

THE FUGITIVE
SLEUTH

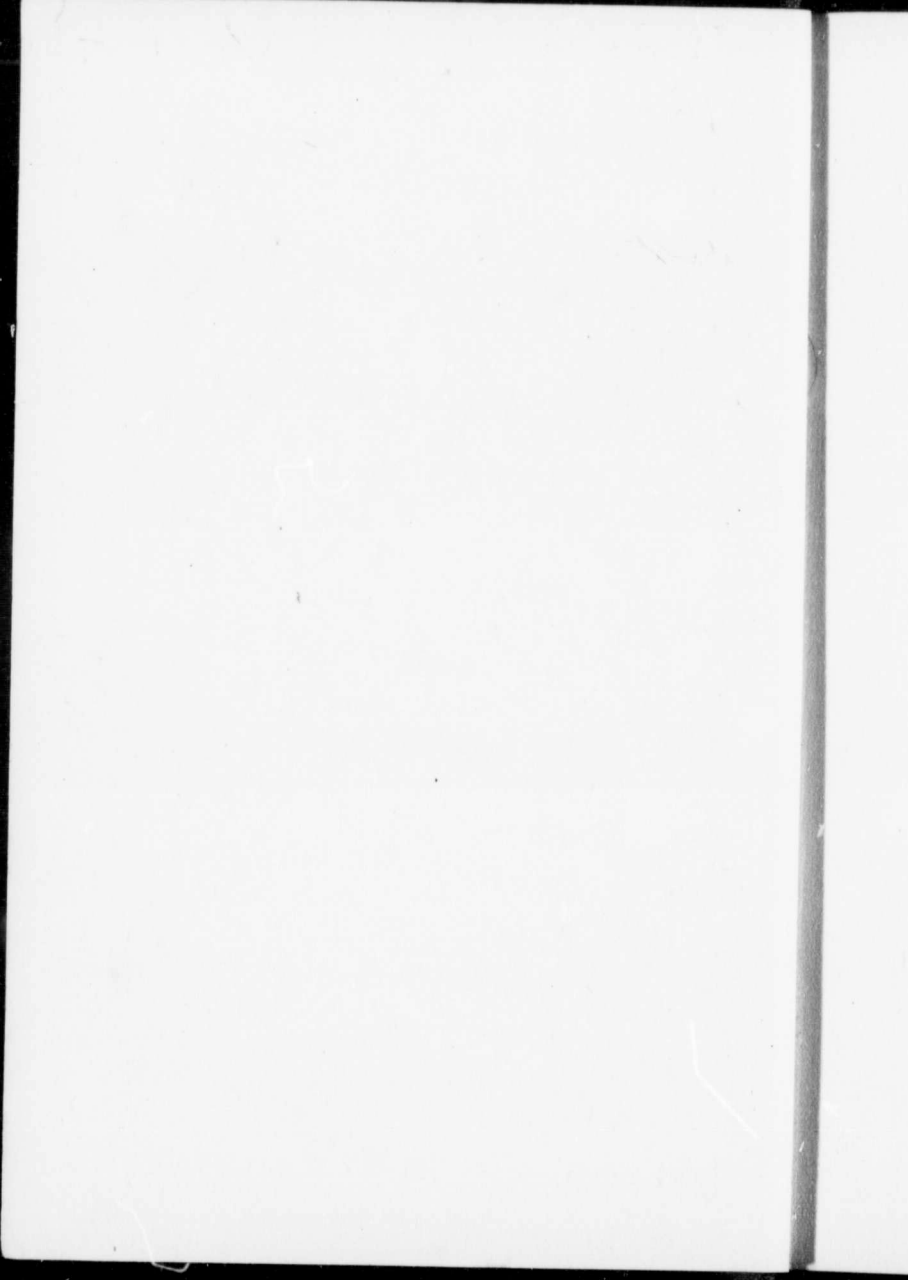


HULBERT FOOTNER

(Adm)

Early book
Early edition

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THE FUGITIVE SLEUTH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HUNTRESS - 1972

THE FURBRINGERS - 1970

LONDON:

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

THE FUGITIVE SLEUTH

BY
HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Huntress," "The Furbringers," etc.

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CHAPTER I

A PAIR OF PA—TROUSERS

EVERYBODY knows Fourteenth Street. It has its character. All day long on the south side a stream of shoppers passes to and fro before the stores philanthropically engaged from one year's end to another in selling out below cost. The pavement vendors add variety to the scene. Toy automobiles dart among the feet of the walkers and fall over with an expiring whir. Small boys in blue tin stagger from foot to foot swinging amazing weights—of celluloid. In little backwaters out of the current on the squared circle of a handkerchief those ancient cockfights are still taking place manipulated from the pocket of the showman by a black thread, which deceives nobody.

Then there are the faces in soft red rubber which lend themselves to such hideous distortions. For thirty years they have made mouths on Fourteenth Street without anybody having been seen to buy. Dealers in sweet lavender, chamois skin and china cement are other peculiarly Fourteenth Street institutions. The clink of the mended china as it is swung on its paving-stone pendulum is one of the leading motives of the tone poem.

On the other hand, the north pavement has always been quiet. You cross to this side if you are in a hurry to get to the bank before it closes. Here little girls mind baby carriages, while their mammas hunt bargains across the street.

Real estate agents ascribe the backwardness of this side to the splendid, decayed mansion which still proudly holds the fort against trade, though its front stoop has been

shorn off by the street-widening and its big garden is desolate and sere.

On this side of the street, over in the next block, between Fifth Avenue and Union Square, there is a row of tall houses which began life as the city residences of prominent citizens, but have long since fallen from that estate. An eczema of signs has broken out upon their erstwhile haughty faces. Now there will be a Hungarian restaurant or a second-hand bookstore in the basement, with perhaps the warerooms of a minor piano factory on the parlour floor, and upstairs, in a diminishing ratio of rent and repute, beauty parlours, detective agencies, queer, unheard-of little manufactories, and finally, under the roof, studios which may be had at a low rental, owing to an entire absence of "improvements."

In the top floor rear hallroom of No. 21 (that is to say, the cheapest apartment in the house), Neil Ottoway, whistling abstractedly between his teeth, was modelling his "Old Beggar." A glance at the little figure on its stand was sufficient to show that the young sculptor was fully in accord with his time. The treatment was extremely broad and sketchy, the clay thumbed on dashingly, yet the old beggar had bones withal, and suggested in his stillness a capacity for movement. The sculptor's favourite tool was a toothbrush handle.

The original of the study was at that moment collecting pennies in the street below. As Neil lacked the means to tempt him from that lucrative pursuit, he was obliged to work from memory, and from pencil notes.

It was without doubt the smallest studio for a sculptor in New York, say nine by twelve. One wall was filled by a rough trestle bearing a row of other studies under wet cloths. There was a little gas stove and a bread-box on the window sill, a narrow cot in the corner, with a piece of canvas over it to catch the flying clay. In front of the grate stood a broken chair.

Clay was upon everything, and the reek of the wet stuff was in the air. An ordinary sash let into the sloping roof lighted the artist's work.

He was wearing a faded and stained dressing-gown of

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orange-and-blue silk, with the sleeves turned back over his sinewy wrists. Such garments are only to be found in the possession of artists; with other properties they are handed down from generation to generation. He had a thick, upstanding crop of wavy dark hair and wore a soft collar and flowing tie, all in due accordance with tradition. A certain resolute quality in his direct glance and close-shut mouth suggested, however, that he was not one to be depended on to follow a tradition unquestioningly. His age was twenty-four, and he looked and spoke beyond his years.

His dark eyes were passionately bent upon the clay figure under his hands, shooting the inanimate matter full of his dream, one might say. By and by something began to be wrong. The fire failed occasionally and the eyes wandered restlessly; the artist sighed and scowled. With a visible effort of the will he would set to work again. But the lapses increased in frequency.

Finally he threw down the toothbrush, and walking to the window threw back the cover of the tin bread-box that constituted his larder. It was empty as he well knew. Slamming it shut, he stood drumming on the pane, and scowling into the long workrooms of the lofty buildings that filled in the outlook. Everyone of those hundreds of girls had had her lunch, he thought bitterly.

One or two near the windows raised a flirtatious eye in his direction. He turned away disgustedly. He was too hungry for that sort of thing.

"What the devil am I to do?" he demanded of himself. "There's no use trying to work as if nothing was the matter. The question has got to be faced! I'm not going to submit to stay up here and starve like an artist in a second-rate novel. It's too ridiculous, anyhow—with the money as good as in my fist. Something's got to be done about it!"

He strode up and down the little room cudgeling his brain. No happy thought came to aid him. In the presence of the simple facts no amount of determination was of any avail.

"Oh, well," he thought, weakening, "I'll have to

wait until dark anyhow. Maybe somebody will come up in the meantime. The old codger's got to come home some time, or the girl."

He set his door standing open on the hall, and half-heartedly resumed his work.

Neil had two neighbours on the top floor of Twenty-One. It was not his fault that he was acquainted with neither, though he had been living there nearly a month. Both were decidedly stand-offish.

In the large room adjoining lived one of the queer, middle-aged solitaires in whom the city abounds. Neil had christened him the old codger. He stole in and out of his room noiselessly, and never gave a sound within, so that for a long time Neil knew he had a neighbour only by the crack of light that showed under his door every evening. The first time Neil had met him in the hall drawing water, he had precipitately retreated without his pail.

The second time Neil blocked the way and obstinately addressed him. He was bald, red-faced and conspicuously neat. An odd, old-maidenly air clung to him.

"Good morning," Neil had said. "Can you lend me a spoonful of sugar and save me a trip downstairs before breakfast?"

The old man blushed and fumed and avoided Neil's glance. "Never borrow or lend," he grunted.

"Good rule!" said Neil, smiling. "I only wanted an excuse to pass the time of day. Come in and look at my work."

"I—I don't know you!" stammered the old man desperately.

"Oh, you soon will," said Neil. "Come on in and have a talk."

"I *never* talk!" cried his neighbour, succeeding in escaping into his room.

Neil heard him breathing hard inside. He christened him the Old Codger, and made a little sketch of him in clay.

Neil's other neighbour was a girl who lived in the front hall room. At least he supposed she was a girl from a

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certain agreeable slenderness of outline. He had never seen her face. She, too, was mouse-like in her comings and goings. He had met her once or twice on the stairs, but she turned her head the other way, and at best the halls were dark. On her letter-box she had a label with her name, "Rose Raleigh," in fancy lettering.

"An artist," Neil decided, "and a new one. They always start in with a fancy trademark. Probably a fright, and takes art very hard."

As for the large front room, it was vacant. Neil occasionally wandered in there to obtain a glimpse of his beggar on the pavement across the street below. But as it was a five-story building, the distant foreshortened view was not very helpful.

It was humiliating to be obliged to confess it to himself, but he was too hungry to work. He "fooled around," as he would have said, whistling to keep up his spirits.

"If the worst comes to the worst," he told himself, "I can go down and do a highland fling on the corner. One can always get arrested and be sent to the psychopathic ward for observation. I suppose they feed you there."

Finally he heard a veritable step on the next to the last flight of stairs, and his heart lifted. Would it stop on the floor below? No. It rounded the landing and attacked the last flight. A certain delicacy in the fall of the foot suggested that it was the girl artist coming home with her big portfolio under her arm.

A sudden panic attacked Neil.

"Lord, how can I apply to a girl to help me out?" he thought. Still he did not close his door.

It was the girl. Rising and rounding the stairs, the light through his door fell on her. Neil was startled, she was so different from what he had made up his mind to. Not only was she young but—well, it was the sculptural possibilities of her head that struck him first; the beautiful poise of it on her neck; the fine, wide brow. She did not deign to look at him at all.

"Hello," he said engagingly, conscious while he said it of a certain inadequacy in the form of address.

A hint of displeasure showed in the quarter view of her adorable cheek, which was all he got. She bowed stiffly without looking at him, and went on to her own door.

"I say," said Neil in some confusion—his need was great. "Beg pardon, can I speak to you a minute?"

Her only reply was to close her door firmly without temper.

"Oh, very well, if you feel that way about it!" he said to himself viciously. He shut his own door so she could hear the sound through hers. "Just like a girl! Incapable of making distinctions! They look on every man as a Silenus!"

He applied himself to his work again, borne up by a righteous indignation. It didn't last long. He was too empty. He conducted another search among his slender belongings. No use. Nothing edible had been overlooked. He began to be really sorry for himself.

In a few minutes he was very much astonished to hear a little disembodied knock upon his door. He had heard no step outside. He threw it open half expecting to see some ghostly messenger bearing succour like the ravens to Elijah—but it was she once more. He gaped in his surprise.

For the first time he looked into her face, and what he saw there drew and touched and disconcerted him all at once. Her eyes, placed so far apart, gave her an oddly benignant look, and both proud and beseeching withal; her eyebrows, arched, added a touch of wistful astonishment; her cheeks were adorably soft, and her parted lips enchanting. She was frowning a little, and shamefaced. She caused him to forget completely the serious situation he was in.

"I—I beg your pardon if I was rude," she said breathlessly. "Perhaps I misunderstood. I'm sorry." She turned to fly back.

"Oh, wait!" cried Neil, no less confused than she. "Oh, that was square of you—to own up, I mean. I—I'm so glad you're human! Oh, that isn't what I meant to say. Come in and see my work."

It was the countersign one artist to another. She

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hesitated, turned, and came slowly back. Neil, comprehending that he had to deal with one unaccustomed to the ways of the craft, left the door standing open behind her. Observing, she looked self-conscious and grateful. Her face was perfectly unsmiling. Neil gazed at her delighted; the charming, grave child! She was not so young, either; it was the arched eyebrows, the soft cheeks, the unconscious proud, beseeching air.

"To think that I have had that across the hall for a month without knowing it!" the young man exclaimed to himself.

He understood that he must find some sane, neutral matter for discourse or she would surely fly away again. He made haste to exhibit the "Old Beggar."

"Do you recognize him?" he asked eagerly.

"Recognize him?" she echoed, raising her eyebrows.

"The old boy who stands in the doorway of the vacant store across the street. With his furry silk hat, his Melton coat with the big pearl buttons, his black kid gloves with all the fingers out. Have you never seen him?"

She shook her head.

"And you an artist!" he said reproachfully.

"Anyway, what do you think of it?"

"I don't know what to say," she said hesitatingly.

"I'm sure you don't want the usual platitudes. I'm sure it's very good—but I'm not qualified to speak."

"That means you don't like it," he said, disappointed.

"No, that I don't understand it. Why does the old man look down and behind him in that odd way?"

"His characteristic pose," explained Neil. "That's pride. He's looking at his placards. He gets clean sheets of wrapping paper, you know, and letters them with blue and red chalk, very flowery letters. 'Ladies and Gentlemen: I swear to God this is every cent I have in the world!' Then he makes a design of pennies all around the edge. Decoys to attract more, you understand."

She smiled briefly and became grave again. "But why don't you show the placard?" she asked.

"That would spoil the composition," said Neil.

"Then how is one to know?"

"Oh, you're supposed to interpret the pose to suit yourself. The artist mustn't tell too much, you know. What do you think of it?" he asked again, hungry for her praise.

"Very life-like," she said softly, "quite wonderful. But—so sordid!"

Neil smiled a little ruefully. He was accustomed to this style of criticism. "But *you're* an artist," he said protestingly.

She shrugged. "Oh, no! I make what they call animal comics for the newspapers. It's just to earn my living."

"Oh——!" said Neil compassionately.

She turned to the other things. "May I see these?" she asked.

Neil quickly removed the cloths. With her grave and wistful eyes she studied in turn "Head of an Old Fruit-Seller," "Woman Prisoner," "The Old Codger."

"Our neighbour," he said.

"How shy he looks!" she murmured.

"Of course!" said Neil. "And I thought it was just bad temper!"

"I think you will do great things," she said at last. "But I expect you have not had much trouble in your life."

Neil smiled the same smile. She was adorable, but she was no critic. "Young or old," he said with assumed lightness, "one must work out what one sees."

She began to move shyly toward the door.

"Ah, don't go!" he said quickly. "I like your name, Rose Raleigh."

"Do you?" she said.

"Bet you made it up," he said teasingly. "Sounds literary."

She looked startled and uncomfortable. Clearly she was one of those terribly conscientious people. Neil was seized by remorse.

"Just like me," he said quickly. "I was born

Thomas Williams. What could an artist do with a label like that? 'Neil Ottoway' is rather good, don't you think? Simple and striking."

"But when you do make it famous you'll be sorry," she said. "You'll want your very own name again. Anyway, you know there was Tom Moore and Tom Hood. There was Ben Jonson and Sam Johnson."

"Plenty of time to consider it," said Neil lightly. "Fame is still out of sight. But you're a nice one to call me down."

She looked uncomfortable again. "It's not so simple for a woman," she said. "Besides I shall never be famous."

"Oh!" said Neil penitently, not knowing exactly what to say.

She again displayed an inclination to sidle out of the door.

"When are you going to show me your work?" he demanded.

"Never," she said. "It's purely utilitarian."

"We're all in the same boat," said Neil. "Look here!"

He drew a cloth from a tablet of florid design in high relief, ready to be photographed for a calendar heading. "This is what keeps me in chewing gum," he said without bitterness. "Criminal, isn't it? I get the magnificent sum of five dollars for it, which does me for a month, leaving out the rent—which I don't pay."

She smiled politely with grave eyes. She was now at the very door. Neil in view of losing her suddenly recollected the dilemma he was in.

"Oh, wait a moment," he said. "There's—there's something else."

She looked at him questioningly.

He hastily cast round in his mind for an expedient by which he might lead up to the delicate matter in question. With such a skittish customer this promised not to be easy.

"I'm at a standstill," he said. "Can't do any more to my old man until I have another look at him."

"Isn't he down there now?"

"Yes, but I'm a prisoner up here."

She looked at him with a funny little wrinkle over her nose.

Neil, bent on leading up to his communication artistically, presented the minor difficulty first. "I haven't a cent to my name," he said candidly.

She blushed. Instantly her hand went to her little bag.

"I could—a little—a very little," she said.

"Darling kind heart!" thought Neil. Aloud he said: "I will return it this evening. As soon as I can turn in my calendar heading."

The little bag was open. "I have only half a dollar," she said, looking at him frankly and blushing.

"I need only half that much."

She shyly put the coin on the pedestal.

"Ah, don't," she said, cutting short his thanks.

"It is nothing!"

But Neil would thank her, and in great discomfort she turned to fly.

"Oh, wait a minute," he said; "there's something else."

She looked alarmed.

"I want to ask your advice. You see, I've only been in New York three months, and I've moved three times. I haven't had the price to join a class. So I'm friendless.

"Advice? What is it?"

"Didn't it strike you as odd that I should borrow a quarter when I said I had only to turn in my tablet to get five dollars?"

"No," she said.

"Why don't you ask me why I don't turn in my work, and be done with it?"

"Well—why don't you?"

Neil felt that he had now paved the way very cleverly. "That's what I wanted to ask your advice about. Do you think I'd be arrested if I went down in the street dressed like this?"

The eyebrows went up sharply. "Arrested?" she

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echoed. "Dressed like that? What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't mind," said Neil gravely, "only if I was arrested I couldn't cash in my calendar heading."

"Surely you're not in earnest," she said.

"Dead earnest," said Neil. "I haven't any other clothes."

"No *clothes*?" she repeated with her grave air of concern.

Neil saw that she suspected him of being demented. He suppressed the desire to laugh. She was so funny—and so sweet. He couldn't resist teasing her a little.

"Pa—I mean, trousers," he said.

She looked quite aghast.

He pointed tragically to a scorched ruin before the grate. "Burned up!" he said.

"Burned?" she murmured, wide-eyed.

"My only pair."

"How did it happen?"

"Well, you remember it rained yesterday. I got wet. When I went to bed I built a little fire in the grate and hung them before it. The chair tipped over backwards. By the time the smoke awakened me the damage was done for ever!" He held up the ruined garment. "I might turn them into knee pants," he said with an innocent air "but I haven't any long stockings."

"But this is serious!" she said rebukingly. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm asking your advice," said Neil.

"I suppose you haven't had any dinner?"

"Not a bite."

Her glance was turned inward for a moment. "I haven't a thing in my room. But I'll get something."

"Oh, thanks!" said Neil. "But I'd rather have pa—trousers than food."

"But how *could* I?" she said, blushing.

I have another pair being mended at the tailor's in University Place," he said eagerly. "That's what the quarter is for."

"Oh!" she said with a catch in her breath.

There was a silence. Neil stole a look at her. The

round averted cheek was the colour of the sunny side of a peach.

"It's just around the corner in University Place," he went on cajolingly. "Next door to the Busy Bee lunch room. His name is Pincushowitz. Good name for a tailor, eh? It's a terrible thing to ask you to do. But you see how I am placed. If it was any other street in town I wouldn't mind making a dash for it. I could put them on when I got there. But Fourteenth Street! You know what it is. I'd be mobbed before I got across the road."

"Of course I'll go," she murmured. "But I scarcely know what—what should I ask for?"

"Oh, thank you!" cried Neil. "Just ask for the pants of the young man who makes clay models. He doesn't know my name. They're blue serge, somewhat shiny in the—where they're worn. The bottoms were frayed, and he was to turn them up and press them for a quarter. You will be saving my life!"

"Oh, don't laugh," she said in a stifled voice, and fled downstairs.

Neil ran out into the hall and looked over the banister after her. The sound of her flying feet died away on the interminable stairs. His heart swelled big and warm with the thought of her.

"Little darling!" he said to himself. "So funny and kind and old-maidish and adorable! What joy to have her for a neighbour and a pal! To tease her and love her to death!" A pang of fear promptly attacked him. "Heaven knows who may be ahead of me. Sweet as she is, it isn't possible she has escaped other men up until now.

Hastening back into his room, he consulted his little mirror.

"Lord! what a sight! This artistic carelessness stuff can be carried too far." He violently attacked his unruly hair with the brushes.

"Could I take her to dinner out of that five?" he anxiously asked the glass. "We could walk to Garlotti's. With tips it would cost one dollar and thirty cents. Think of having *that* across the table. . . .

Heavens, she would inspire a mastodon to flights of wit! . . . But to live for a month on three dollars and seventy cents afterwards—it can't be done. Oh, hang it! I'll sell my soul again, and do another calendar heading."

After finishing with himself, he violently set to work to put his room in order. Then he had to tidy himself again. Still she did not come. He became seriously anxious. Had her courage failed her at the door of the tailor's? Had Pincushowitz refused to deliver the pants? Maybe the little Jew had insulted her delicacy. He would naturally suppose—Neil turned hot and cold.

A hundred times he went out and looked down the stairs. At last he heard a muffled voice from the landing below.

"Please go into your room and close the door."

"But why?" asked Neil. "What has happened?"

"Please go in and close the door!" she repeated with a plaintive note.

He obeyed, wondering. There was a scurry on the stairs, a brief pause outside his door, and a slammed door in front. Neil stuck his head out. There were the trousers safe enough, hanging nakedly from the door-knob.

"Pincushowitz didn't have any wrapping-paper!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER II

"It."

RETURNING from the lithographers who employed him, with his money in his pocket, Neil made haste to knock upon the door of the front hall room. There was no answer. At the same time a certain quality in the stillness within suggested that the tenant was at home.

Neil was filled with resentment. Returning to his own room, he left the door standing open, and, making a pretence of working, waited to confound her.

Sure enough, in the course of an hour she opened her door. Seeing him on the watch, she made as if to go back, but changed her mind and came toward the head of the stairs with chin up.

"I knew you were there all the time," said Neil morosely.

"Oh, was it you who knocked?" she said with an unconvincing air of innocence. Her face was a study. She wished to lie to him, but her essential honesty rebelled, and her pride suggested that it was none of his business anyway.

"You *knew* it was I!" said Neil accusingly.

"So many people, canvassers, beggars, come through the halls, I never open my door," she said.

"They don't trouble me much," said Neil.

With an offended air she made to go on downstairs.

It was impossible for him to remain angry with her. "Oh, never mind," he said quickly. "Your room is your castle, of course. I just wanted to pay you back. Here."

She dropped the coin in her bag, blushing.

"I accepted another order for a calendar," he said, talking for talk's sake to detain her awhile, "so I'll be in funds this month. They wanted the Courtship of Miles Standish in high relief, but I persuaded them to give me a simple little Arabesque box with 'Hilgenreiner Brewing Company' inside it."

She smiled and made to go on.

"Haven't you got a word to throw to me?" demanded Neil, all ready to be offended again.

She turned a face of genuine distress towards him. "I don't wish to be unfriendly," she said. "But there's nothing to say, is there? We don't know each other."

"Let's get acquainted, then," said Neil. "Come to dinner with me at Garlotti's, and we'll get acquainted fast enough."

She looked at him with a startled "Oh!" She quickly recovered herself. "I'm sorry I can't go," she said soberly.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I have an engagement."

Neil immediately fell prey to a gnawing jealousy. "Oh!" he said, seeking to read her secret with probing eyes. "Well— make it to-morrow night."

She shook her head.

"Another engagement?" he inquired sarcastically.

"No."

"Then why not?"

The soft and charming girl developed unexpected reserves when she was pushed too far. She looked at him full. "Because I don't wish to," she said clearly.

Neil was reduced to sullenness. "Oh! Since you put it that way, I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "I thought you were human and friendly. My mistake."

"I *am* friendly," she said, resentful in turn, "but you won't let me be friendly."

"Then why won't you come out with me?"

"You talk about friendliness," she said warmly. "If I were another man you would not presume to cross-examine me!"

Neil's sense of justice compelled him to confess the hit. He climbed down. "Oh, I suppose you're right," he muttered. "I forgot myself. I'm sorry."

At the sight of his confusion she melted enchantingly. "It's not such a serious crime as all that," and she gave him one of her rare smiles. Nor did she offer to run away now.

It promptly intoxicated him again. "I say, you must think I'm a regular lobster!" he said ardently.

"Oh, no," she said, with a slightly bored air.

It was lost on him. "You will come out with me some time?" he insinuated.

The smile was called in. "It's out of the question," she returned firmly. "There's nothing more to be said about it."

Then she did go.

Neil was provoked to the mad extravagance of dining himself at Garlotti's. He enjoyed it very little, for after he got there he felt mean thus to be spending his money in solitary gratification. Afterward with the young man's instinct of warding off troublesome thoughts he went to three moving-picture shows in succession.

He got home before midnight with a headache, and without having attained his object, for as soon as he lay down in his bed the troublesome thoughts came thronging.

How sweet she was, and how baffling! She had looked hurt when he accused her of unfriendliness; yet she had turned him down peremptorily. What did that mean? What was the matter with him that she didn't like him? Yet she did seem to like him, but kept him at arm's length, too.

Humility was not one of Neil's virtues. That such a soft, appealing, adorable creature should dare to set her will against his drove him wild. He would show her! But how, if she didn't care? Somehow she seemed to be able to put him in the wrong. She made him cut an inglorious figure in his own eyes. Unpardonable in her! Oh! confound her, anyway, for being so maddeningly sweet!

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At intervals his old self would arise and administer discipline. "Here you! Cut it out! You're in a fair way to make a fool of yourself. This will interfere with your work. Get a grip on yourself. She's only a girl like a thousand others. You can't afford it!" And so forth and so forth.

And then he would fall to speculating on the mystery that enveloped her. What sights life could have shown her, a mere girl, that made her eyes so deep and quiet and wistful with the recollection? Only pain borne in silence can lend human beings an immutable dignity like hers. What had she been through? Indeed she was not a girl like all the others. He had never seen a pair of eyes that could play on his heartstrings like hers.

In short, self-discipline was a failure. He was no sooner dressed next morning than he opened his door and fixed desirous eyes on the door down the hall. He went without his breakfast for fear she might slip out while he was gone. Work was a hollow pretence. The old beggar stood untouched under his cloth. The sculptor made feeble sketches for calendar headings and tore them up. The door he watched was never opened. By and by a sharp anxiety attacked him. Suppose she were taken sick in there alone! A lively recollection of yesterday's rebuke kept him as yet from inquiring.

In the middle of the day he heard the postman's whistle, and for a diversion, travelled downstairs on the slim chance of finding a letter. Since the responsibility of the post office department ends at the street door, each of the tenants maintained a mail-box in the entry. All of different sizes and designs, the collection hung on the wall like nests in a chimney.

As he came down the last flight Neil was astonished to see the girl of his thoughts in the act of unlocking her box. How had she got there before him? He lingered inside, meaning to accost her in the greater privacy of the stair hall. The light was behind her, and Neil could not read her expression.

Something suggested, however, that she was changed from the day before. She did not get a letter, and Neil's

jealous heart was glad. Instead of coming in, she immediately turned into the street again.

Neil involuntarily followed her, hatless as he was. She had not been home since early morning, he knew, and he suspected not all night.

She turned east, and crossing the wide esplanade under the shadow of Lincoln, entered Union Square, with its high green fences and clutter and wrack of subway construction. She walked with the curious hurried aimlessness one sees so often in New York. Neil became sure that something was wrong. She seemed in a desperate hurry to get somewhere, yet suddenly she stopped and sat down on a bench. It was as if her legs had refused to carry her further.

As he drew closer Neil saw her face. He was prepared to read trouble there, but he was shocked by what he saw. She was as white as paper, and a look of wild terror dilated her eyes. It wrung his breast. She made him think of a fainting hart listening to the bay of the hounds.

And this in the middle of New York at mid-day with hundreds passing to and fro, none giving a second look.

He slipped into the seat beside her, "Good morning," he said, with an amiable assumption of fatuousness.

She turned her eyes on him without recognition.

"Watching the animals march?" he said, making himself as much like a clown as he could.

"Oh—you're the young man in the back room," she said dully. "Please go away, I wish to be alone."

Neil could not resent it, seeing those eyes. "You're in trouble," he said bluntly. "Can't I help?"

"I—have neuralgia," she said, with a curious painful eagerness. "That's what makes me look so pale and haggard. There's nothing to do but wait till it goes."

"You were not home all night," he said at random.

By her terrified start he knew it was true. She quickly made an effort to recover herself. "Nonsense!" she said. "I got up very early because I could not sleep."

"What's the use of making believe?" asked Neil quietly.

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He was not to be discouraged. "I am your friend," he said.

"Friends!" she cried. Her voice began to shake hysterically. "Men can't be friends with women! They always want something. I tell you I have nothing for you—nothing! Now go and let me be!"

But Neil sat tight. After a long time she asked: "Why don't you go?"

Neil smiled with obstinate good nature.

"It would be easy for you to find out if I want something," he said. "If things are very bad with you already, it wouldn't matter if I turned out no good, would it? And on the other hand, I might not be a bad lot, you know."

She searched him deep with her wild, pained eyes. "I don't believe there's such a thing as decency or manliness," she murmured.

"Maybe not," said Neil.

"Well, I will try you!" she said wildly. "If I could have a friend—— But it isn't possible. It doesn't matter, anyway . . . No questions, mind. Oh, it's only a little thing, anyway. I talk in this silly way! You mustn't mind. It's my head——" She paused.

"Fire away!" said Neil, with a stolid air, calculated to quiet her.

She made a piteous effort to speak in a natural, off-hand way.

"I want something out of my room. My portfolio of drawings, and—and two photographs off the bureau. Those terrible stairs—I'm not equal to them. So you see—it's only a little thing after all. Here's the key. The portfolio stands on a chair in plain view—and the two photographs. They are the only photographs there. Don't forget to lock the door after you. And hurry. Oh, please *hurry*!"

Neil opened the door of her room filled with a mighty curiosity—and conscious of a little shame in being able to gratify it. He had a feeling of entering upon holy ground.

His first look inside was a disappointment. She had lived there scarcely long enough to leave her stamp upon it.—unless its neatness and bareness were symbols. It was like a convent cell. In size and shape it matched his own room, but there was no skylight. The ceiling sloped down in front to a low window close to the floor.

He pounced jealously on the photographs, but there was no occasion for the jealousy. They represented a dignified, middle-aged gentleman and a gentle lady. Obviously her father and mother. The cards bore the imprint of a photographer in Baltimore.

Of course a young man falling in love would say it did not matter; still in his heart he is gratified to find that the parents of the innamorata are gentlefolk. Neil wondered greatly how the daughter of this charming, old-fashioned couple came to be living in such a place as himself.

Full of relief and satisfaction, he slipped them inside the portfolio with the drawings, and turned to go.

As he laid his hand on the doorknob a faint, peculiar smell alarmed an instinct deep within him. Like an animal he lifted his head and sniffed. He could not have told why, but his heart began to beat fast.

He looked about him. Alongside the door into the hall, just as in his own room, there was another door giving on a clothes-closet.

Under that door had crept a thin, blackish-red trickle, which ended in a little black pool.

At such moments a man does not think. A whole set of ordinarily unrecognized impulses comes into play. With a gasp he involuntarily threw open the door. He was already prepared for what was inside. He did not cry out, nor even start back; he only looked with eyes fixed in horror.

A dead man lay on his back on the floor in a grotesque attitude, like a wooden doll; his heels elevated among the girl's dresses hanging there, his arms oddly twisted, his glistening bald crown pointing towards Neil. A towel had been dropped on his face, perhaps with the object of

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soaking up the blood; but it had escaped underneath. It had ceased to flow. Neil did not care to lift the towel.

It was the body of a heavy, middle-aged man.

In our quiet and comfortable lives we shudder at the thought of death by violence. But our under-selves are less squeamish. We are the heirs of the savage ages, too. Suddenly faced by frightful things, we find ourselves acting quite calmly, after all.

Frowning slightly at the dead man, Neil rapidly debated what to do. Knowing nothing of the causes of this tragedy, he had nevertheless taken his side. It was enough that this thing at his feet was the means of making the girl suffer intolerably. He already hated it.

First of all he must return to her. If he did not come quickly she would surely go mad with the suspense of waiting. Afterward he would make a plan.

He closed the closet door on the sprawling manikin and left the room, locking the door behind him. On the way downstairs he schooled his lips to whistle, that his face might not shock her with its grimness.

As he passed along the familiar street, ugly and matter-of-fact in the sunshine, he looked on his fellow-creatures with a new wonder.

"Lord! what animals men are!" he thought. "They feel nothing!"

She was sitting as he had left her, her white face turned over her shoulder watching for him. In spite of his whistling—or because of it—she suspected something, and a wary look appeared, more distressing for him to see in those frank eyes than the previous agony. He avoided her glance.

She moistened her lips. "The photographs?" she whispered.

"Slipped 'em inside," he said with a careless air. "Every thing was O.K. Hope I didn't seem long. Stopped in my own room a moment——"

Her strange look dried up his speech.

"So you know," she murmured.

Neil caught his breath. "Yes—I know," he said, stricken with horror for her. By saving him the trouble

of breaking the news she had cut all the ground from under his feet. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. There he was struck dumb, when he had such a need to reassure her!

But the added blow seemed to steady her. The quietness of despair settled on her eyes. Watching him warily, she slipped her hand inside the portfolio and drawing out the photographs tore them across without looking at them.

"Oh, why do you do that?" he said aghast.

Guarding them against his possible interference, she tore the cards into tiny bits and let them drift away on the breeze. The act had the effect of scattering the ashes of the beloved.

"They mustn't be found on me," she whispered. "It would kill them if they ever knew!"

He was hurt by her suspicion that he might try to prevent her doing as she wished. He forced his benumbed lips to utter, "You have nothing to fear from me!"

"You are kind," she said indifferently.

"I shouldn't have looked!" he stammered. "But the—it—something had run under the door. I opened it before I thought."

"It doesn't matter," she said dully. "You have done all you can for me."

Both were silent for a while, looking straight ahead. The stream of clerks, stenographers, shopworkers out for their noon hour and the changeless idlers passed in both directions before them, without anybody remarking their white faces.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered at last.

"Please leave me," she answered.

It broke the spell of horror that paralysed him. "I will not leave you!" he said energetically. "I'm *glad* I found the thing. I'm going to take a hand in this. You've got to be saved from yourself!"

She shook her head wearily. "You cannot help me. You do not know."

"I'll find a way!" he protested.

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"What for?" she said, with soft bitterness inexpressibly painful to hear. "I have told you that I can never give you anything, nor be anything to you. That is final. Give me the key to my room."

"I will not!" he cried. "What do you think I am? Don't you believe a man can ever do anything except for pay? This thing is out of your hands now. You can't stop me from helping you."

She looked at him as she had once before with eyes wistful, searching and incredulous. "You understand," she said, "I cannot even tell you what happened. You can't work in the dark."

"You can tell me when I have earned your confidence," he said.

She shook her head. "I can never tell you. You must know that in the beginning."

It was a bitter dose for him to swallow, but he got it down at last. "Oh, well, if you can't, you can't, he muttered.

"I can only tell you one thing," she said wistfully. "I didn't do it."

"I don't care if you did or not," he said quickly. "I'm not afraid to face it. Maybe you had good cause. The brute!"

"Oh, no!" she said quickly. "He was a good man in his way. He was kind to me."

Neil's theory of the affair was already well established, and he looked at her, taken aback. "*Kind to you?*" he repeated.

"You see, already you are wondering," she said sadly. "And I can explain nothing."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," he insisted doggedly.

"Yes, that matters," she said. "You can't help me if you think I—did it—or helped."

"If you tell me you didn't, that's enough for me."

"Look at me and swear it!" she breathed.

For the first time their eyes met and held.

"I swear I believe you," he murmured with deep earnestness.

A little sigh escaped her. She relaxed. "Then—

you may do what you like," she granted. "But it is useless. Nevertheless I am grateful to you."

"You must not give up," he urged, full of a passionate solicitude. "You are young. You have a right to life and happiness. Do not put too much store by man-made laws. You have a right to seize it if they keep it from you."

"That sounds like romance to me," she said wearily. "The sordid reality remains. How am I to live? I've already faced starvation once. I was just getting started—with my drawings, I mean. Suppose I succeed in keeping out of the hands—of the police—it means I must start again. I dare not even collect the money that's owing to me. How am I going to live?"

"We will find a way between us," said Neil.

"I couldn't take anything from you," she murmured.

"I did from you," he reminded her, "and I'm a man into the bargain."

"That was a different thing."

They were silent again while Neil debated inwardly.

"One question," he ventured diffidently. "Suppose the—*it*—were not found. Could they trace that man to your room? Think hard."

"I don't think so," she murmured. "No, I am sure."

His face cleared. "That's all right, then. You can go right on living where you are, and doing your work. I will undertake to dispose of—*it*."

"Oh, I couldn't have you!" she protested. "It would ruin you!"

Neil smiled confidently. "A young man isn't so easily ruined. If I have the stuff in me, nothing on earth can ruin me. Anyway, if the worst comes to the worst, accessory after the fact isn't a hanging matter. But I shall never let them get me. It will be fun!"

"*Fun!*" she murmured, deeply scandalized.

"To outwit them," said Neil. His spirits rose rapidly. "I suppose every fellow imagines himself in such a situation when he reads newspaper stories of

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crime. It's hard to tell which is the more stupid, criminal or sleuth.

"I'll show them. You leave it to me. I'll take it away, and—remove all traces. In an hour you can go back to your room as if nothing had happened."

CHAPTER III

OFFICER HARTIGAN

BACK on the top floor of No. 21, Neil, after making sure that the Old Codger was away from home, proceeded to transfer the gruesome tenant of the girl's clothes-closet to his own. The weight of the dead flesh instantly suggested that no woman could have put it where it was unaided. Neil wondered jealously what man had been concerned in the affair.

With his hands under its stiff, cold arms, he dragged it across the hall, while the big head lolled on the fat chest. To have imagined such a scene would have filled h'm with shuddering horror, but in enacting it his busy mind ran ahead, and he did not think of it at all. Indeed, being free of any load of blood-guiltiness himself, the excitement filled him with a kind of exhilaration.

He got it inside his own room at last, and the door safely closed behind him. He looked at the empty tenement where it lay revealed under his skylight with a sentiment of grim humour. Yesterday it was the centre of a universe, and to-day an inconvenient lump that must be hustled out of the way somehow.

As he looked he realized with a start that he had known the dead man in life. No mistaking the rugged lines of that face, fat, yet hard, too, with the curious grey bang like a tonsure on the low forehead.

It was Casper Tolsen, the landlord of No. 21! Only two days before Neil had had his usual set-to with him.

His first feeling was one of regret. Though Tolsen was his natural enemy. Neil had a sneaking liking for him, and somehow he had felt that it was returned. Their disputes had been carried through in a spirit of

irony on both sides. Neil had contrived to live in his house for a month without paying any rent. The game was to see how long he could keep it up.

Tolsen did not own the building, but merely rented the upper floors from the piano warehouse on the street level, and in turn sublet the rooms.

The discovery of his identity gave Neil considerable food for thought. Naturally when he was reported missing one of the first places they would look would be in the building that supplied a large part of his income.

That made Neil's task more difficult—perhaps searchers were already on the way! As for the causes of the tragedy, the mystery was only deepened. No amount of speculation furnished Neil with a plausible hypothesis to account for the connection between the hard-fisted, prosperous peasant and the fine-drawn girl in whose room he had found the man's body.

Neil observed with a sickness of the heart that the conspicuous diamond went to decorate the fat third finger was missing. Hardly any need to look if the great roll of bills he was fond of displaying was gone, too.

But Neil had work to do still, and was compelled to defer his speculations for the time being. Shutting up what was left of his landlord in his closet, he went back to the girl's room with scrubbing-brush and pail. He afterward swept the hall, to remove any evidences of scraping heels in the dust.

No one disturbed the top floor during these operations.

As the hours passed without any sign of the girl, a heavy anxiety attacked Neil. Of course, she could not be expected to sleep in that room. What would she do throughout the night? What a fool he had been not to think of that before, and to provide for it! He had not even thought to arrange for another meeting! Suppose she gave him the slip altogether? His heart sank dismally.

It occurred to him that she might still visit her little box below, so he made haste to put all the money he had in an envelope, barring enough to buy bread for a few days, and dropped it in her letter-box.

In an hour he found it back in his own box, with a scrap of a note:

Truly I have enough for my needs. I have received a check. Do not trouble about me.

Neil walked up and down his little room, making and discarding innumerable plans of action. He recalled all the murder mysteries he had known of, both solved and unsolved, and criticised the technique of the criminals. Fiction dealing with crime he mostly passed over; in novels the long arm of coincidence was generally invoked, and he couldn't depend on that.

He had a stubborn fact to contend with—nearly two hundred pounds stubborn. He told himself with a certain pride that his problem was more difficult than any he had ever read of. He had neither a bath, a furnace, a trunk nor a cellar, those time-honoured expedients of persons with a body on their hands.

It started in to rain in earnest, and his heart lifted. Rain would help him enormously. He did not see the girl again.

Late in the afternoon he had a blow. Returning from a trip down town to buy what he needed for his plan, he found a strange man in the girl's room. It proved to be a dealer in second-hand furniture, who had bought her cot, her chest of drawers and her chair.

She had gone, and without telling him! He sought in his mind for arguments to explain it, but the heavy sense of ingratitude remained.

However, the business had to be carried through just the same. Night found him ready with a coil of light rope and a bunch of common house-keys that he had bought for a few cents from a junk-dealer.

His plan, like all well-considered plans, was exceedingly simple. From the street he had observed by a sign in the window that the top floor of No. 13, four doors down, was vacant. While the world slept he meant to haul the body up through the skylight, drag it with infinite care across the intervening roofs and lower it into the vacant room. It would be necessary for him to enter the vacant

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room to open the skylight, and again to close it to remove the rope.

Such rooms are generally left open when vacant, but in any case he had the keys. He trusted to the rain to keep other tenants from seeking air on the roof that night, and also to wash out any marks of his progress.

At eleven o'clock Neil had the satisfaction of seeing the crack of light disappear from under the Old Codger's door. Shortly thereafter he heard the well-known sound of his snore. This was his cue to put things in motion.

Neil's only doubt was whether he would be able to haul that weight all the way from the floor to the skylight. Anything in the nature of tackle was out of the question. He determined to raise it as far as he could from below.

He therefore split up his trestle into two parts, superimposed the smaller on the larger, and put a chair on top of all. Little by little, with infinite pains, he managed to get the body on the first shelf, then to the second, and finally on the chair. During the progress of these grisly and strenuous labours he kept up his heart, as men do in desperate cases, by a species of grim jesting.

"Up you go, old man! Our last ride together! Heave-ho! Pull yourself together, old top; you're all over the place! There! I didn't mean to bash your face! It's all the same to you, isn't it? You're good-natured now, all right! Once more, all together—up you go! I'm helping you to heaven as far as I can!"

The rope was already tied under his arms. When he got him athwart the chair Neil opened the skylight and, tossing the end of the rope up on the roof, climbed after it.

The sky wept softly on the tin roofs. The tall loft-buildings with their innumerable shuttered windows rose like great, pale cliffs. It was not as dark as the adventurer could have wished, for the street lights were reflected back from the pinkish, low-hanging clouds, and the wet tin glimmered wanly. But it was as solitary as any spot in the five boroughs at that moment. Neil had taken a preliminary survey of the route and knew his way.

The frame of the skylight provided a good purchase

for his feet. He picked up the rope and braced himself. When the body swung clear of the chair his strength was taxed to the utmost. He set his jaw. The thing *had* to be done!

The body rose slowly. The tonsured crown showed in the opening, and Neil, holding it there, was going down the rope hand over hand, preparatory to grasping the collar—when something happened. Either the knot slipped or the rope parted, he never knew what.

He was catapulted backward. He landed with a horrifying crash in the middle of the next skylight, and presently found himself sitting on the floor of a dark room much shaken in body and confused in mind.

Instantly from close by was lifted a series of ear-splitting yells: "Help! Police! Murder! Thieves!"

Neil recognised the voice of the Old Codger. So *that* was where he was! Here was a pretty situation for a conspirator! He wondered if he would have to do a real murder in order to hide the one he had not committed. He lay very still, trying to figure out where the door lay. He knew it had a spring lock. If he could reach it!

Getting his bearings at last, he commenced to creep toward it softly. The yells redoubled in volume. Neil heard stirrings below, and his heart sank.

"Shut your head, or I'll brain you!" he growled.

The voice was called in with a gasp. At the same moment Neil laid his hand on the patent lock of the door. Up the ladder through the scuttle and over the roofs was his plan. If he could conceal his identity all might not yet be lost.

He was too late. As he opened the door an electric flash was thrown in his face, momentarily blinding him. He fell back a step. Several people crowded inside.

The voice behind him was promptly raised again. "That's him! The thief! Seize him! Hit him over the head!"

"I've got him covered!" said a man's voice.

Neil ground his teeth in helpless rage.

The Old Codger scrambled out of bed and lit the gas. Neil was ready to give up all hope. However, in the

general excitement he was not immediately recognised as a fellow tenant. None of them knew him very well. All the tenants who slept in the building were there—four men, and a large woman wearing a boudoir cap. She kept a correspondence school of millinery on the floor below. The uncouth, scantily-dressed group was etched on Neil's retina.

Everybody talked at once.

"Seize him, the scoundrel!" cried the Old Codger. In his excitement he forgot his shyness—he in his night-shirt, too, and a lady present.

"It's all a mistake," said Neil, with as much dignity as he could muster. "I was walking on the roof and I stumbled and fell through the skylight."

This was received with a chorus of derisive laughter. "Likely story!"

Neil flushed hotly. "Did you ever hear of a burglar jumping through a skylight?" he demanded.

"Well, then, you've been robbing some other place," said the milliner sapiently. "Take him in boys, on the chance."

How Neil hated her, the fat, vulgar creature!

"A desperate character!" cried the Old Codger. "Threatened my life, he did!"

Neil, thinking of what lay in the next room, was ready to seize upon any pretext to take them away from that vicinity. Perhaps he might be able to make a break for liberty in the street below. None of these looked like runners.

"Very well, let's go and find a policeman," he said. "I'm willing to put it up to him."

"You'd better be!" they said.

They descended the stairs in a body with a great clatter. Unfortunately for Neil's hopes of escape the detestable lady milliner had taken the precaution to scream out of the window before venturing upstairs, and they met a policeman coming up with drawn club. At a respectful distance followed a little crowd of curiosity-seekers, such as may be raised in New York at any hour of the night.

A confused and noisy explanation took place on the landing. To Neil it was like a bad dream. His coatless and disordered state told against him. The gas turned up and doors opened and closed. Close around pressed a circle of vacant, staring open-mouthed faces, every human feeling sunk in mere animal curiosity.

The representative of the law presented a broad blue front and rosy gills under his visor. His accent betrayed a Gaelic derivation. He was scornful and bored.

Gripping Neil's arm in one hand he swung his club in the other. "Get back!" he cried hoarsely. "What the hell do youse think this is, a circus? Who's the complainant here?"

"Me? cried a voice from above. "I'll be down as soon as I get some clothes on, officer."

Presently Neil found himself walking through the empty, shining streets, the policeman beside him, and on the other side of the policeman the old Old Codger, still pouring out his tale of wrong.

"Ah! save your breath to blow your soup with!" cried the bored, lordly bluecoat at last. "Tell that to the lieutenant at the desk. I ain't got nottin' to do but bring him in, see?"

The Old Codger fell back and addressed his narrative to the more sympathetic ears of the stragglers behind.

The policeman glanced curiously at the dogged face of his young prisoner. Behind the official front there was a slow-witted, good-natured humaneness.

"You ain't had a word to say yet," he suggested.

Neil shrugged.

"Oh, well, just in the way of conversation," the bluecoat went on sociably, "You can say anything you like to me. I ain't got nottin' to do wit' it. Hartigan my name is, Terence Hartigan. Don't forget it. I always make friends wit' the fellas and girls I take up. Exceptin' the genuine rat-face brand. It's a fancy I have. Lord! there's many a mistake made, I says, and I'm only a human bean meself. Them complainants, they gen'ally make me sore. They show such nasty dispositions, like. God! they want you to hang every poor fella! Why,

some of the best friends I got are fellas I run in first-off. They never hold it against me."

Unfortunately Neil was not in the proper frame of mind to appreciate this good fellow. He scarcely heard him.

"It's a dog's life they lead you anyhow," Hartigan went on. He was of the well-fed type that loves a grievance. "Say, us cops gets it coming *and* going. We got to do ev'ybody's dirty work. What with the public on the one side and the Organization on the other we're like that kid in the Bible that was claimed by two mothers. Young Solomon wasn't it? I dunno. Ev'ybody picks on the cops.

"Say, the way the newspapers hands it to us is fierce. They get all their news from us, don't they? There's gratitude! But them suffergettes is the worst. I mean the old hexes that hunt the streets for trouble, and want you to arrest the brutes for overloading their automobile trucks, and take down your number and write to the commishner. Say, a cop's got no more freedom of action nowadays than a street corner sign. We're nailed down, boy, that's what we are, nailed down!"

The populace was halted outside the door of the police station. Prisoner, complainant and the four male witnesses lined up before the rail. The lady, recollecting her crimping irons, had remained behind to dress. The lieutenant was a thin, dyspeptic-looking officer with an air unutterably bored by the dramatic scenes which succeeded so rapidly before him. The green shades on his lamps lent his complexion a ghastly hue. The scene bore a strong resemblance to a dingy schoolroom without any desks, and with grown-up scholars.

The lieutenant entered a formal complaint in his big book, and ignored alike the Old Codger's fervent accusation and Neil's indignant denial.

"Tell it to the magistrate," was his answer to both. "Put him in No. 27, Hartigan."

Neil was led out of the back door, across a narrow, flagged court, and up a short iron stairway into a separate building, lost to the world among the back walls. The

windows were ominously barred. An ancient doorkeeper, red-eyed and horribly callous, sat within, with his keys on a bell ring.

"No. 27," Hartigan said, turning Neil over to him.

Hartigan lingered, casting a commiserating eye on the bedraggled youth. "If you've got any money I'll send you in lunch," he said.

"Don't want it."

"Do you want me to telephone any friend to send you a coat and hat? You're wet through."

Neil shook his head.

"Well, so long," said his captor. "You're lucky that I took you up early. You won't be here long. They'll send you up to the night court with the last load. The wagon will be round in an hour. I'll ride up with you. So long."

Neil was ushered into a narrow cell, and the door clanged to with the ring of shooting bolts, a sound exactly like no other sound on earth, and which, heard for the first time behind a man, completely changes his point of view on society.

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CHAPTER IV

IN THE TOILS

NEIL sat on the wooden shelf running lengthwise of his cell, and considered his situation. It was about as bad as it could be. Even though he succeeded in concealing his identity, where would he be if he were sent up for attempted burglary or even for disorderly conduct? And even in the unlikely event of his being able to impress the magistrate with the very sketchy tale he was prepared to tell, the court would require verification.

Whichever way you looked at it there was small chance that the secret could be kept locked in his room. To tell the truth, he had bungled miserably. He did not spare himself. The business he had engaged in so light-heartedly now wore a very different look.

Black as the outlook was, Neil could not be altogether downcast. There was another part of him which took a weird joy in the novelty of his sensations. His eyes and ears were busy in spite of him. The corridor outside was brightly illuminated, and a certain amount of light came through the barred door. The drab-painted brick walls of his cell were revealed covered with the thoughts and the pictures of former tenants.

Among the former he deciphered this :

Some folks land here from too much beer
And some from finding money.
But that, old dear, was not my queer—
With a cop I got too funny.

Presently Neil heard a voice : " Hey, cull ! "

"I don't know," the voice went on anxiously. "If I was slick, he'd be easy on me, but me clothes is a bit dusty. And she gimme a bloody scab wit' her club. You always get it worse when you look bloody. I wouldn't mind if it was fall, but with the summer just comin' on——! It was a mistake! It was a mistake! I had a mind to go to Canada. Who's sittin' in the night court now?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, I forgot you were a fledgeling. A lot depends on that, son. Take my advice, and before you get run in pick your magistrate. If it's old Mulligan, he knows me. I laugh real hearty at his jokes and he lets me down easy. But these new young fellers, they're serious-minded. I do' know how to take them. Well, so long. I'm goin' to sleep now. See you in the wagon. I'm Indiana Joe. You'll know me by my scab."

Farther down the line of cells Neil heard another dialogue.

"Say, fella, what time is it?"

"Twenty minutes past twelve."

"Daytime or night?"

"Say, your pipe's out! Night."

"Night!" The hell you say! Say, is it yesterday or to-morrow?"

"What's the matter with you? Do you think that's humorous?"

"I ast you a civil question, didn't I? Is it yesterday or to-morrow?"

"It's to-day, you souse!"

"Sure, I know it's to-day. But is to-day yesterday or to-morrow?"

"Hey, doorkeeper! A straitjacket wanted here."

"Can't you tell me, is it yesterday or to-morrow?"

"Ah, go on and sleep it off. It's Wednesday."

"That doesn't do me no good, because I don't know what day it was I got drunk. What am I goin' to say to my boss if I don't know whether it's yesterday or to-morrow?"

By and by, down the corridor Neil heard the bolts shot back and the doors clank open, one by one. The slumberers were awakened with no gentle hand and voice.

The old mastiff of a doorkeeper, with his dull, vindictive eye, finally unlocked Neil's door and held it open. This prisoner obeyed the mute invitation, and followed the others down the corridor and across the courtyard into the back room of the station house. He recognised the battered Indiana Joe without difficulty, but was not over-anxious to make himself known.

Officer Hartigan was waiting for him. While maintaining his stern port, he shot words of encouragement out of the corner of his mouth.

"How are you, Jack. Did you have a sleep? How about an automobile ride? Rockfellow don't dast break the speed limit like you will to-night."

The hang-dog flock, with its brisk, blue shepherd, passed through the front room and down the steps. The patrol wagon was backed up to the curb. As Neil was about to get in it Hartigan restrained him.

"Let them bums get in first," he whispered. "You can sit by me at the end. It's better air."

During their rapid passage through the city Neil was once more aware of a vastly changed point of view. To saunter in the streets and look in shop windows now seemed like a wonderful privilege. Late passers by smiled in superior fashion at the loaded wagon. Little newsboys who ought to have been in bed capered in its track and made insulting gestures.

"This is what it feels like to be the under dog," thought Neil.

Arrived at the back entrance of a grim, tall building, they were marched up a heaven-pointing, straight flight of stairs, barred top and bottom. At the top they were put in a great cage which already contained a score of prisoners. There they were left to their own devices for awhile.

Drunks and thieves were in the majority, the first, for the most part, battered and repentant, the other class neat, wary and hard-eyed. Neil dreaded this part of his

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ordeal; he felt different from the others and looked for them to turn on him.

Nothing of the sort happened. A fellow-feeling united them like old friends. One ragged burlesque of humanity begged Neil to tidy him up for the judge; another besought him to wait in the street if he was let off first, as he had the horrors coming on and couldn't bear to be alone.

One man was distinguished from all the rest by his serene smile. He was young, dark and able. His clothes were neat and plain like the thieves', but this man's eye was beaming. The battered wretches turned to him with instinctive confidence. He caught Neil's eye and nodded in a friendly way.

"How did you get here?" Neil asked curiously. It was the usual question, man to man.

"Labour agitator," he smiled. "All in the day's work. How about you?"

"Oh, a rotten mess!" said Neil, with a shrug. "Not altogether of my own making."

"Got a lawyer?"

Neil shook his head.

"Want one?"

Another shake.

At this moment the dark young man was called for and their talk cut short. His name was Adolph Zinns.

From the "pen" the prisoners progressed one by one into a long corridor, where they were made to sit in a row until their cases were called. The officer responsible for each prisoner lingered near, in many cases sitting beside his charge, and chatting amicably. Men are naturally good-tempered.

Hartigan was not the least among the good-tempered. "I fixed it up for you to go on early," he whispered to Neil. "I got a pull here."

"Much obliged," said Neil.

"Say, it's a great place to see life, ain't it?" the other went on, waving his hand down the waiting line. "Always 'minds me of sinners at Peter's gate. Well,

up there they'll get a square deal, anyhow. But of course magistrates ain't angels."

Neil entered the courtroom feeling like an actor called upon to play the leading part in a play unknown to him. A fresh doubt of the story he was going to tell attacked him—and it was too late to think up another now.

The great room was brightly lighted. It was panelled to the ceiling with a light yellow wood. As long as he lived that colour affected Neil with a slight sickness. Hartigan was at his side, rosy and self-conscious. The back benches were half full, mostly with anxious-eyed men and women who had a stake in the cases to come. Some there were who slept in painfully upright attitudes, calculated not to attract a court officer's attention. There was a cloud of policemen, all looking oddly defenceless without their visors.

On a bench inside the gate Neil saw the Old Codger watching and waiting, bursting with vindictiveness.

His heart sank. He had had a vagrant hope that apoplexy might intervene.

Neil looked eagerly toward the magistrate's bench. Upon it he saw a youngish man with a tall head, solemn and rather disgusted looking, like one who is performing an unpleasant duty self-righteously. Meeting him outside Neil would have passed over him indifferently. "Commonplace" would have been his verdict. But there he sat, enthroned above, charged with a power over his body.

"I'll never be able to do anything with this owl," thought Neil. A subtle antagonism crept into his breast which didn't help his case any.

The Old Codger needed no prompting to tell his tale. It poured out of him with embellishments. Neil stared indignantly. "What does he want to lie for?" he thought "It's bad enough!" Officer Hartigan followed the complainant on the stand. The other tenants of No. 21 were not present.

While the testimony was being given another policeman touched Neil on the arm, and, to his astonishment, offered him coat and hat.

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"The striker guy that was acquitted left these for youse," he said. "Said you'd need 'em if you had to take another ride. Said his card was in the pocket if you wanted to return 'em."

Neil thankfully accepted the gifts. The coat fitted him. Though he was not borne down by any feeling of guilt, still with the coat he put on an increased self-respect. So dependent are men on their habiliments.

"Well, have you anything to say for yourself?" the magistrate finally asked, turning a lack-lustre eye on the prisoner.

"Only this," said Neil. "I ask you as a reasonable man if I had intended to rob this man's room would I have announced myself by jumping through the skylight?"

The court attendants looked a little scandalized at the familiar tone.

"I don't know," said the magistrate solemnly, "never having been a thief. What were you doing on the roof?"

"I'm an artist," said Neil. "I was studying the effect of rain at night."

"Hm!" said his honour. "You have given your address as No. 13, while the complainant says he lives at 21. Why didn't you stay on your own roof?"

"The composition was better over there," explained Neil.

The magistrate looked blank, but would not confess his ignorance of the term. Neil perceived that he was making an impression.

"I mean the arrangements of objects and shadows," he explained.

"Have you any witnesses?"

"I was alone."

"I mean character witnesses. Some one to inform the court that you are what you claim to be."

"No," said Neil, assuming an air of indignation. "I don't want to drag any of my friends into this ridiculous business."

"Hm!" said his honour again. After considering a moment or two an expedient worthy of Solomon occurred to him. He looked gravely pleased at his own perspicacity. "You say you are an artist. Clerk give him pencil and paper. Now make a quick sketch of me." He assumed a before-the-camera expression of judicial dignity.

This was child's play to Neil. His heart looked up. He was doing better than he expected. But prudence held his hand. The tall-headed, solemn young man lent himself fatally to caricature. Neil doubted his ability to flatter him.

"I couldn't do your honour justice in a short space of time," he said respectfully. "I will do this policeman instead."

The magistrate looked disappointed, but signed to him to proceed. Officer Hartigan blushed to his ears and looked wildly around. But he was trapped. The quick pencil was already at work. The other policemen grinned behind their hands. In a few minutes Neil handed the paper up to the bench. There was the plump officer, rosy gills, Irish upper lip, and honest disgruntled eyes to the life. And all in twenty lines.

"Not bad! Not bad," murmured his honour, looking at Neil with a tinge of respect. He was graciously pleased to pass the sketch around. A discreet titter travelled in its train. All the policemen were delighted except the subject of the sketch, who sniffed contemptuously. The tide ran strong in the prisoner's favour. Feeling it, Neil cast down his eyes to hide any untoward exultation.

"He didn't take anything, did he?" the magistrate asked the Old Codger.

"He didn't have a chance," was the ill-natured reply.

"How about the broken glass?"

"I will pay for that, of course," said Neil quickly.

"You have the money with you?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes," said Neil. "That is, a dollar or two."

"Well," said his honour, "men don't customarily

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undertake small thefts with money in their pockets. I think a mistake has been made. I will——”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” cried an excited soprano voice from the back of the room. “I know something about this case!”

It was the large blond milliner lady. Neil’s soaring heart came down with a broken wing. Apparently it had taken her all this time to make ready for a courtroom appearance. Elaborately coiffured, hatted and harnessed, she sailed down the aisle with a gracious bend in her back. She was carrying daintily at arm’s length a bunch of rusty door-keys.

She took the stand. “I am also a tenant in No. 21,” she explained in a choice phraseology and melodiously. “I am Madame de la Warr of the De la Warr Millinery Academy. My card. Awakened by the crash overhead, I flung up my casement and summoned the police. Subsequently, after partially dressing myself, I assisted in the capture of the prisoner. After they had hauled him off to the police station I sent one of the boys—one of the gentleman tenants—up to the roof to see if he could discover any evidence. He brought back these keys. I came to court as quick as I could.”

“Hm!” said the court, looking grave.

Madame de la Warr was staring strangely at the prisoner. “Why—why—” she gasped. “I know him! I never got a good look at him before.” She forgot the mellifluous accents. “If it ain’t the sculptor fellow on the top floor! Why, his room is right next to the old party’s there. His name is Neil Ottoway.”

His honour turned to the Old Codger. “Do you identify the prisoner as your neighbour?” he demanded.

The complainant blinked. “It—it may be,” he stammered. “I’ve only passed him a couple of times in the dark hall. My eyesight is not what it used to be. It may be.”

The magistrate turned a portentous frown on the prisoner. “What have you to say to this? If you are what you claim, why did you conceal this fact?”

Neil played his last desperate card. “The lady is

mistaken," he said indignantly. "I never saw her before to-night."

"Ohhh!" she cried in virtuous horror. "Did you ever! Many's the time he stopped and passed the time of day. But I never gave him no encouragement. A lone woman has got to be careful!"

This was a lie. There had been overtures of friendship—but from the other side. Neil glared at her helplessly.

"I will look into this matter," said his honour. "The prisoner is remanded for an hour. Officer Wilkinson, you are instructed to go to the house where this affair occurred and learn if there is a person named Neil Ottoway living there. You are to find out if he is at home. If there is no answer to your summons at the door you are instructed to force it, and to report to the court on any evidence you may find inside."

Neil turned a little sick. The game was up now for sure—and when he had seemed so near freedom! Truly, it seemed as if a maliciously inspired fate were pursuing him in the person of the horrible milliner.

"Take him back," the magistrate said to Hartigan. "And wait until I send for you again."

Neil turned blindly toward the door back to the pen. As he was about to pass through the clerk of the court spoke to Hartigan. It seemed that he wanted to verify something in the evidence. Hartigan turned to his desk, and thus it happened that Neil passed through the door alone. Neatly coated as he now was and carrying a good hat, the officer who kept the record on the other side of the door did not immediately recognise him.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded gruffly.

Neil clutched at the chance like a drowning man at his straw. "I want to consult with my client," he said glibly.

"Don't you know enough to apply at the consultation room?" stormed the policeman. "This is the prisoners' door!"

"I've never practised in this court before," ventured Neil humbly. He did not expect to get away with this;

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still, it was a chance. He was fervently praying that Hartigan might still be delayed.

"Huh! you *must* be a new one!" sneered the bluecoat. "Who is your client, anyhow?"

Neil thought of his benefactor. "Adolph Zinns," he said.

The policeman, still grumbling, consulted his big book, while Neil waited in mid-air, so to speak.

"Discharged," he said. "He don't need you."

"Oh!—much obliged," said Neil. "Sorry to have troubled you. If you can ever put anything in my way——"

This was accompanied by a significant look, which was not lost on the policeman. He relaxed, and rose.

"If you go back that way you'll be arraigned," he said. "You must go out by the consultation room. I'll pass you. What did you say your name was?"

"Michael Goldstone," said Neil. "West Tenth Street, opposite Jefferson Market."

"Well, if I can put anything your way I will," said the policeman, quite affable all at once.

At the door of the consultation room he gave Neil an opportunity to slip him a dollar out of sight of the waiting prisoners in the corridor. If any of these recognised Neil they remained loyally silent. His conductor vouched for him to the guards in the outer room.

And so, scarcely daring to believe his senses, Neil found himself in the courtroom again, by means of a door toward the back. Another case was now in progress, and no one noticed him. All this had happened in the space of a minute, and Hartigan was still at the clerk's desk.

Neil crossed the room nonchalantly and went down the front stairs, faster and faster as he sniffed the blessed free air of the street.

He issued out of the building soberly enough. There was a taxi-cab at the door. He still had a little money. If he could beat the policeman to Fourteenth Street and drag the body into the vacant front room, it would give him a little time to turn around, all might not yet be

lost. He jumped in the cab and gave the driver the number.

Alas for his hopes! At Thirty-fourth Street they had a blow-out. He lost precious minutes in finding another cab. He was then afraid to go direct home, and had himself put down around the corner.

It was well that he did so. Spying cautiously from across the way he saw Officer Wilkinson come running out of the doorway of 21 with agitated mien. With his night-stick he rapped smartly on the sidewalk for assistance. Neil did not linger.

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CHAPTER V

A HOT SCENT

THE fugitive instinctively sought the lower east side of the city, where even in the small hours of morning there is light and life. A solitary figure in a dark street is fatally conspicuous.

Neil felt a grim amusement in the consternation his escape would raise in that decorous court when news of the gruesome find in his room was brought back. He pictured the rosy Hartigan turning pale, and the surly doorkeeper singing very small.

It was funny, but it was ominous, too. Heaven help a fugitive when the *amour propre* of the police force is wounded! Within an hour, Neil knew, every one of the thousands of bluecoats patrolling the streets would have a minute description of his person, and every breast among them would be fired with the determination to bring in one who had so grievously belittled the force.

Off against this imposing organisation he had only his unaided wits to play. His assets otherwise consisted of a dollar and some cents in money and the clothes he stood in.

But liberty after his brief incarceration was ineffably sweet. To keep it he was prepared to fight to the last ditch.

In Park Row, Beekman and Spruce Streets, he found a reassuring bustle around the newspaper offices. The morning papers were being loaded on automobile trucks with a deal of noise and excitement. In the doorways and alleys around hovered a crowd of homeless idlers

drawn like Neil to the only spot in town where there was something going on at that hour. Neil lost himself comfortably among them. The frantic haste of the workers and the apathy of the lookers-on offered a sharp comment on modern social economy.

It began to grow light. He dreaded the daylight, but all the wishing in the world would not put it off for a minute. The next best thing was to find a safe hiding-place. In New York the current of life flows north and south, and therefore on the eastern and western edges of the island are to be found many quaint little backwaters forgotten of the city.

Neil, instinctively guessing this, turned east up Cherry Hill to Corlears Hook, then north, always clinging to the waterside.

The neighbourhood in which he found himself had nothing in common with modern New York. The humble streets, the names of which New Yorkers themselves never hear, with their little tenements half empty and their out-of-date factories half ruinous, were as quaint and undisturbed as those of a mid-state town that was prosperous half a century ago. The solitude of these streets revealed Neil in startling focus, but fortunately the district did not seem to be worth policing. He made haste to find refuge.

A lumber yard promised well. There was a high board fence on the street with a gate padlocked on the outside. Therefore there could be no one within. The piles of lumber stuck up over the top of the fence, and much of it was weather-beaten, showing that it had been there a long time. Some empty barrels beside the fence offered an easy way over.

With a hasty survey up and down, Neil climbed on a barrel and, swinging over the fence, dropped to the ground on the other side.

The alleys surrounding the tall piles of lumber made an admirable maze for one who wished to hide. Neil penetrated it to the farthest side of the yard, where the undisturbed look of everything suggested that the employes rarely came. Here the piles towered thirty and

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forty feet in the air, and the deep pits between were like miniature cañons.

Rounding the last corner, Neil found himself in a little cul-de-sac formed by two piles of lumber and a blank brick wall. At the end of it was a little sloping shelter of boards, evidently left by some previous outcast.

A sound from beneath it startled and warned Neil. He ducked his head to look. A man was sleeping there.

Neil hesitated whether to retreat, or to provoke an encounter. His greatest need in the world was of a disguise, and here was a good one. The man was unquestionably down on his luck as he was himself, and he thought he could safely trust to the freemasonry of the unfortunate. In any case the man was no bigger than he. He felt able to handle him.

So he stayed.

The sleeper becoming conscious in his sleep of a gaze upon him, stirred and awoke. Seeing Neil he bristled defiantly.

"Well, wot abaht it?" he said in the accents of Whitechapel. "Cawn't a bloke 'ave a free sleep in your blighted free country?"

"Keep your shirt on," said Neil, "I'm no better off than yourself. I'm looking for a place to stow away, like you are."

The awakened one changed his tone. "Oh!" he grumbled. "Thought you was a watchman. Welcome to our 'appy home. In this country they 'ave the sweepings watched. That's freedom!"

He was somewhere near Neil's age and build, the latter fact a matter of satisfaction to the fugitive. There could be no mistake as to his occupation; ragged coat and trousers, thick woollen undershirt, woollen neckcloth and cloth cap all greasy with coal dust. Even the pale, shiny-scrubbed face betrayed the coal-passenger on a liner.

"How did you find yourself in this corner?" Neil asked.

"Blimy if I know where I am," was the answer. "Never been off West Street before. I wore me feet to the ankles walkin'. I was lookin' for a plice to lie low till the Catalonia sailed to-day. Wot's 'ell got for you

after the stokehole? It's a dog's life! A dog's life? Why, a dog lives like Barney Barnato alongside a stoker! They sweat your guts out in five years, and throw you in the dustbin. Not for me no more. I'm lookin' for a little bit of your freedom. They tell me the sun shines all summer in America, and peaches grows free by the road. I'm goin' to 'oof it out to the perairies."

"Those clothes give you away," said Neil suggestively. "You ought to have a change."

"Sure!" said the stoker sarcastically. "I ought to have a motor-car, too, and a thousand pun. Where'll I pick 'em up?"

"Well, as for the clothes," said Neil, "you can change with me."

"Garn!" cried the other suspiciously. "Wot are you gettin' at? I'm honest so far. I don't run me 'ead into no noose."

Neil grinned. "I'm honest myself, though wanted by the police like many another honest man. What do *you* care, anyway? My clothes on me would land me in jail. On you they'd never be noticed. You don't look like me in the face."

"No, thank God!" said the stoker good-naturedly. "Wot's it worth to you, mate?"

"Half a dollar." said Neil.

The other man eyed the clothes covetously. To him they seemed quite fine. "Strike me if it wouldn't be a fit!" he murmured. "Everythink included?" he asked.

Neil agreed.

"Done!" said the stoker, and they shook hands on it.

They changed clothes. Neil's flesh crawled a little at the grime, but he told himself that coal dust was clean dirt, and that men engaged in dirty occupations were notoriously cleanly. He hoped that he looked more at home than he felt in the other man's garments. The stoker was strutting like a cock-grouse in the strike-leader's coat and hat. Neil kept the owner's card against the chance of paying for them some day.

"Blest if I couldn't ship first-clawss in these," said the stoker. "There's a 'at for you!"

Neil cocked an eye at the narrow strip of sky overhead. "The sun must be up," he said. "We've got to get out of this before the yard opens for business, or stay all day."

"Right-o!" said the stoker. He tossed the half dollar. "I'm going to wrap meself outside a square meal."

They made their way back to the street fence and took a cautious survey over the top. Choosing a moment when the little street was empty, they swung themselves over, and parted at the other side with a hasty handshake.

"So long," said Neil. "Good luck and plenty of peaches."

"Same to you," said the stoker. "May the bobbies never see you in front!"

They headed for different corners of the street and never saw each other again.

Neil continued north along river-side streets which started up one beyond another as the island widened. A strictly rectangular city plan is hardly suitable to the edges of an island. Coming to a coalyard he grimed his face unobserved, and then washed it in a horse-trough, leaving only enough black in the hollows to give verisimilitude to the part he meant to play.

His awkwardness gradually wore off. He was charmed with the general effect as revealed by the window mirrors of corner saloons. Thus tricked out he was not afraid to look any policeman in the face. The only thing out of keeping was his over-luxuriant hair. But that was pretty well hidden under the grimy cap.

Neil's ironic humour prompted him to return to the scene of the crime to see what was going on. He breakfasted on Avenue A and started west. The streets now began to be populated with men carrying their dinner pails to work, and girls with their little packages of sandwiches. The air had a delicious freshness, and the fugitive's spirits rose. Nobody looked at him. He had a most comfortable feeling of insignificance.

At the door of No. 21 stood a policeman with a knot

of the curious trying to peer into the dark hallway behind him. It was not a policeman that Neil had seen before, and he joined the loiterers boldly. The group made a little eddy in the pavement current, continually breaking up only to be renewed. They were silent with that odd shyness of a crowd which must wait until some bold spirit speaks up and loosens all tongues.

Neil found himself next to a plasterer in his dusty working suit. "I sye, myte," he asked in accents suitable to his make-up. "Wot's the row 'ere?"

"Search me," was the answer. "Fella says a burglar broke in here last night."

"Well, if 'e's been and gone, wot's the bloomin' bobby for?"

"Guess you don't know our ways, George, said the plasterer dryly. "When you've been cleaned out already they plant a cop so's the next burglar won't waste his time on you, see?"

"Well if Hi was a burglar Hi wouldn't burgle an old rabbit-utch like that."

Here a self-important man spoke up. "It wasn't no burglary, I tell you. A guy was murdered in there last night. They carried out his body at two o'clock this morning. I know a guy who lives there. He told me himself. It was a stone-cutter done it. Beat in his nut with his mallet."

"Cheese it, 'bo! What nickel liberry do you subscribe to?" asked a messenger boy satirically.

"It's a fact, I tell you," said the self-important one excitedly. "I had it straight!"

"Move on there!" growled the policeman.

The group dispersed; its place immediately to be taken by another. Neil and the plasterer walked away together.

"In a couple of hours they'll have a 'ole bloomin' family cut up small in there," said Neil.

"Ah! I never pay no attention to sidewalk talk," said the plasterer. "It'll all be in the papers."

They parted at the corner.

The papers! Neil thrilled with excitement at the

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thought of reading his story as seen through the eyes of the Argus press.

He had still two long hours to wait until nine o'clock when the "noon" editions appear. He walked across town to West Street where the big liners dock, and the longshoremen off duty foregather. This was where he properly belonged in his present make-up. On West Street he was one of half a thousand coal-passers, and his disguise was good enough to excite no attention from them. He was careful, however, not to try his home-made accent on the genuine imported article.

As the time approached he loitered outside a little stationery store. When the newspaper wagons clattered up Neil was the first to buy.

It was the earliest, most enterprising and most reckless of the papers. No lack of sensation here! There it was in letters of red two inches high across the front page:

MURDERER LOST IN SHUFFLE!

A queer, prickly feeling ran up and down Neil's spine.

An extraordinary breathless hodge-podge of fact and fancy followed. The absurd story of the stone-cutter was told in detail. After committing one murder, it was said, the malefactor attempted a second in the adjoining apartment. A respectable citizen woke up to find a wild-eyed man standing over him brandishing a bloody mallet.

After a terrific struggle with five men and a beautiful woman the desperado was finally subdued and turned over to the police. He was arraigned in the night court and remanded to the Tombs for trial. After that all trace of him was mysteriously lost. The responsibility lay between the sergeant in charge of the prisoners at the court and the warden of the city prison. A furious controversy raged between the two. There were interviews with each.

The escaped man was undoubtedly insane, but gifted with a devilish cunning, and with every appearance of sanity. The murdered man had not been identified. A fairly accurate description of Neil was given. Finally

there were hysterical alleged interviews with Madame de la Warr and the Old Codger.

All this had the effect of violently irritating Neil. Such preposterous lies to be told about him! He wanted to fight somebody about it. To have it published that he was insane hurt more than to be called a murderer. It required no little self-control to keep from calling up the editor. However, he resigned himself to wait for the soberer sheets which come out at noon.

He resumed his promenade up and down West Street. It gave him a queer turn to see the idle longshoremen on the doorsteps spelling out that flamboyant story of himself.

In due course he obtained copies of all the noon editions. The solider journals smoothed him down a little. The most accurate of these, after self-righteously rebuking its light-headed contemporary, told a fairly straight story of the affair.

The murdered man had been shot in the forehead, not attacked with a mallet. The revolver had not been found. The victim had been identified as Casper Tolsen, the landlord of the house on Fourteenth Street. Apparently he had been attacked when he called for his rent. The models found in the murderer's room were in the possession of the police.

A well-known connoisseur of sculpture who viewed them said that they showed a considerable degree of artistic skill, though in a hopelessly debased style, of course. He said it was a shocking object lesson of the results of the modern cult of the ugly. Something like this was bound to happen.

Nothing had been found in the supposed murderer's room to throw any light on his connections or antecedents. He was unknown to any of the prominent artists of whom inquiries had been made. No one of the name of Neil Ottoway was registered at the larger art schools. No one in the building where he lived was well acquainted with him.

The murdered man had not been missed earlier, because on the night of his death his wife had received a

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telegram purporting to be signed by her husband, informing her that he had been called to Chicago on business. This was evidently an expedient of the murderer to gain time. The widow was prostrated by the event. Upon being interviewed she had said her husband had mentioned that Ottoway was trying to stall him off of his rent.

The dead man's diamond ring, gold watch and pocket-book were all missing, furnishing an additional motive for the deed. It was Mr. Tolsen's custom to carry a considerable sum of money on his person.

The funeral was to take place from his late residence in the East Twenties at ten o'clock next morning.

Reference to Neil's escape from the courtroom followed. This was still wrapped in mystery. Evidently the one man who knew the details preferred to accept general opprobrium rather than confess how he had been duped. Such a thing, it was claimed, had never before occurred in the history of the New York police courts. The prisoner had apparently vanished into thin air. An investigation was in progress, and as a result, it was hinted, a shake-up in the force was imminent.

Meanwhile the city was being combed for the fugitive, and every avenue of egress was watched. An arrest was expected within twenty-four hours. A photograph of Neil had been found in his room, and this was published. It was not a good enough likeness to cause the original much uneasiness.

So far so good. Neil allowed himself to feel a little complacent. If they gave away as much as this in subsequent editions, surely he had little to fear. Apparently the safest place for him was under the noses of those who sought him.

But in another paper, printed in red, he found a later bulletin which effectually upset his complacency.

EXTRA!

The police this forenoon arrested a young man answering to the general description of Neil Ottoway. Under examination he gave his name as Harry Wiggins, 24, occupation stoker. He

claimed to be an alien, and upon receiving assurances from the District Attorney that he would not be deported, he told the following story :

Here followed an account of the meeting in the lumber yard told from the cockney point of view. The account continued :

From this it will be seen that the much-wanted Neil Ottoway is now made up as a stoker. He is wearing a pair of cassimere trousers and a blue cheviot coat, a kind of pea-jacket, both much worn and shiny with coal dust. He has on a grimy white woollen neckerchief and a cloth cap pulled low over his head, and wears clumsy hob-nailed shoes, which are too big for him.

It was owing to the fact that Wiggins had taken off Ottoway's shoes that the attention of the police was first called to him. Ottoway may be distinguished from a genuine stoker such as frequent West Street in large numbers by his rather long, curly hair. A coal-passer always has his hair cropped.

The police say Ottoway cannot escape them. An arrest is promised before the day is out.

Neil read this sitting on the steps of a shipping platform. He turned hot and cold, and ardently wished for the sidewalk to open and swallow him. Up and down West Street hundreds were now reading that damning description. For awhile he dared not lift his eyes for fear of finding a stare of recognition upon him. But the feet went on passing by as usual, and when he finally did steal a glance around him he found his neighbours reassuringly indifferent.

He got up. He must instantly find a hiding-place again. But before he went into hiding he must try to plan to get rid of the hateful clothes that betrayed him, or he would never be able to come out of hiding.

He thought of the girl. All morning he had been planning to write to her. He refused to believe that she had abandoned him. At any rate, he meant to find out. She offered his only chance of succour. He supposed, of course, that she had instructed the post-office where to forward his letter.

Within a few yards of him was one of the quaint little sloop-shops in which West Street abounds. Neil went in and asked for a sheet of paper and an envelope to write

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"'ome." Leaning on the counter and affecting to have great difficulty with his chirography he wrote :

You left me in the lurch the other day, but I'm hoping you didn't mean it that way. The papers will tell you how everything goes. Don't distress yourself about me. I'm still at large, and intend to remain so.

I need a change of clothes badly. Can you get it for me? If so, I will be walking up and down Hudson Street, between Hudson Park and Abingdon Square, as soon as it gets dark to-night. Left-hand side, going north. Do not recognise me when you see me, but follow where I lead. Make yourself look poor and common if you can. It's a poor neighbourhood. If you can't manage it, never mind, I shall make out. Write to me care General Delivery.

Yours ever,

TOM WILLIAMS.

P.S.—Bring a pair of scissors and a candle.

CHAPTER VI

ENTER KID DOTY

IN the same store where he wrote his letter Neil bought a blue cotton shirt and a red satin necktie.

Issuing into the street again with his heart in his mouth, he reached the corner in safety, and after posting his letter, hastily turned away from the dangerous neighbourhood of West Street.

He was in one of the nondescript streets of stables, junk yards and dilapidated little tenements that run from West to Hudson Street. His first lodging in New York had been on Hudson Street, and he was fairly familiar with the neighbourhood. This little street was almost empty of people. Half way through the block over a ramshackle deserted stable he saw a window, one of a row of three showing as many broken panes as whole ones, bearing the sign "Flat to Let."

Making sure that he was unwatched at the moment, he turned into the door beneath.

He found himself in an inky passage, and fell over the bottom step of a flight of stairs. He climbed cautiously up the broken and littered treads. There was a damp, foul smell on the air. On the landing above a little light filtered down through a broken scuttle. There were two doors giving on the landing, both locked.

Neil went on up the rickety ladder to the scuttle and out on the roof. There were no tall buildings near with windows to overlook him. In the roof he found a skylight with a broken pane. This was what he had hoped

for. He had only to reach an arm in to unfasten the hooks, and the way was clear.

The fact that it was hooked was good evidence that no one had gone that way before him.

He dropped to the floor beneath, and looked behind him. This was the vacant "flat," not exactly a desirable dwelling, but suitable to his present purpose. Not much danger of his being disturbed. Rats scurried away through holes in the floor. Fallen plaster, soot, and the debris left by the last tenants lay all around. There were three rooms, front, middle and back. Front and back rooms each had a door on the stair hall, and the key to the front room door was in the lock.

Neil, making sure that there was no one in the street below at the moment, took the precaution of removing the ticket from the window.

In the back room, to his high satisfaction, he found a tap that gave water. He resolved to spend the afternoon in washing the coal dust out of his clothes. The windows in the back looked out on the disused stable yard.

Just when he was beginning to feel snug the sound of a heavy fall in the middle room brought his heart leaping to his throat. Springing to the doorway he found himself facing a thin, half-grown boy who pointed a revolver at him.

"Hands up, Neil Ottoway!" he cried in a cracked boy-man voice. "You're my prisoner!"

Quicker than thought Neil's fist shot out and struck the thin wrist. The weapon flew across the room. Neil pounced on it. The boy shrank away, terrified; yet he had a queer kind of courage. Folding his arms, he said:

"Do your worst! It isn't loaded. And if it was it's rusted solid. I only gave a quarter for it to a junk man."

Neil's startled nerves relaxed again. This was not a very formidable antagonist. He laughed, and pocketed the ancient weapon. He possessed himself also of the key of the front door, and regarded his visitor, divided between amusement and vexation. The question was

what the devil to do with him. He was a pale, big-eyed and naturally gentle boy, for all his quaint affectation of toughness.

"You *are* Neil Ottoway, aren't you?" asked the boy with a touch of awe.

"You get me wrong, son," said Neil good-naturedly. "My name is Paddy Leary from a shpot called Tipperary."

"Oh, you can't fool me!" said the boy confidently. "With your long hair and all, and hiding away like this. As soon as that came out in the paper about you changing with a stoker I began to look for you on West Street. I tracked you here from the store where you wrote a letter."

"What were you going to do with me when you got me?" asked Neil curiously.

"Turn you over to the police. Then my old man would *have* to let me be a detective."

"Oh, I see!" said Neil.

"What are you going to do to me?" the boy asked with a shade of apprehension.

"Not a thing—if you keep away from the windows," said Neil. "Glad to have somebody to talk to. What's your name?"

"Kid Doty," the boy said with a swagger. "Doty means brave, see? I'm not afraid of anything that walks!"

"That's so?" said Neil.

Kid Doty suspected irony. "Well, I followed you right into your lair, didn't I?" he said aggrievedly. "That's something."

"Sure, that's something," said Neil grinning. He liked this boy.

The Kid looked around him with bright eyes. His fears at rest, he chattered like a child to his mother.

"Say, this is a note! Us two being locked up together. I never read anything like it, did you? Or saw it in the movies. These rooms would make a great scene in the movies, wouldn't they? This is the real thing! Say, you'll have to keep me with you now

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wherever you go, to prevent me from telling the police."

"I suppose so," said Neil ruefully.

"Oh! Will you? Will you?" cried the boy eagerly. "Oh, say, I'd give anything to go with you! I'll be your man. I'll help you fight!"

"But I thought you were going to be a detective," said Neil.

"I want to see Life!" cried the Kid. "I don't care how. There's nothing in New York for a fellow like me. I'd have gone West long ago, but I didn't know how to ride the bumpers. I don't know where the bumpers are on a car. You can show me."

"Well, we'll see," said Neil guardedly.

"How do you feel?" asked the Kid, with respect.

"I feel all right, thank you," said Neil. "Why?"

"After croaking a guy, I mean."

Neil hated to disappoint his ingenuous admirer. He made an effort to play up to the part ascribed to him. "Don't want to talk about it," he growled, as if in unhappy retrospect.

The Kid vented a long breath of excitement. "He haunts you!" he cried.

Neil looked around him apprehensively. "Ah! cut it out!" he muttered.

"I've done lots of bad things myself," said the boy eagerly, "though I haven't killed my man yet. I suppose you're a dope-fiend. I smoked a pill once. I wasn't very sick, neither. Have a cig?"

Neil wondered if it required a criminal to win a boy's confidence completely. He wasn't going to spoil it by a moral homily. "Cigarettes!" he said, affecting scorn. "Cigarettes are for women and dudes. I smoke a pipe."

The boy's face changed. Unostentatiously he put away the box. "Sure!" he said. "I smoke nothing but a pipe myself. Or a good, strong cigar. I just carry these to give away."

The afternoon passed very pleasantly on both sides, notwithstanding the absence of lunch. Together they

washed Neil's clothes and spread them to dry in the patches of sunlight under the front windows.

Meanwhile, the Kid bombarded Neil with hundreds of questions concerning a life of crime. Neil's ingenuity was put to it to find satisfactory answers. Fortunately the boy was uncritical. At the same time Kid Doty continually forgot his assumption of the desperado, and lapsed into the normal adolescent. He entertained Neil with simple domestic details.

"My old man's a lawyer. Good head, too. But of course he doesn't understand me. Fathers always want you to study hard in school and get high marks. Huh! teacher's pet! Not for mine! They didn't do it themselves, no, sir! I found an old letter that told how dad was arrested once for breaking church windows. So he can't blame me.

"Wants me to be a lawyer. What do you know about that? Gee! if I had my way, I'd take the whole push of lawyers, barring the old man, and put them on a ship, and torpedo it. I got a young brother. He thinks he's bad, too. He's just imitating me. I won't let him be. No, sir, that kid's got to stick in school and make something of himself!"

When it began to grow dark Neil prepared to go out. Dressed in the renovated clothes, and wearing the blue shirt and red tie, there was little to suggest the coal-passer. Kid Doty pressed his felt hat on his idol. With considerable stretching, it was made to do.

"Where are we going now?" the boy asked.

"You're not going anywhere," said Neil.

His face fell. "Aw, I'm your pal now," he pleaded. "Through thick and thin. I could stall off the cops. Two heads are better than one."

Neil was a little touched. "I don't doubt you, old man. But I have trouble enough to look after myself, let alone another. Besides, I'm broke."

"I got a dollar and a half," the boy said eagerly.

Neil shook his head firmly.

"What did you do with the old guy's roll?" asked Kid Doty.

"Never mind that now."

"Gave it to your girl, I suppose. They all do."

Neil was cutting the woollen neckcloth into strong strips.

"What's that for?" asked the boy.

"To tie your wrists and ankles, my son."

"Honest?" The Kid's face was a study in delight and alarm. "But—but this is a dickens of an out-of-the-way joint," he faltered.

"When I make my getaway I'll tip off the police to come and release you."

The would-be desperado's face glowed. "Oh, say, will you? That'll make some story, eh? That's pretty near as good as bringing you in myself. Gee! when they read the papers in school!"

With alacrity the boy put his hands behind him to be tied. "Make a real knot," he urged, "so they can't say it's a frame-up."

There was enough of the scarf left over to make a blind for the youngster's eyes. Neil prepared to put it on.

"But what's the use of that?" asked the victim.

"I'm coming back in a little while," Neil said. "And you mustn't see what I do."

"I wouldn't tell."

"I know," said Neil, "but it makes it seem more realistic."

"Oh, all right. Better gag me, too, or they'll want to know why I didn't raise the neighbourhood."

"Time enough for that later."

"I can see under the bandage. Pull it down a little," said the helpless one conscientiously.

Neil smiled as he tied the knot. He gripped the thin shoulder in a friendly hand. "I'm off now. Lie low for awhile. I'll bring you in a bite to eat. So long, old fellow!"

"So long, old fellow," returned the boy in careful imitation.

Neil locked the room door behind him. Feeling his

way downstairs, he satisfied himself with a cautious survey that there was no one immediately outside, and issued into the street. He made his way over the uneven flags towards Hudson Street.

After dark it was more than ever an unsavoury neighbourhood. Few lights were to be seen in the little tenements sandwiched between yards and stables, yet figures occasionally passed in and out in the dark. At the corner of Washington Street under the tin awning of a vacant store a group of youths with sneers fixed in their faces eyed him hard as he passed.

He had little to fear from such as these. His shrunken, creased clothes offered little temptation to foot-pads, however small their way of business. He walked with a slouch and a vacant look that disguised him better than his borrowed clothes.

Turning into Hudson Street, the scene was instantly metamorphosed. New York is a city of such breathless scene-shifting. A line of brightly-lighted stores stretched up and down on either hand, and the pavements were alive with after-supper shoppers. Neil went into the first bakers to obtain a bite for himself and a bag of cakes such as might appeal to a boy's salivary glands. Then he made his way north according to schedule, searching the faces of the passers-by, while careful to maintain the vacant look of his own.

Would she come? He realized now that it was herself he longed to see more than anything she might bring for his succour. Why had he not asked her to come anyhow? Fearing a sickening disappointment he would not allow himself to hope. He thought of a dozen good reasons to prevent her coming; she might not have got his letter; and even if she had, how could a girl be expected to get a man's outfit together at an hour's notice; and how could a delicately brought-up girl bring it to this mean quarter after dark? He should not have asked it of her—but what else could he have done?

"Of course she will not come!" he told himself a score of times, while his desirous eyes continued to search for her.

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Slouching along, head down and hands in pockets, he reached Abingdon Square without seeing her. He retraced his steps the whole way, still without reward, and turned north again, considerably saddened in heart. Suddenly one of the poor housewives of which there were so many making their little purchases, brushed against him, and a voice whispered startlingly :

“ Don’t you know me ? ”

Neil had his nerves under good control. He walked on with unchanged face. The woman who had spoken was in front of him ; he studied her figure sharply. Surely it was not possible ! She was wearing a long, ill-fitting rusty coat, much braided, the braid coming off. Below it appeared a faded skirt and deplorable shoes. She was bareheaded. Her brown hair, twisted in a loose knot, was escaping untidily in every direction. She carried a covered basket. More convincing than the clothes was the walk, the manner ; the whole figure sagged wearily.

It could not be !

She stopped under pretence of looking in a shop window, and Neil had a glimpse of her profile. He was amazed. It *was* she, his charming girl, but terribly changed. Her skin showed the sickly pallor resulting from bad housing and insufficient food. Her nose and the skin about her lips was reddened and rough, her glance weary and lustreless. Neil was strangely divided in his mind between horror at the outrage to her beauty, and delight in the cleverness that had accomplished it.

His imagination was impressed for ever by the notion of a woman who could dare so for a man.

He walked on, and she fell in behind him. In order to avoid the loiterers by the empty store he led her through the next street, and approached his hiding-place from the other direction.

Once in that dark and furtive little street, he paused and let her catch up with him.

He sought her hand and pressed it hard. “ How good of you ! ” he whispered. “ I dared not hope you would come ! ”

She disengaged her hand. "Of course I came," she said. "Ah, don't thank me!"

"But I must," said Neil. "I never knew of such a thing!"

"But—but it sounds like mockery," she said, "for you to thank me—now."

"How wonderful you are!"

"Please, *please!* I have what you asked for. Where shall we go?"

"I have a place," he said, "such as it is. You're not afraid to go alone with me to such a place?"

"Afraid?" she said with a break in her voice.

"Would you be in such a place if it weren't for me?"

This note made Neil exquisitely uncomfortable. "For goodness' sake, don't take that line," he exclaimed. "I'm having the time of my life!"

"Ah, don't joke about it!" she said.

"Come on," said Neil. "I'll show you my castle."

"Is it safe for us to walk together?"

"Surely. You could go anywhere in that make-up. How did you manage it, you wonderful one?"

"A little paint works wonders. It wouldn't pass in the daylight. I studied my scrubwoman, poor soul! These are her clothes. I changed at her house. She thinks I've gone to a masquerade. It's easy for a girl to disguise herself if she wants to."

Reaching the door of his hiding-place he led her in boldly. "Don't mind the smell and the dirt," he said. "There's safety in the forlornness of the place."

"There were people across the road who could see us," she whispered apprehensively.

"Doesn't matter," said Neil. "People in such a neighbourhood as this mind their own business strictly."

He led her up the rickety stairs. Her hand lay in his as soft and warm as a nestling. In the pitch blackness of the landing above he could not help trying to draw her close to him. Surely after this she must love him!

But she held off determinedly. "Ah, be generous!" she whispered with a catch in her breath. "Don't make me sorry I came!"

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He released her with a little groan. He could not resist this kind of an appeal. She was safe because she was so entirely at his mercy. At the same time he was a man and she a woman. How was he to know that she did not secretly desire him to overbear her resistance? Boys learn out of the air that maidens must be maidenly.

When he opened the door a cracked voice from within instantly asked in accents of alarm: "Who is it?"

"All right, old scout," said Neil.

He had heard the girl give a little gasp. He pressed her hand reassuringly, and touched her lips for silence.

Neil carried the bag of cakes into his willing prisoner.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" whispered the young desperado.

"The rats made a fierce racket!"

Neil squeezed his shoulder, and opening the bag put the refreshments where he could reach them with his mouth. This pleased Kid Doty more than the prosaic method of fingers.

"I'll be in the next room," said Neil. "I've got to shut the door. If the rats come round again, sing out."

CHAPTER VII

A BASKET'S CONTENTS

"**D**ID you bring a candle?" Neil asked the girl in a whisper.

She nodded, and feeling in her basket, presently put it in his hand.

Neil led her into the middle room and closed the door. "So the light won't give us away through the front windows," he explained. He lit the candle. "We'll have to sit on the floor," he said. He spread his coat for her.

"But—but what am I staying for?" she faltered.

"I've brought you the things. I must go back."

"Ah, not right away!" he said, reaching for her hand.

"I need the sight of you more than new clothes. It's lonesomeness undermines a man, not danger. Every minute you stay gives me fresh heart."

She was persuaded to sit down. The candle threw immense, grotesque shadows of them upon the stained walls and broken ceiling. They were so quiet that tiny pairs of eyes ventured to peer at them from the corners. Neil shied bits of plaster at them. He gazed at the girl in the light with fresh, delighted interest. The lovely deeps of her eyes reassured him of her beauty.

She was only human. "Ah! don't look at me," she murmured, averting her head. "I'm hideous!"

"You're still yourself," he said deeply, "though changed on the outside."

"It's my hair," she explained. "Untidy hair undoes a woman completely."

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"Looks as if it hadn't been brushed for a week," he said maliciously.

"Oh!" she gasped. Her quick fingers searched in the coil for pins. With a shake she tossed it free. It fell all around her in lovely, smoky coils.

"Oh, beautiful!" he cried softly. "You look like a dryad now."

"I didn't let it down for you to say things like that," she reproved him with her adorable primness. "It has to be fixed before I can go out."

He laughed in his throat. "Oh, well, let it wait awhile," he murmured dreamily.

Affronted by his ardent glance she twisted it up again hastily. But Neil snatched up the pins from where she had laid them.

"What's the matter with me?" he demanded. "Can't I even look at your hair? Am I hateful to you?"

"Would I be here if you were?" she whispered, holding her hair up with one hand and extending the other for the pins.

"Oh, that may be gratitude," he said. "I don't want your gratitude."

"It's all I have. Please give me the pins."

"No!" he insisted. "Let it down again."

"You have me at a disadvantage," she said reproachfully.

"You said that before," he said grimly. "It's really the other way around. *You have me* where you want me. You know I couldn't hurt you. But I can't guarantee my manners. Put your hair down."

With a shrug and an offended look she obeyed. She couldn't do anything else.

"Now I'm a brute, am I not?"

She made no answer.

"What is the matter with me?" he burst out again. "Tell me plainly if you don't fancy my style. I've no illusions about myself. And you're not supposed to fall in love with me just because I've had a chance to help you. But I have an instinct—I feel somehow as if you

felt the same—felt what I do, and were just putting some artificial restriction on yourself. That's what drives me wild!"

"Nonsense!" she cried quickly. "That's what every man says."

"Just vanity, eh?" inquired Neil bitterly. "But tell me in plain words; there's no chance for me?"

"No! I told you in the beginning. Why do you make it so hard for me?"

"Hard?" said Neil dejectedly. "What need you care?"

They were silent for awhile.

"Tell me one thing, if you don't mind," he suggested at length. "What is your name—your real name?"

"Laura," she answered readily.

"Suits you," he said laconically.

A young man in love cannot be permanently discouraged by a mere verbal refusal. Hope soon began to stir in Neil's breast. "I wouldn't want her to fall in my hands like an overripe peach," he thought. "She's worth climbing for. I'll get her yet!"

The continued silence disconcerted her. "I must go," she said nervously.

"Wait a minute," he returned with an off-hand air. "Let me look over what you brought."

They knelt one on each side of the basket. Neil held the candle up while Laura unpacked the contents. A well-cut blue suit was revealed, which bore inside the collar an eminent tailor's name. Beneath it there was a silk shirt; also collar, cravat, socks, hat and shoes. Everything had been thought of down to handkerchiefs, gloves and collar buttons.

"Upon my word!" cried Neil. "This is a regular Johnny's outfit. Much too fine for me."

"I thought good clothes would be the best disguise after the stoker," she explained shyly.

"Of course!" cried Neil. "But where did you get them, you wonderful woman?"

She parried the question. "I brought the scissors. What did you want them for?"

He was not to be diverted. "Where did you get the clothes?" he insisted.

"Well, if you must know," with a quaint touch of bravado, "I stole them."

He was effectually astonished. "Laura!" he cried.

"Are you horrified?"

"No! Enchanted!"

"Don't be silly," she murmured. "What do you want the scissors for?"

"To cut my hair. That's the worst give away of all."

"How can you cut your hair?" she asked unguardedly.

"I was hoping you might."

"Oh!" she cried in the hushed, shocked tone that delighted him.

"No one will see you," he teased.

"I don't mind that—if it's necessary." She was unsmiling. "But I never did such a thing. If I bungled it it would be worse than not doing it at all, wouldn't it?"

"You won't bungle it if you put your mind to it. Take off a little at a time, and it's sure to come out right. We have all night."

"I must get home," she said uneasily.

"Do you hate so to be here with me?"

"*Please!*" she rebuked him. "You only distress me when you talk like that."

Neil sighed. "I'll try not to. But you *will* cut my hair, won't you?"

"How can I see to do it?"

"I'll sit on the floor and hold the candle up. You kneel behind me."

They took the suggested positions. She hesitated about beginning.

"Fire away," said Neil.

"I—I don't know where to start. It seems like a sin to cut hair off. If I do it wrong I can't stick it on again."

"No, but God will in His own time," said Neil.

"Begin at the neck and work up. Lift the hair with the

comb, and snip the ends off. That's the professional technique."

Above him he heard her delicate breathing, a little agitated. She made a few tentative cuts. In his mind's eye he saw the puckered brow and the grave, concerned eyes. "Oh, you darling!" he whispered to himself.

"Who is in the next room?" she asked.

He told her the story of Kid Doty in whimsical vein.

She rewarded him with one of her rare short laughs.

"Dear, funny boy!" she said. "Some man who understands boys ought to make friends with him."

"Maybe one will."

"You were out when I moved," she said in her conscientious way. "I had no chance to tell you. I now have a room in West Twelfth Street." She gave him the number. "If you want me again you should write there."

"Would you come," he asked eagerly.

"Any time, anywhere," she said simply.

Neil seized the hand that held the comb, and pressed it hard to his lips.

She snatched it away. "If you do that again I shall stop!" she cried indignantly. "Have you no sense of fairness?"

"Oh, I don't know that I'm lost to shame at that!" muttered Neil sullenly. "You do everything to make me love you to distraction—then you slap my face. I'm only human! . . . Oh, you're right, of course. I'll try to behave."

The hair-cutting went on, in silence.

"What are you going to do next?" she asked timidly at last.

He forced a cheerful tone. "I don't know. Whatever comes up. First I must find a means of livelihood with permission of the police."

"I have been paid for three drawings," she said diffidently. "I have plenty of money now."

"Fine!" He affected not to see the point.

"You—you might take a little of it—against the terrible debt I owe you—always will owe you."

"Don't take that line," he said roughly. "It makes me savage."

"But you will, won't you?"

"Yes, later, if it becomes necessary."

He felt her hand tremble. "I feel as if I had ruined you," she whispered.

"Nonsense! If there was good work in me it's there yet, isn't it?"

"Yes, but your name is clouded."

"Not my name, really. You had already advised me to drop 'Neil Ottoway' and stick to plain Tom Williams."

"I've robbed you of your friends."

"Not any real friends. Besides, this will blow over in time."

"I must always fight against the truth becoming known," she said sadly.

The question was heavily fraught with emotional possibilities. Neither could bear to discuss it.

"The hair on top is too heavy for the comb." She changed the subject.

"Clip it between your fingers and cut," said Neil.

"Like this?" she inquired. Let her deny him as she would, her voice was warm with tenderness, her hands subtly caressing.

"Yes!" he said dreamily. "How sweet to have your hands in my hair!"

She shivered. "I shall be glad when I am through with this," she murmured.

When she was through, Neil felt at his cranium a little anxiously. "Feels like a professional job all right," he said, reassured. "I knew you could do it!"

She got up. "I must go now."

"Oh, wait!" he cried for the half-dozen time, hastily casting around in his mind for an expedient to detain her. "Wait till you see me in my new disguise . . . I can't tie my tie myself without a mirror," he added cunningly. "You'll *have* to wait. Go in the front room while I change."

"Oh, well——" she protested irresolutely. "But hurry!"

The clothes fitted him better than he could have expected. As he put on the comfortable, gentlemanly garments Neil's point of view changed again. He had now to play the part of one of the complacent elect of the world. It was somewhat of a height to mount at one step.

In the bottom of the basket he found a pair of those fashionable large, round spectacles, rimmed with tortoiseshell. More than anything else he can put on, they change a man's appearance. By their aid the fattest face is lent something of an insolent and distinguished air.

"Clever girl!" thought Neil for the hundredth time.

He threw open the door, and held up what was left of the candle. "How do I look?" he asked eagerly.

"Very well," she said in her grave way. "I thought they would fit, or nearly."

This remark caused Neil an obscure jealousy. Where had these clothes come from?

"You *have* tied your tie!" she said accusingly.

"But not properly. You must straighten it."

In that most intimate of positions it was hard for him to resist throwing his arms around her.

"Well, I didn't, anyhow," he said whimsically as she left him.

"Didn't what?"

"You know very well," he teased. "Give me some credit!"

"Don't be silly!" She averted her head and began to gather up the old clothes and to stuff them in her basket. "We must leave separately," she announced.

"How can I let you go alone?" objected Neil.

"You must. I can go where I like in these clothes—you said so yourself. As for you, a man can go anywhere, of course. But for us to walk together, me like this and you like that, it would be a remarkable sight."

"I suppose you're right," he grumbled. "Turn to the right as you go out, and go down to West Street. There's an ugly-looking crowd the other way."

"I mean to," she said. "I'm going to take a ferry over to Jersey City, and drop the basket overboard on the way."

"You think of everything!" he applauded admiringly.

"I can do so little!" she disclaimed with a shrug, and held out her hand. "Well—good-bye!"

He kept the hand. "You say it easily!" he complained with a whimsical smile. "I suppose you don't want to kiss me good-bye?"

"You don't want a grateful kiss."

"No! Hanged if I do!" he said energetically.

She withdrew her hand. "Good-bye," she whispered, and turned to go.

Something gave way inside Neil. He could no longer hold himself. "Oh, I *can't*!" he cried sharply. "Not like this!"

She struggled with the door-knob, but he caught and pressed her close to him. The candle-end rolled on the floor and was extinguished.

"Laura, my darling!" he whispered brokenly. "I love you! I love you! Ah, don't fight against me so! I wouldn't hurt you. I only ask to love you and take care of you. But I *must* make you listen to me. Give me a good reason for not loving you, and I'll try to hold myself in. Or love me a little back again and I'll trust you with my life, and not ask a question. But you neither trust me nor love me. Don't you see you're driving me mad? What man am I up against? Let me know where I stand. What man wore these clothes before me? What is he to you?"

"Let me go!" she panted, struggling hard.

"I have a right to an answer!" he insisted. "How do I know but what I'm wearing the murderer's clothes?"

A terrible low cry of pain escaped her.

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" he cried contritely. "I was raving. It doesn't matter, anyhow. I'm no sentimentalist. But trust me—or love me!"

"You're hurting me! You're hurting me!" she wailed.

His arms automatically released her.

"I knew it would end like this!" she cried. "I wish I'd never seen you!"

She ran out of the room, and went stumbling down the rickety stairs. He made no attempt to follow.

By and by Neil went heavily into the back room. There was no more fight in him at the moment. He had a mind to give himself up to the police and let things take their course. Scarcely listening to the boy's eager question, he felt for the knot at his ankles with the idea of letting him go.

"Is your pal gone? You might have let me in on your secrets. I wouldn't have blabbed. But I suppose you've got to try me out first. What are you going to do now, Neil?"

Admiration and utter confidence were blended in his tone. Neil held his hand and began to reconsider.

Kid Doty rattled on: "I've been thinking what you ought to do while I was lying here. I've got a scheme. You ought to join the police force. Wouldn't that be a stunt? You've got a good figure and all. You could pass the examination. Say, they'd never think of looking for Neil Ottoway among themselves."

"Bully!" said Neil abstractedly. It would never do for him to show the white feather before his little disciple, he thought. Slowly the will to fight on was reborn in him.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the boy anxiously.

"I'm going to leave you now," said Neil.

"Oh, take me with you!" pleaded the Kid.

"Can't be done, old man."

"Take me with you! I wouldn't be any trouble. I never knew anybody like you before."

"You won't have to wait here long," said Neil.

"I'll telephone to the police immediately to come and let you out. That'll be some yarn, eh?"

"I'd rather go with you," said the disappointed boy.

"I'd give up anything to go with you!"

Neil gripped his shoulder. "There's something I want you to keep in mind, old fellow. You read the

papers. When you see that I am out of this trouble, you must look me up."

"When you get out of it?" echoed the boy. "But you did do it, didn't you?"

"Well, I may get out of it, anyhow," said Neil. "Men do, sometimes. You must look me up, because you and I are going to be pals, see?"

"But I'll miss all the fun if you don't take me."

"We'll have plenty of fun yet, don't you fret."

"I say, Neil, there's something I want to tell you," said the boy in embarrassed tones. "My name's not really Kid Doty. It's Percy Randall. Such a sissy name!"

"Oh, I've heard worse," said Neil cheerfully.

"Good-bye, and don't forget me."

"Forget you?" stammered the boy. "Oh, I—I'll never forget you!"

The lieutenant in charge of the desk of the precinct police station was reading a newspaper when the telephone bell rang. With the fatigued air characteristic of police lieutenants—an uninterrupted course of crime is the most wearing thing in the world—he took down the receiver.

On this occasion he heard the novelty of a calm voice over the wire: "Hello? Is this the police station?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had better send an officer or a couple of officers to a house on Dickson Street to liberate a boy who is imprisoned there."

The quiet voice startled the policeman, who was hardened to screams. "Hey?" he cried.

"Attend to what I say, please. I didn't notice the number of the house, but you can't miss it. North side of Dickson, half way between West and Washington Streets. Two-storey building; empty stable on street level and unoccupied rooms above. The boy is upstairs. The front room is unlocked."

"What are you giving us?" cried the astonished officer. "I don't pay no attention to telephone calls. If you mean business, come in here and show yourself."

"I have a good reason," said the voice sweetly.

"Is this a josh?" demanded the lieutenant. "It don't go down with me. How d'ya know so much about it? Who are ya anyhow?"

"It is not a hoax," said the voice, undisturbed.

"The building is full of rats, and the boy is of a nervous temperament. If anything serious happens it will be up to you. The father is an influential citizen."

"What do *I* care?" roared the exasperated policeman.

"Why don't you let him loose yourself?"

"Because I just tied him up and left him there."

"Who the blazes are you, anyhow?"

"Neil Ottoway."

"Who?"

"Neil Ottoway. Shall I spell it out to you?"

There was a silence in the police station while the officer struggled with a vertigo. Then—"Oh, go to hell!" he cried, slamming up the receiver.

But the next instant he thought better of it, and took it down again. "Give me the superintendent, quick!" he said to the operator.

"Hello! This is Lieutenant O'Malley. Find me the source of that last call for here. I'll hold the wire."

In less than a minute the answer came: "Public telephone in the Hudson and Manhattan Terminal Station, extension nine."

"All right. Give me the police sub-station in the terminal . . . Hello! This is Mike O'Malley. Guy just called me from Terminal Station public telephone, extension nine. Said he was Neil Ottoway . . . Yeh, that's what I said, Neil Ottoway. Look him up, quick!"

In ten minutes the telephone at the lieutenant's elbow rang again. This was the message he got: "There are sixteen telephone booths here. Half are worked through a switchboard, and half have coin boxes in them. Number nine has a coin box. Consequently the switchboard operator doesn't have anything to do with whoever uses it. There are a couple of hundred calls an hour from here. Nobody saw a man answering to Neil Ottoway's description. It's probably a stall."

"Oh, sure," said Lieutenant O'Malley. "Don't let those slick reporter guys on to it. They'd make a big story out of nothing."

He hung up the receiver, and debated a moment or two. "Reardon," he said to an officer on duty. "Take Simpson with you, and go to this house on Dickson Street, and see if there's a kid locked up there. Let Mitchell and Dawes follow you in plain clothes."

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE FUNERAL

THE net result of Neil's stormy scene with Laura was to fix him in the resolve to unravel the mystery of Casper Tolsen's murder on his own account. He did not doubt that the girl's skirts were clean, though there was so much to be explained, but he felt that, being a woman, she very likely required to be saved from herself. At any rate for the sake of his peace of mind he must know the truth.

There was, moreover, the healthy instinct of self-preservation, which even a young man in love may not ignore. He had no notion of allowing himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter—with the dim figure of another man in the background profiting by the sacrifice.

Having made his resolve, the next thing was to debate ways and means of carrying it into effect. He acknowledged frankly to himself that he was not the ideal detective, though like nearly every man he had rather fancied himself in the rôle until he was called upon to play it. The impressionable and expansive nature of the artist, while it may conceive of a marvellous detective story in the abstract, is not fitted to the relentless, single-minded pursuit of the concrete.

However, his great need would have to supply this lack in his nature. It would have to supply many another lack as well. The hunted one is not in the best position to hunt on his own account.

Though Neil's head was smooth enough to pass in a crowd, the professional eye of the barber he visited next morning was not deceived.

"Who cut your hair?" he asked in scorn.

"Fellow in a little country town," said Neil carelessly. "Thought I was stuck there for a couple of weeks, so I let him do it. And this morning the house wired me to come in."

"He wasn't no barber, he was a butcher, *he* was. It's lucky you come to me. I'll fix you up good."

The newspapers with their fresh crop of rumours hourly afforded Neil more entertainment than information. He was becoming hardened now to the liberties they took with his name. This amazing figure of a Neil Ottoway they had built up was like somebody else now, a distant relation, possibly, but not the inviolable "me." No tale concerning him was too wild to be printed.

Lacking any real testimony, they were free to endow him with a splendid lurid past. All the unsolved murders of ten years past were ascribed to him. Evidently he had commenced his career of crime in knickerbockers.

His principal concern with the morning editions was to learn what had become of his young friend. One account ran:

The sleuths on the trail of Neil Ottoway last night liberated a boy who said that the desperate young criminal had imprisoned him in an unoccupied building on Dickson Street, where he was found. The boy gave his name as Kid Doty, sixteen, no home. He was discovered tied hand and foot in a vacant room filled with debris, and overrun with rats.

For a long time the police could get nothing out of him. Apparently he had been terrified into silence. But when he learned that they were already well informed as to all the movements of Neil Ottoway, he reluctantly told his story.

It appears that young Doty aspires to be a detective. Reading in a newspaper of how Neil Ottoway had secured a disguise as a stoker he started out to find him on his own account. By a remarkable coincidence he did actually run into him on West Street, and shadowed him to the empty house on Dickson Street. There the boy, according to his own story, attempted to arrest the fugitive with a rusty revolver, but was overpowered and tied up as described.

Thus, if the tale is true, the plans of the police who have Neil Ottoway under surveillance, narrowly escaped being frustrated by the amateur. There is a strong suspicion, however, that the whole thing may be the product of an imagination overheated by dime novels and a course of sensational motion pictures.

This suspicion is lent additional colour by the fact that the

boy would not or could not carry his tale any further. No amount of questioning would induce him to tell what went on in the empty house during the time that he says he spent there with the fugitive. He seemed to take the pose that the police were his rivals, and made believe that he intended to use whatever evidence he had secured to further his own game. The police were much amused by the youthful would-be sleuth.

At a late hour last night his father called for him at police headquarters, and it transpired that his name was really Percy Randall, son of Haviland Randall, of Meigs, Thorley & Randall, lawyers, with offices in Nassau Street.

The boy was given into the custody of his father, who undertook to produce him in court any time his evidence might be required, but it is not supposed that young Percy will be asked to figure in the limelight again. It may be hazarded that a somewhat painful interview took place in the Randall domicile last night which may have the effect of discouraging the detective ambitions of young hopeful.

Neil smiled upon reading this. "Good old Kid Doty!" he thought. "True blue!"

All the newspapers expressed the same confidence on the part of the police. They were still promising to arrest Neil Ottoway within an hour or two. The inference was that they could put their hands on him at any moment, and were waiting only until they had secured a certain mysterious piece of evidence. Neil felt somewhat uneasy. Was it possible that the police were really cognizant of every move he made? He looked uncomfortably around the lobby of the big hotel, where he sat.

A moment's reflection reassured him that it was simply that time-honoured expedient of a baffled antagonist, a bluff. He remembered other cases that he had followed. They would arrest him fast enough—if they could. Moreover, there was internal evidence in the newspaper story that they were still at sea. Neil's own part in telephoning the police was suppressed. And although they knew the boy's story was true, they had had to discredit it to save their own faces.

In the copious discussion of the Tolsen case reference to his funeral was not overlooked. It was to be held that same morning. Back and forth in his mind Neil played with the idea of attending it. Of course, it would be a

foolhardy thing to do, the crowd would be larded with detectives; still, sometimes the most fool-hardy-appearing act proves in the outcome to have been prudent. If his disguise was sufficient to carry him through, all right; if it was not, he might as well be arrested soon as late.

It was the chance that he might learn something to further his own search that impelled him. He was not unmindful of the morbid attraction the occasion would have for the real murderer. Since he could not work upon the terrors of Laura, and he had nothing else to go on, he must make a start somewhere.

He examined himself in a full-length mirror. The loss of his bold, up-standing thatch he viewed with a sigh; he had cherished it. Still it made an extraordinary difference in his appearance. His hair had been his leading motive; people remembered him by it. He could not believe that anyone would be able to identify the careless, unconventional artist as the smooth, smug young man-about-town who faced him, elegantly tapping a cigarette on the back of his chamois-gloved hand.

Neil had changed his expression to suit his clothes, too. The round shell-trimmed glasses provided the last touch of affectation.

"I wouldn't know myself, if I didn't know it was me," he thought.

Besides, the police were still looking for a stoker . . . Neil decided to go to the funeral.

The late Casper Tolsen's address in the east Twenties, a block between Second and Third Avenues, near Gramercy Park. As he turned the corner from Third Avenue he caught his breath in astonishment. He was prepared for the gruesome trappings of woe and for vulgar curiosity; but here was a crowd of thousands of white faces, completely filling the street from wall to wall. A cordon of police was required to keep a clear space around the hearse.

Moreover, every stoop and window was full, bodies clung precariously to every projecting ledge and every rail, and heads stuck over the edge of the roofs.

"This is fame!" thought Neil. "Lord, what a yell would go up if *I* were exhibited to them!"

He shivered, and for a moment was inclined to beat a retreat. However, as his startled nerves quieted, it suggested itself as the safest place in the world for him. He smiled, remembering his confident hope of picking out the real offender. To mix with such a crowd wiped personal identity out clean.

It was the tail end of a fashionable street, over the dead line of Irving Place. Old-fashioned, middle-class dwellings lined each side; there was but the one design of house in the entire block. Hideous respectability was the keynote. The decorative horrors of thirty years ago were still naïvely displayed within the parlour windows.

Neil seized every opportunity that offered to edge himself unobtrusively forward. A waiting crowd is passive: none opposed him. Faces flashed on his consciousness and faded out; fresh and wrinkled, hairy and shaven, rosy and sallow, clean and dirty. Here the differences ended; for individuality had been surrendered to the crowd. It was one huge gape centering on the hearse. No emotion was suggested save a primitive curiosity.

Neil, who had a vital interest in the matter, studied in self-defence to show a face as blank as the others. Occasionally he identified a detective by his size or air of officialdom.

Neil finally succeeded in worming himself into the first rank but one of the spectators. He did not care to show himself quite in front. Apparently this crowd was prepared to wait all day. At intervals the police with a concerted effort forced the encroaching circle back. In the midst of the pushing and shoving there was much good-natured banter.

There was nothing to indicate that the occasion of the gathering was the funeral of a man foully murdered. The black-clad driver of the hearse lolled on his seat with his elbow supported on his crossed knees, and looked down from his point of vantage with a sneer. Conscious of his importance in the scene, like a free citizen he showed his

contempt for it. The horses slept. Neil wondered behind which stolid face in the front rank lay guilty knowledge. Nothing showed on the surface.

After an interminable wait the door of the house opened, and a stir passed through the crowd. The bustling undertaker appeared, ushering the coffin borne by six solid husbands and fathers, perspiring and oppressed by self-consciousness. Neil had a vivid mental picture of what lay within the long, black box. It was thrust in the hearse, the pallbearers meanwhile glancing over their shoulders with much the same uneasy suspicion that royalty has of the mob.

Next appeared a long procession of floral offerings borne by the undertaker's brisk, well-fed young assistants. There were crosses, anchors, wreaths, an open book, a broken column. All these were placed in proud array in an open carriage preceding the hearse. The cortège moved on a few steps at a time to give place to carriages for the mourners.

A stronger thrill passed through the crowd as the shrouded widow appeared on the top step, supported by her relatives. This was the note of human interest that for the crowd gave relish to the show. Neil regarded her with compassionate interest. Whatever the truth of this confused matter, here at least was an innocent sufferer.

This was the climax of the scene. Pretty soon the crowd began to stir and break up. A large number remained staring fixedly at the house as if they got some subtle emotional satisfaction out of its stone face.

Neil was not quite ready to leave the spot. He found a refuge out of the press in a street-level doorway near the corner, where he could watch the faces float by. The other corner of the doorway was already occupied by a youth of his own age, who threw him the half-smile of one admitting an equal among a crowd of the unwashed.

Neil nodded to him, and sized him up. An easily recognisable type, he decided, the slender, good-looking and utterly worthless young male that every large city produces in such numbers nowadays. His well-cut

clothes set off his graceful limbs admirably, and he displayed a nice taste in haberdashery, particularly in a cinnamon-coloured tie which "went" with his sallow skin. His face, while vacuous and sneering, yet had a boyish comeliness which recommended him even to one who saw the evil, so potent is a harmony of feature.

As in all men of his kidney, the predominant note of him was an immense scorn for all the world.

"Huh!" he said for Neil's benefit, indicating the passing crowd with a nod, "the G. A. R. has certainly turned out in force to-day."

"G. A. R.?" asked Neil.

"Grand Army of Rubber-Necks. Lord! what a bunch of worm-eaten nuts!"

"Well, we're here, too," said Neil good-humouredly.

"I got something better to do, I can tell you," returned the other loftily. "But I got caught in the blame crowd and I can't get out of it."

"I see," said Neil. "What do you think of this case anyhow? I suppose you read the papers?"

"Don't think anything of it. A common kind of crime. A guy croaked for his sparkler and his roll I don't see why they make such a fuss about it."

"Well, it's a kind of mystery," suggested Neil.

"Mystery nothing! This fellow Ottoway did it, all right. I suppose the poor fool will let the police nab him directly. These fellows have no nerve. Why, anybody could stall off the police if they put their mind to it."

A feeling of resentment stirred Neil against this cocksure young idler. "Well, what would you do if you were in his place?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, they'd never get hold of *me*," said the young man confidently, but vaguely.

"Yes, but what would you do?" insisted Neil.

"I wouldn't do anything!" returned the other triumphantly. "That's just where they make a mistake. They run, and naturally somebody takes after them. I'd stay right here and bluff it out."

"Pretty good advice," observed Neil dryly.

"A man never gets caught till he loses his nerve," the young man with the cinnamon tie continued. "When he begins to slink along and look guilty the first cop that sees him just naturally has to take him in. Look a cop square in the eye and he daresn't touch you."

"You seem to 'know," said Neil.

The other favoured him with a sharp glance, suspecting ridicule. But Neil's face was bland. Their further talk on the subject was interrupted by a heavy, red-faced man, who struggled out of the crowd and edged himself between them. He turned round and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

Something vaguely familiar in his aspect made Neil anxious. Naturally he did not want to see any acquaintances just then. Presently the man took off his Derby hat to mop his forehead, and Neil saw with a great inward start that it was no other than Officer Hartigan!

Civilian clothes changed him greatly, and he had shaved off the noble moustache; but it was he. Neil felt that the slightest untoward movement would instantly have betrayed him. He remained staring calmly out of his corner, while the alarm bells clanged 'deafeningly inside him.

Hartigan turned to him. "'Scuse me if I seemed to crowd you," he apologised. "I got to wait here awhile."

Neil steeled himself. This was the acid test of his disguise. "Plenty of room," he said offhand.

Hartigan turned to the other. A silent breath of relief escaped Neil. He had passed! Hartigan was ingratiating himself with the young man with the cinnamon tie. Neil determined to stay where he was. Once establish his new character in Hartigan's mind, and the danger of identification by him was over for ever.

The three of them fell into converse about crowds.

"Beats me where they all come from!" said Hartigan. "Any little thing'll raise 'em any time—a fire, a fight, or a guy in a fit. A fella 'ud think nobody in New York never had to work for a livin'."

"Ah! they're all bugs!" said the young man with

the cinnamon tie scornfully. "Crazy as wood-ticks, every mother's son of them!"

"I suppose that's what they'd say about us," observed Neil.

"Oh, well, sometimes a man's got a purpose in foolin' around." Hartigan was portentous.

"As I was telling this fellow here, *I* got caught," said the other young man. "I got something better to do."

"Well, how about you, Jack?" queried Hartigan facetiously of Neil. "If it's a fair question, what are *you* doin' in this mob of boobs?"

For a single horrible moment Neil thought the policeman was playing with him. But the expression of slow-witted jocosity was reassuring. This bull of a man was incapable of such subtlety. Neil took inspiration from the thought of his little friend, Kid Doty.

"I'm interested in crime," he said with a serious air. "My old man wants me to go into his firm, but I can't see it. Crime is the only thing I like to work at. I follow all the big trials. I keep the newspaper clippings. Some day maybe I'll write a book, or start a detective agency."

Neil's good clothes had already inspired Hartigan with respect, and the suggestion of a well-to-do father was not lost on him. "You're right," he said agreeably. "Crime is very interesting when it ain't fed to you too regular."

"Thank God for a stupid policeman!" thought Neil.

The street was now clearing rapidly, and there was no further excuse for the three to linger. They strolled to the corner.

"Come and have one on me," suggested Neil.

Both the others looked pleased. Hartigan wiped his mouth with the back of his hand in anticipation.

"It's real hot for the season," he deprecated.

They lost no time in lining up before the nearest mahogany rail. As a result of the excitement around the corner the place was doing a glorious business. When they were served Hartigan elevated his glass.

"Here's to the corpse that brought us together!" he said. "May he rest easy!"

Like everybody else in the vicinity, they fell into the talk of the crime and the elusive criminal. No striking new thoughts were brought out. Neil was hardened by now, and took his own name in vain as freely as anybody else. From the crime they passed naturally to the police.

"That's all a bluff about the police having Neil Ottoway under surveillance," opined the young man with the cinnamon tie in his scornful way.

Neil smiled inwardly. Hartigan bristled, but managed to keep himself in for the moment.

"The police ain't got no show," he said. "Nobody won't leave them alone."

"Ah, they're a lot of boobs, anyhow," said the young man rashly.

Hartigan exploded. "You could be run in for that!" he cried, pounding the rail. "Insulting an officer in the performance of his duty! Who are you to be criticising the finest body of men on God's footstool? A cigarette-holder, a hall-room boy? I've a mind to take you out and turn you over to the officer on the beat!"

The scornful one gradually wilted. His sallow complexion took on a greenish tinge.

"Ah! I didn't know that you—I didn't mean anything by it," he murmured.

Hartigan glared at him, preparatory to another blast. The young man murmured something about having to see a friend, and faded away.

Hartigan's indignation died down in subterranean rumblings. "Finest force in the world! Young big-mouth! I'll lay you he has good reason to respect the force. You observed the way he made tracks when he saw that I——"

He stopped and devoted himself to his glass, feeling perhaps that he had said too much.

"So you're on the force," said Neil.

"Yes—no—that is, not exactly." Hartigan was a trifle flustered. "Oh, I don't mind telling a friend," he went on. "To tell you the truth, I resigned yesterday."

All a self-respecting man could do. The *force* is all right, mind you. It's them that knocks it that's rotten. Anybody that knocks the police force is a——" Hartigan made a reflection on their parentage and spat fervently. "Magistrates, reformers, newspaper reporters and suffergettes, to blazes with the whole push!"

Under Neil's unstinted sympathy the ill-used ex-policeman expanded like a flower in the sun.

"Say, do you know who I am?" he asked at last with an impressive air.

"No," said Neil.

"I'm Hartigan, the guy who arrested Neil Ottoway the night before last for burglary!"

"No!" gasped Neil, wondering a little if he were not dreaming this topsy-turvy situation. The ex-policeman's eyes were turned inward on his grievances, and there was little danger of a recognition now.

"Yes, sir, arrested him and took him to court, and there they let him slip through their fingers! Did you ever hear the like? Let him walk right out of the front door! And then blamed me for it. And suspended me yesterday without a hearing!" He forgot that he had said "resigned."

"A rotten shame!" murmured Neil.

"Yes, sir, it hurts!" said Hartigan. "I made friends with him, see? A nice, decent-appearing young chap for an artist. Ain't got much use for that lot. They ought to be put to work, I say. But I talked to him squarely and friendly, and saved him the end seat in the wagon. This is what I get for it!"

"There's ingratitude!" said Neil.

"Well, I got a little money put by," Hartigan went on, "and I'm willing to spend every cent of it to bring him in again. I'm doin' a bit of detective work of my own. Shaved off my moustache to disguise myself. That's why I watched the funeral to-day."

"You're sure Ottoway did it?" inquired Neil.

"Sure am I?" said Hartigan surprised.

"Owed him his rent and all. And him with a big

diamond and a roll! And the body found in his room and all. Who else could have done it?"

"Oh, it's clear enough. Too damn clear. Makes me think there must be something behind. My knowledge of crime makes me think nothing is ever the way it looks like."

"Well, now, that's so." Hartigan was impressed. "What's your idea?"

"I haven't any," Neil confessed. "Only the police have been so busy looking for Neil Ottoway they haven't looked into the crime at all. You say he was a decent young fellow?"

"Seemed like."

"You didn't find the diamond or the roll of bills on him. The papers said he was poverty-stricken."

"Maybe he salted it away."

"What do you want to waste your time for looking for Neil Ottoway? There are eleven thousand police after him. If you could prove somebody else committed the crime that would square you, wouldn't it?"

"Sure! But——"

"Well, it's worth looking into, isn't it? Take that telephone message. His wife told the police somebody called him up the evening he was killed, and he seemed pleased with the message. Why should he be pleased to hear from Neil Ottoway? He dressed and went out. Why should he take the trouble to dress up? Now, it would be easy for anybody who knew the ropes to trace the source of that telephone call. Also the telegram his wife got later."

"By God, you're right, son!" exclaimed Hartigan. "There's work for me! I'll do it now!"

"Here's luck to you!" said Neil, raising his glass.

"I say, fellow," Hartigan observed diffidently. "You say you're interested in this case. Why can't you and me work together on it? Now, I'm a good policeman. If there's any stick-work wanted, I'm right there with the goods. But I wasn't cut out for no detective bureau. I ain't got naturally a suspicioning nature. Suppose we get together to-morrow, after I look up this clue? Are you on?"

"Sure thing!" said Neil. They shook hands on it.

"Where'll it be?" asked Hartigan.

"How about Union Square, nine a.m., on a bench near the Lincoln statue?"

"O. K.!"

CHAPTER IX

CONEY ISLAND AND ARCHIBALD

NEIL'S double activities—keeping out of the hands of the police himself while he solved the Tolsen mystery for them, bade fair to be brought to a standstill by the lack of munitions. He was reduced to a ten-cent piece, and dinner-time coming on as usual. Prompt measures were called for.

After parting from Hartigan he walked the streets fingering his lonely coin, and debating how to lay it out in order to insure the largest returns.

He finally decided to stake all on a trip to Coney Island. This day, Saturday, it had been widely announced in the newspapers, would see the official opening of the summer season. Moreover, the American sun was doing worthily, and a north-east breeze was making the waste-paper dance in the gutters of the cross streets. There was sure to be a crowd. Strange, thought Neil, if in the grand resumption of the Metropolis of Diversion, he couldn't find a job.

Shortly after noon he was set down in Surf Avenue with a hungry and determined eye. That unreasonable street was running under a full head of insanity. In the pitiless sunlight the temporary buildings in their premature decrepitude, and the permanent buildings in their pert dressiness outvied each other in ugliness. The clangour of trolley cars and automobiles, the music of a hundred pianos and steam melodions, the roar of the roller coasters and the shrieks of the passengers all combined to shatter the ears. More pervasive than the racket

was the soft scuffle of thousands of leathern soles on the pavement, and the rustle of the creatures' clothes.

The invariable crowd surged slowly up and down, showing weary, sated faces, wistful in the quest of real entertainment.

"We have an odd way of taking our pleasure!" thought Neil.

To make a pretty long story short, Neil was completely unsuccessful in his search for a job. The proprietors of beer-gardens, bath-houses, scenic railways, merry-go-rounds and sideshows looked him over and shook their heads. Though he had put his shell-rimmed spectacles in his pocket at the beginning, still his clothes made him out a bit too fine for their purposes. More than his clothes, perhaps, it was a certain sentience in his eye.

"You know too much for me!" one employer, more candid than the others, told him with some heat. Neither would the humbler vendors of soft drinks, popcorn, salt-water taffy or hot dogs listen to him.

At the end of two hours he gave up, or at least retired temporarily to take counsel with himself. He went off to one of the narrow stretches of beach still left clear of underpinning, and sat down to beat some new idea out of his dejected brain. The alternative of walking ten miles back to town on an empty stomach was not an enlivening one.

He was surrounded by various groups and single figures resting in the sand. Exhausted by the interminable promenade on the pavements above, they came down here and stared helplessly out to sea. That, at least, didn't cost anything.

The sculptor in Neil began to stir again. He had been deprived of his work for two days, and it seemed as many years. What models!—and a medium ready to his hand, too. Nearest him lay a corpulent gentleman of the Hebrew persuasion sleeping on his back, with his large new shoes pointing stiffly to heaven, and his hands clasped tightly on his equator. Evidently he was taking no chances with his rings while he slept.

"Effigy of a Twentieth Century Knight," thought

Neil with a chuckle, and his hands involuntarily began to shape the damp sand. "No sculptor ever dared depict a man like that," he told himself vain-gloriously, and for the moment forgot all about the Tolsen murder, the police, even his insistent hunger.

When, presently, he sat back to survey his handiwork, the spell was broken by a titter of applause behind him. He was startled to observe that a semi-circle of admirers had gathered without his being aware. There they stood grinning and craning their necks.

The thought flashed through Neil's mind: "You fool! to give yourself away like this!" However, he was careful to betray no agitation.

Half expecting a detaining hand to fall on his shoulder, he nonchalantly got up and sauntered away, losing himself quickly among the piles of a building extending out over the beach.

He walked half a mile down the shore and back without receiving any inspiration as to how his necessities might be relieved. Neil, like all self-confident young men, would not concede that circumstances might be too much for him—but self-confidence began to be put to a strain. The situation resolved itself into a horribly simple formula, viz., to eat one must have money. No amount of ingenuity was of any avail to change it.

On his return he came to a little crowd gathered on the sand, and idly joined the edge of it. From the centre issued a voice:

"—just a natural born gift. Never took no lessons in modelling. Didn't want any. In the art school they make you put in every little thing just so, and all elegant and smooth like. That don't suit my style. That may be art, but there's no imagination in it, I say. Imagination is what counts with me. It's imagination makes you see the joke. Friends, I don't claim to be no regular artist, but only a man like yourselves what sees the funny side of life. Stand back a little friends. You can see better when you ain't so close. Don't forget the poor artist!"

Neil's idle curiosity gave place to amazement, and that

in turn to indignation. Looking about him he saw that he had returned to the spot where he had left his effigy, and gradually realised that it must be his own work which provided the excuse for this harangue on art.

Once more forgetting prudence, he pushed his way into the circle to confound this robber of his fame.

He saw a spare, middle-sized man clad in a faded yellow suit of a youthful cut, several seasons old. A certain youthful grace clung to him still, though he was middle-aged and faded like the suit. He was clearly enjoying himself. His eyes gleamed and danced with the wary, mocking light of the quack, the charlatan, the spell-binder. Speech ran from him like water from a tap. He had an old whisk-broom and a pail of water, and while he talked he dipped the one in the other and sprinkled the sand model as a florist sprays his flowers.

Beside the effigy he had spread a piece of wrapping paper, weighed down around the edge with sand. On it dropped pennies, nickels and an occasional dime.

"Sorry I can't show you the original model of this here guy. He was sleeping over yonder when I done it. When he woke up and saw himself, maybe he wasn't hot under the collar—oh no! Not a bit! Wanted to fight me, he did, but he was too fat. Then he offered me a five-spot to let him break it up, but I turned him down. So he beat it. Don't forget the poor artist, friends. Remember I turned down a five-spot to give you a little fun!"

Neil furiously angry, stepped forward and stamped out the figure. The exhibitor with movement swift as a cat's, swept up the money on the paper and fell back warily. A loud murmur of protest went around the crowd.

"The man is a liar!" said Neil, glaring around. "He couldn't model a barrel! I made this myself for my pleasure. You'd better get your money back."

So saying he elbowed his way out, and strode up an inclined walk to the pier overhead. The crowd stared after him open-mouthed, and broke up, jeering. He did not see what became of the man in the yellow suit.

Neil walked out on the pier a little way. There was a show going on out at the end, but the long approach was almost deserted. There were tables against the railing on either hand, and waiters flitted to and fro. However, as signs everywhere informed the public that all seats were free, Neil ventured to sit down with his back to the shore.

As he cooled down he reproached himself heartily for his folly. "It's only by the grace of God there wasn't a detective in that crowd. Fat chance *you* have of keeping out of their hands if you're going to lose your head as easily as that!"

Presently he became aware that some one was watching him from behind. Glancing over the rail, he measured the distance to the sand below. Say twenty feet; it could be done, he decided, and it would take a bit of nerve to follow that way. He took a fair look over his shoulder at him who was watching him, and saw with some relief that it was no detective, but the same fellow in the yellow suit.

As soon as Neil's eyes met his the man grinned sheepishly, and began to sidle toward him. In spite of himself Neil found something taking in the rascal's worn, sharp, cheery aspect.

"Excuse me, mister," said the man in yellow silkily. "No offence taken or meant. You and me ought to have a little talk."

Without waiting for an answer from Neil, he slid into the seat opposite.

"I don't blame you for going up in the air like you did," he went on. "Artists are always touchy. You can't tell me. It's my business to manage artists. I've had twenty years' experience with artists and I guess I know the real thing."

Neil bowed ironically.

"Artists! There was the original Fatima now, the Oriental dancer. Why, she blacked the eye of every manager she ever had but me. The woman had an arm! But when she began to tear lose I'd just say to her, 'Fatty, my dear, I just love to see you lose your temper,

because then I know you're going to give a good show.' And she'd close right up! All you want to handle artists is tac'!"

He grinned delightedly, and for the life of him Neil could not help grinning back.

"I want to tell you I wouldn't appropriate no man's art as my own," the other went on, much encouraged, "except, of course, to fool the public, and that's legitimate, according to the greatest showman of us all. Not if I had a chance to make a deal with the artist. But when I find it lying around loose and unregarded, as you might say, and just asking to be exhibited, can you blame me? Now, honest, can you?"

"Why, when I come by on the beach the boobs were just guying your model; didn't know no better. So I up and told 'em how good it was—with tac', you understand. Of course, I had to let on I did it or they wouldn't have understood my game, and if they wanted to toss me a little change, I couldn't very well toss it back. But, of course, I want to do the square. I took in eighty-three cents. Here's forty-two. It would have been good for five bones before dark if you hadn't busted it."

Though he called himself a fool while he did it, Neil's pride forced him to shove the money back. At the same time the other man's scrupulousness caused him to feel a little ashamed of his display of temper.

"Keep it!" he said. "I didn't do it for money."

The other man thankfully pocketed the money. Said he:

"Every little bit helps, as the old woman said when the fly got in the currant pudding. I'm a showman by trade and down on my luck. I ask you, is there any guy poorer off in the world than a showman with nary a show to show? Look at my mustard suit. What chance have you got if you can't put up a swell front?"

The last of Neil's stiffness vanished. "I'm a bit down on my luck myself," he said frankly. "Say, I'm sorry I lost my temper."

"Perfectly natural! Perfectly natural!" explained the other, waving his hand. "An artist wouldn't be an

artist without a temper." He extended the hand across the table. "Put it there, friend. Archibald Tinling's my name. Archie to my friends. We're quits now. Have something on me."

Since the money made out of his work was jingling in the other man's pocket, Neil's pride allowed him to condescend thus far. "Don't mind if I do," he said.

Archie hailed a waiter with an air. "What'll it be?" A near-by sign had been teasing Neil's empty interior since he had first sat down there. "I'll take a plate of chowder," he said.

"Seems like a funny thing to say to a pal," Archie resumed, "but I'm real glad to hear your luck is down. For I'm the boy to bring it up again, see? I'm a showman and you're an artist. We were made for each other. I can't give a show without an artist. And you can't get the public without a showman. No artist can manage himself. He's got too much pride to bow to the public. And a showman ain't got no pride at all. So there you are."

"What do you propose?" asked Neil.

"You and me can make a good little thing down here on the beach to fill in time. Soon as you're through eating we'll pick out a good stand and go to it. Just below the boardwalk on the way to Brighton would be the best. All you got to do is to get down in the sand and make your figures, and I'll stand up on the walk and give the spiel. It'll be a hit."

Neil shook his head regretfully.

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Archie.

Naturally Neil was not prepared to give his first reason. "Sorry," he said, "I know I'm foolish, but if those boneheads pitched pennies down to me I'd have to climb up and smash them."

"Taint charity! You're giving an honest show."

"Can't be done, old man."

"There's the artistic temperament for you!" wailed Archie.

He spent half an hour in arguing the matter cunningly.

"Sorry," said Neil at last. "I need the money worse

than you. But I couldn't give them the satisfaction of thinking they had been charitable to me."

"Oh, you want to hire a hall!" Archie snorted.

He sat biting his fingers and thinking hard, the picture of resourcefulness hard pressed. For the moment he was quite unaware of his companion. Neil rejoiced in the individual flavour of the man. His hand involuntarily sought his pencil, and the sharp worn face, the bald temples, and the lank look in the middle began to be transferred to the deal table. The jaunty air of the young-old showman teased him.

Archie, all unaware of his occupation, asked bluntly:

"Have you any money?"

"Not a sou," said Neil cheerfully.

"Can't you suggest something?"

"You're the manager," Neil suggested.

Suddenly Archie perceived what Neil was doing, and his eye lighted up. "Can you draw, too?" he cried. He hastened around the table to see better. "Yes, sir! There he is, the seedy old guy! And done in two minutes! Oh, say, if you can keep that up we're all right! That's better than messing in the sand."

"What have you got in mind?" Neil asked dubiously.

"You wouldn't mind doing portraits for money, would you? No shame in that."

"But I can't do straight portraits," objected Neil. "Only character sketches. They make most people sore."

"Not if you prepare their minds right!" cried Archie enthusiastically. "You can prepare the public's mind for anything—with tac'! That's my job. Leave it to me, son!"

"How do you propose to operate?" Neil inquired, interested.

"I'll hire a concession on Surf Avenue—just space enough for a couple of chairs off the sidewalk. I have a place in mind alongside a hot-dog stand. I'll have to give up half what we take because I can't pay in advance, but I'll make a better dicker to-morrow. All you got to

do is set there and draw to beat hell. Little funny pictures, that's all. I'll bring the business to you."

Archie's sharp eyes discovered a handbill blowing under a near-by table. He pounced on it. "Draw one of me on the back of that," he said. "For a sample, like. Never mind my feelings."

Neil obeyed. As he handed over the completed sketch he said:

"Mind, I don't agree to anything in advance. We'll just give it a trial to-day."

"Sure!" cried Archie. "Wait here till I get back."

He returned with triumph in his eye. "Come on!" he said; "we'll get them before they spend all their money."

Five minutes later Neil was hard at work in the odour of sizzling sausages. The first sitter, a gentleman of leisure, had been secured by the outlay of a dime. He was a good subject. Meanwhile Archie mounted on a soap-box outside and opened his song.

"Here's your chance to get a funny pitcher of yourself by one of the greatest living comic artists! I won't tell you his name because he's too well-known, but wait a minute, and I'll show you what he makes of this good-lookin' feller sittin' here. You've all seen his comics in the Sunday papers. Children cry for them. Only the doctor ordered him to take sea air, so that gives you a chance to get a funny pitcher of yourself by one of the best cartoonists for the small sum of twenty-five cents, two bits. Quarter of a dollar, friends, think of it! It's as good as gettin' your pitcher in the paper without the notoriety. Anybody who's stuck on his shape better not try it. But if you like a joke, come on in. Look what he did to me! Ain't that a scream, folks? No matter how handsome you are, I guarantee you a funny pitcher of yourself for quarter of a dollar, or twenty-five cents!"

The samples held up excited laughter, and a fat man promptly offered himself for a victim. After that there was no lack. Archie, excited by success, outdid himself. His "spiel," always in the process of selection, amendment and amplification, improved hourly like any other

thoughtfully considered work of art. Neil, listening to it grow, laughed, and admired. He saluted his new friend as a genuine protégé of the comic muse.

With only the briefest possible pause for supper, they kept it up until nearly eleven o'clock, when the crowd was beginning to thin out, and what remained had spent all its money anyhow.

Archie stepped down from the box, holding his larynx. "Voice all gone," he croaked. "Let's call it a day. I don't want to kill you first off."

Neil exercised his cramped fingers. "What are the takings?"

"Eleven fifty. I agreed to pay half the receipts for the stand up to three dollars only, so we split four twenty-five to each. Not too bad, eh?"

"They were worth more than a quarter," said Neil, frowning. "I hated to see them go!"

"There's the artistic temperament!" groaned Archie reproachfully. "Grasping, I call it!"

"They didn't know how good they were," Neil grumbled.

"But I knew," said Archie artfully. "There ain't a fellow on the New York *Jingo* can touch you! To-morrow we'll do twice as well!"

Now, Neil, thankful enough that no incident had occurred, was not disposed to put himself in jeopardy a second day. Was not his talent for caricature part of the description in the hands of the police? He regretfully shook his head.

"What's the matter now?" Archie demanded, crestfallen.

"I can't do it, old man."

The showman by his adroit arguments finally got Neil in a corner. "It's too public, that's why!" he explained at last in desperation.

Archie suddenly fell silent, regarding Neil sidewise out of his wary, bright eyes. With a flash of uncanny perspicacity he asked abruptly: "Are they after you?"

Neil, off his guard, could not help a startled look. He

saw that the sharp eyes marked it, so he disdained to dissemble.

Archie continued to watch him narrowly. The frankfurter man had put away his stock and doused his lights, so that the two were standing in partial obscurity, and alone.

"By God! I have it! whispered Archie excitedly. "With your modelling and your drawing, you're Neil Ottoway!"

CHAPTER X

HARTIGAN'S HUNCH

NEIL'S face hardened. He instinctively clenched his fists. "Well, what are you going to do about it?" he demanded harshly.

The showman's face changed. The sharp, confident eyes actually looked wounded.

"Say, you get me wrong, kid," he muttered in real distress. "Guess you think I'm pretty low, eh? God knows I can't afford to be too particular. I've had to do lots of things—but I never split on a pal! Oh, hell! what's the use of gassin' about it. You make me feel bad!" Suddenly he exploded. "———, I wouldn't touch a dollar of blood money if I was rotting in the gutter!"

Neil relaxed. "I believe you," he said simply. "But you see now why I can't go on exhibiting myself."

The irrepressible Archie's resourcefulness soon began to work again. "Hold on! Hold on!" he cried. "Don't make up your mind too quick about that. I'll find a way!"

"I doubt it," said Neil.

"Give me the night to think it over. Call me up at Gimpy's Hotel here at nine to-morrow."

"I have a date at nine," said Neil.

"Well ten, then, or as soon as you can."

"You understand you mustn't count on me regularly," Neil warned him. "I've got a serious job on my hands. That is to find out who *did* kill Casper Tolsen."

Archie accepted Neil's innocence as a matter of course. "Well, maybe I can help you there," he said. "Lord!

I've had experience enough of life. Call me up, anyhow."

"I will," said Neil. "Well, good night."

"Will you—shake hands with me?" asked Archie diffidently.

"Sure thing!" cried Neil, suiting the action to the word.

Archie retained his hand a moment. "I wonder—if I'll ever hear from you again?" he said wistfully.

"I said I'd call you up." Neil was surprised.

"I know—but you've got to protect yourself, of course," he stammered in novel confusion. "It—it ain't only a matter of business. I got to know if you *really* think I'm on the square. Will you do something? Will you walk with me right past that cop standing under the electric light yonder?"

Neil could never refuse a dare. "Come along," he said, slipping his arm under the showman's.

Arm in arm they approached the policeman. Archie's innate mischievousness impelled him to stop in front of the officer. Clinging to Neil's arm, he glanced slyly in his partner's face. It never changed a muscle.

"Can I trouble you for the time, officer?" asked Archie.

"There's a clock in the station yonder," was the fatigued response. "Ain't yeh got eyes in yer head?"

"Much obliged. It's been a great day, eh?"

"Great day for boobs! I see they ain't no fewer than last year!"

Archie and Neil passed on laughing. The showman glanced admiringly in Neil's face. "You're a game kid!" he said, squeezing his arm. "Now I know, all right. You and me's goin' to do something together!"

At nine o'clock on Sunday morning there were few householders abroad in Union Square. The benches were given up to the roofless ones with their newspapers. They were finishing their sleeps in extraordinarily uncomfortable attitudes, or whispering together in furtive friendliness. The lower one goes in the scale the easier it is to make friends.

The fountain splashed inanely inside its neat circlet of flowers. The hyacinths looked like poor little prisoners forced to stand at attention until they fainted. A crowd of English sparrows bragged and squalled and flew about light-headedly, birds of no spirituality.

Neil sat across the path staring at the bench where he had accosted Laura the morning after the tragedy. That was only four days ago, but how long it seemed! He could think of nothing but the girl. There she sat, frozen in terror, only her piteous eyes alive. Well, if he had even partly done away with that tragic look, all his shifts had not been in vain.

It had been exciting, too, on its own account; no use trying to pose as a hero to himself.

How sweet she was! It made him a little dizzy just to think of her. And how he longed to see her! They had parted in a kind of anger. What would he do to square himself? Dared he go to see her? Anyhow, he could write. While he sat there he composed the sentences of a dozen letters.

Hartigan was late. As time passed Neil became anxious. The rosy ex-policeman was the one thread he held to the Tolsen case tangle. If that snapped what was he to do? It's all very well to have ingenuity and determination, but one must have something to exercise them on. Teeth, however sharp, are of no service when bread is lacking. Problem: How is a fugitive from justice to set to work to unravel the crime of which he is himself accused?

Half-past nine came and went, and the hands of the sidewalk clock near the University Place corner were approaching ten. Neil was thinking of giving over his wait and going to telephone Archie when he noticed that he had become an object of special attention to one of the passers-by.

It was an undersized boy of fourteen or so with the wary, inscrutable look taught on the streets. He was sauntering back and forth with an elaborately indifferent air meanwhile glancing furtively at Neil.

A sharp little anxiety attacked Neil. Even a shaver

like this had the power to ruin him if he raised his voice. Suddenly the boy approached, and said in a mysterious whisper out of the side of his mouth :

" Say, youse ain't waitin' for no guy here are youse? "

Neil felt relieved. " What's that to you? " he asked.

" 'Cause if you was I might put you wise. "

" Well I am, " said Neil.

" W'at's his name? "

" You tell me if you know it. "

" No, sir! I'm a fly guy, I am. You tell me. Tell me what letter it begins wit', anyhow. "

" H. "

The boy's face cleared. " H for Hartigan, " he said.

" That's right! Guy wit' fat cheeks and red neck. "

" Sounds like him, " said Neil.

" Come on, then. "

" Hold on a minute. Did he send you for me? "

" Sure! Said to tell you he couldn't come to meet you, and promised me a quarter if I'd bring you where he was. I thought maybe it was a stall, so I wasn't goin' to let anyt'ing on, see? "

" Where is he? " asked Neil.

" Back room of a saloon on Twelf' Street. "

" Alone? "

" Sure! "

Neil debated inwardly what this might portend. It seemed unlikely that Hartigan should have found him out while they were parted, and if he had, surely he would never send an emissary from whom he might take warning. It must be something else that had kept him. Anyhow Neil had been taking chances from the beginning, and in his difficult circumstances there was nothing for it but to continue to take them.

" Lead on, Macduff! " he said.

" My name's Mulligan, " answered the guide.

They found Hartigan as the boy had promised, in the back room of a saloon on the corner of Twelfth Street and Sixth Avenue. A single glance in the ex-policeman's face reassured Neil. Hartigan's confidence in his young friend was so far undisturbed.

He was the only occupant of the room. Out of deference to the day the blinds were pulled down, and the electric lights turned on.

Hartigan sat by a window with a glass of beer and a leathery sandwich before him—the latter out of respect to that strange law which ordains that men may not drink without also eating on a Sunday. The window looked out on Twelfth Street, and Hartigan was continually peeking around the edge of the blind. Elation was writ large on his sanguine features.

"Hey, boy!" he cried. "Good work! Good work!"

"What is it?" asked the startled Neil.

"Wait a minute!" He was mysterious. He dismissed the boy with his quarter, and waited until the lad was out of the place.

"Now, sit down," said Hartigan. "What'll you have?" Again he peeked around the blind.

A vague anxiety was gnawing Neil. "Oh, never mind that," he said. "What's up?"

"I'll tell you!" said Hartigan impressively. "You were right, friend! Neil Ottoway didn't kill Casper Tolsen no more than you didn't!"

Neil's heart went up with a bound.

"I certainly am obliged to you for the tip," Hartigan went on. "It was a woman done it!"

Neil's joy collapsed like a pricked balloon.

"Let me tell you," the ex-policeman went on, peeking into the street. "Soon as I left you yesterday I traced that telephone call. Seven-eighteen p.m. Tuesday was the time. I found it came from a drug-store on Fourteenth Street, just west of the Avenue. They have a couple of booths there. Well, I got hold of the clerk who was on duty at that time, and he give it to me straight. It was a girl that called Tolsen up. She had been in the store before. Seems she was a good-looking girl, and the clerk had tried to make up to her before and got turned down. That's what fixed it in his mind. He was sore on her. Give me a first-rate description."

Neil scarcely needed to ask what it was.

"About five foot four, twenty-one or twenty-two years

old, weight a hundred and thirty. Elegant shape, neither fat nor skinny, but round-lookin', he said. Dressed mostly in black, but not mourning like. Brown eyes, creamy skin, and thick, shiny brown hair. High-arched eyebrows which give her a kind of funny, surprised look. Has a kind of high and mighty look to her, and never smiles at nobody."

Neil felt a little sick at heart.

"Well, soon as I got that," Hartigan went on with unction, "I went over to 21 to talk to Mme. de la Warr—smart woman that; me and her's real good friends. She was the one first called me in Thursday night, 'member?"

"I read it," said Neil.

"Well, without tellin' her anything I knew, I described the girl and asked if she'd ever seen anything like that around the place. 'Sure!' she says. 'That's the girl artist upstairs. Calls herself Rose Raleigh.' The madame, it seems, didn't think much of her; kind of sniffed—you know how it is with women.

"Well, I lost no time goin' upstairs, but nachelly the bird had flew. Through the post-office I traced her to 52, West Twelfth Street, which is right across the way there—a rooming-house. She made it easy for me because she didn't change her name. She's home now. Just saw her go in. Fits the description to a T."

"But—but what are you going to do about her?" faltered Neil.

"Do?" echoed Hartigan. "I'm going to nab her, quick! I want you to watch for me, just for three minutes, while I go down to Jefferson Market Court and get some fellow I know who's on duty there to come and arrest her for me. Huh, I guess they'll have to hand it to Hartigan!"

Neil, gasping, so to speak, sparred wildly for time. "But man, you can't arrest her on the evidence of that telephone call alone!"

"Oh, I ain't told you all yet," said Hartigan. "I searched her room good, top floor front hall room at 21. Looked to me like somebody'd been scrubbing the floor

of her clothes closet. I scraped some dirt out of the cracks and took it to a chemist. He says it's blood, all right. I picked up some hairs, too; short grey hairs. The microscope will prove if they come out of the dead man's head. My theory is young Ottoway was stuck on the girl and he offered to dispose of the body for her."

Neil silently cursed the stupid fat man's shrewdness. A clever man would never have hit on anything so simple as the truth. "But now you've spotted her," he said, "you're safe. Don't risk the whole thing by acting too precipitately."

Hartigan was already up. "I'll take my chance," he said. "You sit over here, and don't you take your eyes off that door. If she should come out before I get back, detain her at any cost. Never mind what you say, but don't let her get away. I daresn't telephone such a delicate matter, you understand. I got to go in person to get some friend to help me, so there won't be no slip-up. You don't mind doin' this for me, do you?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Neil. "Go ahead!"

"Back inside five minutes," said Hartigan.

In a daze Neil watched him go, and watched him to the corner through the crack of the blind. The instant he disappeared in Sixth Avenue the young man's sub-consciousness galvanised him into action.

Leaving money on the table to pay for what they had ordered, he hastened out of the place. He darted across the street to the door marked 52 and rang the bell. It was a shabby, old-fashioned English basement house, unnaturally tall and thin as if it had been squeezed under heavy lateral pressure. The effect was heightened by the round arches over all the narrow windows. The old house seemed to be saying, "Oh!" as if the pressure hurt. There was a fence in front, of iron under a hundred coats of paint, with a gate which opened with a wheeze and shut with a clang like a cracked bell.

Neil stood in the vestibule, suffering a very torment of impatience. He had a vivid mental picture of Hartigan hurrying to his destination and hurrying back, while he was compelled to stand still. Would *they* never come?

More time would surely be lost inside. He rang thrice.

The door was finally opened by a fat woman with a hard eye. "What's the matter with you?" she demanded crossly.

"Does Miss Rose Raleigh live here?" asked Neil breathlessly.

He made no pretence of concealing his agitation, but there was no infecting this mountain of flesh. She looked him up and down deliberately before replying, "She does."

"I want to see her. It's *very* important! Tell me her room and I'll go right up."

The fat woman blocked the door. The malignant creature guessed how to madden him, and became slower and slower. "Not in my house," she drawled. "I don't know you. I'll tell her myself."

"For God's sake, *hurry!*" cried Neil. "Tell her to put on her hat so she won't have to go back for it."

"What name shall I say?" asked the woman heavily. She afflicted Neil like some horrible nightmare shape.

"Never mind the name!" he cried. "She will know who it is."

Clearly, she would have liked to close the door in his face, but she did not quite dare. Neil came into the hall. She commenced to raise her enormous bulk up the stairs a step at a time. Neil watched her, grinding his teeth. Meanwhile he was making desperate, futile calculations of the number of steps it would take Hartigan to reach Jefferson Market Court and return.

"I suppose Laura lives on the top floor!" he thought with an inward groan.

However, the fat landlady proved to have no intention of putting herself to the trouble of more than one flight. From the landing overhead Neil heard her call: "Miss Raleigh!" and presently heard the dear and silvery reply that made his heart jump: "What is it?"

In accents of strong scorn: "Here's a young man asking for you. He *says* it's important, and to bring your hat."

There was no stupid antagonism in Laura's actions.

Almost instantly and with blessed relief Neil heard her flying steps on the stairs, nearer and nearer down three flights, swift and sure as a sandpiper's run on the beach. She rounded the top of the last flight and his heart leaped up to meet her; in sorrow or in joy, in danger or in safety, he loved her so!

Her face changed upon beholding him, and he saw by that that he was not the one she expected to see there; but whether she were glad or sorry he could not tell.

She became alert, composed and unsmiling; she was pinning her hat as she came. The landlady, anxious to hear Neil's communication, followed at a surprising rate for her; but Laura reached Neil well in advance. She asked no questions, save with her grave, deep eyes.

"You must get away quickly," Neil whispered. "The police are coming here. They tracked you through the telephone message. Not an instant to lose!"

"The telephone message!" she whispered with a catch in her breath. She gave him a poignant look.

Something deep in him answered the look quicker than thought. "I do not doubt you."

Her eyelids dropped like winged birds. "How about *you*?" she whispered.

"I'm safe for the present. Call me up later at Gimpy's Hotel, Coney Island. Ask for Archie Tinling. Will you remember that?"

"Gimpy's Hotel, Coney Island, Archie Tinling," she repeated, moving toward the door.

"Let me go out first," said Neil.

He looked out. The way was still clear. It was about fifty steps to the corner of Sixth Avenue.

"Come ahead," he said. "Go toward Fifth. Walk quickly, but not too quickly. Don't look behind you."

She nodded, sparing unnecessary words.

Alas, as he pushed open the wheezy gate Hartigan and a portly friend in blue hove around the corner, walking importantly. They were heading for the saloon across the street, but instantly they caught sight of the couple, and changing their direction, broke into a run.

Neil groaned in spirit. His brain worked as swiftly as a shuttle.

He seized Laura. "Make believe to struggle with me," he whispered.

She obeyed like lightning. They gave a highly-realistic imitation of a struggle all over the sidewalk. The fat landlady stared from the doorway, turned into stone with astonishment.

"It's too far to Fifth. Make for Sixth," Neil managed to whisper. He had to trust that she understood him.

When the two men were close upon them he whispered: "Push me away, hard!"

She thrust him back with a will. She was surprisingly strong. Neil went careening backward with both arms extended and contrived to collide with both running men. The three of them went down together. Laura was off like a released arrow; across the street and back around the corner into Sixth Avenue.

Hartigan and the uniformed man bounced up again like rubber balls. They took after the flying girl silently. It is surprising how these fat policemen can run. Neil was put to it to keep up with them. They rounded the corner just in time to see Laura's skirt disappear inside a doorway fifty steps away. The whole street was agog with astonishment. A few bystanders started to run after them in uncertain fashion. There was no sound but the running feet.

It was in one of a row of the old-fashioned, smallish brick buildings with which the street abounds that she had disappeared. There are shops on the street level and flats above; old-fashioned, respectable Irish New Yorkers live there. Hartigan left the uniformed man to watch the street door. He and Neil found themselves in a narrow black hall, and bounded on upstairs. Doors stood open on the landings, and voices and pointing fingers urged them on up.

"If they weren't so damned respectable they wouldn't be helping the police," Neil thought hotly.

They heard a door slam above. There were four

flights of stairs. A door blocked the topmost. It opened to their hands, and they found themselves out on a flat roof amidst a tangle of clothes lines. There was no sign of the girl.

Hartigan halted for a moment, undecided. There were half a dozen or so of the little buildings with roofs on the same level, divided by low parapets. At each end of the row was a much taller building with a blank wall offering an unscalable barrier. There was a score of chimneys to hide behind, and in each roof was a sort of companion-way leading to the floors below.

"We've trapped her up here all right," said Hartigan. "And if she goes down through one of the other buildings Conley will nab her on the street. You go to the right and I'll go to the left. Look behind the chimneys. Holler if you see anything."

Neil nodded, and obeyed, praying with his whole heart that she might be on his side.

A few residents of the floors below ventured up the stairs behind them, and stood around outside the door, prepared to duck inside if matters got too warm. Everybody was asking everybody else what was the matter. Neil cursed them in his heart for idle busybodies.

Behind the farthest of the little roof houses containing the stairs Neil found her. There she crouched, white and panting, a hunted thing, and dared not look up to see who it was had found her. Neil's heart was wrung at the sight.

"It's I," he whispered swiftly. "Don't give up. Stay where you are for a few minutes. I'll try to lead them away."

She looked at him with eyes full of gratitude.

Neil flung open the door around the corner from her, and shouted. Hartigan came vaulting over the parapets with amazing nimbleness. The slat gratings which protected the tin roof creaked and slapped under his flying feet. Neil stood holding the door open, in such a way that Hartigan was blocked from looking around the corner, if it occurred to him to do so. Laura was not eighteen inches from where Neil stood.

"She was just inside," said Neil. "She went down when I opened the door."

They plunged down the stairs together. The others on the roof followed at a more discreet pace. Neil contrived to reach the street in advance of Hartigan.

"There she goes!" he shouted, pointing diagonally across the street into Twelfth Street.

His cry broke the spell of silence. A roar went up from the crowd which had gathered around Conley, three doors up, and the whole mob, including the officer, set off pell-mell in the direction Neil indicated.

Neil was the first around the corner. "There she is!" he cried again, and the mob piling at his heels took up his cry.

The long block stretched down to Seventh Avenue, presenting an undisturbed Sunday morning aspect. Respectable high-stoop dwellings lined either side. There was scarcely a soul in sight. Neil had to account for the fugitive somehow.

"Went into a basement door!" he gasped to Hartigan as the policeman overtook him. "This house," he affirmed, choosing one at random.

Hartigan rang the basement bell, and rattled the grating. The crowd came to a halt on the pavement three steps above them, where they pushed and stared with eyes as soulless as buttons. The housewife, attracted by the noise, was already close at hand, and the door was opened with what was to Hartigan suspicious suddenness.

Ordering the bluecoat, as before, to watch the door, Hartigan pushed inside with Neil at his heels. The housewife, a good, simple creature, was divided between indignation and terror. Neil was genuinely sorry for her; but somebody had to suffer that Laura might go free.

The woman's very natural confusion convinced Hartigan that she had guilty knowledge of the fugitive. To Neil's joy, therefore, he announced his intention of making a room-to-room search. The crowd meanwhile was glued to the pavement outside. This would give Laura time to make a getaway. Hartigan ordered Neil

to watch the door into the yard; and meanwhile he stamped upstairs, followed by the unfortunate woman, scolding, crying and wringing her hands. It took a long time because she made a fresh stand at the door of each room. Neil heard the contention pass from floor to floor with various rumbles and squeals added as the lodgers were disturbed.

At last Hartigan came down, considerably crestfallen. The woman was not sparing him. "Been clear to the top," he muttered to Neil. "The scuttle was nailed down, and there was no ladder. Must have been next door."

"May be," said Neil, "but I was sure——!"

They went out. As they joined the bluecoat in the areaway, another policeman pushed through the crowd. "What's up?" he asked.

Hartigan explained briefly.

"Nice lookin' gal in black, white face, high eyebrows, little black hat with white flowers?" the newcomer asked eagerly.

"Sure!" cried Hartigan. "Where?"

"Just went up the Elevated stairs at Fourteenth Street. Looked sort of wild to me; been running. But thought she just wanted to make a train. Looked so much the lady I didn't like to stop her."

"That's her!" groaned Hartigan.

"Well, she's on the way to Harlem now."

A little silent song of thanksgiving was lifted up in Neil's breast. Aloud, for Hartigan's benefit, he swore disgustedly.

The policemen returned to their several posts; the crowd broke up, smiling audibly, and Sixth Avenue quickly resumed its ordinary Sabbath shirtsleeve aspect.

Hartigan and Neil were once more in the backroom of the saloon, talking things over.

"Well, what's to be done now?" asked the former. His confidence in Neil's powers, while somewhat shaken by the late fiasco, was not altogether destroyed. He did

not suspect his loyalty. "Suppose I go across the street and question the landlady."

"Lord, no!" said Neil in a panic.

"Why not?"

"You'd queer the whole business!"

"Why would I?" Hartigan inconveniently demanded.

"You don't want to show your hand, do you?" Neil asked with a fine scorn to conceal the vagueness.

Hartigan was impressed. "Well, maybe you're right," he agreed. "Maybe if she don't have a chance to warn him the fellow'll come here, and I'll nab him."

"The fellow!" cried Neil with a sinking heart. "What fellow?"

"The fellow she was with when she telephoned."

"You never told me about any fellow."

"Didn't I? Well, there was a fellow."

"How can I advise you what to do if you keep the main facts from me?" Neil asked with some heat.

The ex-policeman was not in the best of tempers himself as a result of the last hour's events. "Aw shucks!" he said irritably. "Knowing about any fellow wouldn't have kept you from letting her give us the slip, would it?"

Neil discreetly ignored the question. "Anyhow, what about the fellow?" he asked, frowning.

"He talked to the clerk in the drug store while she was in the telephone booth. The clerk took a good look at him, because, as I told you before, the clerk was soft on the girl himself. He said he was a good-lookin', sporty young fellow about twenty-four years of age, middle-size, five foot seven or eight, light weight, but well built. Mean-lookin' in the face, the clerk said, but he was sore on him. Thin-faced, he said, and yellow-lookin'. Has a way of pushin' his hat back when he stands. Has elegant curly yellow hair, which looks funny, because his eyes and his eyebrows are dark. A sport and a swell dresser, the kind girls run after."

The hot little flame of jealousy that leaped up in Neil's breast almost betrayed him. He silently ground his teeth, and kept his eyes down as if he were studying the case.

Hartigan went on: "The clerk had a dope sheet spread out on the counter; something of a sport himself, I guess."

"Dope sheet?" asked Neil.

"You know, one of them sporting guides that comes out every day in the racing season. So they got to talkin' about the horses. The young fellow he run his fingers down the entries at Bennings next day, and the clerk he looked sharp, thinking he might get a good tip.

"The young fellow said: 'Blackader is scratched for the fourth. Too bad!'

"The clerk asked him if he had any good dope on that horse.

"The young fellow said he backed him regular. Said Blackader had been runnin' in bad luck and cleaned him out, but he knew he'd get it all back, 'cause Blackader was a good horse.

"After that the girl came out of the telephone booth. She said to the young fellow, 'He's coming right down,' and they went out together."

"That was your murderer," said Neil bitterly.

"Maybe," said Hartigan, "but the girl was the decoy."

"Never!" cried Neil.

Hartigan looked mildly surprised at his tone. "There's the evidence, isn't it? She telephoned. She said, 'He's coming.' It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"I don't believe it;" insisted Neil.

"What makes you so sure?"

"Since I've seen that girl, I know she never plotted a murder. I always knew no woman could have moved that body."

"She moved *you*, all right," said Hartigan dryly. "First-off I thought the young fellow must be Ottoway——"

"No such luck!" muttered Neil.

"Eh?"

"Nothing."

"But the blonde hair and the sporty clothes killed

that. There wasn't no sporty clothes found in Ottoway's effects."

"I suppose not," said Neil, with irony that pleased him and escaped Hartigan's attention.

"So it must be some other fellow."

"Naturally."

"What's your idea?"

"It's some vampire that has fastened himself on her. We must save her from him!"

"Eh?" said Hartigan, surprised. "She certainly has a way with you young fellers. After knockin' you flat in the street, too! You're a soft-hearted guy, you are. First-off you wanted to save Ottoway, and now you want to save the girl. You'll never make a sleuth with that tender heart. I don't care *who* done it, girl or feller, so I get my job back. Are you with me?"

"Sure!" said Neil hastily. "Give me twenty-four hours. I'll meet you to-morrow same place, same time. Give me a number that I can call up if I get hold of anything before that."

CHAPTER XI

AN OATH UNTAKEN

NEIL made haste to reach Coney Island that he might be on hand in case of a possible telephone call from Laura. He found Gimpy's at the lower and quieter end of Surf Avenue, in what might be called the native quarter of the Island, where people actually live. It is a region of small saloons and rooming houses given over to "light housekeeping."

It happened to be a wet spell in the excise barometer; consequently Gimpy's was hospitably open to the public. Indeed, the entire front wall was removed. There was a bar down one side of the room, and the balance of the floor space was occupied by small tables. Lusty bartenders of Teutonic extraction worked the beer-taps and slammed bottles on the mahogany as on any other day in the week; yet in the middle of each table was a saucer bearing a tiny, dog-eared sandwich, showing our passion for strict legal observance.

At noon on Sunday the place was well-filled, not with casual holiday-makers, but with habitués of the Island; lessees of concessions, small promoters, sports of every degree, and general hangers-on. Neil perceived Archie Tinling sitting alone near the pavement, biting his finger in undisguised impatience. He sprang up.

"Here you are, John!" he cried, adding *sotto voce*: "Your name is John Groat, see?"

"Sounds familiar," said Neil, smiling.

"Twelve o'clock!" cried Archie, full of reproach.

"Three blessed hours I've been sitting here counting the money we might be taking!"

"Well, I told you——" began Neil.

"Why didn't you telephone?"

"No chance," said Neil grimly. "I've had a strenuous morning."

"Well, come on anyhow," said Archie. "I've got a swell stand. Tell you on the way."

Neil held back. "I've got to wait for a telephone call."

Archie expostulated almost tearfully.

"No use!" said Neil, grimly. "I won't stir from this place till I get that call, if I have to wait a week!"

Archie flung up his hands in despair and sat down. "Well, tell me all about it," he said resignedly.

Neil obeyed, nothing loath. Since his secret was already in Archie's keeping he felt that he might as well take advantage of the showman's shrewdness and experience.

"Hm! Some girl!" was Archie's comment. "I suppose you're gone on her."

"Not at all!" said Neil with dignity. "But of course a man's got to do what he can to save a woman."

"Sure!" said Archie dryly. "Specially a good-looking woman."

Neil ignored this.

"It's more than ever up to you to make some money now," Archie went on cunningly. "Because now that she's had to run, her supply will be cut off."

"I doubt if she'd take anything from me," said Neil gloomily.

"She will if she has to," retorted Archie. "What do you propose to do about running the blonde sport down?"

"I don't know. I'm asking you."

"Well, fellows like that generally hang out at the pool-rooms."

"Pool-rooms?"

"I don't mean billiard parlours. Joints where they take bets on the races. They are all supposed to be cleaned up by the police, but I hear there's four or five doing business, though they have to move often."

"Will you take me to them?" Neil asked eagerly.

"To-morrow," agreed Archie. "They're only open on race days, thank God! To-day we'll make the where-withal to lay a couple of small bets when we go there."

"What's your scheme for making money?" asked Neil. "You know what my situation is."

"Make yourself easy, kid. I got a concession in the Bowery from a Chink who's going to run a Japanese lottery, but his stock of notions for prizes ain't come yet, so he'll let me have it for three a day until he's ready to open up. In the middle of the Bowery where every visitor passes. Best stand on the Island. It's a cinch!"

"But we agreed that I shouldn't show myself like yesterday," Neil objected.

"You ain't," said Archie. "Let me finish, will you? I've hired a little tent and put it up, and you sit inside with the front down and do your work, see? There's nothin' like a little mystery to draw. I'll be outside with a frame of samples and my peerless line of caloric ether."

"But it's the samples that will give me away to the first bull that strolls down the Bowery."

"I doubt it. It's too plain and above-board to start those guys guessing. But if it should, I guarantee no bull will get by me at the door."

"Do you know them all?" Neil queried sarcastically.

"I know their style, my son. The nose look is unmistakable. Besides they always travel in couples. And everybody's got to go in the tent one at a time, see?"

"Do you mean to say if a couple of husky bulls want to rush the tent you can keep them out?"

"No, but I can tip you off inside, can't I? And the back of the tent is open, isn't it? And it leads into a beer-hall where they have moving pictures and it's always half dark. Give me credit for some forethought. There's a hundred ways for you to lose yourself among the little concessions and the beer-gardens and the alleyways, and there's a quarter of a million people here to-day

and on the way. You can look the lay-out over before we start."

"It's all right if it works," said Neil a little dubiously.

Archie threw up his hands. "Well, it's up to you, son. You've got to have money. If you know any easier way of getting it let's hear it."

"I'm on," said Neil briefly. "Soon as I get my call."

Archie hailed a friend across the room. "Hey, Pete! Come and have something with us. This guy knows the racing game before and behind," he added for Neil's benefit.

He who approached their table looked like a gaunt little Mephisto turned white. He had an ironic cock to his right eyebrow and his manner was bland.

"Pete, shake hands with my friend, Mr. John Groat," said Archie. "Mr. Peter Tuckett."

After amenities suitable to the occasion had been exchanged and drinks ordered, Archie said:

"Pete, my friend here is looking for a guy that follows the races. We thought you might know him."

"Looking for him?" said Mr. Tuckett, lifting the high eyebrow higher.

"Oh, it's on the level," said Archie quickly. "Take it from me. Purely a personal matter."

"What's his name?"

"Don't know. We believe he frequents poolrooms."

"Poolrooms?" said Mr. Tuckett in his bland way.

"And you're asking *me*?"

"Oh, I know you're only connected with the respectable end of the business," said Archie dryly. "That's understood. But you must have to meet all kinds."

"Well, what about him?"

Neil described the man they wished to find.

"A description don't tell much," said Mr. Tuckett.

"The same description would fit a thousand. There's so many blonde, well-dressed kids following the ponies. They camp on my trail looking for tips. If you had some peculiarity, now?"

"We know that this man is daft on the horse

Blackader," said Neil. "And that he's been backing him all through his losing streak."

"That doesn't tell much," said Mr. Tuckett. "Blackader is a popular horse. But I'll inquire for you?"

From time to time Archie hailed other sporting acquaintances as they came in, to whom they put similar inquiries. Nothing of value was learned. One man volunteered the information that at present Blackader was running at the Laurel track near Baltimore."

"That's an idea," said Neil. "I'll go to Baltimore."

Archie swore in serio-comic fashion. "You've done me an ill-turn!" he said to his friend. "Snatching the bread out of me mouth!"

"Archie Tinling wanted on the 'phone," cried one of the bartenders.

Archie and Neil sprang up together. "Well, it *might* be for me," the former said with a grin. "Ladies have been known to call me up."

The instrument stood on one end of the mahogany bar. Archie took the receiver down while Neil waited beside him, impatiently shifting his weight from foot to foot.

"Hello?" said Archie in a dulcet voice. "Yes, this is Archie . . . Oh, ain't I? You want John, I guess. John's the fellow gave you my name because I'm known here . . . Oh, don't mention it. Pleased to hear your voice . . . Yes, he's right beside me here, cursing me for keepin' him waitin'."

Neil snatched the receiver out of his hand, and put his lips close to the transmitter, so that none of the bystanders might hear. His heart was in his low, moved voice.

"Hello, Laura!"

"Oh, this is you," came back in soft tones of relief. "I was afraid——"

The loud conversation, the shouted orders for drinks, the scraping of chairs, the slamming of bottles and glasses, all rolled off Neil's consciousness. He might have been telephoning in a void for all that reached him

outside of that whisper on the wire. There was a warm suggestion in her tones that caused his heart to beat high. Back and forth between the two thrilled, soft voices the following matter-of-fact conversation took place:

"Yes, it's John Groat."

"That is what I must call you?"

"Yes."

"Who was that I spoke to just now?"

"A friend. I'll explain when I see you."

"You are in a public place?"

"Yes."

"I'm in a booth."

"But wires have ears, you know."

"I know. I will be careful."

"Where are you?"

"The Martha Washington. The woman's hotel. It seemed the safest refuge. So respectable!"

"Quite right. I'm so glad you called. I was afraid——"

"Oh what?"

"That you might give me the slip."

"After you've been so good to me? How can I ever thank you!"

"Oh, don't!"

"I must try to thank you."

"Cut it out, I say! Have you any money, dear?"

A brief silence here. "*Please!* You mustn't! You distress me so!"

"Forgive me. It just naturally slipped out. Have you any money?"

"A little."

"How much?"

"Well—forty cents. I had to pay for my room in advance because I didn't have any baggage."

"I will bring you some more."

"You wouldn't take any from me."

"I would if it had been necessary. I took other things."

"When are you coming?"

Very warmly: "Do you want to see me?"

Another brief pause.

"Why—of course!"

"I'd be on my way now if I could, but I've got to earn the money first. I'll be there a little before seven."

"Ask for Miss Folsom if you don't see me—but I'll be looking out for you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye—dear!"

Neil left the telephone, feeling like a giant refreshed. Little danger that Hartigan would stumble into the Martha Washington. For the present all was secure. Moreover, the disembodied voice had conveyed an intimation that Laura in the flesh had so far refused him.

"She *got* to love me in the end!" he told himself triumphantly. "Events are simply driving her into my arms!"

"Lead on!" he cried jocularly to Archie. "I will draw for you with both hands and both feet, if it will bring in the shekels!"

"What was that I heard about making a date?" demanded his partner suspiciously.

"I'll have to get off between six and eight," said Neil. "To carry her some money," he added frankly.

"You could send it," Archie grunted sourly.

"Not quite the same thing, old man."

"God help the poor boob that sets out to manage artists!" cried Archie.

His ill-humour vanished when they arrived on the scene of their labours. Neil praised the arrangements highly. After looking things over with particular attention to the way out behind, he immured himself in the tent with paper and pencil, while Archie mounted the soap-box outside and opened his spiel.

Almost from the first moment business was good. Neil, like all artists bent on money-making, adopted a formula for his sketches which saved both time and mental outlay. The result, while inferior, seemed to please quite as well.

To each sitter he gave five minutes. The first two he devoted to studying his subject while he told a story.

If it took, he transfixed the victim in the abandonment of laughter with all his tell-tale wrinkles. Naturally there were some whose vanity was hurt, but to these Archie cheerfully returned the money, and kept the sketches for his case of samples. Some paid, then, to keep out of the case.

By and by Archie felt justified in raising the price to half a dollar, and still Neil had all he could do. When six o'clock came they had taken in more than twenty dollars.

On the stroke of the hour Neil, regardless of Archie's pleas, put down his pencil. Taking his share of the money he flew, but not as fast as his desires, across the marshes, over Brooklyn, under the river and under the streets to East Twenty-ninth Street. It was quarter to seven when he entered the imposing lobby, and looked eagerly about him.

She sat in the corner of a mission settee with her feet daintily crossed on the floor and her hands in her lap, pale, composed and every inch a lady. Neil knew she had nothing but what she had flown in, yet somehow she contrived to look as refreshed and refurbished as a woman with a maid and all afternoon to dress in. Impecunious ladies accomplish such miracles. He could not help but contrast it with his last glimpse of her crouching on the roof. A gush of emotion foundered speech.

"It's so good to find you—safe and sound!" he stammered."

"I had a scare!" she said simply. "Where shall we go to talk? There are sitting-rooms somewhere."

"Let's stay where we are," said Neil. "No place so safe and secret as a public lobby. You can't hear a word."

She nodded.

Neil had made a little package of the money he had brought her. He dropped it in her lap. "Earned it this afternoon," he said with a touch of pride.

Her hand closed over it. She blushed. "I'll pay it back," she murmured.

"Oh, please!" said Neil.

"Tell me everything that has happened since I left you," she said. Womanlike, she ignored the painful manner of their parting.

Neil started in with the funeral. He could tell a story. She hung on the telling with the rapt interest of a child. Neil wanted to hug her for it.

Oddly enough her attention was caught by the young man in the cinnamon tie whom Neil had not thought of since. She asked several questions concerning him. Did he wear any jewellery? What colour was his hair? and so forth.

"I didn't notice," Neil answered. "Why."

"Oh, you made him seem interesting," she said hurriedly. "Go on."

He told her of his first and second meeting with Hartigan, and how the ex-policeman had been led to her door.

"So you see it was my fault after all that he was put on your track."

She made no comment on this. Her face was averted from him. Neil fell silent. Both were busy with uncomfortable thoughts.

"What—what else did Hartigan tell you?" she asked at last in a stifled voice.

Neil repeated verbatim what Hartigan had reported concerning Laura's companion in the drug-store. He waited for her to explain. But she did not offer to.

"Have you nothing to tell me?" he asked at last with a sinking heart.

"Oh——!" she whispered painfully. "What can I tell you?"

"Ah, you're not fair to me!" he protested. "After all we've been through together, and with what we have to go through yet, haven't I earned a little of your confidence?"

"It's not that," she whispered. "You have it."

"Who is this man?"

"I cannot tell you."

His hurt and angry eyes were bent on her as if in the

determination to drag out the secret. She could not bear the glance!"

"If you knew how unhappy I was!" she whispered. "Have mercy on me!"

He could not withstand an appeal like that. The scowl broke up. "Everything about me is yours," he whispered brokenly. "I love you with all my heart. You know that. I'd cheerfully go to the chair to make you happy!" A sterner note crept into his voice. "But the distinction must be understood. Everything for *you*, but nothing for another man. I would not be a man myself if I felt differently. I will not sacrifice myself for the benefit of an unknown waster and braggart—and worse. I have no assurance that it would make you happy to let him go free. I believe otherwise. Anyhow, I'm only human and he's my rival. I believe you love me. I remember your voice over the 'phone, your eyes sometimes——"

"That's nonsense!" she gasped.

"Well, you *could* love me then," he persisted. "Only he is in the way somehow. I mean to find out the truth."

"Only intolerable wretchedness for us all could result from that," she whispered.

Anger began to get the better of him again. "Then I must be the goat offered up to save your yellow-haired Isaac," he said bitterly. "I've got to shoulder the whole thing."

"Do you think *I'm* having an easy time?" she murmured.

He would not listen to her. "You're willing to let me go to jail, to worse perhaps, so that he can follow the races!"

She flashed a reproachful look on him. "You know that's not true!" she said. "The moment you are arrested I will tell the truth. You know that!"

"Then I will give myself up to the first policeman I meet," he said sullenly. "I can't stand the suspense any longer."

She made a gesture of utter weariness. "Sometimes I wish you would!" she said heavily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sharply.

"If I *have* to tell the truth, I will kill myself," she said simply. "It is too horrible! I have not the strength to face the consequences."

"Laura!" He stared at her in horror. No mistaking that she meant what she said.

They sat silent amidst the discreet hum of the woman's hotel. Quaint old ladies ambled aimlessly to and fro and pestered the clerks. Up-to-date young ones marched in and out as offhand and businesslike as men. None paid more than a cursory attention to the pair sitting on the mission settee. Very likely there are many such intense scenes acted out quietly in the middle of a crowd without anyone being the wiser.

"Oh, Laura!" he said brokenly. "How you can stab me! Why do you keep me at arm's length? Why won't you let me help you really?"

"Help me?" she echoed. "What are you doing—" A shower of tears threatened—there among the old ladies!

"You should hear my partner, Archie," said Neil quickly. He gave her an imitation of Archie's spiel outside the tent.

Laura gulped, smiled wanly, and drew a long breath. The crisis passed.

"What is it you want me to do, then?" Neil asked.

"Do nothing!" she implored. "Except keep out of the hands of the police. I believe you are clever enough for that. The great hue and cry will be over in a few days, and everybody will forget about it—but us."

"You don't know what you're asking of me," groaned Neil. "It's easy to promise it, but I doubt if I could keep my promise. You're asking me to stand back with a bow and a smile and let another man have you—a worthless scoundrel, it appears. If he was all right it would be different—I mean if he could take care of you. But he seems to me like a kind of vampire that has fastened on you. How can you expect me to stand by

and keep my hands off? The fact that you will tell me nothing makes me sure that if I knew the truth I would be more than ever determined to run him down. It's not entirely selfishness. I feel that you've got to be saved from him."

"Oh, don't go over all that again," she begged.

"One thing would make me leave him alone if I were convinced of it," Neil said doggedly, "and only one thing."

She looked her question.

"Do you love him?"

The eyelids dropped like plummets.

"Give me a fair answer. I've earned it. Do you love this man?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"You must look at me and say it," he groaned.

"I said 'convinced'."

With a manifest effort she dragged her eyes up to meet him. "I love him," she whispered from between bloodless lips.

"I don't believe it!" he cried.

She shrugged with a withdrawn air.

"Swear it!" he commanded. "Swear it by—by that photograph you set such a store by. Swear it by your love for your mother, and I'll believe you!"

She got up, trembling with real—or assumed—anger. She did not look at him. "How dare you speak to me so?" she said. "You cancel all my debt of gratitude to you. If you have any feeling of mercy, leave me and my miserable affairs alone. I will not take this money from you. I never want to see you again!"

She dropped the little packet on the settee, and turning abruptly entered a waiting elevator. He could hardly make a demonstration there among the old ladies. He stood staring foolishly after her until the elevator, having received a load, sped upward to the sacred precincts where no males may go.

Neil could not be altogether cast down.

"After all she wouldn't swear it," he thought with

grim satisfaction. "And I'm still free to go after the young blackguard!"

Then he recollected her penniless condition and was filled with compunctions. He went to the hotel desk.

"Miss Folsom dropped this when she went upstairs," he said carelessly. "Will you send it up to her room, please?"

"Front!" cried the lord of the lobby. "Number 611."

The bell-girl departed with a flirt of her pig-tail, and Neil turned Coney Island-wards.

CHAPTER XII

ENTER "BLACKADER"

AT five minutes past eight Archie was standing in front of the tent with his hands thrust deep in his pockets and a heavy, aggrieved scowl. The narrow thoroughfare in front of him was literally packed with a good-natured and opulent-looking crowd. The showman felt like a hungry man looking into a baker's window, or like a revivalist watching a procession of sinners with a padlock on his mouth.

"Pay dirt! Pay dirt!" he muttered to himself. "And nary a godless pan to wash it in!"

But pretty soon the figure of his partner struggled out of the throng before him. Neil was munching a sausage in a roll, and carried another in his free hand. Archie's face changed at the sight of him, but he refused to forego the satisfaction of his grievance all at once.

"Oh, here you are," he grumbled. "Look at the business passing by our door!"

"Only ten minutes late," said Neil. "The crowd kept me. 'I didn't stop for any dinner.'"

"By the time we get started the cream'll be taken off their rolls," said Archie morosely.

However, in spite of himself his eyes began to sparkle. He was already thinking of his spiel.

"Get along inside with you," he shepherded Neil. "I'll get them started while you finish your lunch. Get in with you! An artist never ought to be seen eating in public. It makes you look common. A hot dog, too! They'll think we're a frost!"

"What about a countersign?" asked Neil. "We've never fixed on one."

"What do you mean, countersign?" said Archie.

"If any bulls should come nosing around we want a code word, don't we? You want to tip me off quietly."

"Sure!" said Archie. "Let it be President Wilson then. If you hear me work President Wilson into my spiel, you make a quiet sneak, see?"

"I get you," said Neil.

Neil went within. Archie mounted his box, and smiled engagingly at the crowd. He was his own man again.

"Boys, I want a word with you. Pass on ladies, this is for men only."

Naturally every woman within hearing made her escort stop.

"Now, girls!" admonished Archie, wagging an arch forefinger. "You think you're going to hear something naughty, don't you? But you're not. I'm an honest woman!"

"This, in Coney Island's most approved style, made the crowd laugh, and the sound of it brought others thronging. A real laugh is so rare and desirable. Archie hastened to pursue his advantage.

"I told the men to step up because I've got a comic artist chained up in here who will make you cartoons as fast as you feed him half dollars. The only one in captivity, people! You lovely girls don't want anything like that. You wait, and next week I'll engage Howard Chandler Fisher or Harrison Christy to put you on a candy-box. But if there's any sport present that can stand a laugh on himself he can step up and get more fun for himself and friends for half a dollar than a twenty-dollar bill would buy elsewhere. This is no cheap show, friends. If you ain't got half a dollar, please make room for them that has. Step up and look at these samples, if you ain't afraid of busting your buttons." And so forth and so on.

Business was even better than in the afternoon. Neil's heart was not in it, but by this time it was almost a subconscious operation. He ground out his sketches while his mind was free to pursue its own problems. From the loud laughs that reached him as each sitter went out with his portrait he judged that he was still a success. Fat men, lean men, old and young, of every degree of

comeliness and homeliness, but principally the latter, appeared within the tent one after another in endless procession as if introduced by some kind of mechanism.

Neil began to loathe his job—but he needed the money. Archie read his humanity correctly; very few women cared to offer themselves after glancing at the frame of samples.

A break to the monotony was offered when Mr. Peter Tuckett's Mephistophelian white head protruded inside the tent opening.

"Thought I'd call this bluff of 'Archie's,'" he said a little sheepishly.

The sight of him came pat to Neil's thoughts. "Sit down," he said eagerly. "It's a relief to see a friendly face. You're a good subject, all right. You don't mind if I heighten the effect a little, do you?"

"Do your worst," said Mr. Tuckett.

Neil's excessive desire to learn if Mr. Tuckett had discovered a clue made him diffident about asking. Mr. Tuckett himself was of a coy nature. So they wasted several minutes in a discussion about art. Finally Neil said very offhandedly:

"I suppose you haven't learned anything about that young sport I asked about?"

"Nothing certain," said Mr. Tuckett, guardedly. "There's many a blonde kid crazy about the horse Blackader. Blackader is one of those showy, uncertain performers that takes the public's fancy."

"Yes?" said Neil. "But you have learned something about him? I mean the man, not the horse."

Mr. Tuckett shrugged. "I'll give it to you for what it's worth," he said. "Friend of mine who runs a little flat, not a poolroom, you understand, but a private club for a few gentlemen interested in racing——"

"Sure!" said Neil soothingly.

"He said he knew a young fellow answering to your description; curly blonde hair, dark eyebrows and all; a big talker. My friend didn't know his name. Always called him Blackader on account of his bug on that horse. My friend said he came to his place regularly and put up

something on Blackader every time the horse ran. And, just as you said he did, he went broke during Blackader's losing streak. Used to borrow change from the boys, and lay trifling bets. Do you ever draw with colours?"

"Oh, yes," said Neil.

"That's a wonderful gift now; more than a plain pencil."

"Oh, I don't know. Colour often helps cover up the artist's lack of skill. What more about Blackader?"

"Well, a couple of days ago, Wednesday it was——"

("The day after the murder!" thought Neil.)

"He turned up with a roll again, a good big one——"

"That's my man!" cried Neil aloud.

"He paid off what he owed to the crowd, and blew them. They have a little sideboard, you understand; just between friends. Thursday afternoon he was in again, and told my friend he was going down to Laurel, Maryland, where Blackader is running now. And he's there now, if it's the one you're looking for, because one of the boys came up for Sunday and told my friend he'd seen the fellow they call Blackader at the track yesterday."

"Ah, fine!" cried Neil. He jumped up and did a little calisthenics to relieve his feelings. "I can't tell you what a good turn you've done me, Mr. Tuckett. Some day I will. There's a midnight train for Baltimore, isn't there?"

"Twelve thirty-one," said Mr. Tuckett. "Say, Archie won't thank me if you give him the slip," he added dubiously.

"Archie knows I've got to go," said Neil. "Anyhow, I couldn't keep this up long."

For the evening session Archie and Neil made a change in their arrangements. Neil now took the money when he handed over the sketch. It saved any argument outside. At eleven o'clock Neil, as a result of three hours' uninterrupted labour, had nearly fifteen dollars in his pocket. At the moment he was doing a large and bibulous individual who was disposed to be talkative.

Neil's thoughts were far away, and he scarcely listened. On the paper narrow forehead and fat jowl, meagre shoulders and distended paunch, suggested in outline a scallied pear superimposed on a Bartlett.

"That's some bally-hoo you got outside," he was saying. "W'at do *I* want wit' a pitcher o' meself? I do' want to be reminded o' me shape. But he plumb hypnotised me, he did. For the price o' ten good beers, too."

"That's what he's there for," said Neil abstractedly. He was busy with the problem of how to journey to Baltimore and conduct a search on total resources of, say, eight dollars.

"Listen at him now," the fat man continued plaintively. "Blame if he ain't workin' in President Wilson, and all the crown heads of Europe!"

"Eh?" said Neil sharply. He had forgotten all about the code word.

"Listen at him!" said the fat man.

Archie, by this time as hoarse as a crow, was saying: "Yes, friends, I tell you President Wilson himself picked out my artist from a thousand others. President Wilson, he knows what's what. Ain't he the most caricatured man in America?"

Neil's heart slowly rose in his throat. "Confound this pencil!" he said carelessly. "I'll have to get another. Wait a moment, will you? I have them outside here?"

Taking his hat, he went through the back door of the tent, encircled the rear of the darkened moving-picture hall, crossed an alley, and came out on the Bowery through a concert garden lower down. A glance up the street showed Archie still holding forth. No alarm had been raised. But Neil was not disposed to linger. Striking down a side street to Surf Avenue, he just managed to push through the gates of a train starting for Park Row.

Archie, hoarse but happy as the day's successful labours drew to a close, had suddenly noticed a pair of

men on the outskirts of his audience whose wary, business-like expressions differentiated them markedly from the amiable, vacant holiday-makers.

"Bulls!" he said to himself, and kept a sharp eye on them while he went on with his spiel.

He saw them edge unostentatiously up to the frame of samples, examine them, and whisper together. Suspicion grew to certainty in his mind. It was then that he made his first reference to President Wilson. He had no way of knowing if Neil took the hint. Without pausing at all in his harangue, he stepped down from the box, and contrived to block one of the men as he was about to peep inside the tent.

"One moment, friend," he said good-naturedly. "The professor has a sitter. Do you want a funny pitcher of yourself? You're next.

The man fell back for the moment, but Archie realised he could not hold them long. No sound came from within the tent. Archie did not dare look inside himself for fear of precipitating the catastrophe. He talked on, still taking the President's name in vain, though he was losing his grip on the crowd. They drifted away toward the homeward trains.

Little beads of perspiration broke out on Archie's brow. The bulls were growing visibly impatient.

Suddenly the bibulous fat man issued out of the tent, mildly aggrieved. "Say, he went away and left me half done," he said. "I'm tired sittin' there. I won't pay, neither."

Archie breathed a great sigh of relief. "That's all right, friend," he said soothingly.

One of the detectives darted inside the tent, and presently issued again, swearing. What was left of the crowd gaped wonderingly. Archie mounted the soap box again.

"Friends, the professor's made near a hundred sketches to-day, and is suffering from a slight attack of artist's cramp. He's gone home. Come back to-morrow, and he'll make you a cartoon guaranteed to please. Sorry

you were disappointed about your picture, sir," he added for the detective's benefit.

It was not gracefully taken.

Archie put the soap box inside, and fastened the door. Taking the frame of samples under his arm, he started off with an innocent air. One of the disgruntled detectives laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You come along with us, Jack. We got a few questions to ask you, see?"

"Sure, anything you like," said Archie serenely.

Neil left the train in Brooklyn for fear they might have telephoned ahead of him to have the Park Row terminal watched. He took one of the little-used ferry routes back to Manhattan. From a drug store he mailed Archie's share of the day's takings to him in the care of Gimpy's.

Neil, for his part, was determined to go to Baltimore. He dared not show himself in the great, empty spaces of the Pennsylvania terminal at midnight, so he took an electric train from down-town for Newark, and waited for the Southern train there.

Boarding the half-lighted day coach, he found the passengers settled for the night. It was not so very different from the park benches on summer nights. Gentlemen in their shirtsleeves sprawled in amazing attitudes of discomfort over two places, or if they had been lucky enough to secure them, three, with newspapers between them and the green plush upholstery. The public displays a touching confidence in the antiseptic virtues of newspaper. Heads tousled or bald, stuck over the seat arms into the aisle, and while the train lay at rest a pleasant murmur of sleep filled the air.

Neil was obliged to content himself with the narrow seat by the rear door. Looking ahead from this position it seemed as if the car was empty, except for the three people who were in erect positions. Away up at the other end was a woman sitting bolt upright. Somehow she seemed out of place there with her straight back, her tidy hair, her modest and becoming hat.

Neil having nothing better to do, studied her idly as the train rolled on.

Suddenly his heart began to beat at a suffocating rate. Good heavens! that little black hat with the white feathers. He sprang up and strode down the aisle.

"Laura!"

She turned a startled white face. *You!*"

The thought leaped through Neil's brain: "She's going to him!" He ground his teeth jealously. What he felt showed in his eyes. She, recovering from her first confusion, faced him proudly, as much as to ask what he was going to do about it. Spoken or unspoken, there was no answer to that.

He looked away. Seeing that sprawling, dishevelled company, his thoughts took a new turn. He shuddered for her.

"This is no place for you," he said. "Go back in the sleeping car."

"I haven't the money," she said proudly.

"I have a little," he suggested. "If you put it with what you already have——"

She shook her head resolutely. "I'm already travelling on your money," she said bitterly. "It isn't easy. I will not take any more. I shall pay you back to-morrow."

"Do you hate me as much as all that?" he asked with a wry smile.

She turned her head sharply. "I do not hate you," she murmured. "You force this attitude on me."

"Well—here we are!" he said. "Can't we at least make believe until morning? May I share your seat?"

She shook her head. The situation was too difficult, more difficult perhaps than he had any notion of. "It's no use," she said. "There's nothing to be said. Please go back to your own seat."

The image of the other man tortured Neil, and turned him vicious. "So that's what I get!" he said bitterly. "You force me to remind you how I've worked for you!"

"Oh, don't!" she said painfully. "You have helped me—more than you know, but you ask a price I can't

pay. I didn't want you to help me. I warned you I couldn't pay. Please, *please* forget me and let me go. You kill me when you talk of ingratitude!"

He waited, looking for some sign of her relenting. She would not look at him again.

"Then I must go?" he said dully.

"Please go," she murmured.

He went heavily back to his own seat.

As the train pounded heavily through the dark he watched the back of her head, hungrily hoping against hope that she would turn it. She never did. He could not guess from her still attitude whether she slept or sorrowed. The train stopped at New Brunswick and a few people got off. Neil and Laura were left the only upright figures, she at her end, he at his.

These night trains on moderately long runs pursue a leisurely course. The sleeping cars behind impose the pace. The train is not obliged to arrive until the people are ready to get up. Neil looked ahead down the long hours until morning, and it seemed more to him than a man ought to be called on to bear; to see her there whom he loved so dearly, lonely, unprotected, grieving, perhaps, and be forced to keep the whole car's length between them.

"God! but women can be stony!" he groaned to himself.

Somewhere beyond Trenton he became aware that one of the shirtsleeved passengers down the car had awakened, and was sitting up, gazing at Laura with interested eyes.

"By Heaven, if any man annoys her!" he thought with instinctively clenching fists. Then an unregenerate twinkle was born in his eyes. "I hope he tries it on!" he thought. "Oh, go ahead, Jack! That would be my chance!"

Whether in response to Neil's winged wish or not, the gallant did presently stand up, and smoothed his greasy hair down with his hands. He wore an outrageously striped shirt. He had the grace to put on his coat. He

looked like a drummer in a small line or a sport of low degree, flashy, rat-faced and servile. Such a one could hardly have had any real hope of making a conquest of Laura. He approached her probably because she was defenceless.

Draping himself over the back of her seat, he addressed her with a leer. Laura, with a startled glance, shrank away into the window. Neil, watching, was on fire to run down the aisle and knock the man down, but he held himself in. "She will be gladder to see me if I make her endure it a little while," he told himself. "If I could only make her look around for me, she couldn't send me away afterwards."

The man looked down the aisle, and Neil closed his eyes. Since no danger appeared to threaten, he sat down on the arm of Laura's seat, with an arm extended along the back. Whether he was bent on charming her, or simply upon making himself offensive, the result was the same. Neil burned, but still sat tight. For a while Laura stared out of the window while the man whispered and leered. Finally upon his venturing to edge a little closer she could stand it no longer. Turning her head, she sent an imploring glance down the aisle.

It released a spring inside Neil. In a breath he was at her side.

"Get out!" he said to the would-be gallant.

That worthy sprang up astonished and inclined to be truculent. "What the hell business is it of yours?" he demanded.

"Never mind," said Neil, bright-eyed and smiling unpleasantly. "You get out quick, or I'll throw you out!"

"You ain't man enough!" said the other, squaring off.

However, at a threatening move from Neil, he abruptly changed his mind and beat a retreat into the smoker ahead. As he went hastily through the door he announced that he was coming back and then Neil would see. Neil laughed and slipped in beside Laura with a singing heart.

"Laura, dear," he whispered, "you see you need me."

"Don't triumph over me," she murmured bitterly. "It isn't worth your while."

"Triumph!" he echoed. "If you knew what I felt!"

She said no more. His heart was wrung by the sight of her despairing white weariness. "You've nothing to fear from me," he said. "I swear I'll keep my mouth shut from now till morning. I'm happy enough just to be here beside you!"

She was so quiet that he finally became alarmed. Leaning forward and looking into her averted face he saw the clear tears rolling down her adorable soft cheeks one after another. An acute convulsion took place in him. He seized her hand and pressed it hard.

"Laura, you break my heart!" he whispered brokenly. "Can't you tell me what it is, dear? Can't I help you?"

She did not pull away her hand this time. "Please," she whispered, "if you are my friend—be still—say nothing. I—I am glad to have you here."

Dimly he realised that she was crying perhaps not out of wretchedness, but from the sudden easing of a strain. Dizzy with happiness he sat as still as a mouse, and let his hand clinging to hers speak for him. The shaken breath quieted down. By and by her head began to nod, and finally—wonder of wonders!—it slipped down on his shoulder, and she slept like a baby.

Neil never stirred until dawn blushed over Chesapeake Bay. Not for a throne would he have changed his uncomfortable seat.

CHAPTER XIII

ARCHIE AGAIN

LAURA, awaking, sighed deeply and nestled close to Neil. It was a moment of exquisite joy for him. Then, full consciousness returning, she sat bolt upright with a look of horror. It quickly gave place to her usual proud, sedate expression.

Neil smiled at her in tender mockery. Let her make believe what she liked, he thought, she could not undo the last two hours. He underrated women's capacity for ignoring what is inconvenient to recognise. The calm, reserved look she presently bent on him put him back where he had been the night before. It intimidated him while he resented it. He dared not remind her that her head had lately been couched on his shoulder.

When the train came to a standstill in the station at Baltimore, she bent an odd look on him, the slightly defiant look of a child who asks a boon expecting in advance to be denied. "Will you wait here a moment?" she said. "Let me go up first."

Naturally Neil jumped to the conclusion that his rival was waiting above, and the fires of jealousy were lighted again. "You ask too much of the flesh," he said sullenly.

She shrugged. "Very well. It is not what you expect."

They went up the station stairs together. There was a man waiting for her, but not one of whom Neil could be jealous. It was a silvery old gentleman in a black wide-awake hat and a well-cut but worn frock-coat. His manner expressed an old-fashioned, unworldly chivalrous-

ness, which was a thought theatric, too. In short, Neil, with a feeling of relief, recognised the original of the photograph he had salved from Laura's bureau.

At least she would be taken care of here!

The old gentleman clasped his daughter fondly to his breast.

"I scarcely expected you would leave the sleeping-car so early," he said. "But you see I came anyway."

"I told you in my telegram that you must not come to meet me," she protested.

"My dear, I would have come to New York for you had I known you were travelling unescorted."

Neil stood a little way off watching this scene with mixed feelings. If she wished to deny him to her father, well and good; he had no intention of thrusting himself upon her. Neil expected her to ignore him. At the same time he was not going to make it any easier for her by marching off of his own volition. So he waited at a discreet distance, and in the end she surprised him, as she generally did.

"Father, this is my friend, Mr. Groat. He has been looking after me on the trip."

"I am happy to meet you, sir," said the old gentleman. "Permit me to thank you for your attentions to my daughter."

Neil wondered jealously if it was by accident or design that she had suppressed her family name.

"What baggage have you, my dear?"

"None," she said with a quick laugh. "Oh, pap, such a ridiculous accident! I sent my suit-case to the station by a messenger, and when I got there it had not arrived. So I had to come without it."

"I shall have the matter investigated," he frowned.

"Oh, the railway people have undertaken to trace it," she said quickly. "It will surely be along by a later train. The worst of it was, all my money is in it except a little change. I had to borrow five dollars from Mr. Groat to make up the amount of my tickets."

Instantly the old gentleman's wallet was in his hand.

"So this is why she detained me!" thought Neil, disappointed. "Well, anyhow, she confides her fibs in me. She can lie for love's sake."

"I trust that Mr. Groat will give us the pleasure of his company at breakfast," said the old gentleman.

Neil rejoiced a little wickedly. This, he guessed, was outside her calculations. Indeed, she looked at him quickly, a woman's look saying as plainly as words: "Here is your chance to revenge yourself if you will. But spare me!"

What was he to do? He declined politely, but at the same time feeling a spice of resentment against her. "She does not play fair," was his thought.

"Thank you very much," he said, "but this is a fleeting visit. I have a little business to do that I must set about at once."

She thanked him with a warm glance. ("Oh, yes!" he thought ruefully. "Wind me about your little finger and then thank me prettily!")

"Well, if you find you have an hour to spare you must run out," said the old gentleman. "Mrs. Kevney will want to thank you."

Neil glanced triumphantly at Laura. He had learned so much in spite of her. This was his revenge. She would not look at him.

"I recommend Rennert's," the old gentleman went on. A little old-fashioned, the young people tell me, but I find it most comfortable."

"Thank you, Mr. Kevney," said Neil slyly.

He bowed and left them. He saw them get on a car marked "Electric Park," but this did not furnish much of a clue. Scarcely likely anybody lived in a place with such a name.

Neil had never been in Baltimore before. His instinct told him the centre of the town lay in the opposite direction to that his friends had taken. He walked down Charles Street, past the little shops that cluster around every railway station, through a neighbourhood of garages and up a hill under rows of dignified, plain

residences, hard upon the pavement. He could have wrapped upon the parlour windows as he went by. He passed the old-fashioned lofty monument, went down hill again through gardens and up the other side among handsome shops. At this hour of the morning there was not a soul stirring abroad.

Neil was looking for a place of entertainment very different from what he supposed "Rennert's" to be. His capital had been increased to seven dollars by the old gentleman's bill, but this was little enough to conduct a search on. The part of town he was in was much too expensive. Down a steep hill to the left he glimpsed a cheaper quarter. Here he found Calvert Street, with rooming-houses and cheap restaurants such as he had need of.

In the cleanest of the latter he had his breakfast.

He had plenty to occupy his mind. The grand question was, What had brought Laura to Baltimore? Was it to warn the man Neil knew only as Blackader, or was it simply to seek refuge at home?

The latter supposition would scarcely hold water. For if she wanted a refuge, she would naturally have sought it when trouble first overtook her. Everything she had ever said about the necessity of earning money was against it. Only the night before she had spoken of getting work.

No, it must have been his refusal to give over the chase of his rival that had brought her flying down here, Neil thought. Perhaps they were together now. If so, Neil might as well take the next train back to New York for all the chance he would have of finding his man.

Still, if she had known where to find Blackader she would have written or telegraphed instead of coming. Maybe she knew no more than Neil did, that the wanted man was following the races. If he had luck he might find Blackader first.

Neil was with the first of the crowd that passed through the gates to the Laurel race track. It was still an hour before the time set for the first race, and these were the

devotees. Neil guessed that the man he wanted would be found frequenting the society of jockeys, trainers and touts, but he scarcely knew how to gain an entrance into such circles himself. If he had had Archie with him!

All morning Neil had been frequenting the resorts of the little racetrack town. Unfortunately for his present purpose, he was not of a pushing disposition in strange company. He had to be content with watching and listening—so far without result.

The betting ring was under the grandstand. Upon the wide floor stood a rough circle of little platforms, like auctioneers' stands or pulpits, each with an occupant who leaned down and took your money, acknowledging the bet in raucous tones, and issuing a ticket. Beside him stood his assistant in charge of a displayed blackboard on which was posted the "price" of each horse. Each assistant was provided with a pair of field-glasses, with which he kept an argus-eyed watch on all the other blackboards, and changed his own figures accordingly, so that it behoved a bettor to move quickly if he wished to secure a bargain in odds.

Neil went from one stand to another, looking in the faces of the bettors. He saw many a blonde youth, but none that corresponded in other respects to the description he had in mind. Taking into consideration the prevailing cropped style about the ears and neck it was not always easy to decide the colour of the hatted man's hair.

Neil quickly realised that he had a large order on hand to pick out a man he had never seen from among these shifting hundreds. He learned that the horse Blackader was entered for the fourth race, a sweepstakes.

Meanwhile the special trains were arriving at shorter intervals, and there was much tramping overhead as the grandstand filled. A soprano part began to be heard in the baritone chorus, and the scene was made gay with spring dresses and parasols. The first race was called and the scene in the betting-ring was like bedlam. Then with the cry: "They're off!" the whole crowd rushed out through the alleys to the space in front of the stand,

excepting the real dyed-in-the-wool gamblers, who did not look at the race at all, but took this occasion to have a quiet drink at the bar.

During the interval before the next race Neil loitered about the gate to the paddock, as a likely place to spot his man. He discovered that only a privileged few might enter there. He did not see what he was in search of, but in a little back-water out of the human current he heard a significant bit of a whispered conversation.

"You're sure it's all right?"

"Right as rain! The mare is mistaken for another skate of last year. Not a soul is on her. It's the chance of a lifetime."

"If this fails me, I'm done."

"Put up all you can scrape. Mine is already there."

So saying, the two speakers passed him. They parted at the door to the betting-ring. Obeying an involuntary impulse, Neil followed him who made his way to the book-makers' stands.

This man placed five separate bets of ten dollars each on a horse called Lady B. The odds were fifteen to one. Neil went to another stand and offered his five-dollar bill. "If she loses it's a case of walk home," he thought grimly.

He watched the race, but was too green at the game to understand it. At the finish he heard a groan go up from the crowd, and one or two men near him swore. Not until the result was posted on the great bulletin did he realise that Lady B. had won. Returning to the book-maker with a beating heart, he diffidently offered his ticket, and pocketed eighty dollars with a dazed air.

Every five minutes thereafter he put his hand in his pocket and was thrilled anew by the delicious greasiness of the old bills.

His best point of vantage was the middle alley leading from the betting-ring to the track side. Watching from here a little later, he suddenly beheld Laura in the grandstand not thirty feet from him. He drew back in the shadow where he could watch her, himself unseen. To find her there confirmed his supposition that she was

hunting for Blackader, as he was himself. She was sitting in the second row of seats behind the boxes, with an arm resting on the rail above the alley, where Neil could have leaped up and touched it. She had a man with her, a tall, good-looking, grave young fellow who bent a whimsical, wistful glance on her that told its own story.

"Who's *he*?" Neil wondered jealously. "He's in love with her, too!"

The two of them seemed to have many acquaintances in a certain element of the crowd; not the showy element which is much the same at all race tracks, but among the unostentatious, well-bred people especially characteristic of Baltimore.

"She's well-known here," he thought with a new kind of jealousy. "These are her own people. And only yesterday she had been chased over the house-tops in New York!"

She answered the greetings of her friends with her grave smile, and chatted with a box-party in front. Neil watched with a bitter smile. He who loved her so well was forbidden. Nevertheless he remembered she had put on the charwoman's disguise for him. That was something he was willing to wager the good-looking young fellow at her side didn't know about. And her head had lain on his shoulder throughout the night!

While she took part in the talk about her, her eyes never strayed long from the alley below. She marked all who passed in and out. Neil, sure by this that she had come on the same errand as himself, decided that he could not do better than watch her. He found a foothold out of the press behind a pillar, and waited patiently.

Between races Laura and her escort visited the paddock and the restaurant like everybody else. Laura never ceased to search among the passing faces, and Neil never lost sight of her. At other times while she remained in her seat she sent the young man down to the betting-ring. Neil was close at his heels as he made his rapid survey from stand to stand. The elusive Blackader still kept out of the way.

During the actual progress of the fourth race, the principal event on the card, when a hush lay on the crowd and every eye was following the horses, Neil saw her lay a swift hand on her companion's arm and point among the people below. Instantly the two of them rose, regardless of the frowns of those they disturbed, and started to make their way down.

The point she had indicated was out of Neil's range of vision. The alley in front of him was closely packed, and he had to push his way through forcibly that the two might not escape him. The slight commotion he made caught Laura's wary eye as she passed in front. She turned her head and their eyes met squarely.

Laura blushed painfully, and detained her companion. Neil saw her lips shape the words: "I was mistaken." They turned back.

Still Neil could not see the point towards which they had been making, and the crowd in front of him, intent upon the issue of the race, refused to let him through. Retracing his steps he tried the next alley, but could distinguish nothing out of the sea of straw hats and red necks beneath.

Blackader won the race amidst riotous enthusiasm. The crowd broke up, and Neil was swept back into the betting ring.

He sought eagerly among the elated faces of the winners. Surely the one he wanted must be among these! It was a highly popular victory, and a little queue formed below each bookmaker's stand, ticket in hand. This was the best chance Neil had had. He made a rapid survey from stand to stand. But by the time he got to the last it was nearly paid off. If the blonde youth had shared in the success of his favourite, Neil had missed him again.

Returning to the grandstand later, Neil saw that Laura and her escort had gone. A sharp anxiety attacked him. Could they have got ahead of him after all? Now that the principal events were decided the stand was beginning to empty generally, and Neil decided to transfer his post of observation to the race track gates.

It began to seem to him that he was on a fool's errand. He had to fight a paralysing sense of discouragement.

On a strip of no-man's land between the race track and the railway an itinerant preacher in goggles and Sunday blacks was holding forth. It seemed a strange place to choose to preach salvation, but on second thought not so strange. For the losers were in a suitable frame of mind to hear the sport of kings damned, while the winners might square themselves by making donations. At any rate, during the intervals between the departure of a train and the pulling in of another, a great crowd swarmed round the shouting evangelist.

Neil attached himself to the edge of the crowd, where, perfectly inconspicuous himself, he could watch the two currents converging upon the station. The seat-holders came down a long flight of stairs, while the "field" followed a boardwalk around the stand. To tell the truth, Neil had searched in so many places that by this time his faculty of observation was becoming atrophied from over use. There were too many. Try to concentrate as he might, they flowed past him in a whitish blur. Moreover he had lost faith in his luck.

Each time a new train pulled into the station there was a rush for seats, and the preacher would be left with a much-diminished audience. On one occasion Neil was startled to hear himself addressed from behind:

"My friend, are you a sinner?"

The speaker had dropped the nasal tones of the professional exhorter, and his voice rang strangely familiar in Neil's ears. Neil, whirling about, perceived behind the goggles and the white choker the demure face of his late partner.

"Archie! by all that's wonderful!" he cried.

"Easy there! Make out you're gettin' your soul saved, kid!"

"What are you doing here?"

"Lookin' for you."

"Oh, good! I tell you, I was wishing for you."

"Easy! Listen to me. I learned this morning that the police got a tip you were in Baltimore, so I came right

down to warn you. This place is full of bulls, Baltimore or New York variety, I don't know which. You'll have to look sharp."

"Hm!" said Neil. In his preoccupation with Blackader he had temporarily forgotten the other chase.

"I've got a disguise for you," Archie went on. "Take my suit-case into the men's dressing-room under the stand and change."

"What kind of a disguise?" asked Neil.

"Sky-pilot, like me," said Archie demurely. "The best ever. Run along, and come back and help me save souls."

Neil flushed and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" demanded Archie. It's a good graft. I've taken in my fare down from New York already."

"I can't do it, old man," said Neil.

"Lord! there's so many things you can't do!" snorted Archie impatiently. "It's a good work, ain't it, selling religion? Better than selling booze. I don't want you to do any of the spieling. All you've got to do is circulate in the crowd and hand out these tracts I got from the Bible society—genuine tracts."

Neil was no match for Archie in an argument. All he could do was to continue to shake his head and stubbornly refuse to join in.

"Oh, well, let the bulls take you then," said Archie disgustedly.

"I'll take my chance," said Neil. "It isn't so easy to spot a man in this crowd. I've been looking for one myself all day."

"You're working at random, I guess," said Archie. "It's work thrown away unless you get a regular plan. You need someone with a little horse sense to advise you, I guess."

"Very likely," said Neil dejectedly. "What do you suggest?"

"Pete Tuckett gave me a list of hotels in town where the sports hang out mostly. If he's a winner to-day we'll

likely find him spending it in one of those joints to-night."

"If he isn't already warned."

"Oh, cheer up! Maybe he's pig-headed like you are, and won't take no warning."

Archie glanced around him apprehensively. "You'd better beat it for town," he said, "if you won't change your clothes and stand in with me. This ain't a healthy neighbourhood. Gee, what a meeting we could get up in the train. They'd jolly the life out of us, and then fork over to square it! It's like throwing money overboard to miss the chance. Oh, well, run along and take this train. Go in the last car and wait for me."

On the way back to town Archie's good humour was gradually restored, though he could not help occasionally breaking into lamentations over their missed chances. "I had it all doped out," he said. "My plan was for us to make a round of the hotels to-night, and hold meetings. They wouldn't mind; it's good business. Then if we thought we saw our man we could set out to save him, see? What a chance! And think of the takings! The secret of success in life is to make what you got to do anyhow, pay!"

"Sorry, old man, but I haven't got the histrionic ability," said Neil.

"The what?"

"What you have such a plenty of."

Archie told of his being taken by the police. "They put me through a little bit of third degree," he said, "but I stalled 'em by telling the truth. Told all about our meeting in the sand and all. The only thing I kept back was my knowing who you was. They traced us to Gimpy's and questioned the crowd there, including Pete Tuckett. He was game, of course, but some fool who was sitting at the next table when we were talkin', said he heard you say you was goin' to Baltimore. So they're here. Luckily them two that broke up our show didn't get a sight of you. They've only got a general description."

In turn Neil narrated his own experiences without

reserve. Archie's resourcefulness and experience were too valuable not to be used to the full. Moreover, Neil was not unaware of the genuine sympathy under his partner's jocular scorn.

"They're sure to get hold of him first if they haven't found him already," Neil groaned in conclusion. "The chances are all against me."

"Oh, I don't know!" returned the indomitable Archie. "I don't guess our blonde friend is any too anxious to see the girl. According to the way we dope it, he run away and left her to face the music. Maybe he'll see her first and duck."

"I never thought of that." Neil was encouraged.

The train dropped them in Camden Station. As they issued on the street with the crowd, Neil clutched Archie's arm.

"There she is in that car ahead. Don't let anything on!"

CHAPTER XIV

BLACKADER UNBOSOMS HIMSELF

L AURA and her escort of the afternoon were sitting in an automobile at the curb. Neil and Archie passed them, feigning to be oblivious. The two in the car were still searching the faces of the race-train crowd.

"They haven't met up with him yet," whispered Archie. "Around the corner and back into the station through the baggage-room. We'll watch the watchers through the waiting-room windows."

An hour later, the last race-track special having arrived, the man in the car spoke to his chauffeur, and they drove away with disappointed expressions.

"Chances are still even!" cried Archie gleefully.

Since Neil refused to be a sky-pilot with him, Archie decided that they must play the part of sports. Under his direction Neil bought for both the quaint, tall-crowned straw hats in vogue at the moment; also haberdashery of suitable aggressiveness. The hats made them look as if they were carrying miniature water-tanks around on their craniums.

Nevertheless Archie's exactly became his young-old vivacity, and to carry out the effect he added a carnation as big as a saucer, and swung an imitation malacca stick. The contrast this made to the late demure revivalist was striking.

Neil was similarly turned out. For his part he found it more difficult to suit his expression to his giddy apparel, but he consoled himself with the thought that in

this era of the development of salesmanship many a heavy countenance is shaded by pert headgear.

After supper they divided forces in order to save time. Neil took three hotels on the list and Archie the balance. They arranged for telephonic communication with each other at stated hours.

Neil first visited the New Mortimer on Howard Street. Nothing happened here. The next place was the Mount Royal on East Baltimore Street. Here he found the same kind of wide, brilliantly-lighted lobby filled with men in comical hats and ties like his own, all chewing cigars with strange facial contortions. A clatter of talk pressed against the four walls, out of which scraps of racing jargon reached his ears. He sat down on an ottoman built around a pillar to take a preliminary observation.

By and by one of the straw-hatted figures in the kaleidoscopic mass fixed itself by addressing him: "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

Neil saw a typical young sport of the better style, thin, graceful, comely, howbeit of a comeliness not altogether to inspire confidence; the eyes shallow and set a little too close, and the mouth predisposed to a sneer. The face struck a vague chord in his recollection. Somewhere in the welter of the past week it had drifted by.

The young man himself fixed the event. "I know," he said; "it was in the crowd at the Tolsen funeral in New York last week. We were standing in a doorway together, and a fat guy came by, an ex-cop."

"Oh, yes," said Neil, none too cordially. "You were the fellow with the cinnamon-coloured tie." Neil had not been favourably impressed on the former occasion, and now the interruption distracted him from the business he had in hand.

The young man did not seem to be aware of any lack of warmth. He sat down beside Neil, stretching out a pair of neatly encased legs and daintily plucking up his trousers. "What are *you* doing down here?" he idly inquired.

"I might ask the same of you," Neil parried.

"Me? Oh, I go where the sports go. That's my regular biz. Say, that fat guy was a scream, eh? The way he blew off his mouth about the police force! I could have told him a thing or two, but I happened to see a fellow I had to speak to about something. When I came back you were gone."

"We waited for you about half an hour," said Neil dryly.

The irony was apparently lost on the young sport. "Say, the police are regular chumps!" he went on. "They haven't caught that murderer Neil Ottoway yet."

Neil's collar suddenly became tight upon his neck. He clamped his teeth together to keep his tongue quiet, and affected to be busy with a cuff-link.

"Say, I was looking for somebody to drink with," the young fellow went on. "Will you join me?"

"I'll be damned if I will!" thought Neil. Aloud he said: "No, thanks, I'm waiting for somebody."

But the other was not so easily to be put off. Apparently he was bored by his own company. "Aw, come on," he urged. "I owe you one. You can come right back. I won a bit on Blackader to-day."

The word had an effect as of ringing a gong inside Neil. He started, and glanced at his companion alertly. It flashed on him that Laura had questioned him about the young man with the cinnamon-coloured tie. Was it possible—?

"Oh, well, I don't mind if I do," he stammered.

"Come on," cried the young fellow, jumping up. "They call me Blackader, you know. So this is my night to celebrate."

Neil followed him into the bar with his brain whirling a little. This was not the way he had pictured the recognition would be made. "I have him! I have him!" he sang inside his breast—yet he could not quite believe in such good fortune.

Blackader shoved his hat back from his forehead, planted his elbows on the mahogany and smirked at his reflection in the mirror. Neil was now assured there could be no mistake. The mop of curly yellow hair was

revealed; there were the dark eyebrows and eyes and the sallow skin to complete the description.

The truth was that Neil, with too close a preoccupation with the verbal description, had unconsciously built up a phantasm in his mind, and had not recognised the original when it was put before him.

"This is not what I thought he looked like," he told himself, surprised. "Oh, you fool! you never would have found him if he had not obligingly come and forced himself on you! Oh, well, I have him anyhow!" Neil was now as ready to celebrate as the other.

He studied Blackader with strong curiosity. What dark secrets were hid behind that smooth brow, those smiling lips? It was a curious mouth, thin-lipped, yet slightly protuberant; remotely suggesting a beak. He had a disarming boyish air, and his restless dark eyes were full of an earthly zest. Neil had to confess that it was an attractive young scoundrel.

"No good, but everybody falls for him," he thought. Like every serious youth he resented the light-minded. "Takes what he wants and never pays," he thought. "Well, by Heaven! I'll see that he pays this shot!"

Having found his man, the next thing was to hold him. This promised not to be easy, for Neil was unaccustomed to dealing with sports. He didn't know what to talk about. Yet it was essential for him to win Blackader's confidence. Giving him up to the police was not to be thought of for the present. His task was to learn the truth so that he might sleep of nights. He meant to exact a confession to hold against the worst eventuality. "If Archie were only here!" he thought. But it was still an hour to the time when he had agreed to call up his partner at the Eutaw House.

However, Blackader proved to be easy to handle. It transpired that he had commenced his celebration some hours before, and was indisposed to be critical. Only let Neil listen and sympathise without stint, and he was ready to hail him the finest fellow in the world, and vow eternal friendship. Blackader was well along in the first, or boastful, stage of drunkenness.

"They say the talent is busted as a result of the meet so far. They tell you not a horse is running true to form. Don't you believe it! You always hear that kind of talk. Of course, the amateurs get pinched. That's what they're for—to provide pickings for us guys who are in the know. You don't hear *me* complain. I'm ahead of the game, all right. It isn't luck, either, but good judgment. There's damn little luck in racing. But of course you have to be in with the right men, like I am."

"I expect it takes a cool head," said Neil, feigning deference. It came hard. He would much have preferred to smash the smirking face. But he flattered him, and silently added another mark to his score.

Blackader continued to boast, and to take pleasure from his reflection in the mirror. Neil suggested that they find a table in the restaurant where they could be comfortable. He desired to take his companion away from the distractions of the bar, where he might pump him a little.

When they had seated themselves Blackader asked: "What's your name, 'bo?"

"Porter Williston," said Neil at a venture. "What's yours?"

"Oh, call me Blackader," was the careless answer. "That's my sporting monniker."

"Were you raised around here?" Neil asked with an idle air.

"Around here? Lord, no! I was raised in—What do you want to know for?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Nothing. I thought you didn't have the Baltimore drawl."

"Among sports you don't ask about a man's beginnings. It isn't safe," explained Blackader lightly.

"My mistake," said Neil.

Nevertheless Blackader became more and more communicative about himself, though still in general terms.

"I'm twenty-three. Lord! many an old fellow dies without having seen as much life as I have already. Things seem to happen around where I am. Ran away

from home when I was thirteen, and been on my own ever since."

"What do you do?" asked Neil.

"What do you mean, do? Work?" Blackader laughed. "Never did an honest day's work in my life. Let the rough-necks work!"

"Oh, I've heard that before," said Neil, designing to draw him. "Generally the fellow turned out to be a hard-working clerk at six per."

Blackader's vanity was touched. "I swear I never earned a cent!" he protested warmly. "I don't have to. I've got a head on me."

"You've got money, then?"

"Not a sou."

"How do you work it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I live well. There's always somebody to give me a handout. I look like somebody's white-haired choir-boy, you know. Turn on a smile and the rest is easy."

Neil smiled admiringly. To himself he was thinking:

"Oh, you precious little cad!"

"Oh, I'm a bad lot," said Blackader cheerfully.

"What's the odds? I didn't make myself. I take things as I find them. It's other people's fault if I'm a crook. They make me one. Fall all over themselves doing things for me—I don't ask them to—and then turn on me . . . People make me sick, anyhow. Won't let you alone."

"That's why I'm so crazy about horses. I was introduced to Mike Rohrty yesterday. He's Blackader's trainer. He took me into the old boy's stall. Say, I was as excited as a kid going to see his girl the first time—only girls never excited me. The beauty! He don't worry about right or wrong. All he's got to do is to run like hell. Say, I'm looney about that horse. He took to me, too. Rohrty said it was unusual. He let me put an arm around his neck, and I rubbed his nose and he whinnied. Somehow we understood each other. He took me as he found me, see?"

"Say, if women were only like that we could get crazy

about them, eh? Women are the plague of my life. Always getting me in wrong when I wasn't after anything. Always trying to make you different from what you are, and crying and carrying-on and pulling at you!"

Such was Blackader's naïve confession of faith. To Neil it was unspeakable heresy. Naturally when Blackader said "women" Neil thought of Laura, and his heart burned. He kept his eyes discreetly lowered, and his clenched hands under the table.

"I suppose if the truth were known," he said carelessly, "there was a woman at the bottom of the Tolsen case."

"Not necessarily," was the unexpected answer. "Women aren't in everything."

"I wonder what it's like to have a murder on your conscience," mused Neil.

"Oh, that's all rot, that about conscience," said Blackader calmly. "If you don't like to think about a thing, you don't have to, do you? Thank God, I've got a first-class forgettorry."

"But a cold-blooded, premeditated murder," insisted Neil.

The careless one was slightly touched. The dark eyes bolted. "How do you know it was cold-blooded?" he said.

"Didn't the murderer call Tolsen down there by telephone?"

"What of it? Maybe he just wanted to levy a little tribute. Tolsen was known to carry a fat roll and a lump of white coal on his finger. Maybe Ottoway held him up, and Tolsen showed fight."

"I never thought of that," said Neil. "But where do you suppose the girl comes in?"

"What girl?" questioned Blackader irritably.

"Why, I read somewhere that it was a girl called Tolsen up."

"I don't know anything about that," said Blackader sullenly. "I suppose Ottoway had a girl like everybody else."

"Well, I wouldn't like to be him," said Neil.

"Hell! he's a fool if he lets it spoil his sleep," grunted Blackader. "Every day is a new day, and the world is wide and full of suckers. Let's have another drink."

As the drinks succeeded each other it became ever harder to fix Blackader's attention. The restless dark eyes were all over the room, the light mind was fatigued by the slightest effort to pin it down. Neil returned to the charge again and again, but cautiously. He could not long keep away from the matter that it tortured him to hear of.

"You seem to have had a lot of trouble with women," he suggested.

"Trouble!" Blackader snarled. "Trouble is woman's other name! I've known hundreds, I guess. Lord knows, I'm not a conceited man, but I couldn't live as long as I have without finding out that there was something about me that gets them going. I don't take any credit from it. They simply pitch themselves at me. It takes all the fun out of the game. Then they turn on you and abuse you because they lost their heads. Once I knew a quiet woman—— Say, this Bourbon is rotten. Call the waiter."

"What about the quiet woman?" asked Neil, with a beating heart.

"Who? Oh, *her*! I fell for her. It didn't last long. She was too damn quiet. Goody-goody. She had a way of making me out a dog without saying a word. I admit I acted mean to her. I suppose I'd be blamed for it. But I don't blame myself. The way she curled her lips raised a devil in me . . . There's a couple of guys at the next table want to make friends."

"Oh, let them be," said Neil. "We're having a good time."

True to his nature, he was making little vagrant sketches on the menu card to steady himself. "How did you act mean to her?" he asked.

"Who?" said Blackader, wandering.

"The quiet woman."

"Oh, I used to get her in wrong. She was too holy. It was my sport to show her up in a bad light, see?"

"You cur!" thought Neil. "You're going to get yours directly!" Aloud he said: "I don't understand. How do you mean, get her in wrong?"

"Oh, let her go," said Blackader. "These two guys are interested in your drawings. Let's ask 'em over."

Neil looked over his shoulder and saw two burly, red-faced, hard-eyed specimens of the genus "bull." No mistaking those natty, sober clothes, still faintly suggesting the uniform; nor that heavy, transparent assumption of guilelessness. His heart went down like a stone in deep water. Too late he swore never more to carry a pencil.

"They want to make my acquaintance," I guess," said Blackader, pluming himself. Clearly this youth was an indiscriminate charmer.

"Don't let's get tied up to them," said Neil quickly. "They look like stiff. Let's go on to some place where there's somethin' doin'."

"Oh, you mustn't neglect to cultivate your graft," said Blackader. "You never can tell what may be in it." He lifted his glass to the next table. "Come on over," he said.

The detectives obeyed with alacrity. Neil felt as if the net were cast over his head at last. A fine perspiration broke out on his temples. Visions of jail rose before him.

The beastly taste of it was still strong in his mouth.

Worse than jail was the thought of Laura's despair if he were taken, and she forced to tell the truth.

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CHAPTER XV

"WONDERFUL ARCHIE!"

THE first detective introduced himself as "Mr. Johnson," and his friend as "Mr. Wilson."

"I'm Smith," Blackader came back facetiously. and this is Willie Jones."

"What's in a name!" said Mr. Johnson roguishly, and they all laughed and seated themselves about the little round table. Mr. Johnson announced that the next round was on him, and called a waiter to take the gentlemen's orders.

Neil sternly fought down the signs of rising panic. Now if ever, he needed all his wits. They were not yet sure of his identity, or they would not have put themselves to the trouble to be so ingratiating. If he played his hand astutely he might still win out.

Mr. Wilson picked up the decorated menu card. "You're quite the artist!" he said with oily obsequiousness.

"Oh, it's just to amuse myself," said Neil carelessly. "Anybody can do as much as that. I never took it up seriously. No money in it.

"I think it's real good," averred Mr. Wilson. "I'm going to keep this, if you don't mind. Souvenir of a pleasant evening."

"Go ahead," said Neil. "I'll make you all you want."

"Have you ever been in New York?" asked Mr. Johnson with an ostensibly careless air, but boring Neil through and through with his dull, hard eyes. The assumption was so transparent the artistic Neil scarcely had the assurance to make believe he couldn't see through it.

"Oh, yes; off and on," he said. To talk a good deal, and to maintain an air of simple frankness was the line he chose. "My brother's an artist there," he improvised glibly. "He's an honest-to-God artist! You wouldn't think much of my scratching if you could see his work. Colour and all; more to the life than a photograph. Maybe you've heard of him, Everard Williston? Draws for the magazines. He's got one of these—now—studios up on Sixty-seventh Street. Some joint, believe me! With models coming in every day. His wife don't mind."

"Unfortunately Neil was playing over the heads of his audience. If they had been clever men they might have been deceived by his admirably unconscious air, but, in fact, they were so intent upon their own laborious thought processes they scarcely listened to him.

"I suppose you know Coney Island," said Mr. Wilson, watching him lynx-eyed for the effect.

"Good old Coney!" sang Neil. "You bet! Say, I bought one of those strip tickets to Luna Park, and took in every darn show inside! (Lord, a year-old baby would take warning from these boneheads!" he thought.)

"Ever hear of Gimpy's?" demanded Mr. Johnson.

"Gimpy's?" What's that?" asked Neil innocently.

"A hotel."

"Didn't know there was such a place. I've heard of Henderson's and Reisenweber's and Riccadonna's."

Blackader, the charmer, was becoming very bored because he was not the centre of this conversation. He broke into it brusquely: "I suppose you men were out at the track to-day. Wasn't that fourth race a dandy?"

Neil welcomed the interruption gratefully. It gave him a chance to breathe, and to get a fresh grip on himself. Mr. Johnson answered Blackader curtly, and turned back to Neil. Whereupon the blonde youth went into a fit of the sulks."

"I used to know a fellow hung out at Gimpy's," Mr. Johnson resumed. "A kind of a sport, too. Wonder if you ever run into him. Archie Tinling by name."

"The only fellows I know in New York are my

brother's friends," said Neil. "Artists and actors and writers, and so on. What they call Bohemians. Mostly long-haired guys."

There was no making any impression on their bovine stupidity. They ought to have been deceived, and they were not. That, more than his actual danger, upset Neil's equanimity. They were not listening to him. He began to wonder how long he could keep this up without losing his temper.

"I suppose you don't know Fourteenth Street," said Mr. Wilson.

"Fourteenth Street?" said Neil. "What about it? There are shops down there, aren't there?"

At this moment a diversion was created by a bell-boy who appeared calling for "Mr. Warrington." Blackader, who was telescoped in his chair, suddenly sat up and beckoned. Here was an opportunity for him to gain general attention once more.

"What name" he asked the boy.

"Mr. Kenneth Warrington. Wanted on the telephone."

"That's funny," said Blackader to the table at large. "I didn't let anybody know I was in town. Must be some skirt who saw me at the races to-day. Women are the devil for remembering!"

Messrs. Johnson and Wilson gave him but scanty attention. Only Neil was all ears. "Kenneth Warrington!" He wrote that down on the tablets of his brain.

"Holdin' the wire," said the boy.

"Oh, I can't be bothered," said Blackader. "Tell her I'm out."

Neil had an inspiration. "Hold on," he said. "It would be a good joke if I answered for you. Do you mind?"

"Go ahead!" said Blackader.

Mr. Johnson arose with Neil. "I want a cigar from the stand," he said.

"Oh, sit down," said Blackader. "Let the waiter bring it."

"I like to look over the stock myself," said Mr. Johnson.

He accompanied Neil into the lobby and watched him safely into the telephone booth.

Neil picked up the receiver with a hand that trembled a little. He could not foresee the outcome of this hazard. He spoke in a disguised voice.

It was not Laura's voice that answered him, but a man's. He was relieved. He had not welcomed the task of trying to deceive her.

"Who's this?" the voice asked. Neil instantly thought of the tall, good-looking fellow who had accompanied Laura to the race-track.

"Warrington," he answered.

"What Warrington?"

"Kenneth."

"This is Geoffrey Parran. Do you remember me?"

"Can't say I do."

"It doesn't matter. I have a message for you. Perhaps you know who from. I want to be sure I have the right man."

"I suppose it's from Laura," answered Neil at a venture.

"Yes. Laura said to ask you to come to her at once at her father's house. It is a matter of the greatest importance concerning your own safety. Do you get that?"

"How did you find me?" asked Neil.

"Oh, I have been telephoning from hotel to hotel," the voice answered impatiently. "Shall I tell her you will come?"

"Oh, all right," said Neil, imitating Blackader's sulky tones. "Tell her I'll be out."

The other man hung up. Even while he had been talking Neil was turning the pages of the telephone book. He had his finger on the entry of the Eutaw House and asked for the number.

Archie must have been waiting close to the switch-board. Promptly upon asking for him Neil heard his whimsical drawl.

"Thank God I've got hold of you!" he cried.

"What's up?" asked Archie. "Got Blackader?"

"Yes, I've got him," said Neil. "And the bulls have got me!"

"Well! Well!" said Archie facetiously. "What do you mean, got you? You're not pinched? Where are you?"

"The Mount Royal. No, not yet, but they've fastened on me. They're only waiting a chance."

"It'll take me five minutes to get over there," said Archie calmly. "Try to stall them off until then. I'll try to cut you out. Whereabouts in the place are you?"

"In the restaurant. One of the bulls said he knew you."

"I doubt it. Don't matter, anyhow. They've never seen us two together. Mind, you don't know me when I come around you, see?"

These two telephone talks together had not used more than three minutes. Mr. Johnson was waiting for him in the lobby, negligently trimming the end of his cigar. Neil assumed a silly grin for his benefit.

"There's trouble storing up for Smitty all right," he said.

They rejoined the other two in the restaurant. Blackader affected a great indifference to the telephone call, but Mr. Wilson was frankly curious.

"What about it?" he asked with a leer.

Neil from a variety of reasons had determined to tell the truth. "It was a fellow," he said. "Had a message from a girl called Laura."

"Oh, is she here?" muttered Blackader sullenly.

"She said she wanted to see Smitty right away. Kenneth, she called him."

"She can go on wanting," said the blonde youth with a conceited smirk at his companions.

"I said you'd be right out," said Neil.

"That was all right. Let her wait."

Neil lowered his eyes to hide the rage that made them blaze. But Blackader was pretty drunk by this time, and the other two, notwithstanding their profession, were not

perspicacious men. All three took Neil's story at face value.

"Where does she live?" asked Neil, with an idle air.

"Oh, never mind," said Blackader. "No sport there. Let's have another drink."

"Johnson and me knows a nice quiet little place down Fayette Street," suggested Mr. Wilson. "Let's taxi it there."

"The police station!" thought Neil.

"Plenty of time," said Blackader. "Give your orders first. My buy. I won a bit on Blackader to-day. Some horse, that! They call me Blackader."

"You're drunk, kid," said Mr. Johnson callously.

Nevertheless, the one more drink was ordered, and before it came Neil had the satisfaction of seeing Archie appear. He rolled in through the street door, and stood just inside, balancing himself on uncertain legs. For a moment Neil was dismayed to see him drunk, too, until he reflected that his voice had been cold sober over the 'phone, and he could not possibly have acquired it in the interim.

Archie was doing the vacant, good-natured, wandering drunk. Men glanced after him with a smile as he teetered among the tables, smiling idiotically, blinking and swallowing.

After the first glance Neil was careful to ignore him. He was aware that Archie was approaching them by a roundabout course, delayed en route by an exchange of tipsy badinage with various tables. The absurd hat was cocked askew, and the lank forelock hung over one eye. Never was there a more convincing picture of drunkenness. Blackader, who was now almost as drunk in reality as Archie feigned to be, roused himself at the sight with a scornful grin.

"Here's a peach of a souse!" he said to his companions. "Watch me while I have some fun with him."

"Hey, 'bo!'" he called out. "Where did you collect it?"

Archie put a hand on the table and leaned heavily upon

it. "Say," he said, with an infantile grin all around, "have you seen me fr'en'?"

"Who's your friend?" asked Blackader. "Diamond Dick or Peter the Whaler?"

"I name no names," said Archie, with drunken mysteriousness. "If I did, maybe it would s'prise you, mister."

"He must be wanted by the police," said Blackader.

"Maybe he is and maybe he isn't," retorted Archie, with dignity. "There's many a better man than you had a run-in with the police."

The laugh was on Blackader. He sulked.

"Me and him come down from New York to-day," Archie continued, addressing the table at large. "Not on the same train. Oh, no; we know a trick or two."

Messrs. Johnson and Wilson began to evince a mild interest. "What's your friend look like?" asked the former.

"Dark-complected young feller, twenty-four years old."

"That fits Jonesy, here," said Mr. Wilson facetiously.

Archie looked Neil over with drunken calm. "That ain't him," he said. "My friend ain't no sporty kid. He's a gen'lman, *he is*."

The laugh was now turned against Neil. He joined in it heartily, marvelling at Archie's astuteness.

"Well, what's your name, friend, if you ain't ashamed of it?" asked Mr. Johnson.

"Ashamed of it!" cried Archie truculently. "No, sir, *I* ain't ashamed of it, and they ain't no man livin' man enough to *make* me ashamed of it!"

"Well, what is it, then?"

"My name is Archie Tinling, and I don't care who knows it!"

Neil caught his breath sharply. Glancing obliquely, he saw Mr. Johnson's prominent eyes almost leap out of his head. Messrs. Johnson and Wilson exchanged signals, and underwent a rapid metamorphosis.

"Sit down! Sit down!" they cried hospitably. Johnson procured an extra chair, and forced Archie into it.

"I got to find me fren'," murmured Archie plaintively.

"That's all right!" We'll help you to find him. Tell us about him!"

Blackader roused himself to mutter: "Ahh! what do you want to fool with a souse for?" But no one paid any attention to him, and he subsided.

"Where did you see him last?" asked Wilson.

"At the track to-day," said Archie ingenuously.

"We spotted a couple of bulls out there, and we thought we better come back to town separate."

"What makes you think he's here?"

"Didn't he tell me to meet him here? But I met some sports up-town and took a couple. Not more than six, I 'sure you, boys. Say, do I show it on me?"

"You'd never know it!" they cried, clapping him on the back.

"That kid would give me fits if I did. He don't touch a drop. He says we've got to keep our wits about us, we have. Well, I may take a drink or two, but I know when to stop. I don't never let it get the best of my wits. No, sir! I don't feel very good, like, but I ain't drunk. No man can say it!"

"Sure you ain't!" they said soothingly.

This kept up for awhile, Messrs. Johnson and Wilson fondly supposing that they were pumping Archie. Meanwhile he led them where he chose. Neil observed with a relieved breast that the two detectives were no longer thinking about him. Meanwhile Blackader was snoozing in his chair.

Finally Archie appeared to grow restless, as drunken men do. He got to his feet again. "I got to be goin'," he said in a dazed fashion. "I got to meet me fren'."

"Are you sure this is the right place?" asked Johnson with an expression of craft that would have warned a drunker man than Archie was feigning to be.

"Sure, this is the place! Didn't he say ten o'clock? Wasn't his very words to me, 'Meet me in the Eutaw House rest'runt ten o'clock?'"

The two detectives exchanged a triumphant glance. "You've made a mistake, friend," said Johnson. "This ain't the Eutaw House. This is the Mount Royal."

"Is it?" asked Archie with wandering vacant eye. "Honest?" He turned to an adjoining table. "Say, fellow, what hotel is this, on the level?"

"The Mount Royal, 'bo."

Archie seemed about to weep. "Hell! I been in so many places to-night! How'm I ever goin' to get back? I don't know this damn town. The kid'll give me hell!" Johnson and Wilson sprang up magnanimously. "Come on, old fellow. We'll take you up to the Eutaw House. We'll taxi it."

Blackader awoke and protested, but they heeded him not. Neil felt that verisimilitude required him to suggest that they all go together, and he did so.

Mr. Johnson dropped his pleasant mask. "Nah!" he said in the ordinary intimidating tone of the bull. "You stay where you are, see?"

Neil discreetly sat down again. Johnson and Wilson went out, tenderly supporting Archie between them. Neil sat demurely staring at the tablecloth while his heart lifted up a little song of joy.

"Wonderful, wonderful Archie!" was the burden of it.

CHAPTER XVI

GEOFFREY TAKES A HAND

IT behoved Neil to get Blackader out of the Mount Royal as quickly as possible. He could not expect Archie to keep the two detectives hoodwinked much longer, and in these days of telephones and taxi-cabs the ancient unities of time, place and action must be entirely reconstructed.

Blackader retained only sense enough to balk. No, he liked the place. What was the use of moving? Drinks were the same everywhere, and anyhow he had to have another, quick. Neither entreaty nor persuasion were of any avail. In vain Neil drew a picture of a seductive, imaginary resort down the street. Blackader refused to budge.

Finally Neil, recollecting a drunken man's dread of being left alone, threatened to go by himself. Blackader invited him to go and be damned. However when Neil feigned to take him at his word, and paying the score, made for the door, Blackader hastened to follow, tearfully protesting meanwhile.

Outside Neil hailed a cab. During the few moments that they stood waiting for it to draw up a touring car came to a stop before the main door of the hotel, some twenty paces down the street. The door was flung open, and out stepped the tall young fellow, Geoffrey Parran—and Laura!

Neil's heart leaped to his throat. His cab was now in front of him. He bundled Blackader in, but not before Laura saw him. Neil told the driver to go to Union

Station, and sprang after Blackader, carrying with him a picture of Laura rooted to the sidewalk in dismay. Looking through the little window behind him he saw her and her escort jump back into the car they had just left.

Blackader apparently had not seen the couple. "Union Station?" he muttered. "What the deuce is that for?"

Neil, feeling that he had him pretty much where he wanted now, did not trouble himself to answer. Anyhow the cool air brought Blackader's intoxication to a crisis. Without knowing whether or not he had been answered, he fell over like a log in the corner of the cab, and Neil knew he would have no further trouble with him.

Through the window behind his head Neil watched the other car coming, not a block behind. It was driven by a negro. Behind him Neil dimly perceived the two pale faces of his pursuers. In the front window of his own vehicle there was a hole for the purpose of communicating with the driver. Rapping on the glass, Neil said:

"Double fare if you shake that car behind. Turn plenty of corners."

The driver's answer was to bear down on the accelerator. The light cab leaped ahead like a horse touched with the whip. They turned a corner, flung themselves down a hill, and skidded around another corner at the bottom. The pursuing car clung to them closely. It was of heavier construction, and what it lost in picking up speed it made up in turning corners. The taxi-cab bounded and swayed like a runaway buggy, but Neil was chiefly concerned for the precious load of the car behind.

"What if they should hit a trolley car?" he thought aghast.

They tore through quiet streets of warehouses over all kinds of pavements, mostly bad. Sometimes they lost their pursuers for a moment, but the taxi-cab engine banged like a pneumatic hammer in the night, and the other driver was no doubt able to follow by the sound. They raced back across Baltimore Street again, and

twisting and turning through residential streets, gradually worked north.

Many a respectable household was awakened by the mad chase. Pedestrian policemen impotently commanded them to stop.

When they finally flew across the bridge and turned down the incline to the station, they had more than a block to the good. Neil knocked on the glass again.

"Stop at the door for five seconds, and go on more slowly," he ordered the chauffeur.

By this manœuvre he hoped to deceive his pursuers into stopping long enough to search the station.

They went on out by the exit driveway, and turned soberly down Charles Street. Neil saw the following car stop at the station door. Before he passed out of sight, however, it came on again. He gave the word for more speed.

In his need he remembered the little restaurant and rooming house where he had breakfasted that morning. "Take us to the Dixie Hotel on Calvert Street," he ordered the driver.

They turned the first corner, and eluded the other car. Turning the next and the next without seeing it, Neil began to hope they had shaken it for good. Presently they drew up before the address he had given. Neil and the driver hustled the unconscious Blackader across the pavement and propped him in the corner of the doorway. Neil had five dollars ready. Thrusting it into the chauffeur's hand, he said laconically:

"Beat it!"

The taxi-cab roared away down the street. In the opposite direction Neil could hear the other car a block or so away. The door was locked, though a lighted sign above it still advertised the price of beds. He was obliged to wait for an anxious half-minute for it to be opened, while he kept the swaying Blackader from toppling over on the pavement. When the door was opened Blackader tumbled inside.

The keeper of the place was not disturbed, however, but as a matter of course assisted Neil to pull him all the

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way in, and closed the door. The last thing Neil saw was the lights of the touring-car turning into Calvert Street above.

The landlord of the Dixie Hotel could put two and two together as well as another man. Seeing two sports in his humble entry, one drunk, one exceedingly sober, he smiled an oily smile and unblushingly asked them quadruple his usual rates. He was an obese, unshaven little creature wearing a dirty, collarless shirt.

With a shrug Neil paid what he asked. "I will give you as much again in the morning if we are undisturbed," he said significantly.

The man smiled even more oleaginously. "Nobody is ever disturbed in my house," he murmured.

Together they dragged Blackader up a flight of stairs, and the landlord showed the way into a room above the entrance. They dropped Blackader on the bed, and he instantly started to snore. The man hung about, fumbling for matches. Neil heard the car in the street below.

"No lights," he said sharply. "That will be all."

The landlord withdrew, apologising. Neil went cautiously to the window. The touring-car was standing in the street a few doors above, its yellow eyes glaring idiotically, its engine turning over softly. The tall young man stood on the sidewalk studying the different house fronts.

The lighted sign of the Dixie decided him. Beckoning to the car, he turned to the lodging-house door. The car moved down. Another man, evidently the chauffeur, alighted and joined the first—and a woman, indubitably Laura.

The door-bell rang, and Neil set his door ajar that he might hear what passed. All depended on the scoundrelly landlord now. If only Geoffrey Parran did not offer him a larger price! The door was opened and a murmured colloquy took place in the entry. Neil heard the landlord's repeated denials, and took heart of grace.

But suddenly the fellow's tone changed. "Bribed!" thought Neil. They all came in, and the street door was

closed. A room below swallowed them for a moment or two. Then they softly issued out again, and Neil heard a cautious foot upon the stairs.

He close his door, and softly shot the bolt. It was a rickety affair. He caught the back of a chair under the knob. There was little else he could do. The meagre furniture of the room was of no service as a barricade. If Blackader had only been sober, by working on his fears he might have persuaded him to escape out of the window, but the blonde youth was lying on the bed like a dead man.

There came a discreet tap on the door.

"Who is there?" demanded Neil sternly.

"Just me," answered a small voice. "The fellow who showed you your room."

Neil had an impression of several people keeping quiet behind the speaker. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Sorry to disturb you, mister, but my wife is took sick, and her medicine is on the shelf in your closet."

"You can't come in," said Neil.

"Aw, maybe she'll die on me!" whined the voice.

"What kind of a fool does he think I am?" thought Neil. He disdained to answer.

"Force the door," said another voice softly. "I'll pay for it."

"Oh, mister! Mister!" protested the landlord.

There was a rush outside and the impact of a hard body on the door. The flimsy lock gave, the chair collapsed, and instantly, it seemed to Neil, the room was full of people. Two men bore him down. He was helpless beneath them.

One commanded: "Laura, you get him out, while we hold this man."

"Gentlemen! For God's sake, less noise! They'll close me up!" wailed the landlord.

In the midst of all the confusion the sound of Laura's voice reached Neil's consciousness. She was beside the bed. "Ken! Wake up. Come with me." Even then Neil marked that there was no great amount of tenderness in it. "Oh, he's drunk!" she cried despairingly.

"Help her there, man," commanded the leader.
"Take him down and put him in the car."

Blackader, inarticulately protesting, was yanked to his feet and half led, half dragged out of the room. Neil, seeing his hard-worn prize slip through his fingers, ground his teeth in helpless rage.

"Have you the straps, Cliff?" one man on top of him asked the other.

"Here, boss," was the answer. The speaker was a gigantic negro whose teeth gleamed in the faint light from the street below.

Turning Neil over, the two set about strapping his arms to his sides. Neil made it as difficult a job for them as he was able, but they prevailed in the end. They likewise strapped his ankles together, and left him lying there as helpless as a rolled carpet. By this time the landlord was back in the room.

To him the tall man said: You understand, this fellow is to be set free at half-past one."

"Gag him, mister!" wailed the landlord. "He'll raise the neighbourhood. Please gag him, mister!"

"He'll not cry out," said the other speaker coolly.

"He has his own reasons for keeping quiet."

"What'll I do if he attacks me?"

"Defend yourself," was the contemptuous answer.

"I suppose you have people here."

They all went out of the room and down the stairs. Neil heard the front door close; heard the engine speed up, and the clutch engage. The automobile rolled away out of hearing, and Neil was left alone with his bitter thoughts.

Bitterest was the thought that Laura and another man were triumphing over him together.

Still the Dixie Hotel was not to be left in peace this night. Once more a motor car came to a stop before the door, not the same car; this one banged and rattled disreputably. There came a peremptory ring at the bell.

Neil's heart began to beat apprehensively at the sound, for somehow it suggested further pursuit instead

of relief. He heard the door opened below, but could not guess what transpired in the hall, for they had closed his door on going out.

Presently his door opened softly and swiftly, and a woman ran towards him gasping with terror. With trembling fingers she set to work to unbuckle the straps that bound him.

Neil was sufficiently startled. "What's the matter now?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

"Hush! for God's sake!" she whispered. "It's the police! It's not the first time we've been in trouble. They'll close us up, sure! Oh, be quiet. Don't hold this up against us! I have children!"

"Make your mind easy," said Neil grimly.

"Come with me and I'll hide you," she whispered.

She led him out into the hall. They were none too soon, for men were already on the stairs. They could see the white glow of an electric flash around the turn. Neil and the woman went on up the next flight catlike, on all fours. At the top Neil held back for a moment, though the woman pulled him impatiently. He heard a familiar voice, the intimidating tones of Mr. Johnson.

"We know they're here, because we've got the man that drove them here."

"I'm telling you they came here," replied the landlord in faltering accents. "But they left right away again. They didn't like my accommodations."

"You're lying," said Mr. Johnson. "They would never have come here if they hadn't known the place beforehand."

"You can look from cellar to garret," whined the other man.

"Come," whispered the woman, plucking at Neil's sleeve.

He would not go on, however, until he judged from the sounds that they had completed their search of the floor below, and were ready to ascend. Then he followed her. This floor was divided down the middle into two rows of cubicles with partitions extending not quite to the ceiling. Most of the doors stood open, and snores

in various keys issued from within. Down at the end of the passage thus formed a light within a red globe shed a sickly radiance.

The woman and Neil fitted noiselessly down this passage and through a washroom at the back of the house to a narrow back stairs. In a black hole at the foot of these stairs they waited for a long time in a silence broken only by the woman's agitated breathing. Finally they heard a door open at the top of the house, and heavy feet begin to descend.

She softly opened a door at her hand and led Neil through a dimly-lighted, untidy bedroom. Two children were sleeping in a little bed by a window. There was a large bed with the clothes thrown in a heap. The woman opened a door across the room, and showed Neil the way into a lighted passage, which he recognised as the entrance hall of the place. She stopped at the door.

"I must be in bed when they come down," she whispered. "Go back to the door of your room. If they should start upstairs, go around the same way again."

For a long time Neil listened at his door without hearing anything. The detectives, he supposed, were searching the back premises and the cellar. Finally they came out into the hall below. Mr. Johnson sounded disappointed and abusive, the landlord cringing. Neil held himself in readiness for another flight upstairs, but to his satisfaction, he heard them make for the front door.

He ran to the window, and kneeling on the floor, peeped over the sill. In the street stood a brown taxicab such as he and Blackader had ridden in. The driver lolled under the steering-wheel smoking a cigar with the nonchalant air peculiar to chauffeurs. Messrs. Johnson and Wilson appeared, and after a brief, whispered colloquy with the driver, entered the cab. Starting down the street, it turned to the left at the first corner. As it turned one of the occupants unobtrusively dropped off the far side, and made his way back in the shadows across the street to a deep doorway opposite Neil's window.

Neil drew back into his room, silently cursing his luck.

He was on fire to be out and after his escaped quarry. The prospect of continued imprisonment in that hold was maddening.

Going downstairs he found the trembling couple in their tiny office under the stairs. They were completely demoralised by the events of the past hours, and fear of worse in store.

"I don't know what it's all about!" whined the landlord. "I leave it to you. Why couldn't you leave a respectable house in peace?"

"I've got nothing for you," said Neil sternly. "You want to sell out everybody all around."

The man protested his disinterestedness in Heaven.

"Can that!" Neil snarled bluntly. "One of the bulls is watching from across the street. He'll hear you through the door. Is there a back way out of this place?"

The landlord shook his head. "All built up," he groaned.

Neil considered a moment. "Have you a telephone book?" he demanded.

The woman hastened to get it.

He quickly found what he wanted. It appeared that Geoffrey Parran's residence and office were both listed. Laura's friend was a lawyer, according to the book. The house number was Mount Vernon 1987.

"Go into your bedroom and shut the door," Neil commanded the couple.

They obeyed meekly. Without doubt there was an ear glued to the keyhole, but Neil believed that he could keep his voice from reaching them. The telephone instrument was on the desk. He called the number he wanted.

At intervals the impassive voice spoke out of nothingness: "Ringing Mount Vernon one nine eight seven."

And finally: "Mount Vernon one nine eight seven don't answer."

"Ring again," said Neil grimly.

He was almost ready to give up when he heard the circuit open, and a scared voice answered in the soft, slurred tones of a negro servant. "Hello?"

"I want to speak to Mr. Geoffrey Parran."

"He ain't come home, suh," answered the voice.

"Are you sure?"

"Deed, he ain't come home, suh. I done just look in his baid."

Neil had half expected this. He debated what to do.

"Maybe Mass' Geoffrey at the club," suggested the voice.

"Not likely," said Neil. "Look here, you must wait up for him," he commanded. "When he comes in tell him to call up the Dixie. It's very important."

"Ye, suh, I will suh." Then the voice changed its tone. "Wait a minute, suh. Here he comes. I hear the automobile."

In a few moments Neil heard the well-remembered, curt accents of the tall young man. "What is it?"

Neil bristled a little at the sound. "This is the man you left at the Dixie Hotel," he answered in tones to match. "Do you get me?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Since you left here the place has been visited by the police. They didn't find me. One man is watching from across the road now. I don't know how much you know about this case, but if you don't want me to be arrested, it's up to you to help me away from here."

"What is it to me if you are arrested?" the voice demanded, angrily.

"Oh!" said Neil. "Then you do not know what it is all about. I suggest that you consult Laura."

"That lady is out of reach," the voice returned stiffly.

"Well, if I'm arrested," said Neil recklessly, "everybody's fat is in the fire. You'll have to take my word for it."

No answer from the other end.

"What are you going to do about it?" Neil demanded.

After a brief pause the voice came, a little humanised: "All right. I'll come by in my car, five minutes from now. Be waiting inside the door, and when you hear me coming make a run for it. I'll slow down, but not stop."

CHAPTER XVII

A LITTLE LIGHT

GEOFFREY PARRAN lived in a severe and stately old house at the corner of two old-fashioned streets. It was as square as a box and built of pink bricks with cream sandstone trimmings and neo-Egyptian ornaments. Across the road was a great convent behind its high wall.

So much Neil observed as the motor-car turned into the garage from the side street, the original stable of the establishment. The big doors swung silently to behind them, as if by magic it seemed, until Neil saw the big negro chauffeur grinning behind the car. He had not accompanied his master on this last jaunt.

Parran unlimbered his long body from the machine, and smiled ironically at Neil. The common danger they had just run made them feel almost friendly.

"Close shave," remarked Parran. "How did you feel under fire?"

"Nothing can feaze me now," said Neil.

Fortunately his aim was bad."

"Not so damn bad." Neil pointed to a little round hole in the back of the mohair top.

Parran touched his cigar to it, and scorched the edge all around. "Order a new piece, Cliff," he said. "If anybody asks you how it happened, why, you saw me do it with my cigar."

"Yes, suh, Mass' Geoffrey," said the chauffeur with a yet more expansive grin.

Neil attempted to thank his rescuer, but Parran would not hear of it. "I didn't do it to oblige you," he said honestly.

"I know," said Neil. "But the obligation is there just the same. If you'll show me an inconspicuous way out now, I'll trouble you no further."

"Nonsense!" said Parran. "The whole police force is aroused by now. You'd be arrested in ten minutes, and then where would be the gain for all our trouble. You must stay here until we can contrive some way out."

Neil bowed in acquiescence.

Parran led the way across a flagged courtyard, and through a side door into a great, dim hall.

"My diggings are upstairs," he said. "This part of the house has not been used for years."

Neil was introduced to a wide, dusky sitting-room, the corner room on the second floor. It was unmistakably a man's room, and the kind dear to a man's heart; plain, easeful and not too tidy. Neil marked a capacious fireplace, immense shabby easy chairs, a double student's lamp and rows of books.

"Sit down," said Geoffrey Parran hospitably. "Uncle Isaac will get us something to eat and drink directly."

Neil looked at him in astonishment. This from the man who had knelt on his chest a couple of hours before! "I can't accept your hospitality," he stated stiffly.

Parran debated with himself a moment. "I'm not your enemy," he said suddenly. "You irritated me a little over the telephone, but when I thought it over—well, from what I have learned I am inclined to sympathise, to respect you."

Neil frowned at the carpet.

"I suppose you're thinking of the set-to in that lodging-house," said Parran. "I was obliged to act as I did. There was no enmity in it. If you could forget that, perhaps we might find some working basis on which to get along together."

"What did she—what have you been told?" asked Neil.

"Not much," said the other, avoiding his glance. Whenever Laura was suggested the tall young man immediately became shy. "I understood that you had

befriended—that lady. It seems like a complicated situation.”

“*Complicated!*” said Neil. “Good Lord, none of us knows where he’s at!”

“Sit down,” urged Parran. “Maybe, in a way of speaking we’re both in the same boat. I assure you, I am not trying to take you in. On my honour they are out of your reach for the moment. You will not be any farther behind in the chase to-morrow morning.”

Neil was glad to obey. The last few hours had been wearing. The room seemed like a very haven of refuge. The aged negro presently appeared with cold beef and biscuits and beer. They fell to ravenously.

“No sauce for the appetite like bullets,” it seems,” remarked Parran dryly.

“I hope you won’t get into trouble over that,” Neil remarked.

“No fear. That’s the advantage of having a name that’s a city institution. They’d never dream of suspecting me. And beside I took off the number-plate on the machine.”

“How much do you know about my case, really?” asked Neil.

Parran became diffident again. “Very little,” he said. “Naturally one doesn’t like to ask questions. I gathered simply this: that you were accused of a crime that young blackguard had probably committed, and that while you had shown L—that lady every consideration, still you were determined to bring him to justice, so that she was obliged to fight you.”

“Blackguard?” exclaimed Neil eagerly. “Did *she* say that?”

“No. My word.” Parran’s tone was dry.

“I’m with you there,” said Neil grimly. “I suppose you won’t help me catch him,” he added.

The other man shook his head gloomily. “Not but what I’d like to. But I’ve given my word.”

“I refused to,” said Neil.

“Perhaps you could tell me more of the circumstances——” suggested Parran shyly.

"Not if *she* hasn't done so," said Neil.

"You're right, of course," returned the other, blushing. "I shouldn't have asked it. But one is only human. I am tormented to know."

"Oh, I understand that. Same here. There's one thing in particular that torments me. I know it, and I do not know it. Perhaps you could tell me without violating any confidences. What is he to her that she is obliged to fight for him, unspeakable cad that he is?"

"That is no secret," said Parran, in low tones. "He is her husband."

Neil took the blow standing. "I supposed so," he said quietly, busily crumbling a piece of bread on the table. "It doesn't alter matters for me. Oh, but how could it ever have happened?" he cried, in a voice full of pain.

Parran shrugged bitterly. "No one will ever know that. Of course she was young. But so noble—and wise for her years."

"Oh, yes!" said Neil harshly. "It's always the best ones that fling themselves away!"

The two men were silent for a long time.

"I suppose you have known her for years?" suggested Neil wistfully.

"Since childhood."

"What a dear little girl she must have been!" murmured Neil.

"Never another like her," said Parran gruffly. "How long have you?"

"A week."

The other man looked his astonishment.

"But an ordinary lifetime has been crowded into the seven days!"

"She's in terrible distress," said Parran after a while.

"Couldn't you—let up on your purpose? You and I together could easily keep you out of harm's way."

"Never!" Neil grated. "Neither would you if you knew the truth. It's not my own safety that concerns me, but hers. He's a kind of vampire—with women for his victims. If you had heard his drunken boasting to-night you would not have been as patient as I. You

would have shot him on the spot. I am no fighting man but it made me see red. And to think of Laura in the hands of a thing like that! It's intolerable! I cannot live with it. If there's no other way out I will kill him with my own hands!"

"I have thought of that," said Parran, with a wry smile. "But I couldn't do it with clean hands, because I want her myself."

"So do I," said Neil promptly. "I wouldn't expect to get her that way. The main thing with me is to set her free. I could swing gaily, knowing she was free."

"But the horrible catastrophe!" murmured Parran. "She could never hold up her head after it!"

"I don't agree with you," said Neil. "I think you look at things wrong-end first. I'm an artist, and I don't give a rap for what the world says. What I think of is that she has many years of youth and beauty before her, and she has a right to be happy. When I think of her face as I have seen it——"

He suddenly pulled himself up. "There's no use shrieking about what you're going to do, is there?" he said shamefacedly. "I mean to get him, that's all."

No knight, however passionate and determined his quest, may set Nature at naught with impunity. Sooner or later the great Mother blandly exacts her due. Neil, who turned in "for an hour or two," slept until noon next day. When he did open his eyes, it was not to spring out of bed and armour himself as knight-errant might be supposed to do. He lay for a few minutes, lapped in delicious ease, blinking at the canopy of his immense four-poster and refusing to let thoughts of murders, police and harassed damsels disturb his mind.

The lofty room had a flavour of other days which made him feel like a child waking up in the past. There were cheerful, faded chintz hangings, relieved by spotless dimity at the sashes. The windows were open, and from the courtyard rose a sound of whistling, and the splashing of a hose. After the frantic excitement of the past few days it was like waking up in heaven.

One of the doors opened softly, and the benign, wrinkled black face of Uncle Isaac appeared. Seeing Neil's open eyes, he grinned toothlessly.

"Morning, suh. Does you-all want to get up now?"

"I suppose so," said Neil, with a groan.

"Hot or cold baf, suh?"

"Cold."

Uncle Isaac had Neil's freshly pressed suit over his arm. Clean linen was already spread out. The old man shuffled about the room, with his face beaming with the joy of servitude. Neil had not believed that such ministers of comfort existed outside of books.

Watching him, he indulged in a philosophical reflection. "How tyrannical is a moral idea! These people are natural servants. They are happy in that state. But we were obliged to free them, at no end of trouble all around, merely for the sake of an idea. It's like me at this moment. How utterly comfortable I am! But I am obliged to get up and plunge into the disgusting mess again for the sake of an idea!"

When he entered the sitting-room later, Uncle Isaac was putting strawberries and cream on a little table by an open window with maple leaves rustling outside. The heavy linen, the old silver, the nasturtiums in a china bowl were in keeping. Neil silently groaned again. "To think of Coney Island after this!"

"Where is Mr. Parran?" he asked.

"Done gone to the office, suh. Say he back to lunch at one o'clock."

"It's nearly one now. I'll wait and eat with him. Have you got a newspaper?"

"Yes, suh. Right here, suh. The *Sun* paper."

Neil seized on it eagerly. The Tolsen case still held the first page. But the long dispatch from New York consisted only of the impressive-sounding gossip with which an astute editor in a celebrated case seeks to conceal a lack of real news. Of local news there was no word concerning the several wild flights through the streets the night before. Baltimore papers do not pre-

tend to the omnipotence New Yorkers know. They are content to print what they may.

Following the New York dispatch there was a single paragraph as follows:—

Neil Ottoway is known to be in Baltimore. Last night he was seen at one of the hotels frequented by sporting men, but managed to slip away before he could be arrested. He is known to be in town still, and every avenue of escape is guarded.

His partner, Archie Tinling, of whom the New York dispatches had so much to say yesterday, was arrested in a well-known hotel here last night. He was put through a searching examination. As there is no evidence against him, he was subsequently released.

At Police Headquarters all information about the case was for obvious reasons refused. Colonel Thomas said: "When Neil Ottoway is arrested I will give out a statement. Until then not a word!"

From the chief's confident air it is taken that an arrest is imminent.

"Same old stuff!" thought Neil. Yet it impressed him more than the windy effusions he had read in New York. "These people mean business," he thought. "If it happens they have a real head on their chief of police, a fat chance I have of getting clear! How the deuce am I going to get away from this house?"

In Archie lay his only hope. Neil strode up and down the big room, threshing his brain for some expedient whereby he might establish communications. But he had no doubt they had set Archie free only in the expectation that he would lead them to Neil sooner or later. There was a telephone on Parran's desk that Neil eyed desirously. He dared not use it.

Pretty soon Parran came in. From his unchanged face Neil guessed that he had not connected the paragraph in the morning paper with their affairs. Certainly if he suspected that he was entertaining the famous Neil Ottoway, he hid it well. He brought the first edition of the afternoon paper. Neil studied it with careful carelessness. The article on the Tolsen case was merely a rehash of the earlier story.

While the two men ate the delicious lunch that Uncle Isaac put before them they instinctively avoided all reference to disconcerting subjects. Neil was impressed

anew with the fact that his host was a generous and high-souled gentleman, but a little formalised, a little lacking in humour.

Studying him, he asked himself: "Why didn't she take him?" adding inconsequentially: "I'm glad she didn't. I could be jealous of him."

Not until Parran was making ready to return to his office was Neil's case mentioned.

"What are your plans?" the former asked diffidently.

"I haven't any," Neil frowned. "I'm up a tree."

"Treat this house as your own for as long as you choose," said Parran. "I may tell you without betraying anybody, that your own special object will not be any more difficult to attain by reason of a day or two's delay."

"You're very good," said Neil. "But, of course, I must get in motion again as soon as I can."

Left alone again, Neil's brain pursued the same old round without finding any outlet. He could not but hope that Archie's cleverness, which had more than once astonished him, would ferret him out, though he could not guess how it was to be accomplished, particularly as Archie's every move must be watched.

Neil studied the paper to while the heavy hours. He could not concentrate on a book. In the end an odd-looking want advertisement caught his eye. It was headed "Personal," the only advertisement under that heading, and it consisted of but two words, which caused it to stand out conspicuously in the sea of print:

"President Wilson,

Address Box 294, Sun Office."

That was all. Neil read it and passed on; returned to it and paused. A slow smile overspread his countenance, and his bothered eyes began to shine again. Good old Archie! Trust him to find a way! Neil's hand reached for the telephone. He called up Parran's office.

"I say, this is the guest you left at home."

"Fire away."

"Do you mind if I send Cliff out on an errand?"

"Certainly not! A dozen, if you like!"

Neil sent Uncle Isaac for the chauffeur, the while he

applied himself to composing an answer to the advertisement which would be comprehensible to Archie alone. After several attempts, he inclosed the following in an envelope:—

DEAR PAL:

You thought you were pretty clever, didn't you, with your cryptogram? But I got you. Here's the come-back: If I live to see the end of the world, I'll be ninety-seven years old, so why worry? Just the same, I'm listening all day for Gabe's trumpet. Now will you be good!

Yours,

MT. VERNON.

Neil had no doubt but that Archie's cunning wits would soon unravel out of this that he was to call up 1987 Mount Vernon, and that Neil would be waiting at the 'phone. Even if it should fall into another's hands only Archie had the key, which was Neil's age, twenty-four.

He despatched it to the *Sun* Office, instructing Cliff to drop it in the box for answers to advertisements if there was such a box, and in no case to give it into any hands but those of a clerk behind the counter. He heard the automobile start off, and schooled himself to wait patiently for results. Cliff returned presently to report the safe carrying out of his errand.

Neil was grateful to the size of the room, which permitted him to ease the strain by pacing up and down. It was out of the question for him to read. All his faculties were concentrated on the innocent little instrument standing on Parran's desk. Yet when the bell did ring he had all the effect of a shock of surprise.

He pounced on it. With what joy and thankfulness he heard the well-known nasal drawl out of the infinite:

"Hello, there!"

"Hello, yourself. Good old boy!"

"Same to you, kid!"

"Are you alone?"

"Sure! Left my dogs outside."

"Where are you?"

"At the dentist's."

"The what?"

"Dentist's. You see, when I got your note it give me the toothache. I came out of the *Sun* Office holding me

face and looking for a dentist's sign. I thought it would be a good chance to call you up while I was waiting in the waiting-room."

"I see."

"How goes it, kid?"

"All right."

"Better stop in bed to-day. The weather is damned unhealthy out of doors."

"I get you. Do you know my address?"

"Sure! Got it out of the telephone book just now. But I can't call, you understand, because of my friends, the dogs."

"Sure!"

There was a brief pause. This conversation was all right as far as it went, and comforting to both friends, but neither dared speak of what he most wished to know. Finally Neil had an inspiration.

"Did you get Aunt Julia's letter?" he asked.

"No!" said Archie. In his mind's eye Neil could see the grin that went with it.

"She said she addressed it to George W. Greenleaf, General Delivery, Baltimore."

"You don't say! Glad you told me. I'll drop around directly and ask for it."

"Yes, you'd better."

"Well, I'll call you up after I get it and tell you what she says. So long, old scout."

"So long, old scout."

Neil pulled paper towards him and wrote for Archie a brief yet comprehensive account of all that had happened to him since he parted from his friend. It was possible to write this in such a way that a third person would have been hard put to find the thread. In any case, since it was all about the escape of Laura and Blackader there was nothing to suggest the case of Neil Ottoway, should it chance to fall under official eyes.

Neil ended it with a fervent appeal to Archie to discover some clue to the pair's whereabouts, and prayed Archie to rescue him from his imprisonment, pleasant though it was.

This despatched by Cliff to the post office, the writer resigned himself to another period of waiting. This was not so harrowing as the first, because now he was well assured of getting an answer. He amused himself in chaffing Uncle Isaac, who was delighted with his condescension, and in gazing out of the window up and down the quiet, stately street, with the sight of an occasional pretty, languid woman sauntering up-town to reward him.

It was nearly six and Geoffrey Parran had come home, when the telephone rang again. Archie's voice sounded as undisturbed as ever.

"My tooth's bad again. So I'm at the dentist's."

"Too bad!"

"Well, I'm going to have it out now and be done with it."

"You got my letter?"

"Sure."

"Why were you so long calling up?"

"I wanted to find out something about Blondy and his girl."

The possessive pronoun caused Neil to grind his teeth a little. "Well?" he demanded.

"They've gone back to New York."

"Are you sure?"

"I am. I'll explain when I see you."

"When shall I see you?"

"Well, the Lexington Market Butchers' Association is pulling off a moonlight excursion and crab feast at Rock Hall across the Bay to-night. I thought you and me might take it in. It looks good."

"How about the dogs?"

"Oh, I'll manage to kennel them. I could have done it before, but as long as they were at my heels I knew what they were up to. Seven-thirty from Pier three, Pratt Street. Do you get me?"

"Sure thing!"

"Get your friend to carry you down town in his automobile. So long!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE EXCURSION

GEOFFREY PARRAN approved of Archie's plan. "They'd scarcely think of anyone trying to get out by way of Rock Hall, a God-forsaken wharf on the Bay. But you can get a motor to take you to some railway station. There are motors everywhere nowadays."

He instructed Uncle Isaac to have a goodly lunch put up, and signified his intention of driving Neil down town himself. As they were about to start out he shook his head at Neil's tall-crowned straw hat.

"Not your style at all. Marks you out like an advertisement. Better take one of my old Fedoras."

So once more Neil changed his headgear.

The drive down town was accomplished without incident. At the sight of a policeman Neil had to resist the inclination to slide down in his seat. But none noticed him; they were busy saluting Parran. On the villainously-paved water front, otherwise deserted at this hour, straw hats, white petticoats and lunch baskets were converging into a stream which was swallowed up in the opening to pier three.

Parran brought the car to a stop outside and held out his hand.

"Good luck!" he said. "I wonder if we'll ever meet again?"

"Surely!" said Neil. "I think you and I were intended to be friends."

"So do I," said the other warmly. "In spite of our

bad start. This show they call life is a mixed-up mess, isn't it?"

"No head or tail to it for sure!" said Neil. "But after all the old stuff still amuses us!"

"Does it?" said Parran with his wistful smile. "I have to drug myself with work to tolerate it."

"How can I ever thank you?" said Neil. "You had no reason to be so decent to me."

"Forget it!" said the other. "Aren't we in the same boat?"

They shook hands.

Neil entered the steamboat over the gangplank and stood in the shifting crowd on the main deck, looking about him a little helplessly. As it happened, Archie was within ten feet of him, but it was some time before Neil saw him, and then he felt an inclination to rub his eyes. For Archie was the centre of a laughing party which included both sexes and every age.

Amazing Archie! Where had he collected these?

Archie at the same moment caught sight of Neil, and darting forward seized him and dragged him back into the circle and introduced him all around in a breath. There was Momma Bowles and Poppa Bowles and Aggie Bowles and Aggie Bowles's fellow, and Elvie Bowles, whose fellow Neil had to be because her steady couldn't get off, and Hattie Bowles, who was too young to have a fellow, and Joey Bowles and Billy Bowles, small fry the last two, besides cousins and an aunt.

The introductions were accomplished amidst enormous laughter. Archie was like a king among them; all hung ready to split their sides upon his slightest word. All the Bowleses were fat except Poppa Bowles, who looked as if the rest of the family lived off him and ate pretty close. Momma was the fattest. It was really a question whether they could get her upstairs. Archie made a great business of boosting her from the rear, and she laughed so hard she almost fell over on him and vowed she had broken her stays. Between them all in paper bags and shoe boxes they carried lunch enough to feed a circus.

They got up the companionway at last, and managed

to squeeze and shove themselves into a favourable position in the nose of the vessel on the upper deck. They made as much racket as a flock of blackbirds settling themselves. Only little Poppa Bowles was strangely quiet. He smiled deprecatingly at Neil as one hard-pressed male to another. Archie planted himself with a little boy on each knee and made believe he was a ventriloquist, until the girls begged him to stop or they would die.

Archie winked gravely at Neil. "Some disguise, eh?" he murmured, indicating the small fry on his knees.

"Where did you meet them?" asked Neil in dumb show.

"Picked them up in the wharf. Cracked a couple of jokes about my lonely state and got myself adopted. Comedy goes down with everybody."

Archie furnished comedy in abundance. He addressed the elders as Momma and Poppa, he tried on the girls' hats, he flirted outrageously with the maiden aunt, who was something of a sport herself.

"Ain't he the card!" Elvie gasped to Neil, wiping her eyes.

As the excursion boat with a final blast of her whistle began to move slowly out of her berth, there was a small commotion on the wharf below. All who were near enough to the rail craned their necks to see the cause. They saw two burly individuals run down the pier, leap over the widening space to the boat, and get themselves hauled aboard.

From the decks above came cries of: "Yump, Yon, yump! You can do it in two yumps!"

Neil and Archie looked at each other silently. They recognised their table companions of the previous evening, Messrs. Johnson and Wilson. Archie swore under his breath.

Later, an opportunity presenting itself, he whispered to Neil: "Sit tight! This is as good a place as any. We're so crowded they can't push in front of us to see our faces."

Meanwhile the supply of comedy never failed. Neil gazed at his partner, astonished and admiring.

When the vessel got out into the open water of the Bay and the softening influences of the evening made themselves felt, they must needs sing, of course. They sang "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean," "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier," and other hits ancient and modern.

"When we come home let's sit off by ourselves," whispered the plump damsel in Neil's ear.

"Sure!" he said, grinning until his face cracked.

Thus the voyage passed. If a secret anxiety was gnawing at the breasts of the Bowleses gentlemen friends, nothing of it showed in their faces. They were not approached from behind.

At last they made a landing. It had become quite dark. On shore could be seen the fires under the great pots which contained the *pièce de résistance* of the crab feast which was to follow. It occurred to everybody simultaneously that there might not be enough crabs to go around, and there was a general shove to get off.

"Here's touch and go," said Archie to Neil. Keep your eyes peeled, and stick close to your girl. She's your best cover."

Neil tucked Elvie's arm under his own and followed.

On the companionway Archie touched Neil's arm warningly, and called his attention to the gangway below. Johnson and Wilson stood one on each side, scrutinising the faces that passed between them. There was no other way to reach the shore. Archie looked meaningly towards the opposite door.

"You go on with the family," Neil said to Elvie. "I'll follow directly."

She went, the trusting, plump maiden, and he never saw her again. Neil and Archie edged their way unobtrusively through the other door, out on the narrow deck which looked across the water. It was deserted.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" Neil muttered.

"All my fault!" groaned Archie. "I got you into it."

"Nonsense! I'd have been in jail a dozen times over but for you."

"I can't see how it happened! It wasn't these two that followed me all day, but a pair of youngsters. No question but I shook them. For an hour I hopped from jitney to jitney and car to car."

"Never mind how they did it," said Neil. "Here they are. I suppose some other bull spotted you and telephoned headquarters."

For the moment the resourceful Archie was at a loss. "What'll we do?" he muttered blankly. "Naturally soon as the crowd is off they'll search the boat."

"We might drop off here and swim ashore," suggested Neil.

"Can't swim no more than an iron dog," sighed Archie dejectedly.

"I suppose I've got to do it," said Neil. "Let them take you again. They haven't got a thing on you. Soon as they let you out you can join me in New York."

Archie squeezed his arm. "I want to travel with the big show. That's where the fun is."

"It's only for a day or two."

"I suppose there's nothing else to do. Hold on!" he whispered sharply.

Neil paused in the act of creeping under the rail. A heavy row-boat had just come into view around the stern of the steamboat. It contained two young fellows, one loafing at the oars, the other sprawling on the stern seat.

"Hey, fellow!" called Archie softly. "Take us ashore, will you?"

"Why don't you walk off?" was the reply. "Ain't your legs good?"

"My wife's lookin' for me," said Archie. "I want to give her the slip."

The young men laughed, and the one at the oars brought the small boat close under the vessel's counter.

"Come ahead," he said. "Mind you don't drop through the bottom of the boat."

The deck of the steamboat was about eight feet above the row-boat. At the vessels gangway only the top rail barred the way. By ducking under this and letting themselves down with care, they were able to make the transfer

without undue noise. Two minutes later they were safely landed on the beach.

"Many thanks, old man," said Archie. "I'll do the same for you some day."

"My regards to the old woman," was the answer.

The two partners made haste to mix in the crowd again. "'Ware Bowleses," warned Archie.

Shoreward the prospect was exclusively rural. There was nothing but the wharf with its little warehouse, and a sandy road leading inland. Two or three farmhouses and their fields filled the middle distance. Leaving the wharf, the crowd turned to the right into a grove where the crab feast was to be held. A few of the local population stood about watching the influx.

A single battered motor car stood in the road with one presumably the owner, a lean and malarial individual, leaning against the fender.

"Is the landaulet for hire?" asked Archie genially.

The chauffeur looked him over sourly before replying.

"Maybe," he said.

"What price?" asked Archie.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, just around. Where's the nearest town?"

"Chestertown, fifteen miles."

"Waft us over there, then."

"Can't make it. She's only goin' to stay here an hour to let 'em feed."

"Never mind," said Archie. "We don't have to go back on the boat. Is there a railroad there?"

"Sure."

"Well, we'll take that somewhere."

The chauffeur drew a long breath and blurted out: "Five dollars each."

"Say, friend, you're wasted driving a jitney," Archie grinned. "You ought to be in Wall Street."

"Take it or leave it!" said the other excitedly.

Neil nudged his partner as a warning against the threatened argument.

"Oh, well, we need the air," said Archie. "Come on, let's go."

But the queasy native was seized with a kind of panic at the unexpected granting of his demand. "No, it looks funny to me," he said. "No, I don't go, not any price."

Archie started to argue with him sweetly.

"Oh, come on," said Neil, pulling his partner away. "Let's go for a walk, instead."

When he got him out of hearing he added: "Everybody is off the boat now. In a minute or two the alarm will be raised."

Archie was ruffled. "Say, these hookworms from the back counties give me an inflammation," he said.

"It's all right, anyhow," Neil soothed. "If they should take after us in the ice-wagon we can hear them coming miles away, and if he won't hire it to them any more than to us, why, we can outwalk that beefy pair with ease."

The road wound among low banks and trees, and they were soon out of sight if not out of hearing of the landing place. In a quarter of a mile it brought them to a highway. After a brief discussion they turned to the left.

"If it's the right way it's the right way," said Archie philosophically, "and if it's the wrong way we'll lose anybody that comes after us."

The highway was hard and smooth under foot and the light breeze was sweet with the smell of freshly turned earth and young growing things. The moon was flirting with silver-edged cumulus clouds and they walked now in shadow, now in wan radiance. Faring forth into the unknown, the spirit of adventure was strong upon them. Their spirits rose fast.

"Jiminy! I ain't walked in the country by night in years!" said Archie. "It's out of sight! So cosy under the sky, and all. When the moon comes out, blame if I don't feel like cake-walkin' with my shadow in the road."

They had been walking about twenty minutes when, far off behind them, they clearly heard the automobile start with a couple of backfires and the whir of loose gears.

"Here comes Pegasus," Archie grinned.

They could follow it every rod of the way as it came clanking through the night.

"All of fifteen miles an hour," said Archie sarcastically. "The Empire State Express ain't in it!"

At the junction with the highway the car turned in the direction they had taken. The two pedestrians vaulted a fence and lay down in the grass at the other side. The automobile banged past them without lights.

"They think they're going to sneak up on us in the dark!" Archie chuckled.

They had no more than climbed back in the road when they heard a report like a pistol shot a few hundred yards ahead.

"Blow-out," said Archie. "Come on. Let's see the fun. Run in the soft stuff."

Coming within hearing of a chorus of hearty profanity, they slowed down. Ahead was a grove of trees beside the road, in the shadow of which stood the disabled car. Neil and Archie took to the field again, and making a detour around the trees, crept close in the shadows and lay down to listen.

CHAPTER XIX

GRAVELY, OLD AND YOUNG

AMENITIES were being exchanged generally. Messrs. Johnson and Wilson were cursing the chauffeur for bringing them out in his condemned car, while the chauffeur cursed his passengers for bringing him out on their condemned errand. It transpired during this lively conversation that the car carried no spare tire, that it was a rim blow-out which would take an hour or more to repair, and wouldn't be very strong at that, and that the other three tires had done their duty and were likely to follow the first at any moment.

Archie squeezed Neil's arm in joy.

"Where in this hot-place of a blank-blank country can we get another car?" demanded Mr. Johnson.

"Hot place yourself!" was the indignant answer. "I ain't no man's nigger!"

Mr. Johnson devoted a whole minute to expressing his opinion of the chauffeur.

The abused one threw down his tools passionately. "Well, it's my machine anyhow," he snarled. "Get the hell out and walk! It'll do your liver good. I'll make you a present of the ride so far."

This was the occasion for a fresh outburst from Mr. Johnson. His partner interfered.

"Shut up!" said Mr. Wilson. "They can hear you ten miles on a night like this."

Here Mr. Johnson and Mr. Wilson discussed at length the propriety of Mr. Johnson's shutting up. Mr. Wilson finally prevailed. His partner did shut up. The listeners understood from the sounds that he walked away

muttering and kicking the tree trunks to relieve his feelings.

Mr. Wilson addressed the chauffeur in oily tones: "Don't you mind him, friend. He's just hasty, like. Why, in an hour from now you and him could be drinking together like brothers."

"Well, he hadn't ought to curse me," returned the other almost tearfully. "It takes the heart out of a man. A bar of moonlight revealed him sitting on the running-board with his head in his hands.

"Fix her up like a good lad," persisted Mr. Wilson. "We'll let you run slow."

"No, I'm going back on the rim. I've had enough."

"Is there another car back there we can get?"

"No. Pete Small's over to Chestertown for the night, and Giddy Bunting's got his radiator off."

"Well, where can we get a car?"

"I dunno. Old man Gravely's got a Stanford, but he won't hire out."

"Where is Gravely's?"

"Two miles ahead of you."

No amount of persuasion could induce him to take them there. "I'd have to come all the way back, wouldn't I?" he said aggrievedly.

"How about a telephone?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Gravely's is the nearest to telephone, too, unless you want to go back to the steamboat wharf."

"Come on, we'll have to hoof it," said Mr. Wilson to his partner. "We'd alarm the whole country by 'phone."

Mr. Johnson, the heavier of the two, agreed with an ill-grace.

"I say, what kind of fellow is this Gravely?" asked Mr. Wilson anxiously. "He won't receive us with a shot-gun, will he, if we get him out of bed?"

"Nah! John Gravely don't keep no gun. He's the best scrapper in the county and his son's the next best. He's religious."

Once more Archie squeezed Neil's arm, and Neil wondered what was passing in his mind.

"How will we know the right place?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Big house on a little hill, right-hand side of the road. Painted white and got a double row of cedars to the road. Straight ahead. You can't miss it."

The two detectives started down the road without the formality of farewells. The chauffeur, who by this time had his tire off, started back at a snail's pace. Archie pulled Neil into motion. Doubling back through the trees, they made a wide circle through a pasture field, running at top speed, and struck into the road again some distance ahead of the other two wayfarers.

"Can you dog-trot it for two miles," demanded Archie.

"Sure!" said Neil.

"It'll take the fatties forty minutes or more. If we can do it in twenty or twenty-five it's enough."

"What's the game, Archie?"

"Wait a minute, son, I'm still fixing up the details. All I know is the Lord hath delivered mine enemy into my hands!"

In due course they arrived before the big farmhouse with its double row of cedars. They paused at the turn-in to get their breath and lay a plan of campaign.

"Now, listen with both ears," warned Archie. "No time for chewing the rag."

But Archie's intended communication was not made, for at that moment an automobile swept up the road from the opposite direction to that they had come and turned in at the gate where they stood. The young fellow a the wheel came to a stop and looked them over sternly.

"What do you want here?" he asked.

"Are you Mr. John Gravelly?" asked Archie smoothly.

"I'm his son."

"We want to see your father a minute. It's important."

"He's in bed by this."

"Wake him up, please. There's not a minute to lose."

"You'll have to tell me what you want first. I don't know you."

Archie went a step closer and lowered his voice impressively.

"Me and my friend here, we're heading for a town up the line. We took advantage of an excursion across the bay, and started to walk to Chestertown, where we could get the train in the morning. A couple of miles back we come on an automobile busted in the road. The fellows in it didn't hear us come up, and we heard some funny talk, so we hid and listened. Rough-talking fellows they were. Seems they'd blown out a tire and didn't have any other, and were wild to get some place. Like somebody was after them maybe.

"My God!" says one, 'we got to get another car!' Another fellow speaks up and says: 'Old John Gravely he's got a Stanford!' So the first guy says: 'I can run a Stanford. Let's lift that.' So the other fellow he described the house and the trees and all, and where the garage was. The first guy says: 'Suppose she balks on me and won't start, and the people come out?' and a third bloke speaks up at that. He says: 'Tell 'em in the name of the law, see? Make out we're sleuths after a couple of crooks. Let Gravely come along, if he wants, and drop him out on the road somewheres.' 'Well, suppose we get started and they start shootin' out of the windows?' says the first guy. 'John Gravely don't keep a gun,' says the second one. 'Says he can do up any man in the county without it, and his son's as good as he is.'"

Neil marvelled at this artistic tale. He was not surprised that the young fellow swallowed it whole. But as for carrying it through—that was another matter. The young fellow's eyes sparkled in the moonlight.

"By the Lord!" he murmured. "Where are they now?"

"We ran all the way to give warning," said Archie. "They'll be ten or fifteen minutes behind us. There are two of them. The third guy stayed with the car."

"I'll tell my father," said the young fellow briskly. "You wait here." He ran his machine into the garage and made swift passage to the house.

"Archie, for Heaven's sake!" protested Neil. "This is a bit too thick! We'd better beat it!"

"Not at all, son," said Archie coolly. "It's my experience that an out-and-out nervy frame-up always makes good because it's nervy. This story's so near true it's puncture-proof and warranted not to skid."

In a remarkably short space of time young Gravelly reappeared, accompanied by old Gravelly and two hired men. Few words were wasted.

"Much obliged to you, men," said the elder. "I expected something of the kind. It's that blackguardly Cook crowd. They've had it in for me a long time back."

Archie squeezed Neil's arm.

"We'll wait for them just inside the gateway. Two behind each post. You men can go up in the yard out of the way of trouble.

"No, thanks," said Archie. "We want to see it."

"Go back a little way and lie down," said the old man. "This is our affair."

"What will you do with them?" whispered Archie.

"Put them in the old chicken-house. It's built of logs. They can beat on it till they're tired. We'll take them to the constable in the morning."

"Bulls in the chicken-house!" whispered Archie to Neil. "Ain't that a bit of poetic justice, son?"

"Whist!" said the old man. "Not another word now."

Archie and Neil lay down on their backs in the grass and gazed at the lacy veil of stars so indifferent to man's contrivances. They listened, and by and by they heard away down the hard road the pat-pat, patty-patter of two pairs of heavy shoes, now in step, now out. Their hearts began to beat a little faster.

The two approaching men had nothing to say to each other until they issued from among the roadside trees into plain view of the house. They stopped beside the gate, not more than three paces from the waiting ones. The brief colloquy they engaged in was unfortunate for them.

"This is the place," said Mr. Johnson. "Big white house, cedar trees and all. Just as I thought, everybody's in bed."

"I'll wait here for you," suggested Mr. Wilson.

"Yah! snarled the other. "Always lettin' me do the dirty work, ain't yeh? You come along, too!"

They stepped inside the gate, and a brief, mad scene of violence succeeded. The peaceful night was made hideous by the sounds. Johnson and Wilson, after an involuntary squall of terror at the suddenness of the onslaught, fought back manfully. They had no chance at all. Two little groups, each with a kicking, cursing nucleus, moved irresistibly toward the chicken-house. The door was thrown open and the two detectives energetically propelled inside.

Whereupon a new and ghastlier uproar of squawking and flapping arose. One by one the feathered occupants issued shrieking through the little trapdoor. When they were all out Mr. Johnson's face appeared in the aperture.

"Gentlemen, for God's sake! a terrible mistake has been made!" he cried hoarsely. "We're not robbers; we're detectives!"

A shout of laughter drowned his voice. Mr. Johnson lost his temper and began to kick and beat on the logs.

Those outside heard Mr. Wilson's shriller accents trying to be heard. "One word of explanation will put this matter right!"

"Kick away," said Old Gravely serenely. "Explain to the chickens if you like. Will you come into the house, men?"

"Much obliged," said Archie demurely, "but my friend and I must be getting on to Chestertown."

As they moved away from the chicken-house Mr. Wilson's voice took on a desperate note. "Don't leave us here! Don't leave us here! It smells awful!"

"By the Lord!" said young Gravely. "I'm all waked up now. One good turn deserves another. I'll run you over to Chestertown in the car, if you like. He addressed one of the hired men. "Come ahead, Jim. You can keep me company on the way home."

"Pretty soft! Pretty soft!" whispered Archie to Neil.

The Stanford rolled out of the yard with the four men in it, and sped up the road, pursued by Mr. Wilson's diminishing cries for help and Mr. Johnson's hoarse bellows of rage. They lighted cigars and settled back comfortably.

"Don't push her," suggested Archie. "This is too good."

Archie put forth his best efforts to entertain, which were not unrewarded. His sprightly tales were new and deliciously funny to the country boys. All four were united in the strong bond of masculinity. It seemed like a few minutes only before they rolled up to the Chestertown Hotel.

"Gee! I'm sorry we're here!" said young Gravelly.

"Wait a minute; here's another one," said Archie.

When the laughter died down Archie said regretfully: "Well, I guess it's good-bye, boys. By the way, what's the nearest station on the main line?"

"What main line?" asked young Gravelly. "Norfolk to Philadelphia?"

"Sure," said Archie.

"Dover, Delaware, twenty-five miles."

"Do they still run that night train north?" asked Archie, feeling his way.

"Sure thing. Stops at Dover two-something."

"I suppose you don't want to run us over there, do you?"

"Why not?" said young Gravelly.

"What would the old man say?" suggested Jim apprehensively.

"Oh, he'll be asleep when we get home. Come on, fellows! We'll make a night of it!"

"Marvellous Archie!" thought Neil.

CHAPTER XX

BACK IN NEW YORK

ARCHIE and Neil sat in the living-room of the flat they had just hired. In a flat of their own, Archie had pointed out, they would be infinitely freer. It was on Waverly Place, opposite the dispensary, a neighbourhood populous, yet of almost unblemished respectability, and therefore little troubled by the police. They had the "fourth floor rear, east," of a building housing twenty-four families, among whose numerous comings and goings their own might pass unnoticed.

They had already furnished it with two cots, two chairs and a deal-table. At the moment each had one of the chairs and a window-sill for his feet.

"You never told me how you learned that those two had come to New York," Neil remarked.

"Easy," said Archie. "I made friends with the keeper of that dump on Calvert Street where they tied you up. He heard Parran say something about a sleeping-car. So I went to the Union Station. The rest was easy. A high-toned pair with a drunken sport are remarkable even in a railway station."

"The grand question is, how to find a person in New York," Neil went on. "Sounds like a large order to me."

"Depends on the person. If it's a drifter, I admit it's pretty near hopeless, but if it's a certain kind of person, and you know the kind, why, that narrows it down. Now, this girl——"

Like Geoffrey Parran, Neil always became uncomfortable when she entered the discussion. "It's the man I want," he muttered.

"Exactly," said Archie. "But he's a drifter. We can best reach him through her. Now, we know she's an artist and a high-minded lady. That's a whole lot to begin on."

Neil was mollified. "For instance?" he asked.

"Well, I believe, even though they may have had a little money, her first idea would be to earn something. Now, how would an artist set about finding a job?"

"Send her work around to the magazines."

Possibly. But remember Hartigan. What else?"

"Apply to the Art Students' League."

"Good! We'll look that up this afternoon. Another thing, we ought to look in yesterday's papers and to-day's for 'help wanted' ads. that might attract her . . . No, by Jiminy! I have it! We'll put in an ad. ourselves! It worked fine before."

"Yes, but I wanted to get into touch with you, and she doesn't," objected Neil.

"Never mind. We'll make the ad. fit the changed circumstances."

He commenced immediately to scribble on the back of an envelope with a pencil stub—aided by sundry motions of his tongue. Presently with a self-conscious air he tossed the result over to Neil.

Neil read:

Southern gent, widower, with two small children, desires the services of young lady as governess. Must be able to give good drawing lessons. Salary no object to the right party.

"Fine idea," said Neil guardedly. "But perhaps the wording could be changed a little. It has a sort of matrimonial flavour."

"Oh, well, if you're so literary fix it up to suit yourself!"

"Suppose she were attracted," Neil went on, holding the paper. "How could we arrange a meeting? A place like this wouldn't do."

"There are joints in town," said Archie, "real good-lookin' joints, where you can hire an office for a day or part of a day."

Neil borrowed the pencil, and worked over Archie's draft. This was his version: "Wanted: A young woman of good breeding, native of the South preferred, as governess to two young children. A knowledge of drawing is essential."

"Huh! young woman!" Archie grumbled. "Sounds pretty common if you ask me."

"It's all right though," said Neil. "The real thing never lets on in public that it knows it, you know."

"Just as you say," Archie yielded. "We'll put it in the four largest morning papers."

This was the day of their arrival in New York. To their disappointment there was no word in the evening papers or the next morning's editions of the happenings on the eastern shore of Maryland. They had looked for a bit of fun in reading of Messrs. Johnson and Wilson's night in the henhouse, but somehow the detectives had managed to suppress the story. Baltimore had nothing further to say about the Tolsen case. The New York police indulged in a little crow.

Neil Ottoway has slipped through the hands of the Baltimore police, and is back in New York with his faithful friend, Archie Tinling. The drag-net is spread, and it is only a matter of hours before they will be caught in its meshes.

"Brave words!" said Archie. "The police are optimists, they are! However, we won't neglect any precautions. We must never go out together. You ought to have some simple disguise, a hotel porter or a street cleaner or the like."

"Sure!" said Neil sarcastically. "What would a hotel porter be doing on Waverly Place? And what would the other tenants say if they met White Wings on the stairs?"

Archie had a passion for make-up. He came in after breakfast with a costume suitable to his part to-day. He got it at "Joe's," he said; his sources of supply were mysterious. Neil groaned inwardly when he saw him dressed. Archie had a genius for low comedy, but in straighter business was somewhat miscast. With his

meagre frame encased in an ample frock coat, and a black, broad-brimmed Fedora on the forelock, he did not look happy.

"What's the matter with it?" he demanded.

"The kids will holler after you."

"Let 'em holler! I wouldn't ask anything better to stall off a cop."

"She'll never be taken in," said Neil. "Why don't you go as yourself?"

"If I'm supposed to be a Kentucky colonel, I got to be one." Archie was stubborn. "What's the matter? They ain't all big fellows. You wait till I turn on my dialect. Doan you be skeered no mo', honey. Cuhnel Medders ain't gwine make no mistake in dis year case."

"Oh, my God!" Neil groaned. "You sound like a last year's vaudeville act!"

Archie made a feint of throwing off the frock coat. "Do it yourself if you ain't satisfied," he grumbled testily.

"Oh, go ahead!" said Neil. "It won't make any difference if we can get her to answer the ad. Mind you get her address, that's all."

Neil, following Archie up-town after a ten-minute interval, found the office he had engaged to be part of quite a pretentious establishment. There was a large waiting room furnished in mahogany with a small battalion of clerks and stenographers visible in the rear, and a long row of private offices opening off. Though it lacked half an hour of the specified time, the advertisement was proving its drawing-power. Neil glanced in undisguised alarm at the motley array of "well-bred" young women in attendance.

Upon being shown into the Colonel, he found him wearing an anxious expression. Before Neil could speak Archie said guardedly with a nod towards the adjoining room:

"There's a man in there."

Neil thought of the police with a sinking heart.

"What man?" he asked.

"From what you told me I think it's Hartigan."

Neil's jaw dropped. "Impossible!" he said weakly.

"He was waiting for me when I got here," Archie went on. "Big guy with red gills and a steady grouch; not very well lighted on the top flat I should say. Says he read the ad. in to-day's paper and as the description exactly fitted a woman he was after, asked me to let him stick around and look over the applicants."

"Good Heavens! what a rotten stroke of luck!" cried Neil. "He mustn't see me. We must get him out. And she may be here any minute."

"Well, if you ask me, you're wrong both ways," said Archie. "I'd tell him the truth—or some of it."

"How? Why?" demanded Neil. "How can I explain my not meeting him?"

"Oh, cook up something. In a minute I'll think of a proper lie. I know! Tell him the truth nearly. There's no lie holds water like a near truth. Tell him you had a clue that took you up to Albany, and you just got back."

"But how will we get him out of here?"

"Don't try. He'd only hang around outside. Keep him here under our eye."

Neil nodded, and opened the door into the adjoining room. There in truth he saw the broad back of Hartigan. Through a crack in the other door, the ex-policeman was surveying the well-bred maidens as they arrived in the waiting-room.

"Hartigan!" cried Neil in accents of subdued joy.

Hartigan's open countenance offered a study in changing emotions. The residuum was a kind of infantile sullenness. "Oh, it's you, is it?" he grumbled. "So this scheme is yours?"

"Sure! Isn't it a great one?"

"Maybe," said Hartigan heavily. "Where you been all this time?"

Neil launched forth on a highly circumstantial tale according to Archie's suggestion. Archie listened with a slightly jealous expression, for the pupil almost bade fair to excel the master. Hartigan was only partly mollified.

"Why didn't you call me up when you got back?" he demanded. "You had my number."

"I was ashamed to let on I'd been on a wild-geese chase," Neil explained glibly. "I wanted to show results before I called you up."

"Looks to me as if you wanted to cop all the credit with the newspapers," said Hartigan bitterly. "You can't do it. I can prove it was me first discovered the girl."

"You get me wrong," said Neil with a pained air. "Me and my friend will be only too glad to have you work with us. Won't we, George?"

"Sure thing!" agreed Archie. "Police experience is just what we need!"

Gradually the fat man was smoothed down. Archie flattered him insidiously. In a little while the three were discussing ways and means as amicably as possible.

"As I understand it, George is going to receive them and give them a con," said Hartigan. "I tell you what—I'll make out I'm his stenographer and be pasting the alphabet in the corner."

"Can you work one of them noodles factories?" asked Archie.

"No, but I can give an imitation. 'Taint nothin' to beat out a little type. I won't stop to make words. I'll wear one of them green eye-shades like they do."

"Sure, you'd make a grand, hefty stenographer," answered Archie dryly, "but I might forget myself and bust out laughin'."

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Hartigan of Neil.

Neil was nonplused for a second. Archie spoke up quickly.

"He's goin' to watch from this room, and give me a sign when the right one comes in."

"What's the sign?"

"He'll slam the roll-top desk shut, see?"

"All right," Hartigan agreed. "I'll be with him, and when she comes I'll secure her, and you telephone for the police."

Neil and Archie glanced at each other.

"Hold on!" said Neil, "I got some say in this. The girl is only half our mark. We want the man, and we can only reach him through her. No arrests!"

Hartigan consented, grumbling.

"Yes, you stay with him," said Archie. "But no interference, mind. I don't want no mob effect. You let him watch, Hartigan, and you sit back for a reserve, see?"

This was accompanied by a flicker of an eyelid in Neil's direction. Neil got it. The fat man expressed himself as satisfied, Archie went back into the next room, and the diverse procession began.

The young women ranged in age from sixteen to sixty. Every school of breeding from Passaic, New Jersey, to Brownsville was represented. They were terrifically well-bred; the load was almost more than they could carry. They talked the purest newspaper English, and generally aimed to be as languid as Cleopatra. Peroxide and rice powder were in evidence, and many a scented handkerchief was shaken within reach of the colonel's nose.

They followed each other rapidly, for Archie lacking the sign from Neil (which was not the sign they had told Hartigan), dismissed them cursorily no matter what their breeding.

Neil watched through a crack in the door. The chair in which the applicants sat was placed in his line of vision. Hartigan sat over by the window.

Then Neil saw her, and the heart almost jumped out of his body. No different quality in the closing of the door warned him! Though all these preparations had been made with the design of bringing her to that place, when she came he could scarcely believe his eyes. Yet there she sat, his darling girl, with her proud, appealing glance and her inimitable, ladylike air.

Neil made believe to stumble against the door and it went shut. This was the real signal agreed on before they had left home. Neil had the wit to shake his head at Hartigan as he turned.

"Clumsy!" whispered the ex-policeman.

"I'll open it again as soon as this one goes out," said Neil.

Meanwhile his ears were stretched to hear what was going on behind the frosted glass partition. It did not run all the way to the ceiling. Archie, thinking of Hartigan, pitched his voice low, and Laura's voice was soft anyway. None but a lover could have heard what passed. Neil heard Archie say:

"I suppose you have come in answer to the advertisement. What is your name, please?"

Neil understood that the irrepressible Archie had succumbed to her. He made no attempt to play the absurd Colonel Medders. His voice had a deferential quality.

Laura did not immediately answer his question, and he asked it again.

"May I ask you a question or two?" she countered in the voice that knocked on Neil's heart.

"Certainly, miss."

"Do you want somebody to come by the day to teach your children, or to live in your house?"

"To live with me," said Archie. "The children want a mother."

"Oh, the fool!" groaned Neil inwardly.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"Er—West Seventy-second Street. Close to the Park."

"May I ask why you specified a Southern woman?"

"Why, naturally because I am from the South originally."

"May I ask your name, please?"

"Colonel Greenleaf, of Kentucky. George W. Greenleaf."

"Oh!" The monosyllable expressed volumes. The eavesdropper understood that the interview was at an end—and he was powerless to move!

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" said Archie excitedly. Evidently Laura had risen.

"I could not take the position," she said softly.

"Don't be so hasty!" said poor Archie. "Just give

me your name and address. I would expect to give you references, of course, just as I'd ask for them. Your name and address, please."

"Good morning," she said, and the door closed after her.

So they had failed! But how fine she had been! In a topsy-turvy way Neil was glad she had got the better of them. He felt no love for the ex-policeman at that moment. If Hartigan had not been there he could have gone after her. The worst of it was they were obliged to keep up the solemn farce for Hartigan's benefit at least for a while.

Archie came into them at last. "That's all of them," he said dejectedly. "And the time's up. We have fallen down!"

"She's afraid to show her face, I guess," Hartigan opined. "Maybe we could catch her with an ad. telling her to write in, see?"

"But she'd use an assumed name," objected Neil, "and we don't know her writing. What good would that do?"

"Never thought of that." Hartigan looked blank.

Archie went off on the plea of other business, but Neil had to submit to be entertained by Hartigan at a near-by bar before he could get rid of him, and then only by arranging to meet him next day.

Reunited at last in their little flat, the partners were free to ease their breasts by cursing their luck.

"Kick me for a fool!" invited Archie. "I lost my nerve. I acted like a mutt and a boob before her!"

"Oh, it wasn't your fault," said Neil. "It was a fool plan from the beginning. I can see that clearly now."

"By the Lord Harry, *what* a woman!" cried Archie. "Why didn't you tell me what to expect?"

"I did!" cried Neil.

"She drew the heart right out of my breast!" said Archie softly. "So plucky and so pitiful! I floundered around like a fish in the grass. By God! she's like a princess in misfortune!"

Neil abruptly clapped him on the back. "Archie, you're a good old lobster!" he said jerkily.

"Oh, sure!" said Archie dryly. "Well, what's to be done now?" he asked after a while.

"Hartigan had the right idea," Neil mused.

"Sure, a bonehead rings the bell, but he don't know it," agreed Archie.

"I lied," said Neil. "I would know her writing among ten thousand letters. How would something like this do? 'Wanted: An artist in black and white, by advertising agency. One experienced in drawing animals desired. Address, with full particulars,' and so forth."

"All right," nodded Archie. "Neat and business-like."

"If we get her address we can watch the place, and maybe land him without bothering her at all."

"O. K.," said Archie.

CHAPTER XXI

MY LADY DANCES

NEXT day in the middle of the afternoon Neil rang the bell of an apartment in an old-fashioned house on a side street off Morningside Park. He had chosen an hour when lodgers would most likely be away from home, but he had to chance that. The door was opened by a round little lady, who peered at him timidly through thick glasses.

"Does Florence Folsom live here?" asked Neil, making much of a note he held in his hand.

"Yes, sir," said the old lady, beginning to tremble at his business-like tone. "But she's not in."

"Oh," said Neil, affecting to be disappointed. "Is it Miss or Mrs. Folsom?" he asked. "She doesn't say in her note."

"Miss Folsom."

"Oh! Is there any of her family in?"

"She has no family. At least not here."

"Oh!" Neil digested this piece of information with mixed feelings. "She has applied to my firm for a position," he went on, "and I called to interview her."

The landlady bobbed her little round head. Evidently it did not occur to her simplicity that this was reversing the usual order.

"Will she be in soon?"

"Not until half-past seven, sir."

"Perhaps you could answer a few questions for me. May I come in?"

"I—I suppose so," she faltered.

Neil was introduced to a sunny little sitting-room with

faded plush furniture brightened by "tidies." There was a Brussels carpet, china ornaments, twin canaries and a cat. Remembering Archie's methods Neil applied himself to putting the little body at her ease before pursuing his investigations.

That did not prove to be difficult. A compliment to the cat, a little enthusiasm for the geraniums on the fire-escape, and the trick was done. Her tongue once loosened there was no stopping it again. She was like a little girl who somehow had neglected to grow up; friendly, loquacious and fluttering, full of odd little gasps and giggles. Rocking violently in a patent rocker, with the thick glasses striking sparks, she told Neil all about the late Mr. Colliflower who was a professor of penmanship, and whose last years had been embittered by a series of bone felons on the index finger of his right hand.

"What did you say the name was?" asked Neil.

"Colliflower. Yes, people always laugh. But it's not spelled the same as the vegetable."

Neil gradually worked the conversation back to her lodger. Mrs. Colliflower on this subject was ecstatic and exclamatory to the point of incoherence.

"A firm would be lucky to get her! My life and soul, they would. None of your flaunting baggages! No, sir. She minds her p's and q's. I guess that's what you want in an office, ain't it? What clothes I never saw! Short at both ends! I mean the girls nowadays. Not Miss Folsom. She's old-fashioned. But not behind the times. Clever! My land! Bright as a button. There's no filthy rouge on *her* bureau—nor hidden in her top drawer, neither. Though, of course, I wouldn't look. You should see some of the others who come here. Mercy me, I'm so scared of every new lodger I don't hardly dast go to the door. I'm naturally a friendly woman at that. But New York is such a wicked place it really confuses me. But Miss Folsom, now, I wasn't scared of her. Soon as I see her I thanked the Lord for sending me one like that. I hope she'll never go. Of course she ain't been here very long——"

"Three days!" thought Neil. "Dissembler!"

"But I love her like a daughter already. She's kind to an old woman. Don't poke fun at me, or put on any airs. I guess she's had trouble herself—I mean respectable trouble. My goodness! when I think how I have been imposed on by others! If Mr. Colliflower knew what I had been through he would not be resting easy, poor soul! A manly man and a respecter of women, he was! All are not like that. There was a man took my parlour bedroom last winter, as nice appearing a man as you'd want to see! But wait till I tell you——"

"Are you sure Miss Folsom won't be back before half-past seven?" interrupted Neil gently.

"Yes, sir, she's at her work."

"Oh, she's working, is she?"

"Yes, sir, every afternoon from four till seven. But she doesn't like it. She's always looking for something better."

"What does she do?"

Mrs. Colliflower hesitated. "I ain't sure as she'd want me to tell."

Naturally Neil's curiosity was fired. "Nonsense! I suppose it's honest work, isn't it?"

"Honest!" said Mrs. Colliflower with asperity. "If you'd ever seen her you wouldn't ask such a question!"

"Well, then, why not tell me?"

"Well—she dances."

"Dances!" echoed the astonished Neil.

"Oh, not on the stage!" said Mrs. Colliflower, horrified. "Not in short skirts, or anything! Mercy me, no! Society dances, perfectly genteel and respectable."

"Where?"

"Maybe she wouldn't want you to go there."

"That's too bad," said Neil cunningly. "If I can't get in touch with her this afternoon, I'll have to engage somebody else."

"Well—I'll risk it," Mrs. Colliflower decided.

"You see, there's a lady serves tea every afternoon and there's dancing, which is so fashionable now, and she

engages some young ladies and gentlemen who are extra good dancers to dance with the others. All quite proper and genteel, I assure you. But Miss Folsom says it's too easy to be honest. She's funny. I guess she don't get much. Anyhow she says she's looking for real work."

"Very commendable," said Neil. "But where is the place?"

"Hotel Vandermeer," said Mrs. Colliflower.

While a subway train carried him down town, Neil deliberated on what he had learned. On the one hand he could not but be gratified at the suddenness with which Laura had apparently dropped Blackader upon their arrival in New York; on the other hand if she had dropped him, how was he, Neil, to set about finding him?

He doubted the wisdom of seeking out Laura herself; she would not help him voluntarily, and he could not bully her. Anyhow he ought first to consult with Archie.

So he reasoned; yet when the train stopped at Times Square his feet carried him out of the car and across Seventh Avenue towards the Vandermeer.

"I'll just take a squint at her without making myself known," he thought, unconscious of any self-deception.

It was the hour of rendezvous. The ornate entrance hall of the hotel was filled with amazingly habited ladies sitting in the fauteuils with feet crossed and a deceitful air of unconcern. On the other hand the masculine half of still-to-be-united couples strode jerkily up and down and consulted watches at ten-second intervals.

There were meetings, greetings, reproaches, appeals to the clock and animadversions on the subway (poor old subway!). Further within, down the long alleys, every chair was occupied by people trying to look as if they were accustomed to such grandeur at home. A New York hotel is the most public of buildings. It is like a bit of the street expensively carpeted.

Neil learned from a sign that Mrs. Beasley's afternoon tea dances were held in the Rose Room every afternoon from four to seven. Following the pointing arrows along

the alleys, he presently came within hearing of the pulse-quickenings strains of piano and banjo, and the syncopated drum. The way was barred by a kind of indoor hedge, and a beautiful young lady taking tickets.

He hung about, teased by glimpses through the leaves of the turning couples. The music reminded him that he, too, had an incipient madness for the dance.

Another lady in a gown and hat out-fashioning fashion swam up to the opening in the hedge. "Won't you come in?" she asked with a rock-candy smile.

"I—I don't know anybody," stammered Neil, taken by surprise.

"That's what I'm here for," she said, smiling still.

Neil was not deceived by that smile. "One dollar, please," it said, plainer than words.

At that moment he caught a glimpse of Laura in the arms of a man, and he forgot all prudence. "I guess my money's as good as his," he thought, and his hand went in his pocket like a shot.

"Come along!" said the lady in the remarkable hat. She was one of those uncompromisingly homely women who get themselves accepted for pretty by sheer force of will. "I am Mrs. Beasley," she added. "What name, please?"

"Groat," said Neil.

"You must meet these dear friends of mine," she said, stopping by a table.

Introductions were made all around. Nobody paid the slightest attention to Neil, but the thing was considered accomplished. He "knew" them thenceforward. For that matter, nobody paid much attention to anybody. There was an odd lack of gallantry between the sexes. Each served at his own shrine. Everybody was talking blithely, but Neil could not distinguish any thread. It was not language, but an animated noise.

"Now let us find a table for ourselves," said Mrs. Beasley, drawing him on. They sat. "So glad you dropped in. My little experiment is a great success. A new idea, you know, making superior people known to each other. You might think I would have, well—

unpleasantness, but no! One becomes expert in sizing people up. The other day one of the young ladies left a man in the middle of the floor and came to me. 'Mrs. Beasley,' she said, 'I must beg to be excused from dancing with that gentleman. He's too fresh.' 'Quite right, my dear,' I said. I went to him, and handed him a dollar with a smile. 'What's this for?' he demanded. I smiled sweetly and said: 'I aim to cater only to ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon.' That's how I deal with, well, unpleasantness, don't you know."

The dance came to an end. "Now, which of the young ladies would you like to meet first?" asked Mrs. Beasley. "The one in pink is Miss Merriwood, lovely girl, so vivacious, you know! That one in black is Miss Folsom, quite a beauty and very intellectual. Comes of an old Southern family. Then there's Miss Winston——"

"I should like to meet Miss Folsom," said Neil bluntly. Mrs. Beasley affected him unpleasantly. He felt as if a window ought to be raised. "How Laura must hate it here!" he thought.

The lady with the rocky-candy smile brought the girl who had no smile to Neil's table. At what point in the passage across the room Laura recognised him Neil could not tell. When she arrived her face was composed except for an increased pinkness all over. Neil could not take much hope from that, for the blush went with an angry glint in the brown eyes.

Mrs. Beasley twittered introductions, and scampered away to some new arrivals. Laura and Neil sat down.

Neil, seeing that uncompromising face, wondered what he had hoped to gain by this encounter. "Well—here I am," he said lamely.

"You have me at a disadvantage," said Laura. "I have to seem to be agreeable, or lose my job."

"Is it so difficult?" he asked.

She glanced at him scornfully. "Naturally one does not enjoy being hounded."

The hard word stiffened Neil's back. His eyes shot sparks, too. "Very well," he said. "I accept the

word. I am a hound, and I will never give up my quarry. But it's not you; it's Blackader."

"Blackader?" she said, with raised eyebrows.

The name your precious husband goes by in sporting circles."

Laura was startled off her high horse. "Who told you?" she demanded.

"Geoffrey Parran."

The eyebrows remained up.

"Oh, we became pretty good friends after you left. I stayed with him. He's a first-rate fellow."

Laura frowned. Fear and resentment were blended in her glance on him. "You're a dreadful man!" she murmured. "Whichever way I turn I find you."

"To a man that's a compliment," said Neil. "As a matter of fact, I'm only dreadful so far as you're in the wrong."

"I'm not! I'm not!" she cried passionately. "I can't act any differently. You don't know."

"Then tell me," he said.

She remained silent.

"Oh, well," he said gloomily. "Right or wrong, not much use asking a hound to give up his chase."

"What did you expect to gain by this?" she asked.

"You knew I wouldn't help you. As a matter of fact, I could not if I would. I don't know where he is."

"He knows where you are."

She shrugged. "I advised him to leave New York. I hope he has done so."

"I didn't intend to come in," said Neil. "But I saw you dancing. I thought, why not with me?"

She said nothing.

Presently the music started again. Neil's blood took fire from the sound. He looked at her resentfully. Let her anger him as she would, he was obliged to love her still.

"Make believe I'm a stranger for five minutes, and dance with me," he grumbled.

She rose promptly. "That's what I'm here for," she said without looking at him.

"Spoken like a woman!" said Neil. "You mean to say if I had any decent pride I wouldn't inflict myself on you. Well, I haven't any. I only know I want to dance with you. I guess you have to take worse than I. Come on."

Whatever Laura felt, Neil could and did for the moment forget there was such things as husbands and police in the world. From her oneness with him in the dance, he suspected that she was oblivious, too. Her cheek lay in the hollow of his shoulder. He could have kissed her bright hair. She would not let him see in her face. "Is she afraid of what I'll read there?" he thought. Anyhow, they floated away on the music like two bodies on a single pair of wings. Yet to the eye it was but one of fifty couples—dancing better than some, perhaps, with characteristic impassive American faces.

"Don't hold me so close," murmured Laura.

For answer he held her closer.

"You brute!"

He chuckled. Somehow that epithet holds no great terrors for a man. Perhaps in itself it presupposes a certain intimacy.

He paused near where Mrs. Beasley sat with a new group. "You may go tell her I am too fresh," he said wickedly. "She will stand by you."

"Please don't make a scene," she said with an affronted air. "Go on dancing."

He resumed, holding her close to him.

When the music stopped they sighed involuntarily and drew apart. She refused to meet his eyes. Somehow he knew how it was with her. He was both enraptured and struck with awe by the dim suggestion of what she could be to a man if she chose. But it must be freely; he made no mistake about that. There was a spirit in command of that lovely body that would shatter it sooner than yield on dishonourable terms.

"Won't you go now?" she said. In spite of herself her voice was languorous.

"Two minutes," begged Neil. "See, here's my tea."

She sat with a stony air.

"Couldn't we for once talk honestly and unashamed and unafraid?" Neil begged.

"Oh, please!" she murmured, intolerably confused. Then pride came to her assistance. "There is nothing to say," she added coolly.

"I love you," he said.

"You insult me—now!" she murmured.

Neil made an impatient gesture. "That's not what I mean by honesty. That old stuff! Where does the insult come in when I ask for nothing, and when I'd gladly give—well, the only thing I have to give? Heroics apart, it's quite on the cards I may have to make that good before we get out of this mess."

"I have told you—I would not allow that," she murmured.

"Oh, I don't mean to hang. You have told me you would tell the truth—but at what cost? Naturally, I choose to go first. When a policeman finally puts his hand on my shoulder, that's my clue to exit."

The faint colour fled her cheeks. "How you enjoy torturing me!" she whispered. "Nothing would be gained by your—by that. I could not go on, after."

"Laura!" he cried softly, all his heart in his voice.

She stiffened. "I would feel like a murderess!"

"Oh, excuse me," he said grimly. "My mistake."

Mrs. Beasley came fluttering by their table. "You two!" she said archly. "You look as serious-minded as if you were discussing the high cost of living."

"I am serious, ma'am," said Neil. "I'm telling Miss Folsom she dances like a dandelion seed in the moonlight."

"You man!" she retorted, wagging a roguish forefinger. "I bet you're from the South, too. Don't you let him fool you, dearie!" she scampered on.

"Damn the woman!" muttered Neil. "A pert sparrow!"

"If you love me so much," murmured Laura, ignoring the interruption, "I ask a good deal less than you offer. I ask you to let me sleep at night, to let me have days free of terror."

"That's what I'm working for," said Neil. "In my own way."

"Give up this chase!" she pleaded.

Neil set his jaw. "It's the only thing in the world I can't do for you."

Her lip curled. "So much for your love! Your high-sounding motives won't bear examination."

"I don't know anything about my motives," said Neil. "I only know I've got to do what I'm doing. I've got to get that man."

"You hate him!" she murmured. "You are unfair to him."

"Unfair!" cried Neil, astonished. "Could anybody be unfair to *that*? Isn't he a sneak and a liar and a coward? Answer me!"

"Yes, he is," she cried in a kind of desperation. "But if you drag him down, you wreck me."

"I differ from you," said Neil doggedly.

They fell upon a wretched silence. Laura played with a spoon, and Neil tapped a cigarette on the tablecloth and forgot to light it.

"Won't you please go?" she begged at last.

"I'm going," he said, "but it isn't easy. I think each time may be the last. It would be doubly hard—if we had quarrelled. If you could tell me—though we seem fated to fight each other—if you could tell me you thought I was on the square——"

"Oh, I do!" she said quickly and warmly.

"All right," he said brusquely. He got up.

Once more Mrs. Beasley bustled up to them. "Wanted on the telephone, Miss Folsom," she said.

Neil and Laura self-consciously avoided each other's glance. Each had the same idea as to who it was.

"Please wait here for me," she murmured.

She went away, and Neil sat down again. While she was gone the music started for another dance.

Coming back she said peremptorily: "Dance with me."

"Sure!" said the delighted Neil. "Until the crack o' doom!" He wondered mightily to what this change of front was due.

When they had danced half-way down the room she said: "Listen carefully without seeming to. That call was for you. It was from a man who called himself Archie."

"Archie!" said Neil, astonished. "How did he know where——?"

"Never mind now," she said. "Listen! He said they had picked up your trail—I am giving you his exact words as near as I can remember them. He said two of them were now on the way to the Vandermeer. He said he had been delayed in getting me, and you must look sharp. One was a young man, he said, with a neat black moustache and prominent black eyes; the other elderly and dandified looking. Well—when I came out of the telephone booth there they were in the corridor, just as he had described them. They have just come in. Mrs. Beasley is talking to them—don't look! They have taken the table nearest the door where no one can go out without passing them."

"The devil!" Neil muttered.

"Behind that screen of palms there is the service door. That is your best chance. Guide me close up to the screen and slip through. No one will notice in this crowd. Now!"

"Good-bye, dear," whispered Neil, and left her.

He found himself in a service room or pantry. At the moment it was untenanted. There was a corridor leading away, which he followed. At the end of the corridor he met a waiter coming with a tray of tea and cakes. Neil simulated a moderate degree of drunkenness.

"I want to get out," he mumbled.

"This way, sir. You're headed the wrong way, sir," said the boy.

Neil resisted stubbornly. "No!" he said. "I just came out of there. I want to get out. I'm sick of that bunch. I'll give you a dollar if you get me out."

"All right, sir. One moment, sir."

The boy hastened to put his tray down in the pantry, and returning, steered Neil lovingly through the corridor down a stairway into a larger pantry, and out by a service

door into an areaway. Neil's obvious condition was all-explanatory. None of the other waiters they met remarked anything out of the way in the situation. Neil paid over his dollar thankfully, and climbing the steep area steps found himself in the free air of a side street.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE PIPER IS PAID

UPON his return Neil found the flat empty. Not until nine o'clock did Archie get home, and it was a weary and dissipated Archie that came in to his anxious partner.

"Well, kid, they've got us humping now," he groaned. "If we get out of this we'll qualify for the eel class for sure."

"Oh, well, you're home safe," said Neil. "I've been imagining seven different kinds of the worst. What's the news?"

Archie threw himself on a cot and lighted a cigarette. "Well, to begin at the beginning, this morning when you started out I had a hunch. What is it they call it now—a promenation of evil. So I slipped on my funny coat and hat and took after you. You went up the avenue to Fourteenth, and across Fourteenth to the subway. You should have steered clear of Fourteenth."

"Never thought of it!" said Neil.

"You cocked a leery eye at Number Twenty-one as you passed. That was enough. Two bulls on the watch picked you up on the chance."

"I never saw them!" said Neil, astonished.

"Of course you didn't, innocent, trustin' little kid!" said Archie. "However, I will say to your credit that these weren't the regular thick-necks like we've been accustomed to. I knew them soon as I laid eyes on them—Pinkertons!"

"What are Pinkertons doing in this case?"

"I don't know. This is my guess. Tolsen was a Republican and belonged to a political club. Now, the

police force is Democratic. Tolsen's friends have likely raised a purse to avenge their dead comrade, and so on, and incidentally to show up the other side, see? Anyhow, the Pinkertons are on the job. Take it from me, son, this will be a real lively chase from now on with both sides tryin' to beat each other to it."

"Go on! What happened next!"

"We all rode up-town on the same subway car, you and the two Pinks and yours truly. Now, if you'd only taken it easy over to the old woman's flat all would have been well, for I would have got there first, knowing where you were going, and tipped you off. But no, you must take it on high.

"One of the men followed you into the apartment house. He must have been somewhere in the stair hall while you were talking to the old woman inside. The other waited in the street, and I was down at the corner. In half an hour you came out again, with number one at your heels. Number one gives number two a sign; number two takes up your trail back to the subway, and number one goes back into the house to talk to the old woman.

"Now, I knew if I tried to approach you it would be the signal for an arrest, so I stuck to number one. I knew by the way you started off that you were going somewhere in particular, and I thought my best chance was to find out where the old woman had sent you.

"So after number one came out of the house I tackled the old woman. Say, he had near scared the life out of her. First you and then him and then me—the old dear was in a jelly of fear! I lost valuable time quieting her down. But finally I got out of her that the girl danced at the Vandermeer every afternoon, and I beat it to the nearest drug store and telephoned her the way you know. Took me so long to get her I made sure it was too late.

"I chased down to the Vandermeer to see what was doing. All quiet when I got there. I looked in that there garden of roses and seen her dancing round with a quiet face, so I made out she had got you out. Trust a woman to find a way!

"Well, sir, that's where I got mine. I was so busy thinkin' about you bein' trailed I clean forgot myself. Blame me if those same two Pinks, seein' me nosin' around, didn't pick me up. I've had a time to shake 'em! Same old stunt, hoppin' trolleys up-town, down and across. But these were no Baltimore amateurs. Stuck like leeches. If I hadn't had the luck to squeeze a subway express at Brooklyn Bridge as they closed the doors, I'd been runnin' yet."

Neil told his side of the day's story.

"There's no question they're pushing us pretty close, kid," said Archie ruefully.

"You ought to leave me," said Neil.

"Cut that out!" cried Archie loudly. "You make me mad! What do you think I am? Just when the game is warmin' up!" He stamped up and down the room to relieve his feelings.

"Oh, well, keep your shirt on," said Neil. "What do you think we ought to do?"

"I tell you one thing. You're going to lie snug for a few days."

"How can I?" Neil frowned. "The nearer they come to me the more necessary it is to get *him*. If they get me first, good-bye!"

"What's your idea?" demanded Archie. "You ain't got nothin' to go on."

"Yes, I have," said Neil. "Blackader knows where Laura is. She admitted as much. Now, to-morrow is Saturday, everybody's pay-day. From what I know of that young blackleg I believe he'll try to make a touch."

"Good enough!" said Archie. "I ought to have thought of that."

"He'll go to the Vandermeer about closing time, or look her up at home later. Most likely the Vandermeer, because he can threaten her there. She wouldn't want to make a scene."

"You mustn't be seen around the Vandermeer again," said Archie.

"I'll have to take my chance," said Neil doggedly.

"Anyhow, Blackader wouldn't let you get near him.

I'll go. He won't recognise me, and if he did he's got no cause to suspicion me. I'll go round to Joe's to-morrow, and change my funny clothes for a swell rig."

"If you do get him, what will you do with him, Archie?" asked Neil anxiously.

"Bring him down here."

"Oh, if I could once get him down here!" groaned Neil.

"Well, turn in now. Something tells me we're going to have quite a day to-morrow, quite a day!"

In the middle of the afternoon Archie set forth, looking like a prosperous little business man of Watervliet or Tonawanda.

"How do they give you a fit at such short notice?" asked Neil curiously.

"Joe has tailors there to baste you in while you stand. It'll last out for a day all right."

"If you're kept from coming home can you send me word? I'll be nearly off my head with the suspense."

"Sure, we ought to have some way of communicating," agreed Archie. "But I can't call you up, and a telegram's too risky. You call me up. At six o'clock go out to Dreyfuss's drug store and call up Rafferty's saloon on Forty-second Street. Ask for Greenleaf. If I'm there I'll be by the 'phone. If I'm not there, wait a couple of hours and call me up again at the same place."

"Right-o!" said Neil. "Good luck to you!"

Neil's job of waiting was the harder of the two. In fact, it is about the hardest job an active young man is called upon to perform. Nothing happened to relieve the slow passing of the minutes. At six o'clock he went down to the drug store according to arrangement and called up the Forty-second Street place. Archie was not there, and Neil had the waiting to do all over again. At eight o'clock he got his partner's voice on the wire.

"Anything doing?" Neil eagerly demanded.

"Plenty," was the laconic reply. "Blackader turned up at the Vandermeer according to specifications. Spent most of the afternoon dancing around in there. When

the show was over he and the girl came out together. She gave him money and he left her. Then I picked him up. I bought him a drink, and in a little while we was like brothers. He didn't know he'd ever seen me before."

"Where is he now?"

"On his way down to see you."

"What!"

"He's on the way, all right. I couldn't bring him myself, because the Pinks picked me up again. They're watching me now through the door of the telephone booth. They'll trace this call. We'll have to move to-night."

"All right if Blackader gets here first," said Neil grimly.

"He'll be there at eight-thirty. By the way, he's dyed those well-known yellow ringlets. He don't look so much unlike you now."

"Much obliged."

"Listen. He thinks he's going to a quiet little gambling parlour where he can play with the money he got from the girl."

Neil swore.

"You want to give him a little game at the door. He'll rap three times. I told him the password was President Wilson."

"I get you."

"Use him gently, son."

"Be easy."

"I'll be home as soon as I can shake my dogs."

Not until he heard the three raps on the door would Neil allow himself to believe that his prize was in his grasp. The sound suddenly calmed him. He went to answer the summons with a grim smile.

He opened the door a crack, and without showing himself, asked in cautious tones: "What do you want?"

"Does Mr. Abercrombie live here?" he heard in Blackader's reedy voice.

"What's the good word?" he asked.

"President Wilson."

"Walk in, sir."

Neil opened the door, keeping himself behind it. It admitted Blackader to a little hall, off which opened a tiny bedroom, a bathroom and a kitchenette. At the end of the hall was a living-room in which a light burned. Neil had taken care to have the hall dark.

Blackader made his way toward the lighted room, and Neil closed the door softly, locked it and put the key in his pocket. He followed his man into the living-room.

Blackader, seeing the bareness of the place, exclaimed involuntarily: "What't this?" Turning, he saw Neil grinning in the doorway. "You!" he gasped, recoiling.

It was the same Blackader, elegant, well-dressed, sneering; only the blonde locks were now tintured with walnut juice.

"Glad to see you," said Neil, grinning still.

Blackader rushed past him and down the little passage. Neil let him go. He rattled the door. Like all such doors it was covered with sheet-iron; moreover, it opened in. No chance of getting out that way. Blackader gave up the attempt, and crouched panting, like an animal at bay in the corner of the dark passage.

"Come on back," sang Neil. "I'm not going to hurt you. At least, I'm going to give you a fair chance first."

Finally Blackader slunk back into the room. His fascinated eyes, fearful of a gun, followed Neil's slightest movement.

"What do you want of me?" he muttered, moistening his lips.

"Sit down," said Neil. "A little plain talk first of all. I see you know who I am."

Blackader sat on the edge of a chair in the corner. His panic terror subsided a little—enough at least to permit him to bluster half-heartedly.

"Yes, I know you," he snarled. "You're Neil Ottoway. You murderer!"

Neil laughed. "Pon my soul! I think you almost believe it! That's rich, coming from *you*!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Blackader, with a great parade of innocence.

"You're the one man in the world who knows for sure that I didn't kill Tolsen," said Neil quietly.

"It's a lie!" cried the other. "A lie!"

"You deny it before you are accused," Neil triumphed. "There is plenty of evidence to convict you. You were with Laura when she telephoned Tolsen, and it is known that the body lay in the closet attached to her room."

"Well, that's up to her," snarled Blackader.

Neil drew a long breath to steady himself. "Oh, you pretty specimen of manhood!" he said softly. "I have no word for you. All the bad names I know are too manly."

Blackader squirmed a little under this, but it did not go very deep. All he needed to restore himself in his own eyes was a rejoinder. He found it. "You're jealous!" he snarled.

Neil laughed outright. "Of you? Say, you're more of a wit than I gave you credit for."

Neil thought of the time-honoured police expedient of scaring a suspect with pretended evidence. "That's only the beginning of the case against you," he continued coolly. "There are finger-prints which will be proved are yours any time they take you."

Blackader's eyes rolled a little wildly. "It's a lie!" he said, less surely. "What do you want of me?"

"A confession," said Neil. "There's pen and paper waiting on the table."

The other man essayed to laugh. "What do you think I am?"

"I'd rather not tell you," said Neil. "Go ahead."

"Got nothing to confess," muttered Blackader.

"I don't intend to use it against you," said Neil. "Except in case of necessity. When you have signed it you may walk out of here as freely as you came in. I am letting you go for Laura's sake."

"Say, do you expect me to believe that bunk?" sneered the other.

"I don't care whether you believe it or not. You'll

write the confession. I mean to use it as a club to make you behave decently. Laura will divorce you——”

“And marry *you*, eh?”

“I hope so,” Neil smiled. “But that’s up to her. In any case, you are to leave her alone. If you bother her in any way the confession goes to the police.”

“You haven’t got it yet.”

“Plenty of time! Plenty of time! Plenty of ways to make you!”

Blackader’s eyes bolted again. “I’m not afraid of your threats,” he said shakily. “You daren’t put me out of the way, because then my mouth would be stopped for good.”

“So you *did* kill Casper Tolsen?” said Neil quickly.

“I didn’t, but you think I did.”

“Go ahead, write! You’ll have to sooner or later. You’ll get nothing to eat until you do.”

“You can’t keep me locked up here,” blustered Blackader.

“With my partner’s help I can.”

“I’ll raise the neighbourhood.”

“Then we’ll all get arrested,” said Neil cheerfully.

“If I was arrested it would kill Laura,” whined Blackader, with a crafty look.

“Honestly, when I look at you close I don’t think it would,” said Neil. “However, I don’t mean to have you arrested if I can help it. If you insist on it—well, what comes will have to come. Better draw up to the table and write.”

“You can’t make me.”

Neil approached him. “Don’t press me too far,” he said softly. “I’d hate to soil my hands.”

Blackader cringed in the chair. “Let me alone—you bully!” he whined.

Neil saw that it was the only way. Suddenly seizing Blackader’s collar, he jerked him to his feet. With his free hand he swung the chair to the table, and slammed Blackader back upon it. “Write!” he commanded.

Blackader, demoralised by the display of force, crouched and begged for mercy. His nimble brain found

twenty excuses at once. "It's for Laura's sake I won't confess. No jury would convict me. I found Tolsen in my wife's room."

Neil suddenly saw red. A savage rage overmastered him. Without any volition of his mind his hands found their way to Blackader's throat, and the slim youth was shaken like a rat.

"Take that back, you filthy liar!" Neil hissed.

Blackader squeaked with terror. It was the only sound he could get out. "Yes! I take it back! I lied!" he gasped.

Neil flung him on the floor and turned away. A feeling of sickness followed upon his anger. He was terrified at himself.

"Get up and write!" he panted.

A strange obstinacy still animated the abject figure. "I won't! I won't!" he wailed. "Not if you kill me! If I give myself away I'll go to the chair. You couldn't do any worse to me than that!"

Neil turned away. "Well, we'll try what a little starvation will do," he said.

He filled his pipe, and lighting it, drew deep to steady his nerves. Blackader's slender, graceful figure still lay on the floor. With his head wrapped in his arms he was perfectly motionless, feigning to be asleep or to be dead, maybe.

"Only the devil knows what's stewing in his head," thought Neil.

The silence was broken by the sharp ringing of the electric bell in the kitchen. Blackader started up.

"What's that?" he gasped. "Police?"

"Maybe," said Neil coolly.

"Oh, don't let them in! Don't let them in!" cried the other.

"If it's the police, I can't keep them out," said Neil indifferently. Going to the kitchen, he pressed the button that opened the street door of the house.

Visibly, Blackader nearly died under the strain of the suspense while they waited for whoever it was to climb the stairs. Neil was resigned to the worst. When the

upper bell rang he opened the door without delay. A messenger boy with a telegram stood on the landing.

A long breath escaped Neil. "Fate gives me one more chance!" he thought. He receipted for the message and carried it back into the living-room.

Under the gas light Neil read :

The fellows are on the way. They have the right address. Expect them at nine-thirty. Look sharp.

GEORGE.

"What is it?" Blackader demanded.

"From my partner," said Neil. "The police will be here in ten minutes. Write quickly, and we'll make a getaway."

"It's a trick!" whined Blackader.

Neil forced him to read the message. "Be quick!" he said, "or it's all up with both of us—maybe all three," he added in an undertone.

Blackader sprang to his feet. "Come on!" he said tremulously. "There's no time to write now. I'll go with you anywhere you want. I'll write it later. Oh, come on, for God's sake!"

"Not a step!" said Neil grimly. "Until you write."

Blackader, though his hands trembled as if palsied, and his face worked like a hysterical woman's, would not give in. He raved and pleaded with Neil, and sought to pull him toward the door. Neil flung him off, and stood like a rock with his watch in his hand, counting the minutes.

Blackader, in an abandonment of brutish terror, flung himself down and knocked his head on the floor. Even in extremity he was the spoiled child.

Finally they heard rapid feet mounting the stairs outside. Someone knocked on the door, and rattled it.

Blackader with a cry: "They're here!" sprang to the sill of the open window. For an instant he faced Neil, looking scarcely human.

"Go to the chair, damn you!" he stuttered. "You'll never get her now!"

Neil leaped, but he was over the sill. A terrible cry rang over the backyards, and there was a sickening, soft

crash on the cement pavement below—then silence. Neil stood rooted to the floor with horror.

The rattling at the door recalled him to himself as from a hideous dream. He heard Archie's voice calling to him softly and urgently: "Jack, Jack!"

In a daze Neil went and opened it. Archie was panting for breath.

"The police!" he gasped. "Right behind me. Quick! over the roof and down through the next house. Where's your hat? Never mind it, take mine. For God's sake wake up! What's the matter with you?"

"Blackader," muttered Neil. "Jumped out of the window. Dead in the yard."

Archie fell back, but instantly recovered himself. He urged Neil with his hands. "Well—you can't help that. They're at the door now. Up with you! Linger in the next house a minute or two. I'll take care of everything. For *her* sake, kid!"

That was sufficient. Neil came to life again, and sprang up the single flight of stairs to the roof. Already he could hear tramping in the lower halls. Doors were opening throughout the house.

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CHAPTER XXIII

LAURA EXPLAINS

IT was a hot night and there were people taking the air on the roofs of both houses; consequently Neil's appearance up there excited no remark. Everybody was hanging over the parapet at the back, and though the horrible sounds had been self-explanatory, each was asking his neighbour what was the matter.

Several asked Neil. His subconsciousness answered involuntarily:

"I don't know. I came up to see."

There was a general movement on both sides to go below. Neil attached himself to the party of the house next door. Mindful of Archie's instructions he loitered down, lingering on each landing. Knots of people stood at the doors talking excitedly while they awaited the return of emissaries sent out for information.

Finally a man came running in from the streets. Heads craned over the banisters and the news buzzed up from floor to floor:

"There's a man murdered his wife next door, and jumped out of the window and killed himself. The police have come."

Such was the first version of the story. Neil joined in the general rush to the street. Instead of turning to the right where already a crowd reached half way across to the opposite sidewalk, he made his way quietly in the other direction, and turned the first corner. Half a block from the scene life was going on as usual. He lost himself in the maze of Greenwich Village streets.

The sound of that wild cry still rang in his ears. He was full of the old, old thoughts of death, still fresh and terrible to each one of us when they are forced home. He could think almost kindly of Blackader now.

"Poor devil! He's paid. All his shifting and twisting does him no good now. Now he's got to face things . . . But *has* he got to? Maybe everything's ended for him, good and bad. Maybe there's nothing left of him but dead flesh. That wouldn't be paying if death were the same for all. Surely he must be forced to face the truth for once—somewhere. Or else there's no justice."

Neil, wandering aimlessly down one street and back the next, was not insensible to his surroundings. On the contrary he could never afterward forget the impressions of that hour. Men may be roughly divided into the convex and the concave natures. Men of action present a convex surface to the world around them, artists a concave. Men keyed up to concert pitch do not change their ordinary natures, but intensify them. The roused man of action sheds the impressions of the moment more completely; the roused artist gathers and stores them more deeply.

To Neil, tramping the streets, quite ordinary sights and sounds assumed an exquisite poignancy. The city this hot night affected him like a terrible poem, like a compelling, dissonant symphony; or, since he was a sculptor, most like a superhuman figure, ugly and strong, wise and childlike, bestial and dreamy.

By and by he found himself in City Hall Park. He was brought sharply to earth by hearing his own name shrieked through the night hush of the business streets. He was amazed and outraged by the sound. A flight of boys issuing from Newspaper Row was spreading out fanwise over the park fluttering papers instead of wings.

"Wuxtra! Wuxtra!" they yelled. "Neil Ottoway—!" here an indistinguishable gabble. "Wuxtra! Wuxtra!"

Neil had a little silver coin ready for the first boy that reached him. He did not ask for any change. Surely he of all the world had the most interest in this edition.

He did not have to read far. It was spread across the top of the paper in two inch type :

NEIL OTTOWAY COMMITS SUICIDE.

Neil gasped, and turned red with anger. It affected him like an intolerable insult. But he soon reflected that it was not his real name after all, and his sense of humour came to his aid. He laughed.

Under the caption was a brief bulletin :

At 9.15 to-night Neil Ottoway killed himself by leaping from a fifth-story window in Waverly Place. The police were about to arrest him. Identification of the body was made by his friend, Archie Tinsling.

Neil's breast rose on a prayer at the suggestion contained in the last words. But was it possible that Archie with all his cleverness could get away with a stroke as bold as this?

It suddenly occurred to Neil that the extras were spreading all over town like a swift tide. What if Laura should hear the cry and buy? The thought of the possible consequences made his heart contract. He ran for the subway station.

The papers had already gone up-town by the same route. Quick as Neil was, he heard the echoes of the vendors' raucous cries down the side streets up-town. He rang Mrs. Colliflower's bell as it had seldom been rung. She was slow about opening the door. Finally the thick glasses appeared as the door opened a crack. She had it on a chain.

"Miss Folsom, is she at home?" demanded Neil.

"Yes—no! I don't know as you can see her!"

"I must see her!" cried Neil.

The note of desperation in his voice somehow overcame the little body's fears. She opened the door. "She—she just came in," she faltered. "With her little purchase for breakfast. She looked so strange! She didn't answer me when I spoke. And she's gone in and locked her door."

"Good heavens!" cried Neil. "Which door? Quick!"

"I—I don't know as I ought to tell you," stammered the distracted landlady. "I don't know what to do!"

Neil's stretched nerves could stand no more. "Laura!" he cried. "Where are you?"

There was a sound down the narrow hall. A door was unlocked and thrown open. Neil ran to meet the sound. She was in his arms.

"My darling! My darling!" she whispered. "Oh, thank God!" A shower of tears intervened.

The instinctive embrace justified and explained all. A great, calm happiness filled Neil's breast. He comforted her. Mrs. Colliflower looked on horrified, shamefaced, yet delighted, too.

Finally Laura drew a little away. "That terrible story—what does it mean?" she asked.

"Come away," he said gravely. "I'll tell you."

She led him into her little room and closed the door. She clung to his arms, trying to read his news in his eyes. She guessed it before he told her.

"It was he," said Neil. "The other one."

A little cry of pain escaped her. She drooped. "Oh, poor Ken!" She was silent, and Neil shrank from intruding on her painful thoughts. Finally she raised her eyes, glistening with fresh tears and craving reassurance like a child's. "Oh, do you think there is mercy for him anywhere? I couldn't be merciful. I—I hated him! And now—it hurts so!"

"Tender heart," murmured Neil. "Old scores are all paid."

"Maybe—I drove him to it," she whispered.

Neil smiled. "That's silly, dear. Nothing ever got under his skin. It was the police at the door."

"Now I shall tell you the truth," she said.

"Never mind that now," said Neil quickly. "You've had enough to bear. Some other time—or never. I'm satisfied."

"I want to tell you," she said simply. "I always wanted to. But I loved you. I was afraid of you. I fought against you blindly."

"You loved me!" murmured Neil. "How wonderful!"

"Come into the sitting-room," she said deprecatingly.

"Mrs. Colliflower would be scandalised. She's a dear."

The affectionate little body was fluttering up and down the hall. Seeing by Laura's face that the crisis, whatever it was, had passed, she kissed her, and retired more contentedly to the back of the apartment. Laura led him to one of the plush settees.

"Sit down and let me look at you," she whispered.

"I never dared let myself before."

"Laura, if you say such things to me I shall—I shall cry!" he said whimsically.

"My love, you're tired!" she murmured. "What have you been through?"

He waved it away. "I shall never be tired again!"

"I shall tell you everything," she said. "It's not because I feel any rancour towards the dead. I do not."

"Nor I," put in Neil.

"But it is your right to know. I was well aware of that while you reproached me."

"No apologies," said Neil. "I can't stand it."

"I married him four years ago," she began abruptly.

"I was eighteen years old. That's all I can say in excuse for myself. He had a kind of power over women. I—I was no better than the rest. But I was so ignorant! He was the kind of man to take advantage of a girl's ignorance. I mean he could make hateful things appear in a lovely light. God help me, I thought he was a kind of god! He wasn't the same then as when you saw him. His health suffered later. Why, he was only twenty. My parents were innocent and old-fashioned. They suspected no harm.

"When we were married I began to learn fast enough. I nearly died—I died a thousand deaths, not of a broken heart, but of broken pride. Why, I found out at last that—that—other women—were supporting us. What could I do? My only clear idea was to keep my father and mother from suspecting the truth. They would have blamed themselves. It would have killed them.

"It lasted for nearly three years. Then he was

obliged to leave Baltimore. Some horrible scandal that was quickly hushed up. I never knew. I never wanted to know. I went on living there. It was given out that he was travelling on business. That's what my parents thought. But I had to have money to live. My parents were poor. I couldn't go to them without telling the truth. So I let it be known that I was going to join him in New York, and I came here to earn my living. Drawing was my only talent.

"I struggled along. It doesn't matter how. Finally, three months ago, I came to the house on Fourteenth Street. I was at the lowest ebb. Mr. Tolsen befriended me. He never asked for the rent. Then, ever so slowly, I began to get a foothold. But my—my husband happened to see in the newspaper one of the first drawings I sold. It was one I had made long ago for fun. He traced me by it, and found me. That was the same day that I first talked to you.

"He was penniless, too, but he did not tell me that. He was always boasting. He seemed very friendly. He got my story out of me a little at a time. I was not on my guard. He said Tolsen must be paid his rent at once. He couldn't have me beholden to any other man, he said. I—I was so pleased! I never thought—

"So I telephoned Mr. Tolsen to come down, and I would pay him. As soon as he came my husband dropped the pretence of good humour. I—I can scarcely tell you what happened . . . But I *must*! Bad as he had been, I was not prepared for it. He—he accused Mr. Tolsen. How can I tell you! He accused Mr. Tolsen—and me!"

"Oh, God!" whispered Neil.

She laid a hand on his. "Hush!" she said. "I am a fool to make so much of telling you. It is all over."

"Don't go on unless you want to," said Neil.

"I want to," she said simply. She continued in a stronger voice. "My husband threatened to expose Mr. Tolsen to his wife—unless he paid. I was like a stone woman. I never spoke but once. Mr. Tolsen asked me if the man *was* my husband, and I said yes.

After that he thought I was a party to the scheme. He was a rough, vulgar man, but kind-hearted. They said unrepeatable things to each other. I listened. Finally Mr. Tolsen knocked my—knocked him down.

"Kenneth shot him from the floor. I watched from the window. He took the money and the diamond, and shut the body in my closet. He left me without a word. But he had told me before where he lived.

"I—I walked the streets all night. I was out of my mind. Then I met you. My one idea was to keep my father and mother in ignorance. You know all the rest. When I got your note I went to his room while he was out, and stole the clothes.

"Now," she said, with a strange look, "do you want a woman who has been dragged through the mud like that?"

"That's not fair!" cried Neil. "You make my protestations sound futile! As if the mud could touch you!"

"I know, but I wanted to hear them," she whispered. "What's to be done now?" she asked presently.

"I have no money," said poor Neil.

"That's not what I meant," she said quickly.

"I have lived in a garret alone. How gladly I would share yours! But I have something to ask you."

"What?" said Neil vaguely, alarmed by her tone.

"Let me go away for awhile."

"Laura! Don't you love me?"

"I adore you," she said simply.

"Then why——?"

"Just for awhile," she pleaded.

"Oh—conventions! Surely you owe his memory nothing."

"I thought you would say that," she said. "That's not it. Please—please, I am not ready. I cannot fight you any more. I will go with you—as women do, if you make me, and be happy, too, as women are—but if you would let me be myself—if you would not smother poor me with your love, you'd win my soul too, and I'd be as happy as women seldom are."

"My darling!" he said, deeply moved. "I can wait!"

"You shall not lose by it," she promised.

"What are you going to do?" he asked anxiously.

"I'll have to lie once more and for the last time," she said. "To my people, I mean. I'll say he died in the West. I will live and work at home for awhile."

"I may write to you?" he pleaded anxiously.

"Surely!" she said. "And often. But—don't misunderstand me, only friendly letters, please. If you should—well, make love to me—I know myself!—it will make me self-conscious and perverse and hateful. Just be my friend for the present."

"I can be that," he agreed seriously. "But—no promises! I know myself, too, you see. I may break out in a letter once in awhile."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'll lie low in a cheap hotel for a couple of days until I can get in touch with Archie. When it's safe Archie will come to you for news of me. Archie and I will stick together. We'll go for a trip until the thing is forgotten. But no more aliases. 'Neil Ottoway' and 'John Groat' are both done for. Hereafter I am plain Thomas Williams, as my father and mother intended. You recommended that in the beginning."

"Tom!" she whispered. "That sounds like you."

"Oh, my darling! *Must* I go away?"

"Please!" she begged. "And—don't come to see me until I say so."

"That is hard. You will never say so."

"But you will know when—if you listen well."

When the re-born Tom Williams bade good-bye to Mrs. Colliflower and Laura and went to seek an unobtrusive lodging, the first editions of the morning papers were on sale in the subway stations. They contained further particulars of Neil Ottoway's end.

Tinling was overcome with grief at the loss of his friend. He was quite frank with the police. He said: "Well, he's gone! There's no use keeping anything back. You fellows have been pushing us hard the last two days."

"Two operatives picked me up at the Hotel Vandermeer this afternoon. I was leading them around town trying to shake them when they ran into another operative from the same agency. He told them something that caused them to drop me and face about.

"I was worried. So I took a spell of trailing them. They went back to the office of the agency they worked for. I waited around outside, and a newspaper reporter came out that I had a nodding acquaintance with. He didn't know my name.

"I asked him what was doing inside. He said the detectives had located Neil Ottoway's hangout through a telephone call, and were going down there with the police. He said he had promised not to release the news for half an hour to give them a show.

"There was a telegraph office across the street, and I ran in and sent my partner a telegram on chance. Then I beat it down there. But when I got to our corner there was already a fellow watching from across the street, and just then a couple of detectives and a couple of policemen met up with him, so I made a run into our house to warn my partner. But as I was telling him the police were already on the stairs. He ran for the window and jumped before I could stop him. That's all."

A good deal of sympathy is expressed for the dead man's friend. Tinling seems to have had no motive in opposing the police except loyalty to his partner. He has satisfied the police that he did not meet Ottoway until after the murder. No proceedings will be taken against him.

The dead left no evidence to throw any light on the mysterious features of the case. He died as he had lived, absolutely and completely unknown. The notorious Tolsen case is closed—unsolved.

And Tom Williams, reading these last words, mingled in his heart a pæan of praise for wonderful Archie, and a fervent prayer that the newspaper was right—that it was closed, and unsolved.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN CONCLUSION

ON a fair May morning a taxi-cab was making its way down town towards the steamship piers. In addition to steamer trunks, bags and bundles of rugs, it contained three people. On the back seat sat a young man and a young woman whose faces reflected the May morning. These two had little to say. Facing them was a tall young man with a shadow on his eyes. He made a deal of gay talk and laughter.

"What are you grinning at?" demanded the happy young man.

"The fatuous spectacle of perfect happiness," returned the other.

"Grin away!" said the first calmly.

"With a wife on your arm and a commission for a statue of a favourite son in your pocket—not to speak of tickets to Bermuda, aren't you afraid of the envy of the gods, my son?"

"Oh, the gods are better-tempered."

The happy young woman was not paying much attention to their chaffing. "Geoffrey, will you go to see mother as soon as you get home?" she asked in a moment.

"I will, my love."

"Tell her we got away safely and that the ship looked staunch. And Geoffrey, try to wean mother away from that ridiculous doctor she sets such store by."

"I cannot guarantee that, my dear. Why disturb her faith if she's happy in it?"

"But if she should get really sick she must have a good doctor."

"I will see to it, lady."

"And Geoffrey, be sure to let us know if anybody in Baltimore starts an agitation for a new statue. You might start something yourself if you see a chance."

"I will, gentle grafter!"

The taxi-cab took its place in the long line approaching the pier, and moved ahead a few feet at a time. There was a stoppage somewhere in front and for a few moments they did not move. One of the fattest and rosiest policemen, directing the traffic, stood close beside them. He looked hard at the happy young man, and finally advanced.

"How are you?" he said. "Do you remember me?"

"Hartigan!" cried the young man involuntarily. "Glad to see you!"

"Sergeant Hartigan now," said the bluecoat proudly. "I'm in command of this detail here."

"Congratulations!"

"So we were wrong about the Tolsen case. It was Neil Ottoway after all."

"Yes, poor devil!" said the young man.

"Are you still interested in crime?" asked Hartigan.

"Sure!" A mischievous expression crossed the young man's face. "I've just been married," he said. "I want you to meet my wife. Laura, this is Sergeant Hartigan."

The officer saluted deferentially. "Pleased to meet——" he began—then his jaw dropped. "Well, I'm——"

The young man laughed outright at his discomfiture. Hartigan quickly recovered himself.

"Congratulations, miss! May you live long and happy!"

"Thank you," she said softly. "Same to you. Won't you accept this flower from my bouquet? I suppose you can't wear it, but you can put it in your pocket."

"I shall always keep it!" he said.

The line of taxi-cabs moved on.

When they alighted under the pier shed with bag and baggage the tall young man detained the chauffeur. "I'm going back with you," he said.

"Oh, Geoffrey!" said the young woman. "We have half an hour yet."

"No protracted farewells!" he said jocularly. "Ghastly. Good-bye both of you, and God bless you!" He jumped in the cab and was gone.

At the foot of the gang-plank the young woman caught sight of a little round body of agitated mien. "Mrs. Colliflower!" she cried. "How sweet of you to come see us off!"

Mrs. Colliflower, speechless with agitation, nodded and blinked and pressed a little bouquet upon the girl. It was carefully hidden under tissue paper; the stems were warm and moist from her hand. As the young woman started to unwrap it Mrs. Colliflower found her voice.

"Oh, don't open it!" she faltered. "It's—it's only my geraniums. They would look so common among the grand flowers. But I thought since you praise them—"

"You dear!" said the young woman warmly, and kissed her cheek. "They shall have the first place in my cabin!"

"My dear, I hope you'll be as happy as a queen! I wish you were going to be near so I could keep watch over you. The first year is so important. Never cross a man, my dear. Get your way by seeming to give in. And listen——!"

From this point the conversation was carried on in whispers.

Meanwhile the absurdly happy young man had caught sight of a friend. "Archie!" he cried reproachfully. "You're a fine pal! Why didn't you come to my wedding?"

"Too high-toned for me," Archie grinned.

"Nonsense! There were only half a dozen there. That was not friendly."

"I don't mind you," said Archie, "and her—me and her get along fine. But that Parran fellow—he's all right, too, but he puts me out of face. He don't mean to, but he reminds me that I talk like a mutt and act like a boob. Look here, kid, I brought you a little present, a pair of binoculars, for the voyage."

"Why, Archie, they're beauties!"

"Sure they are! Do you think I got 'em at a sale of unredeemed pledges?"

"You shouldn't have spent the money, though."

"I'm making money. Got a five-year contract with the biggest producers on Broadway. Didn't I turn a frost they had into a knock-out? It was you put me on to the idea that my best bet was travellin' ahead of a show. I'm known, now. I bought a little present for the missis, too. A silver hair-brush. She's got such peachy hair! You give it to her. I haven't the crust."

"Hold on, man, you must give it to her yourself."

"No, I got to go. I can't stand this good-bye business. Makes me feel like a fool. So long! So long! Don't forget Archie the Mutt!"

After the young man and the young woman had boarded the ship and the bell was ringing for non-passengers to go ashore, one more friend arrived to bid them farewell. A figure all legs and arms dashed up the gang-plank, clutching a hastily-wrapped bundle. The two saw him coming and hastened to the gangway.

"Oh, Tom! I was afraid I'd be late!" gasped the boy. "They made me wait for this." He thrust the package on the young man.

"Look at the Kid!" said Neil. "He grows overnight. What's in this, son?"

"A model of a cutter. I made it myself. I just had it varnished. I'm afraid it's rather sticky."

"The Kid's going to be a sailor," the young man explained to the young woman.

"You bet!" said the boy. "I couldn't do a thing in ordinary school. Got a head like a hickory-nut, I guess. I was crazy for a life of adventure. Everybody jumped on me until Tom came along. He said, 'Why don't you be a sailor?' Hit the nail on the head. He got my father to let me go to the school of navigation. I made good there. Next year I'll go to sea."

The young woman looked at her husband inquiringly. "Is this——?"

The young man nodded. "Yes, Kid Doty. You heard his voice one night last year."

"That was some night, eh?" said the boy. "Some time, maybe, you'll tell me the right of that case."

"Why, everything is known, isn't it?" said the young man with an air of extreme innocence.

"Go on!" said the boy. "Do you suppose I believed that tale you stuffed me with? That wasn't Neil Ottoway jumped out of the window. I went to the place where they took his body. That guy's hair was dyed—it was light-coloured at the roots. And he had little, weak-looking hands. He was no sculptor. You're the sculptor, aren't you?"

"Well, don't lose any sleep over it," said Neil.

"I sha'n't."

"All ashore that's going ashore!" cried a sailor.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! See you next year if I have luck!"

The young man and the young woman leaned on the rail and watched the panorama of the waterfront move by in stately procession.

"Dearest, what do you think of Geoffrey's remark?" he asked. "Do you think the gods envy our happiness?"

"Let them!" she laughed. "We have reached the summit. To destroy us now would not be to defeat us. If *we* were gods we would jump overboard this minute!"

"Ah, but I'm glad we're only human!" he said, pressing close to her.

THE END

