon had they acted! In the midst of the storm Von Strom had arrived, and for Malabar's promptness and Naida's presence on the scene to assist him, the German undoubtedly would have succeeded in the theft. Poor Mokra's interference with Von Strom had been something as unwise as seen as it was unfortunate.

This, and Kent's subsequent establishment of Frenchman's death as a crime, had complicated the situation by setting the police on the track of Von Strom. For Malabar and Von Strom had come alone face to face the night of the storm, and Malabar was sure that he had been recognized as Alceste. If the German fell into the hands of the police, he would hesitate to direct them to Alceste—with fatal consequences.

sequences to Malabar! On no account must the police record of Alceste's death be upset!

Von Strom's amazement at sight of him had been genuine. Apparently this organization of criminals in the East had known Alceste, and had likewise accepted the reports of his death. Knowing now that Alceste was still alive, there would be no doubt in the German's mind that Alceste had purloined the jewels Von Strom was after. It seemed likely that overtures would be made for a division of the spoils upon threat of a "tip" to the police. It therefore became imperative for Malabar to learn just what had been his former connection with the gang of which Von Strom evidently was a leader.

The dangerous task of cultivating Wasserhaus to find this out had been undertaken by Naida, and it was while she was engaged in this mission that Addison Kent had followed her. Now that things had assumed perspective, it was easy to see that what Malabar and his sister should have done was to take Addison Kent into their fullest confidence; but at the time the wisdom of this had not been so apparent. It had seemed best to run down the full facts first, Malabar playing a double rôle; for as Alceste he was able to move in underworld circles.

It was during one of his quick excursions after information that unexpectedly he had learned the plans for "silencing" Kent. To save the novelist it had been necessary for Malabar to appear as Alceste and, in front of Von Strom, pretend to gloat over the capture. It had been a risky thing to do; but, bearing in mind Kent's description of the cracksman's smooth, sneering way of talking, he had flattered himself that he had completely fooled the German, although he could

not be sure of Addison Kent. With Naida's Malabar had got him out of the dangerous situation only to find that Kent had indeed discovered Alceste was.

But things had begun to happen so rapidly there was no time for explanations, even had the novelist been in a frame of mind to believe them. Strom had discovered that Naida was Alceste's sister and at once seized the advantage; with Naida's power he could dictate terms to Alceste, which he had not dared to do before. Naida's warning message had rushed Malabar into preparations for the "stand down," and he had put through his call to Washington for official action. They knew him there merely as Naida's brother, working with her on the Cairo case.

V

"It only remains to add," Malabar concluded, "with the death of Von Strom and the recovery of the missing antiques and the jewels, which represented the wealth of the 'Order of the Golden Scarab,' Naida's work has found successful conclusion, and the criminal organization in the East is now on the way to a complete break-up. We discovered, Kent, that Von Strom was trying to engineer a coup by smuggling a fortune in precious stones into the United States, using Professor Caron as a catspaw. How he got the Frenchman into his power so completely—what took place between them at the so-called 'lost tomb' to which they journeyed—that probably will never be known. There was there the 'treasure-chest' of the organization which was concealed, and it is my opinion that Von Strom was attempting to turn traitor to his companions in crime."

by walking off with the whole thing. Undoubtedly Professor Caron was acting under compulsion, and was killed because he threatened to reveal what he knew.

"As for Alceste's connection with this 'Golden Scarab' crowd, we discovered that while Alceste had helped them to rob certain rich men in Eastern countries, he had proved himself a 'thorn in the flesh' by insisting upon most of the proceeds from these forays being given away to the poor and needy. This Dick Turpin mania appears to have shocked the brigands and made Alceste so unpopular that apparently he had been 'black-balled' out of the secret council of the order if, in fact, he had ever been admitted.

"Yet Professor Caron was in great fear of Alceste, and the statement 'his evil lives after him' would seem to indicate Alceste as the founder of the sinister society of the scarab and directly responsible for its acts. I have given this some thought, and the only conclusion I can reach is that Von Strom told Professor Caron a great many fabulous tales about the ruthless Alceste, much as one tells a child about the terrible giant who lived at the top of the beanstalk; he would do this in order to build up a bogey with which to frighten the Frenchman as to the consequences of disobedience.

"Naida has been able to supply definite information regarding the golden scarab gem itself. Do you remember the startling robbery of St. Peter's treasury in the Vatican at Rome some time ago, when international crooks succeeded in penetrating to the sacred jewellery strong box? Such a sacrilege had never been known before. It reminds one of the ghouls of ancient Thebes Professor Caron was telling about that night you and

I called upon him. The theft, you will remember, included the sacred ring belonging to St. Peter's in the basilica, a gold cross set with pearls and diamonds and given by the Colombian Republic to Pope Leo XIII sixty years ago, and certain other rare gifts donated by monarchs and emperors. Among the items mentioned in the newspapers at the time was the Ruby which many years ago found its way, from a secret, conscience-stricken source, into the Vatican treasury. When the collection of stolen Vatican treasures was recovered, shortly after the theft, only the Ruby was missing. But even that is now on its way to Rome——"

"The golden scarab!" murmured Addison Kent, with interest.

"Yes. It was the very ruby at which you gazed in this room the night Professor Caron showed me the golden scarab. It had fallen into the hands of a secret society and evidently was mounted in its original scarab setting to become the symbol of the Order of the Scarab. The lure of it undoubtedly turned Von Strom's head, and emboldened him to risk everything in one mad venture to become a Cræsus.

"That is all, Kent—except that I owe you an apology for the worry I have brought you and for my selfish abuse of your friendship. That friendship has come to mean a very great deal to me, and the half-hour I spent in this room last night was bitter punishment for the hurt I was causing you. The knowledge that your friendship meant something to you also—it was not so easy to dissemble—to go through with the program which appeared necessary. I ask your forgiveness, chap."

Addison Kent was on his feet. There was no

to forgive now—nothing but deep appreciation of the nightmare which this friend of his had been living.

In a long steady grip, more eloquent than any words, their hands met in their man's way, while Naida's eyes shone in sympathy.

Chapter XXX

The Luck of the Golden Scarab

I

It was about an hour later that the restlessness of Mr. Addison Kent finally took him out of the library into the hall. Mysteriously he poked his head around the portières and beckoned surreptitiously to Mr. Richard Malabar. And when Mr. Richard Malabar, obeying the warning finger raised to the novelist's lips, excused himself and left Miss Naida Malabar alone in the room, gazing pensively into the red heart of the fire in the grate—when he reached the hall—

Addison Kent deliberately stuck a fresh cigar into the journalist's mouth and lighted it for him—deliberately seized Malabar's overcoat and helped him into it, then jammed Malabar's hat upon Malabar's head.

"I say!—"

"You are going out for a breath of fresh air if I have to carry you!" whispered Kent fiercely. "For the love of Heaven, take a stroll about the grounds! Go and see a man about a—*mule!*"

With a slow grin of dawning understanding Richard Malabar went.

II

The stars looked down upon that shadowy figure which paced to and fro in the twilight, hands behind his back, head bent in thought. The stars twinkled down upon him.

Eleven keys and a little black book, small enough to go inside a cigarette case!—a legacy of Fate! What did the Future hold in store for him? What revelations would the Past would those keys unlock? Through what Gates of Hazard would the way of duty lie? A path of what shadowed Paths of Mystery must he retrace in the footsteps of Alceste?

Alceste was dead—and buried! True enough, so long as deeds of crime were involved—so far as the people were concerned. True enough, perhaps, as Kenton thought that Alceste had confined his activities to the sphere of crime of theft—that the very name under which he had operated was taken from Molière's *Misanthrope*—Alceste, an enemy of social hypocrisies! True perhaps, that Richard Malabar was no more responsible than one insane. Nevertheless, was he not called upon to make what restitution he could? Would he find any peace of mind—any rest for him in life—unless he had followed backward, step by step, along this Thread of Ariadne which had been placed in his hand—unless he had recovered from the underworld and restored as much as possible of the loo' which Alceste had helped to steal?

No, Alceste must reappear in the haunts that he had known him; but it would be in a new rôle—in the guise of a lone bloodhound, hunting down his quarry and

snatching from their very jaws "the kill"! A dangerous business! But that way, and that way only, lay Redemption.

Back and forth, tirelessly back and forth, paced Richard Malabar, wrestling with his problem. And as he fought it out with himself and reached his decisions out there under the quiet stars, something of their peace descended upon him like a benediction.

Almost without volition his feet trended towards the portico, upon which fell the subdued squares of light from the library of the great house. On tiptoe he approached until he could look in upon the lovers—just a glance. For a moment his gaze lingered upon those two heads close together. Addison Kent's arm was about her shoulder, as if in fond protection, and Naida's head was resting upon that broad chest—what wonderful mates they were! The look on their faces!—

Softly Richard Malabar withdrew. A quick moisture stung his eyes. To him she had always been the "little" Naida of the Storm; now she had come safely into her Port of Happiness!

And as Richard Malabar raised his eyes to the constant stars, a lonely figure in the shadowy night, his heart was filled with a greater contentment than he had ever known.

