

**ALIAS
RED RYAN**

BOOKS BY
CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

ALIAS RED RYAN
A PAGAN OF THE HILLS
DESTINY
THE BATTLE CRY
THE CALL OF THE CUMBERLANDS
THE CODE OF THE MOUNTAINS
THE KEY TO YESTERDAY
THE LIGHTED MATCH
THE PORTAL OF DREAMS
THE ROOF TREE
THE TEMPERING
THE TYRANNY OF WEAKNESS
WHEN BEAR CAT WENT DRY

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"I wanted to tell you all of that—before some one else did."

Alias
RED RYAN

BY
CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK



FRONTISPIECE
BY
WALTER DE MARIS

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First Edition

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ALIAS RED RYAN

PATROLMAN MAHAFFEY could see an illuminated clock as he stood at the corner discussing with an acquaintance the evils of prohibition as he conceived them. By that circumstance he was able to fix the hour of the evening definitely in his mind when it came to making a report.

“Besides anything else ye might say—and there’s plenty, such as makin’ hypocrites out of dacint men an’ women, look at what it does for us,” he observed gloomily. “Here with th’ paapers howlin’ about crime waves, with two fur warehouses robbed on me own bate in wan week of time, an’ all an’ all, we’ve got to spind our energies nosin’ out bootleggers an——.”

He broke off abruptly, bending attentively forward, and when his companion started to voice his lugubrious agreement, the officer raised an imperative hand for silence.

“Stop!” he exclaimed. “Wasn’t that a shot I heard . . . It didn’t sound like a blowout nor yet an exhaust explosion . . . Hist! there it is again . . . that way . . . sure, it’s a pistol barkin’!”

Officer Mahaffey wheeled and went running to-

ward the sound, and as he went other noises came to his ear, so he began shrilling on his whistle for reinforcements, and loosening the buttons of his great-coat over his own holster.

He had to run east to Broadway, up Broadway and around the next corner to his left, and by that time the first alarming sound had been augmented into a chorus of shouting pedestrians and an outcry of confused excitement.

From farther down Broadway came the roar of a motorcycle cop making for the same objective and along the street were running other figures, yet Patrolman Mahaffey was the first uniformed man to reach the spot, and that was a tribute to his fleetness of foot as well as his eagerness of spirit.

He saw a car flirt round the corner into Sixth Avenue before he reached the door about which civilian-clad men were beginning to cluster, and he knew that that car, which he was quick to associate with the crack of guns, had made its escape.

Then, panting, he reached the door of a building whose number and business sign in gilt letters he instinctively noted and registered without pausing. To the half-frightened and morbidly curious men who clung there like flies about a sticky saucer, he gave the force of his elbow, and the curt command: "Gang-way there! Let me through!"

They let him through, for his face was red and his chin thrust out and his hand gestured with a ready

pistol. Inside the door, which stood wide, he found himself in a narrow hallway, and that, too, contained several idle onlookers—unless they were participants now posing as accidental arrivals.

“Get in that door with ye All of ye, and snap into it,” commanded the patrolman, herding them ahead of him and sweeping with a swift glance the room upon which the hall gave. He heard the motorcycle chug to a stop outside, and recognized that reinforcements were at hand, should he need them.

The picture that met his eye through that door frame made him catch his breath for a moment, then he stepped in and considered it.

The room was the office of a wholesale fur warehouse, and this made the third robbery bearing the same bold trade-mark that had afflicted his beat in the last ten days—but this was the first that had added murder to theft, and for an instant the policeman felt jarred with the shock.

There were, besides the casuals he had driven ahead of him, two men in that room, or three if you counted the dead man.

There could be little doubt about his being dead, even in advance of a closer examination. The set of the eyes in the upturned face told that story to Mahaffey's experience; that and the very proclamation of lifelessness in the huddle of the still-bleeding figure lying so awkwardly crumpled on the floor beside a desk.

On the boards there near the centre of the space lay an automatic pistol, and though it burned smokeless powder the acrid stench of nitrate came freshly sharp to the nostrils.

Of the two living men, one sat in a chair, collapsed and tousled—perhaps wounded or perhaps exhausted with struggle, and the other stood looking on, a tall, thin, elderly man with a pistol still clenched in his fist.

As Mahaffey took in these details brother officers came through the door and he heard the clang of an arriving patrol wagon, and a curt order outside, "Don't any of you people go away. Some of you'll be wanted to tell what you know."

It is a cardinal rule of narrative that the story should start at its beginning, pursue its course directly, and arrive concisely at its conclusion. That rule is in general axiomatically correct, yet there are times when a story does not begin at the seeming beginning, but runs forward and back from a centre. This is one of those stories, for the scene that had broken with such startling suddenness on the eyes of Patrolman Mahaffey was in reality a thing whose root and development lay back, some years back, in a soil entirely different, and into that anterior phase one must go to follow it with understanding.

The start of the trail upon which the policeman came that night was a happening in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and its time was before the war.

CHAPTER I

OUT of the crater-bowl of the stadium came the upleap and down-dying of eruption from a score of thousands of human throats, but to the blanketed braves in the locker room it was like the reverberation of artillery pounding away perfunctorily beyond their range.

There in their mole-skin armour, between halves of the season's first game, these men who carried, in heavy responsibility, the football honour of Harvard, were more poignantly alive to the sharp staccato of a single voice raised in the same walls with themselves—the voice of the head coach, impassioned with exhortation and accusing violence.

The volume that eddied up and down out there was only such sound as boils and simmers out of a gigantic caldron of humanity between its moments of interest—the noisy whiling away of an interval with brass bands and cheer clubs and college yells. Inside, the head coach was using his single voice as a scourge and sharp-rowelled spur on the crimson cohort.

“It's no excuse to say that our line-up to-day isn't the same line-up we'll send against Yale or Prince-

ton," declared the stinging voice. "This game is the first of the season . . . It's Harvard's answer to all the questions as to what Harvard has this year . . . It's the unveiling and exhibition of what we've built up. The press is looking on . . . the scouts from New Haven and New Jersey are looking on . . . the world is looking on!"

The head coach broke off as if something like despair had choked him, then he threw back his head and his eyes spurted jets of blaze.

"The world is looking on and what has it seen so far? The first half is over and Harvard hasn't scored . . . Harvard has been held by a team that came as a sort of scrub time-filler . . . Harvard has been held by a college that felt flattered at the chance to come here and get drubbed by us . . . The first half is over and the score is nothing-nothing . . . You men go back onto that gridiron with disgrace staring you in the face—unless you wipe out that first half and show ten times what you've shown so far. The football world came here asking, 'What has Harvard to show us?' and your answer up to date is, 'A squad of weak-fish'!"

Again he paused, and raked the circle of young giants who squatted grimly silent under his verbal lash—grimly silent but welted and stung of heart and conscience.

"We might have expected them to uncork some

trick offensives," went on this battle-chaplain fiercely, "but they had no right to hold Harvard with their defense . . . That defense ought to have been torn open and frayed ragged . . . It must be torn ragged yet . . . Let's see. . . Carson's ankle is sprained, isn't it? Sevens goes in at right end . . . and, for God's sake, remember Harvard is a university, not a prep school!"

The moment of agonized suspense hung intolerable—and for no other man in stuffed armour was that agony so tautly cramping as in the heart of Barbour Sevens.

To Sevens the fact of being at Harvard at all had never lost its tincture of miracle. Always it had seemed a dream from which he must presently awake to find himself thrust back into the twilight dulness of such poverty as prohibits a college career. Yet he was here, working his way through his course, and though only a sophomore, he had made the team. Now he was being ordered into action. Men in hundreds who could buy and sell him with their pocket money would have given years of life to be in his place to-day, but a sense of overwhelming responsibility thrust at him like capsizing puffs of gale. If he made good for one hour this afternoon he might construe his success as an augury. He might make other dreams come true all along the future—and he stood trembling like an overwrought thoroughbred at the starting barrier.

“If you men don’t redeem yourselves this half,” dogmatized the head coach with desperate finality, “you’ll make a laughing stock of Harvard, of yourselves—and me . . . You’ll junk traditions that have been fought and sweated for through years and, as for myself, I don’t see how I can go on with football any longer. They may have some trick offensives. Don’t give them a chance to spring them—Smash into ’em and tear ’em open. Their defense oughtn’t to hold us.”

Then, clasping his blanket about him and with giddy spots swimming before his eyes, Barbour Sevens found himself trotting out with the squad onto the field where the drenching yellow of the sun dazzled him and floods of sound from twenty thousand throats submerged him.

A young man with carrotty hair who occupied a position of vantage in a central section of the stands realized that he was being addressed by a stranger and looked inquiringly up.

“You’ve got an empty seat each side of you,” declared the youth who had bent toward him—“and at ten o’clock this morning I ran all over town trying to get one more in this section. They told me everything was sold out—had been sold for days.”

The red-haired one grinned amiably. “Looks like they lied to you,” he made response. “Or else somebody took sick or died or got locked up.”

“What I had in mind—I mean to say,” hazarded the other in some embarrassment, “would you mind moving into the next seat and letting this lady and myself take the other two—unless somebody claims them? We’ve got two big hats in front of us.”

The red-haired young man grinned even more amiably than before.

“Sure,” he exclaimed heartily. “Move right in and make yourselves at home. It’s all Jake with me—and the game’s half over now.”

A censorious eye might have marked that the hospitably minded onlooker was not dressed in the best of conservative taste, and a censorious ear might have found both his inflection and diction uncultivated. His cut of raiment leaned emphatically toward the bizarre and his neck was shaved. Idiosyncrasies of costume may be condoned, but Brummel himself could not get by with a shaven neck.

This young man’s face was freckled in consonance with the oriflamme of his hair, but his eyes were blue and large and they seemed pools of disarming appeal and angelic innocence.

Just now they appeared more concerned with the audience than the contest itself. It was as though, in the vast and florid variety of that human kaleidoscope, the mind behind the eyes found a more palatable and gratifying food for thought than in the intricacies of this game which was to its players as serious as a crusade.

Another thought also dwelt with him. So long as he sat in the densely crowded tiers, flanked by empty spaces, he had felt vaguely and rather uneasily conspicuous—as if he were surrounded by a margin unshared by his fellows—and, since he knew a circumstance connected with those two empty spaces, which was a secret of his own, this had given him concern.

The young man with the carrot hair had needed only one seat and had only set out to procure one, but the gentleman whose pocket he had picked in the elbowing press just outside the gates had had three held together by one rubber band, so that, to all intents and purposes, they were inseparable. Red Ryan had deftly abstracted them from the pocket where they reposed, and though they constituted a plethora, it seemed inconsistent with the policy of wisdom to attempt a partial restitution.

Now with the stubborn, sweating resolve and ferocity of bull-dogs in a pit, a crimson team and a blue-stockinged team plowed and battled and struggled on the white-striped green below, while from base to rim of the huge bowl of masonry reigned a babel and a pandemonium of gladiatorial exhortation. To Red Ryan it was all somewhat confusing. "What kick do they get out of it?" he silently questioned himself. "Now a coupla husky lads in the ring . . . or a fair field of selling-platers comin' home close-bunched—I could get that, but this Willy-boy

lynching bee—it looks cuckoo to me. What's it all about, anyhow?"

He had not come idly, and he sat patient but unthrilled. When the game ended, his own activities would begin. When the crowds surged down into the field, spilling and cascading over the walls of the stadium, and milling about in howling mobs—then and not till then would Red Ryan's purpose in coming declare itself in action.

Then he would mingle, howling dervish-like with the howling crowds, and if his gift of craftsmanship did not forsake him, he would emerge enriched in treasure and currency, self-endowed with the jewels, watches, and purses of the capitalist class. Meanwhile, with the slightly disdainful aloofness of alien interests, he watched the strenuous entertainment of the capitalist class.

If certain finesses of gridiron achievement escaped him, other observations he made more confidently. With the accuracy of a Maiden Lane appraiser, he placed valuation on the diamond in the scarf of the florid man one row forward, and even on the mesh bag of the pretty young lady whose rosy lips were so excitedly parted just to his left—the girl to whose escort he had gallantly surrendered his extra seats.

Red Ryan was from the Middle West, but he had outgrown it. The bulls out there, both harness and plain clothes, had so embarrassed him with their close attentions that he had emigrated East, where his

incognito was still intact. He stood now on the threshold of that larger world.

The girl with the mesh bag came almost hysterically to her feet and shrieked, if one may use for so musical an outburst of excitement such a prosaic descriptive. She was only a kid, Red reflected, but she sure was an eyeful! Now she stood frenziedly, yet not ungracefully, jumping up and down and waving a crimson pennant while her starry young eyes broke into a sparkle of naïve delight.

Also, she dropped her mesh bag.

“Who is he?” demanded the girl, hoarse from her shouting, “Who is he?”

“That,” her escort declared, his too-casual manner proclaiming him close of kin, “is Pudge Blackwell—I thought everybody knew Pudge.” His superior calm dropped suddenly away. “By gracious, he made his gain, too—on the first down. *Go on, Harvard!*”

“I don’t mean Pudge,” objected the girl imperiously. “Of course I know *him*. I mean the man who followed him through and broke up the tackle. He deserves all the credit.”

“Oh,” the escort enlightened her absent-mindedly. “That’s Barb Sevens—a soph . . . first year on the team . . . looks like a comer, though, doesn’t he?”

“He’s wonderful,” breathed the girl. “Absolutely!”

Red Ryan retrieved and stored away in his coat

pocket the forgotten mesh bag, but as he annexed this windfall he grunted contemptuously.

"It's a cinch there ain't no valuables in it," he told himself. "Still, you never can tell."

The bedlamites grew more maniacal. The gyrations of the cheer-leaders became more fantastic, but Red Ryan, intuitive in gauging crowd psychology, recognized a slackened morale of weakened confidence and he grinned.

"These Haw-ward rooters are kiddin' themselves," he shrewdly reflected. "'Their steam roller's gone blooey—and they're bally-hooin' to keep their noive up."

Perhaps he even laughed derisively, for the gentleman with the diamond scarf pin which Red estimated roughly at two carats turned and glared truculently at him.

Over the crimson-decked sectors of the stadium, as if in fulfilment of prophecy, settled an ominous tendency to quieting . . . the quieting of premonition and gloom. The visitors, who had no moral right to menace so powerful a machine, had uncorked a bottle of effervescent surprises. With only a few minutes left to play, they were holding like a Macedonian phalanx. They were still powerless to score, of course, but their cup of glory would brim over if, without scoring, they could hold their mighty adversaries to a like ineffectualness.

The sunset sky glowed through the western open-

ings of the stadium masonry and the Crimson, stung to a last, superhuman effort, braced every nerve to the tautness of its breaking point. As if driven beyond their own powers by the forces of tradition they went, from centre-field to three-yard line, battering their way in short but consistent gains, and the ball—their ball—lay close to the chalked frontier of victory.

Between them and a touchdown lay that narrowed interval of tramped sod and a human wall that had given back doggedly, stiffening as it went, until now, like human mortar, rigidly set, it, likewise, braced itself for final ordeal.

Between Harvard's determination and its achievement, or its frustration, lay also two minutes of playing time, rigidly guarded and limited by official stop-watches. The spirits of the home rooters blazed up in capricious hope from their ashes. Again they were on their feet, amid soaring volumes of deep-throated thunder.

Barbour Sevens, rankling as though the disgrace of the scoreless board had been all his own, clenched his teeth in a grimed, bloodied, and sweating face, while he crouched with the tigerish ferocity of a single purpose. His nerves were quivering and his pulses hammering. All consciousness was merged and fused into one fiery passion—eagerness and the determination of eagerness—

The forces were hurled together in new collision, the retaining wall of flesh bent back a little, a very

little, but no breaches were rammed through its integrity.

Once more—if they held as well—and the ball would go to the visitors on downs.

“Last down and one yard to gain!”

There came again the staccato barking of signals and Sevens knew that the play was to make its assault around his end! The lines crouched panting close to the earth, the ball was snapped, and Harvard leaped to a single impulse. There was the thud of human impact, the hoarse gasping breath of struggle, the straining of massed conflict—and then a deafening roar from the compassing walls of the stadium. The ball had gone over for a touchdown!

Pandemonium, chaos, indescribable babel of horns and whistles and above them all the solid artillery roar of countless throats. Barbour Sevens straightened up, reeling, gasping, but translated to a seventh heaven of happiness. There could not be more than a few seconds of play left. Harvard would kick the goal—and then——! He could hardly stand, but he rocked on his feet jubilantly.

Then fell the devastating bolt of calamity.

At first it couldn't be grasped. It was too incredible—but the sharp whistle-blow, the whispered consultation, and then the grim-faced finality of the referee as he took the ball and began pacing back five yards, told the story with a merciless baldness.

Harvard had been penalized. Harvard had for-

feited the touchdown and the ball. The play would be resumed with the visitors in possession, five yards away.

Then in absolute corroboration of these disastrous and impossible things came the curt verdict of officialdom.

“Harvard’s right end was offside. Middletown’s ball.”

Sevens was the right end. The penalty that had robbed Harvard of spectacular triumph in the final and conclusive minute of struggle lay squarely at his door. Disgrace engulfed him. He stumbled back, sobbing, with his body racked and shaken in spasm after spasm of anguish. He knew nothing else clearly until the whistle blew and then he threw himself flat where he stood, clawing at the mud.

Unequipped with such erudition as clarified the situation to his understanding, Red Ryan failed to grasp its full and tragic meaning.

“It gets by me,” he muttered to himself as he shook his head in mystification. “A likely lad in the prize ring ain’t supposed to sob himself to death because he only gets a draw when he claimed a decision. He climbs through the ropes and plasters a piece of beefsteak over his bum lamp an’ that’s that—but these highbrow sports lays down on the ground an’ kicks an’ screams. It gets by me.”

His position enabled Red to reach the field with the first breaker of the human tide that spilled over

like dark water from a bursted reservoir. Just before him was the gentleman with the two-carat scarf pin, and both found themselves drawn by the eddying currents into a narrowing circle about the group of sweating and begrimed warriors in red. One of these seemed to have become suddenly bereft of reason, and to be in the hands of volunteers who sought to restrain his ravings.

With one forearm flung across his face and his body shaken by sobs, Sevens was fighting off the men who sought to comfort him; to wrap him in a blanket against the raw evening chill; to set him on his feet and lead him away.

In the excitement that seethed like a swarm of bees about that axis, Red Ryan did more than add his voice to the chorus of volunteered and futile comforting. With a dexterity that bespoke a finished art, he freed the diamond scarf pin from its fastenings at the gentleman's stout throat, and, opening the clasp of the mesh bag in his pocket, slipped it safely into that receptacle.

Then, as they had dragged the figure of the still raving Sevens to his feet, someone forcibly threw an overcoat over his shoulders and several hands reached out to button it in place. This was apparently because the young man, in his bereft state of mind, could not be persuaded to keep a blanket about him. In these offices of gratuitous helpfulness, Red Ryan charitably collaborated. He laid ready

hands on the distracted Sevens, along with others who had better right, and included himself in the escort in which was also numbered the gentleman whom he had just robbed.

In this fashion he could make more rapid progress toward the gates—and it was at the congested channels of the exits that Red hoped to reap his full harvest.

But as he was progressing in this fashion, none too rapidly through the pressed humanity, Red looked to the side, and had his features not been well schooled, they must have betrayed a deep and surprised concern. As it was, a scowling shadow darkened the clear innocence of his eyes, for a few paces away were two men, whose glances were on him, and one of the faces was known to him of old. In that room on the second floor of the City Hall, in Louisville, Kentucky, where the Chief of Detectives conducts his inquiries, Red and this man had held sundry conferences and none of them had been of Red's seeking. "Wot th' hell," he growled now, without sound. "Wot th' hell's old Danny Maher doin' here?"

What Danny Maher was doing at the instant was speaking low into the ear of his companion, whom Red rightly guessed to be a local member of the same craft as Danny.

"Keep an eye on the sorrel-topped lad," he suggested. "Him that's helping carry off the football lad. He'll bear watching."

“Never saw him before,” commented the Boston detective. “What is he? A common dip?”

“He’s a dip, but he ain’t no common one,” replied the Louisvillian. “He’s one of the cleverest kids that ever worked the Middle West and South. I wouldn’t put it past him to have some sparklers in his clothes right now . . . but it’s at the gate he meant to work fastest—until he saw me.”

Maher spoke thoughtfully and rather in the spirit of tribute to ability than with any rancor of hostility in his voice. “He started out as a gay-cat ahead of a yegg outfit, and developed into the headiest pickpocket we ever had down our way. We’ve never been able to send him over the road for it, but we’re pretty sure he’s done some high-class second-story work, too.”

“Want to pick him up?” inquired the local bull, and Maher shook his head.

“I don’t know of any call that’s been sent out for him lately, but since he’s here it’s just as well for you to know his face. I’ll send you the dope on him and his Bertillon record when I get back. It might come in handy some time.”

CHAPTER II

NONE of that conversation was overheard by Red Ryan, yet in his imagination he could accurately divine its trend of text and treatment, and a deep gloom enveloped him.

“If I was this Willy-boy,” he made mental observation, “I reckon I’d lay right down in the dirt an’ sob.”

The day’s work, with all its promise, lying ahead, was stultified. What he had so far gathered in was only a reminder of greater possibilities—and now even those beginnings became a menace to his safety. If these plain clothes bulls decided to “pick him up,” as was the informal way of such gentry as they with such other gentry as he, he must above all be found empty-handed. That “ice” nipped out of the scarf was treasure trove and its abandonment cost him a pang, yet he did not hesitate. With a dexterous gesture, and with a face that betrayed no emotion, Red slipped the mesh bag and its contents into the side pocket of the overcoat that draped itself loosely over the shoulders of the sobbing Harvard end. Then, as the group neared the turning to the locker rooms, the carrot-haired youth detached himself and proceeded toward the exit gates.

There, when the detectives arrived, they found him standing reflectively and with all the disarming seeming of innocence. Flight appeared far from his thoughts as, with a nod from the Kentuckian, the official pair approached him.

"Hello, Red," accosted Maher affably. "Meet Mr. Dennis . . . Mr. Dennis is a headquarters man here in Boston."

"Pleased to meet yer," said Red, with a certain coolness of reserve, and the Bostonian inquired, "What was the name? I didn't get it."

"Which one do you go by now, Red?" inquired Danny, still affably. "Red Ryan's the one we generally use on the blotter—but the monikers change from time to time, don't they, Red?"

"Red Ryan'll do," responded the youth equably. "Nobody ain't got nothin' on me now, an' I don't need no monikers."

"Oh, by the way, Red," it was Maher who spoke, "I'm not accusin' you, y'understand, but you're in a crowd an' you used to work fast in crowds—maybe —?" he broke off on an upward inflection of inquiry.

The young man nodded. He even grinned a little, since some informal justification was what he himself just now considered prudent.

"Frisk me," he invited. "Go as far as yer like."

Maher "frisked" him with a swift but efficient touch of searching fingers. He realized that the pickpocket had not been caught red-handed this

time, and his nod was, for the time being, a clean bill of health. So having passed through the customs, at the cost of a sacrifice play as it were, Ryan was free to proceed and he proceeded. Already the crest of the crowd wave had flowed by, and with it the crest of his own opportunity. He dared not even linger at the fringes, and his day was spoiled.

“Hell!” he growled wrathfully, as for a moment the innocent eyes darkened into a fury of guile. “Hell! Now I’ve got ter blow ther damn burg.”

By certain nightmare progressions that stood out in his memory only as lurid and tortured dreams, Sevens had passed the hour and a half that took him through shower, rubdown, and dressing, and finally left him mercifully alone in his own room. He sat there now with the light turned on, staring ahead out of eyes dazed and suffering. He had in the very fever of over-eagerness betrayed Harvard, and to him the disgrace which the head coach had expounded was actual and crushing. This was the largest world he had known in his nineteen years of life, and to-day this world had tested him, proving his failure. Opportunity had come to him and he had spoiled it. His augury of future triumph had burned into the ashen and dismal conviction of predestined failure. Overwrought, bruised, and exhausted, his tragedy was real. No tempest of the future could shake him more actually than he was just now shaken.

Serious-minded from a childhood surrounded with drab economies, he did not expect opportunity to come to him radiantly or often . . . and a great one thrown away spelled despair.

As he sat inert by the book-littered table of his room, a brisk rap sounded on his door—a sound which he did not answer because it failed to penetrate the blanketing fog of his intensive misery. Then the door opened and a big-bodied, cheery-eyed young fellow let himself breezily in. He stood for a moment looking at the hulking despondency of the seated figure, then came over and clapped a hand on its shoulder.

“Buck up, old hoss,” exclaimed this new arrival. “You were just out of luck . . . Your crime was only that you snapped into it a tenth of a second too quick.”

At the touch and the sound of the voice Sevens started violently, and then with a churlishness that was wholly foreign to his normal character, he growled:

“I don’t want to talk to anybody. I want to be left alone.”

“Forget it,” retorted the other. “I came to get my best overcoat. I’m going out to a party to-night—and I need it.”

“Your overcoat?” Sevens repeated the words in a dazed voice and then, as if groping through the mists of lethargic half-dreams, he nodded dully and pointed

to a worn couch where the coat had been flung down.

"There it is, I guess," he said in a monotone. "I didn't know whose it was or where it came from. When I came in here I—" He pressed a hand roughly across his forehead with a passionate simplicity of gesture, as if seeking to clear away cobwebs from before his eyes—"I seemed to be carrying it over my arm."

"I put it on you on the field," Dicky Stafford explained. "You were sweating and all in—and you wouldn't keep your blanket around you."

As the visitor lifted the coat something fell with a delicate clatter from its side pocket to the floor—a girl's mesh bag.

"What-ho?" he demanded with his incorrigible cheerfulness of booming voice, as he picked it up and turned it in his hand. "You say you don't remember anything about this coat, and yet since you've had possession of it you've stored a lady's treasure in its pocket."

Sevens shook an incurious head, somewhat impatiently.

"I never saw that thing before," he answered shortly. "You must have put it there yourself."

"I tell you the pocket was empty when I put the coat on you." Stafford's voice became more serious in its perplexity. "I say, you were pretty well off your nut when I saw you last, Barb. You don't

suppose you fell to picking pockets in your aberration, do you?"

"Don't be an ass," growled Sevens moodily. "Take your coat and your bag—and yourself—away. I tell you, I want to be alone."

"Grouse all you like," replied Stafford affably, "but there's a mystery here and between us we've got to dope it out. We must open this thing up and try to identify its owner."

Sevens sagged deeper into his chair and sat staring moodily ahead while his visitor opened the bag and shook out on the table its little pile of contents.

"Great Jehosephat K. Jones!" he exploded violently. "What's this? The great Koohinoor diamond?" A grin broadened on his sunburned face and then his roaring laughter filled the room.

"It looks to me, old son," he announced, "as if you not only picked a lady's pocket, but as if the lady, herself, was a pickpocket. This isn't any woman's bauble. It belongs to a he-Cræsus. Let's see, here are cards, too. 'Miss Hope Halleck' and, ah, here's a note!"

"I tell you," reiterated Sevens in petulant stubbornness, "I'm not interested. Do me the favour to take those things away and play with them somewhere else."

Stafford looked quickly up from his engrossed reading, and his tone altered to a quality that broke through the other's crust of self-centred indifference.

"I don't give a hoot in hades whether you're interested or not," he declared incisively. "The question now is whether you're honest or not."

"Honest!" The dead torpor of Barbour's eyes livened into the sharper light of quick anger. "I'd be careful, Stafford, if I were you."

"Ah, that's better," smiled the visitor. "Listen, I've read this note. This purse belongs to a girl named Hope Halleck. It seems that she and her Aunt Abbie—surname not stated—came up from Cape Cod to see the game . . . They're stopping for one night at the Copley . . . That girl will probably be walking the floor about that pin. It's worth slathers of money—so it's up to you to beat it to the Copley and set her troubled mind at rest."

"Go yourself," snapped Sevens, "I'm not responsible. It's your coat."

"It had empty pockets when I draped it over your drooping shoulders. I'll swear to that. Besides, I told you I had a date . . . I'm late now."

"Call a messenger, then."

"A messenger!" Stafford snorted contemptuously. "You can't decently trust valuables like that to an unknown messenger. I'm going now and unless you're a crook, you'll be hotfooting it to the Copley inside the half-hour. So long."

"Hold on, Staff!" There was wild appeal in the voice, but the visitor knew his man. He knew that some such mission as this was needed to drag him

out of introspective glooming, and he had taken up his coat and flung himself from the room.

For five minutes Barbour Sevens sat gazing at the bag where it lay on the table, then with an effort and a sudden realization of aching bodily weariness, he dragged himself up and brushed his hair and got his coat and hat.

In his present sensitiveness he thought the desk clerk at the hotel was saying to himself, "That's the guy that threw away the game for Harvard," so he glared truculently at that inoffensive official. "Please send my name up to Miss Hope Halleck," he directed shortly. "She doesn't know me but tell her I found a bag she lost at the stadium this afternoon, and that I'm here to return it."

Then he paced moodily up and down before the desk until an elevator door opened, and he saw a girl and a middle-aged lady being led toward him by a bellhop. Automatically he moved forward to meet them and then, for a brief, dazzled moment, he forgot his melancholy.

The girl was not more than fifteen or sixteen but with her came the blooming loveliness of apple orchards in flower. Upon Barbour Sevens, whose thoughts had all been black and despairing, she burst like fragrance and a healing spirit of delight—and abruptly he remembered that her name, as revealed in the note, was Hope! He had fancied some such girl as this, dominating that world of dreams upon

which this afternoon had seemed to shut the door—but the portraiture of his imagination had lacked colour, he decided, because the reality was richer.

The older lady was charming, too, though he felt that with the half recognition which one accords to the appropriateness of an unobtrusive background in a picture, whose foreground proclaims itself in outstanding beauty.

The nineteen-year-old heart of Barbour Sevens, unsurfeited with emotional feasting, was not immune. It missed a beat or two, then pounded into palpitation.

The girl came forward, her cheeks blushing.

“You are Mr. Sevens?” said Aunt Abbie graciously. “Hope spoke of seeing you play this afternoon.”

“I’m the fellow that chucked the game for Harvard,” Sevens found himself making bitter confession and he knew that his face was burning brick red.

“I thought you were wonderful,” declared the girl. “All you did was to get into the scrimmage the fraction of a second too soon.” Suddenly Barbour Sevens wanted to kneel down and worship her. His crime became almost a virtue!

“I found this bag in the pocket of a coat that a friend put around me when they were dragging me off the field,” he announced, producing his excuse for being there. “A note gave your name and stopping-place, and I knew you’d be worried—especially about the diamond.”

"The diamond!" both girl and the woman echoed in perplexity. "But there wasn't any diamond."

"Look for yourselves," suggested the young man, "I'm certain it's there, and I'm dead sure I didn't put it there. How any of these things got into that pocket is mysterious enough."

So once more an investigation was held and the pin was examined.

"I never saw this scarf-pin before," observed Aunt Abbie, with a whimsical smile. "The bag belongs to Hope and its loss distressed her But the diamond that is quite a separate puzzle. Mr. Sevens, your hunt for its owner isn't ended yet."

"I never knew diamonds just to—emerge out of empty pockets before," murmured Sevens in bewilderment, then his eyes met those of the girl and for some reason the blood flooded into both his cheeks and hers.

A sudden confusion, new and delightful, overwhelmed him and he found himself turning to the elder lady with honest-eyed eagerness.

"I'm afraid it's an impertinence, Ma'am. An accident brought me here, but I hope I hope I can see you—both of you—again."

In a café not far from the Copley at the same hour, Mr. Maher and Mr. Dennis were discoursing over their cigars and coffee concerning matters both social and professional. The Louisville detective

had come North with extradition papers and, by a midnight train, must start South again taking a prisoner with him.

"I'm glad it just happened that I could give you a line on Red Ryan," observed the Kentuckian. "He's not a big fish, but he's a clever one, and he may grow into a crook that you can't afford to overlook."

"I'll not be after forgetting him," smiled Dennis, "but my guess is that since our little conversation this afternoon, he'll move on."

"He's a queer one," mused Maher, in a mood of reminiscence. "The newspaper boys down home have turned out columns of copy about him from time to time. They've built up a kind of public sympathy for him that a crook oughtn't to have."

"Sympathy? How do you mean?"

"It started some time back," resumed the narrator, "when this lad tried to pull a porch-climbing job at a country house back home. He was easing himself into a second-story window just as a five-year-old kid was coming out . . . The kid was walking in his sleep . . . and he walked straight into Red's arms."

"And Red was nabbed?"

"Yes . . . nabbed half way up the side of the house—but the kid's father couldn't see anything to it but an act of providence, and the kid's father had just been elected mayor . . . There wasn't no arrest in that case."

“How did it get out then?”

“It was too good to keep and the father spilled it after a while to a City Hall reporter. The reporter saw a story in it and smeared it for heart interest, see? Then other stories came along. I reckon most of 'em were fakes ground out on days when local news was scarce. Anyhow, this Ryan lad got the name of being a crook that always started out to pull some man-size crime, and always ended up by doing somebody a good turn. Folks christened him the ‘fairy-godfather’—an’ him doin’ his damndest to be a felon.”

“It won’t get him much around here,” declared the Boston detective. “Crooks is crooks with us.”

“I’m bound to say he took that kind of boosting to be a knock himself,” admitted Danny. “It made him sore as a crab to have his pals hang nicknames like Santa Claus and the Angel Child on him when he was pulling brainy stunts right along, and he wanted to be took serious.”

“Here’s looking,” commented the Bostonian, “and as for us, we’ll take him serious.”

Just then Sevens was leaving the Copley, and through the rack of his despair were stealing half-understood influences of comfort, like scraps of sunlight through fog. Recently crushed dreams began to struggle toward renewed life and toward a vision which persisted. In his vest pocket he carried a diamond pin and, before going back to Cambridge,

he turned his steps toward a newspaper office and inserted an advertisement in the lost-and-found column.

That night he slept, but the clouds descended again on the morrow when, in scathing comment, the sporting writers pilloried him afresh. The inherent weakness of the Harvard machine was exposed to general derision, but upon the offense of the right end they fixed as upon a tangible target and there they centred their fire.

It was while he was deep in this overnight publicity that Sevens rose again to answer a knock on his door, and found a gentleman there in a fur-lined overcoat who held in his hand a clipping from the lost-and-found column of a morning paper.

The visitor took in at a glance the papers all open at the football pages, and without the preface of formal greeting, he broke out with violence—and a stuttering defect of speech.

“You’re reading the post mortems. D—— don’t d-do it! These damned scribblers have n-nothing better to do than p-pick the bones of their betters. I saw you play, and no man on the team showed b-better stuff.”

A half hour later the gentleman rose from an easy chair.

“I’ve enjoyed this t-talk with you—and I’ve got b-back my pin,” he declared. “Sorry you won’t accept the reward, and yet I understand how you feel.”

He moved toward the door and wheeled abruptly, speaking curtly.

“In business it’s a mighty good fault for a man to play the game too hard . . . I’d be glad to have you keep in touch with me from time to time.” He drew a business card from his purse and held it out. “I shouldn’t wonder at all if we could make a place for you at our shop when you get through here,” he said.

Sevens stood still after the door had closed, holding the card in his hand. Yesterday he had met a girl of whom he had dreamed all night. To-day a business man had spoken overtures—and both of these things had grown out of a mystery.

“I wonder where that bag came from?” he suddenly demanded of the closed door. “Whoever arranged it was a darned good fellow and I’m for him strong.”

Into the club-car of a New York train that Sunday afternoon a red-haired youth glanced as he made his way from the day coach in which he was himself travelling to the diner. In view of his fortuitous meeting with the Louisville detective, Red Ryan was abandoning Boston for New York. He had come East reasonably well heeled and had augmented rather than dispersed his capital by the way. “A guy’s got to make a good front in these big burgs here where the game isn’t any hick proposition,” he mentally remarked, “and ridin’ the rods or sneak-in’ into side-door Pullmans is cheap stuff.” Now as

he passed through the club-car, he recognized a face. It was that of the gentleman who yesterday afternoon had mingled with him in the crowd about the weeping football player and whose diamond he, Red, had prestidigitated from the scarf of one to the pocket of the other. Yet now, to the disgust of the observer, the fur-collared gentleman who leaned back in his chair, smoking an expensive cigar, once more wore the diamond pin glittering in his cravat. It was a different scarf, but undeniably the same stone in the same setting.

For an instant resentment and temptation surged across the soul of Red Ryan. There was a smug self-satisfaction on the somewhat heavy face of this other man. His squarishly blocked head and straight mouth were such as betokened a stubborn and opinionated self-conceit. This was, by signs which the predatory critic was quick to read, a stupid man who believed himself clever; a slow-witted fellow who was doubly sure of his own keenness. Just now he was looking particularly self-satisfied, as though his recovery of lost goods had come from his own resourceful endeavours. Yet all he had done was to answer a lost-and-found ad. and probably pay the heavy impost of a reward. Red had also seen that ad. He had reluctantly refrained from answering it himself and now he reluctantly refrained from a more ironic act than that, stealing it the second time. He knew that he could do

it, and the accomplishment appealed strongly to his sardonic sense of humour. That impulse he strangled in the interests of a more long-sighted prudence. Ahead of Red lay the world with all its opportunities, and ahead of him also lay that reef, which unless avoided would wreck him "up the river." At another time and place it might be ventured, but not in a Pullman car.

Yet Tom Shell with his mink-lined great-coat and his ostentatiously large brilliant, was in a fashion also the carrier of a false front. He was less the magnate than he appeared. He could wear that coat because it had cost him less than it would have cost another. The company whose name appeared on his business card was a great one dealing in furs. It was one which had romantic ramifications in the far Arctic where its agents bought in the pelts that adventurous and lonely men incurred risks to trap and market, but Tom Shell's voice in that company, with its Fifth Avenue shop, and its several warehouses, was not a voice of complete command. Beverly Brothers, Furriers, was an old concern, touched in other days with something of the romance of its greater colleague, the Hudson's Bay Company. Now it was practically a one-man power ruled rigidly by old Silas Beverly. Tom Shell had assiduously bent himself to studying old Silas, who must some day pass on. He had undertaken to absorb old Silas's theories with a mirror's fidelity; so to mould himself to the mental

stature of his chief that eventually Silas would think of him as the one man who could carry on as his own successor. Meanwhile, Tom Shell's self-satisfaction caused him to dress, to act, and to talk to others as though he had already attained his end of full chieftainship.

When the train pulled into Grand Central station, Shell alighted jauntily, followed by a red-top carrying his pigskin bag. At the gates there was some crowding and an irritating delay. Red Ryan, who once more found himself standing close to the fur-coated figure, bore this annoyance with philosophy, but Tom fumed. Having gained the street, Shell took a taxi and hurried to his apartment. There he decided upon a bath before dinner—and when he undressed himself his face turned apoplectic and he stuttered versatile profanities. In his scarf there was no diamond. The pin, with the guard he had belatedly attached, remained in place, to be sure—but its upper end was cut clean as is a strand of wire with clippers, and no jewel adorned it.

CHAPTER III

THOUGH almost two years had passed since that day when Barbour Sevens had been off-side in scrimmage, no other day had stood out in such strong relief of memory. Upon it he had tasted the first chagrin and self-accusation that had ever charred his outlook on life with despair. Upon it, too, he had encountered the unheralded arrival of love, a love upon which a hungry imagination was ready to seize, for which his youth was fallow. Time had told him that this suddenly born sentiment was no ephemeral thing but that it had come to stay. It remained with him in ascending growth even when the bitterness of the other thing had softened somewhat in a receding perspective—softened yet left its scar.

It was June now. The days at Cambridge lay behind—and ahead, with the summer vacation intervening. A week of simple and uneventful days on Cape Cod was ending, simple and uneventful to the men and women he met along the elm-shaded roads and by the salt-meadows, but rich in magic to himself.

A gray old house with sweeping roof lines of weathered shingles, flanked by ancient and gnarled

apple trees and silver-leaves, had bestowed on him its hospitality, and from its windows his eyes had looked across green slopes to broken stretches of unbelievably blue waters.

Here with simplicity and even with an eye bent on economy, as the sailor's eye is bent on weather signs, he had found the charm of cultivated life—the life over which Aunt Abbie presided, to which Hope contributed fragrance and music and miracle, and to which Hope's little sister Faith, a pigtailed miniature of herself, offered the sprightly afflictions of mischief.

He would remember that visit and take its hours away in his memory and his heart—the long grass waving in the breeze that came salt-laden off the sea; the scent of the honeysuckle; the feel of the blue water into which they dived, and above all the light in Hope's eyes.

Now he was going away, and as Hope walked with him through a twisting path between bayberry and pines they stopped to watch the overhead scampering of a red squirrel—and a silence fell upon them. The sun was setting under scraps of flawless blue, seen through rents in the green, and it was dyeing the western sky into gorgeousness.

Sevens started to speak and broke off. His courses at Harvard had given him no words for making articulate the impulses that had leaped in him. Hope was standing so near that his arm, had it been bold enough, might have circled her, and he fell

suddenly to trembling. Her face turned toward him and her deep eyes became suddenly wide and full of light—a light not reflected only from the sunset but shining from within. At once emboldened and made timid, but above all young and intense, the boy burst out fervently: “If I had anything to offer you, Hope—Great God, dearest, what things I would say to you!”

“You have one thing”—her voice was low and vibrant, and it seemed to intoxicate him to a madness of joy—“that no one else can ever offer me.”

“I have only a love that’s all of me,” he broke out vehemently. “And love is a thing lots of fellows will offer you—fellows who have all the rest besides.”

“You’re the only one who has *your* love to offer,” she told him. “And that’s the only love I want.”

Then his arms went out and closed, and he felt her lips against his, and the sky and sea and woods became their playthings, and the world their exclusive empire.

Presently she said, “But you have another year at college yet and after that you have to get started in business. We’ll have to wait a long time, won’t we?”

“No,” he declared with a sudden decisiveness that made his well-shaped features go at a breath from boyishness to mature responsibility; “this is my last year at Harvard.”

“But there’s still your degree, Barb——”

“I’m through college, nonetheless. To-morrow I go to New York and see Mr. Shell. He’s dropped in on me once or twice when he’s been in Boston on business. There’s an opening there for me whenever I’m ready—not a big thing but a start—and I’m ready now. I’ve got to get my life launched, dearest—now that I know what course I’m trying to shape.”

“But I don’t want you to break off——”

“I’m not breaking off, dearest, I’m breaking in—breaking into life—and with what I know now I’m not afraid. I’m going to Beverly Brothers and they’re going to call me ‘our Mr. Sevens’, but before we end up, Hope dear, it’s going to be ‘our Beverly Brothers’.”

Barbour Sevens was looking down a vista of some elapsed years on that time now in the small New York apartment in which he and Hope had begun their life together.

The place had been big enough for the roots and branches of love to spread and blossom and grow strong. It had served for the testing of a vision and the fulfilment of a dream, but even Paradise was not large enough or secure enough, to remain uninvaded.

This morning the invasion had come to Sevens, though Hope had known of it sooner, and it had poisoned the air until Barbour Sevens felt himself strangled.

The blow had fallen as he had risen from the breakfast table, and Hope had risen with him and hesitated in something she was about to say.

She had hesitated only a moment, and then she had spoken with an assumption of casual matter-of-factness.

"The doctor won't come to-day," she had told him. "My bronchitis has been stubborn but he doesn't have to look in on me so often now."

"Thank God," exclaimed Sevens. "And now that you are on the mend I can admit how badly scared I was."

She smiled, and there was a wistfulness in her eyes that he did not miss. Suddenly he drew nearer and took her in his arms.

"Were you frightened too, dear?" he asked tenderly.

She shook her head, and then, forcing her words, she went on:

"Dr. Maxwell wants me to see Doctor Galvin."

Galvin! That was enough. Galvin's name was a synonym for exploration into deeper troubles. Galvin was the big lung specialist, and Sevens found himself gulping with a sudden paralysis of panic at his heart. He hadn't been prepared for that. He opened his lips and they closed again without words. It seemed that the world was reeling to the calamity of earthquake and volcano.

When a half hour later he took his hat from its peg

in the hall, he felt that he was a man who had undergone such change as made him a stranger to himself.

As he trudged along Fifth Avenue later in the day, in a rain that was half snow, Barbour Sevens flinched from the facing of fact and a wave of bitterness possessed him. The shoulders that had been broad enough to wear the crimson sweater at Harvard had rounded to a hated, clerical stoop. Tom Shell was largely responsible, he reflected, with that smoulder of resentment in his heart which in some temperaments makes anarchists. Shell had not only set his, Barbour's, feet on the first rung of the ladder, but had kept them chained there. Tom Shell, who had seemed his benefactor in the beginning, had developed into a task master who had exploited his energy and his vitality without due recompense.

Sevens had entered on his business life with the keen zest of a thoroughbred colt fighting for his head and full of the eagerness of contest, but looking back, he saw that he had been thought of and used only as a draft animal that must set its shoulders to heavy harness.

These were not new reflections, yet to-day they presented themselves before his mind with a sharp-cut clarity which they had not before possessed and focussed themselves out of chronic vagueness into the fixed shape of an issue.

Those afflictions that go with us, growing almost imperceptibly from day to day and from month to

month, have that trick of standing forth, suddenly acute. There comes the time when the shoe-sole that has been gradually wearing thin reveals a hole; when the hair that has needed trimming seems to become, all at once, unendurably shaggy and unkempt. There comes a day when the situation that has seemed to belong to the future must be squarely met in the present, and to Barbour Sevens, this seemed such a day.

The news that had shaken his personal world gave poignancy to this reviewing of his business life and this admission of its failure.

He had cut short his university course to come to Beverly Brothers at the invitation of Tom Shell, and from the first Tom Shell had taken him under the wing of paternalism.

Barbour grinned sardonically and bitterly now as he looked back, with the perspective of results, on those first days. Then, despite his own unassuming good nature, there had been heart-burnings in the office and talk among older employees of "Tom Shell's pet."

Then old Silas Beverly had died and Shell, who had played the "sedulous ape" through these years of studying his whims, stood in his stead. It was the position toward which he had built, this finding himself at the head of the concern and answerable only to its board of directors.

"Now," Barbour Sevens had thought, "my op-

portunity has come." To-day he remembered how that thought had intruded itself even while he, with his fellow workmen, had stood by the grave where the old chief was being buried.

"Yet if I could think of my own prospects as the funeral ritual was being recited," he mused with a grimly set jaw, "I thought of them solemnly enough and in terms of the service I meant to give. And I gave the service."

He *had* given the service. He had given it so well and with such a singleness of purpose that Tom Shell had been only a figure-head and he himself the originator of policies. In the old days, Shell had been something of a sycophant to old Silas, obeying orders with machine-like exactness and seeing that others obeyed them, too. Now he found himself falling more and more into the habit of relying on the quick mind of his subordinate for the smartness and initiative that he could not summon from his own slower and more cumbersome processes. He told himself that Sevens was given to experimentation and that this trait would be dangerous if allowed free rein, but that, subjected to his own sounder judgment, it became a convenience. The truth was that he had acquired the habit of the follower and could now display no quality of leadership save pompousness.

Barbour remembered the morning soon after the funeral, when Shell had moved into the mahogany-panelled office that had been Beverly's and had given

him a desk in the adjoining room, that had been Shell's own. They had talked that morning and out of the conversation, Sevens had brought a sense of bitter disillusionment.

He could not now recall the exact words in which the older man had couched his opinions, but he could remember the chill that had settled about his own heart with the recognition of his chief's self-seeking narrowness. It was obviously Tom Shell's idea that history should repeat itself. As he had studied and emulated Silas Beverly so, he thought, Sevens should study and emulate him—though that was hardly candid. What he wanted from Sevens was not emulation but assistance of an importance beyond that expressed by his title or his pay. He believed that Sevens, in giving such service, should submerge his own personality and satisfy himself with looking toward the succession when his chief stepped aside in retirement.

Shell overlooked—since its recognition might be mortifying—the fact that Sevens brought to his position assets of alertness and initiative which he himself had lacked, and that he preferred to climb by other means than the ladder of toadying.

Since then the house of Beverly Brothers had grown. The soundness of its business policies remained unshaken and its verve showed an infusion of youth. The directors, who read this result in immutable figures, rendered tribute to Shell and

knew nothing, or next to nothing, of the anonymous figure that stood behind Shell as the operator stands behind the curtain of the puppet-show.

In theory such a situation need not be long endured by a man of ability and spirit. In fact it is often endured.

"I might have pulled out long ago," reflected Sevens now. "But the fact is I didn't. I suppose other fur houses could have used me, but I'd have had to begin over from the bottom. Here the big chance seemed always just around the corner—and somehow the Beverly trade mark seemed like my own flag. I suppose I kidded myself into the idea that when I'd become just a shade more indispensable, I could write my own contract."

In one respect Shell had been clever. He maintained so well his front of lordly self-confidence that it was hard to carry to him the challenge of definite ultimatum. And in another way also Shell was clever. He managed always to intimate to the man himself a feeling of appreciation which he concealed from others, and always to be planning for a material recognition of that appreciation.

"Now, for years," Barbour told himself, "I've run that concern as actually as some petty kingdoms are run by their premiers—and yet I've never even been called an adviser. It's always seemed an absolute monarchy with Tom Shell on the throne—the seemingly strong man. Nobody would believe me

if I were to shout from the housetops that he's just a gilded dummy."

Then there was Hope!

Without capital, a man could not venture to break away from an employment which, to every seeming, held high possibilities for the uncertainty of a gamble in the dark. Repeatedly Sevens had urged his claims and always, at the end, he had found himself cozened with expectancies and no richer—or little richer—in salary or admitted importance.

The psychological truth was that Barbour Sevens was modest to a point of shyness. He, to whom the company owed an appreciable portion of its recent advancement, could not estimate himself as indispensable. He thought of the organization as a machine so soundly engineered that it could almost run itself on its initial impetus. He underestimated the esteem in which other houses held him and the readiness with which they would have welcomed him. He had been a poor boy to whom Tom Shell had vouchsafed a chance, and it was difficult to sweep aside his early gratitude and realize that he had grown to a larger stature and that Shell was seeking to wring him dry. In other points courageous, Barbour was in self-appraisal timid, and it was Tom Shell of the mediocre mind, who rightly gauged that situation and used it to advantage.

CHAPTER IV

SHELL had held fixed opinions about a young business man "making a front." He had persuaded Sevens, rather against his wishes and judgment, to join the club toward which he was walking now—walking with a grimly set face to resign from a membership that had profited him nothing. Tom Shell always lunched there, and Barbour could see him now, in his fancy, sitting self-complacently back at his table smoking his fat, after-luncheon cigar, a figure of animal-like selfishness and egotism. Hope, mused the young man, had been bound to the cramping limitations of his own life, because they had both been cheated and underpaid. She still swore that he had given her the one thing that no one else could ever give, but in his heart Barbour Sevens wondered whether he hadn't done for her what he had once done for Harvard: cheated her out of her chance of scoring in life.

To-day he was resolved on doing two things: he meant to lop off the useless expense of that club membership and to talk so plainly with Tom Shell that no ambiguities could again stand between them. Heretofore he had encountered evasions. To-day

he meant to batter them down—because to-day he was desperate. Perhaps, without realizing it, this was a time when his impatience would once again lead him into the impetuosity of being off-side in a decisive scrimmage. To-day he would no longer suffer himself to be put off.

He turned off of Fifth Avenue into the side street upon which stood the entrance to the club and paused in a writing room to scribble a few formal words of resignation. After that he went to the dining room where he knew in advance at what table Tom Shell would be sitting. Shell moved in an orbit of fixed habit as binding and as straitened as that of a petty planet. He could be relied on to be occupying a given corner of the lunch room at a given hour, and to be lounging in a specified arm chair by a particular Fifth Avenue window a half hour later.

Sevens saw him at a table with several others, as objectionably typical of successful business-men as himself. The party had reached their coffee and cigars, and the inevitable discussion, across crumpled napkins and filling ash trays, of the victory of the bootleggers over the Constitution. Barbour ordered a small coffee at an empty table near by and impatiently waited for his opportunity—and while he waited his eyes dwelt resentfully on the group that delayed his reckoning.

Shell had turned rat-gray, though he was hardly fifty. He had grown heavy and stolid. Selfishness

and conceit sat enthroned on his face, with a wooden self-complacency, while his talk bored his companions, who endured it only because, like himself, they were creatures encased in strait-jackets of habit.

At last the little clique reached their customary time of adjournment and, rising, pushed back their chairs. Then Sevens touched Shell on the arm.

"I'd like to talk to you," he said.

"Can't it wait till we get back to the office?" inquired the older man without warmth. "I don't like bringing business to the club. A gentleman's club——"

"This is personal—with me at least," Sevens interrupted. "You put me into this club. To-day I've resigned from it. During the years you and I have both been members here, we haven't often sat and chatted. Of course if you decline to do it now——"

"Oh, no. I didn't de-de-decline," stuttered Shell. "Let's go down to the lounging room. I always like to finish my cigar there by the window."

When the chief had settled himself well back in overstuffed upholstery, and propped his feet on an overstuffed stool, a picture of creature comfort, he said bluntly:

"I think it was a mistake for you—to resign. It doesn't do a young business man any harm to be seen here. It's good publicity. Makes a fellow appreciated."

“Does it make you appreciate me?” The question was curt, and Shell meditatively removed his cigar from his lips to contemplate his companion in surprise.

“I know you,” he said. “I d-d-don’t have to get my impressions of you here.”

“I’d like to ask you a question or two.” Sevens was weighing his words and speaking carefully. “As a business man who has observed me, I’d like to have you tell me just what you know about me Suppose you were jotting down a few lines for a card index of your force, their business assets and liabilities, I mean what would you file on my card?”

Shell turned his square blocked head and gazed out on the passing crowds along the slushy streets. The spectacle was less amusing than usual because so many umbrellas interfered with the outlook from the window.

“I’d say that you were incorruptible, intelligent, and t-t-trustworthy, my boy,” announced the older man at length, with a magisterial pompousness. “I’d say that you were a g-good office man.”

“In other words, that I’m an adequate drudge Yet you took me up in the first place because you thought you saw in me a disposition to play the game hard and with keenness.”

“I’d call you a hustler—p-perhaps a little lacking in conservatism.”

“Do you regard me as a prospect for advancement?”

Shell wrinkled his forehead. He at least was not lacking in conservatism and he had no wish to commit himself unduly.

“As opportunity p-permits—un-d-d-doubtedly,” he acceded at length. “I served my seven years for Rachel as it were. You m-must be patient, too.”

The speaker seemed to swell a little with pardonable pride as he mentally reviewed his own success, then he fell again into quotation. He liked to lard his talk bombastically with trite and memorized things. “You know, my boy, ‘He also serves who only stands and waits.’ ”

Sevens laughed shortly. “Serves whom?” he demanded; then, without pausing for an answer he went on:

“You like quotations, Mr. Shell. Did you ever read Alfred Noyes?”

“Yes,” the square-headed gentleman nodded, then with a sweep of his hand began:

“‘There’s a barrel organ carolling across the golden street——’ ”

“That’s not the one I mean,” his junior cut him short. “It’s this:

“‘A great while ago there was a school boy,
He lived in a cottage by the sea,
And the very first thing he could remember
Was the rigging of the schooners by the quay.’ ”

Sevens did not declaim his verse unctuously as Shell would have done. Unconsciously he leaned forward and spoke with a simple, almost passionate intensity:

“He could watch them, when he woke, from his window.
With the tall cranes hoisting out the freight.
And he used to think of shipping as a sea-cook.
And sailing to the Golden Gate.’”

“It has a nice swing,” said Shell censoriously. “But how does it apply?”

“That’s me,” declared Sevens, with a bleak and bitter emphasis. “Now for the actuality:

“He is perched on a high stool in London,
The Golden Gate is very far away.
They caught him and they caged him like a squirrel,
He is totting up accounts and growing gray.’

“What I want to know,” he demanded with a quick intake of breath, “is whether this last stanza is going to apply to me, too:

“He will never, never, never sail to Frisco,
But the very last thing that he will see
Will be the sailor-men a-dancing in the sunrise
By the capstan that stands upon the quay.’ . .

“I want to know whether that’s all I’ve got to look ahead to, Mr. Shell?”

“If you mean you want to know whether B-B-Beverly B-Brothers will ever send you sailing to the

G-G-Golden Gate," responded the chief with heavy humour, "I c-c-c-can only say, I'm afraid not."

"I'm not asking favours for myself," went on Sevens steadily. "And if I weren't there with the goods of course I couldn't get on. But I know I am and you know I am—and I'm not willing to have Hope eternally bound to this treadmill of poverty with me while others go ahead."

"When a young man marries so young as you did," observed Shell drily, "he gives hostages to fortune. I think it was Bacon who said that."

"Has my being married affected my value to Beverly Brothers?"

"No, I didn't mean that, exactly. It fetters a man's independence, though."

"Then you must mean, Mr. Shell, that because you know I've given hostages to fortune, you're exploiting me by the strangle hold of my necessity. You must mean that you think I don't dare rebel."

For an instant the heavy face grew dark under a scowl-cloud and the first words of wrath lost themselves in excited stuttering. It was a paroxysm that passed and Shell, who had half straightened in affront, sank back again to wave his cigar in a decisive gesture. In his tone was the stubborn finality of a solid mind.

"You c-can rebel—if you like."

For just a moment Barbour Sevens was silent. His face had paled a little. He realized that he had

committed the unforgivable sin of wounding this man's smug sense of virtue, and he could guess the penalty. Perhaps the tableau or the quality of the voices was arresting, for behind his paper, in a nearby chair, an elderly member found himself distracted into listening.

"Hope has had bronchitis," declared Sevens irrelevantly, "and it's hung on stubbornly. To-day she's seeing a lung specialist—and I'm afraid to go home to-night. I'm afraid of what the report will be . . . She's got to go somewhere . . . to get out of this damned slush and chill. That takes money."

"If your wife is ill," responded Shell in a hard voice, "it would seem an injudicious time to face unemployment."

"To a friendly superior—if an employee deserved it—it ought to seem a proper time for long delayed recognition."

"That," commented the chief, "is not the way Beverly Brothers does business." Shell looked at his watch. "It's time for us both to be getting back to the office," he said.

Sevens rose too, but his eyes suddenly blazed, and he laid a detaining hand on the other's arm.

"I suppose I've cooked my goose," he declared with that strain which passion brings to a low-pitched voice. "I've got the name and I might as well have the game. You can give me what's coming to me—

a material promotion, or you can let me go. I know that when you do that you'll bawl me out and I mean to beat you to it . . . I thought you were my benefactor when you offered friendly advances there at Cambridge . . . I thought you were opening up the future to me . . . but you were only caging me, like the squirrel in those verses—caging me in an ante-chamber where you could keep me and use me . . . You'd submitted to slavery all your life . . . you'd suffered yourself to be hector'd and brow-beaten till at last you got your chance to turn from slave to slave driver . . . and you went to it . . .”

He paused while the other stuttered ineffectually in the face of such appalling insolence, but before Shell recovered his command of crushing words Sevens had swept into a fresh torrent of rebellion.

“My work has been faithful and responsible . . . I've saved you many times what my increased salary would be and I've handled matters of prime importance . . . I've done everything but boot-lick . . . as you did when you served for Rachel as you call it. That I won't do . . . You advise against marriage because marriage cramps pig-headed selfishness . . . and as you sit there, you're a figurehead of pig-headed selfishness, with no resources outside your swinish little routine of creature comfort and self praise . . . Now I'm through! Am I promoted—or fired?”

For an instant Shell said nothing, but the near-by gentleman noted his apoplectic face, and though he pretended not to have heard what he had heard, he grinned blissfully behind his paper. "The old bore got what was coming to him," he mused. "I hope it was worth what it'll cost that young fool who lashed out."

Then Shell spoke, and he spoke with a surprising quiet.

"You're neither p-promoted nor fired—just yet," he said in a hard evenness. "But we are both late getting back. I'll give you a chance to cool out under the collar, and to apologize later."

Sevens laughed bitterly. "You need me even more than I supposed," he said with dry defiance.

CHAPTER V

THAT afternoon passed, in some unaccountable fashion. The impulse of habit was carrying Barbour Sevens through its routine like an automaton previously wound up; through dictation, conference, and even the exercise of a nice business judgment, yet he seemed only semi-conscious of the processes.

The office knew by some sixth sense of intuition, rather than by any overt manifestation, that a breach had opened between the chief and this important lieutenant, and the office fell tacitly into the taking of sides. A popularity vote that afternoon would have gone hard with Shell.

Once Sevens paused during dictation and looked at the watch that lay before him on his desk. It was four o'clock now That was the hour fixed for Hope to present herself before the diagnostician, whose word was so nearly final in his own field.

He pretended to be concentrating on the letter under construction but as he turned away his face his lips twitched at their corners, and about his eyes the muscles constricted to tightness.

"She's hearing the verdict now," he reflected. "Good God!"

The stenographer looked up. "Period?" she inquired promptly. "Does that end the sentence?"

"Period—Paragraph," dictated the man in his usual voice. "'The present conditions in the fur market make it necessary——'" and he listened to the sound of his own voice as if it were droning upward from some remote, subterranean source.

He left the elevated train at his station and turned into his own street that evening, as into a familiar place made unfamiliar by the stroke of some disastrous blight. He must get to Hope and have the suspense relieved by knowledge—and yet knowledge was more likely to confirm than dissipate his dread. At the door of his own apartment house he halted, obsessed by a sudden, intolerable paroxysm of fear. All verdicts are not brought out of jury rooms nor are all like sentences for prison terms.

After that trembling moment he lunged through the street door much as he might have plunged through a curtain of flame, had the building been burning with actual instead of fright-kindled fires.

But with his key in the door of his apartment he braced himself, forcing a smile of mock confidence, and slipped quietly into the narrow entryway from which he could see unobstructedly into the small living room.

Hope sat there and she had not yet heard him. Her

hands were lying in her lap with a wax-like stillness and her face was unstimulating of feature; stamped with something like bleak resignation, which was the nearest her intrepid courage would come to the admission of despair. Her profile was no less lovely, he thought, than it had been, when her eyes had first widened into confessed love, but now it was paler and less graciously rounded to its curves.

Sevens sprang forward and his carefully rehearsed words of cheery greeting refused to say themselves.

Hope rose suddenly and the smile, upon which she had also resolved, came so artfully to her lips that its counterfeiting was almost a success.

"What did he say?" demanded her husband, with the unrelieved bluntness of terror.

He had her in his arms holding her hungrily, defiantly, and her answer came softly, close to his ear.

"It isn't like it used to be, dear," she declared. "Nowadays, if we take a thing like that in time, we can beat it."

"A thing like that," he echoed wretchedly. "Then——"

"He's not ready to speak with absolute certainty yet," she answered. "Some of the tests aren't finished. He calls it a strong tendency—perhaps an incipient stage—and only in one lung. He says that with rest and nourishment, I ought to beat it."

"Rest and nourishment!" A hint of hope had stolen into the man's voice, but at once it faded out.

“You’re not telling me all of it,” he accused. “Was rest and nourishment all he said?”

She drew away and looked into his face. She was even able to flash a wan little sparkle of amusement from her vivid eyes, because she was strong with the courage of laughter.

“That’s all—so far as we can carry out the orders,” she answered. “Of course, like all doctors, he recommended a change of climate—the mid South or Lake Placid.”

“Did he recommend or command?” The question came with a categorical insistence, and Hope laughed.

“What difference does the word make, dear?” she said, smiling. “How could we obey, if it was a command?”

The man’s face was stonily set.

“I don’t know—how,” he said slowly. “But I do know that it shall be done—if I have to break into the sub-treasury single-handed. I know that much.”

“Don’t be silly,” she commanded. “We’ll win out. We must just avoid getting panicky.”

“I wonder whether you know what you mean to me, Hope,” he demanded in a stifled voice. “I wonder if you know how little anything else, and everything else, counts with me. To me the world began when we stood in those pine woods on Cape Cod—and the gulls were screaming as they drifted over. To me the world would end if——”

He broke off and she answered a shade huskily: "Perhaps I do know. You haven't only said it. You've lived it. We won't admit any 'ifs' yet."

He sat long after Hope had gone to bed that night, staring ahead, and it is doubtful if the brick and plaster of the walls were obstructing the things he saw. He wondered whether she was really asleep or only pretending to be, so that her seeming calmness might still the febrile excitement in his own heart. He wanted to pace the room, but in so small an apartment there was no latitude for pacing so he sat stiffly facing the haunting, shapeless assailants of his dread. Through that confusion, in which sanity grew unstable, the figure of Tom Shell passed and repassed, converted by his mood into a specter of persecution. It was almost as if the words of the physician had been dictated by Tom Shell, as if of intent his employer had blockaded their life and deprived them of those simple requirements which would have been artillery for the meeting of this impalpable enemy.

The telephone jangled stridently in the confined space, and with a smothered oath Sevens jumped for it and caught the receiver down, muffling the bell with his open palm. He wondered whether it had wakened Hope perhaps from some quiet dream of green and blue serenities and of an undisturbed childhood by the sea.

"Who is it?" he demanded in low-toned fury and a

jaunty voice came back, "Hello, Sevens. This is Joe Mandelle. I'm down at the door, seeking admittance."

"Sorry," Barbour's response was inhospitably curt. "I can't ask you up. My wife isn't very well and——"

"Oh, I'm sorry," the voice was incorrigibly brisk and cheerful. Also it was insistent. "Just run down here for a few minutes, then, will you? I won't keep you long."

Sevens turned his head and peered into the darkness beyond the living-room door. It was quiet there and seemingly undisturbed.

"I'll be down," he acceded grudgingly.

What could Mandelle want of him? Mandelle and he had known each other during the first year at Harvard but they had never been intimates and they had not met since those college times. Sevens remembered him as a slender, academic chap with a shrewd wit, who, he had heard vaguely, was practising law nowadays.

"Cheero, old son," greeted the visitor when Barbour stepped out of the dingy elevator cage. "I haven't seen you since long before the Germans became Huns." There he broke off and added soberly, "What's up? You look as if you'd been seeing ghosts."

"I have," came the flat-toned reply. "I'm seeing them still."

As Barbour met his visitor's inquiring glance, he gathered a first, swift impression of enviable prosperity, and the self-assurance born of success.

Barbour Sevens was not given to the spouting of confidences and this man, whom he had not seen in years, had never been close to his affections. The inhibition of almost exaggerated reserve would usually have locked his tongue, but to-night his soul was like an overstressed boiler which must ease its pressure or burst, and the visitor's sympathy, declaring itself without obtrusiveness, offered a safety valve. Contrary to everything that was customary in his habit of life, Barbour Sevens found himself talking rapidly, torrentially. He was hardly conscious of his own flow or direction of words until he came up short with the realization that he had just reached a sort of peroration with a vehement denunciation of Tom Shell. He had done that unaccustomed thing to a man who was almost a stranger.

"I oughtn't to have said that, Mandelle," he hastily qualified in a shamefaced fashion. "I've been making a fool of myself. I'm not quite myself to-night. I'm in a sort of frenzy."

"It's all right," Mandelle reassured him quietly. "You may unburden yourself to me and be sure that it will be held in absolutely Masonic confidence. I know how you feel, and it's not unreasonable. Aside from stress of feeling, you have a grievance.

The fur trade recognizes that you're the brains of that outfit, and that Shell is jealous of your ability. It's an open secret among your business associates."

Sevens passed his hand across his forehead and found it dank with nervous sweat.

"But you're a lawyer," he demurred in some bewilderment. "You aren't a fur man. How do you know about Shell—or me?"

The visitor smiled. "They say that lawyers and reporters have to know something about everything—and then to forget it," he observed. "It was about the fur business that I came to see you to-night. I want to learn more than I know and I want you to have lunch with me to-morrow and give me some pointers."

"Pointers?" Barbour was still uncertainly groping toward self-collection.

"You see," went on Mandelle in explanation, "the fur trade is frightened. The present epidemic of warehouse robberies seems to have gotten entirely out of the hands of the police. Every night brings a fresh outrage, boldly conceived, and successfully carried out. The smaller dealers feel that they must mobilize in some fashion to resist burglary . . . and that's where I come in."

"As a prosecutor?" inquired Sevens.

His visitor shook his head. "There's no one caught to prosecute yet," he offered reminder. "It's rather along lines of prevention, but if you'll lunch

with me to-morrow we can take that up. I won't keep you now."

"Why, yes," assented Barbour with a dull realization that, after all, there would be a to-morrow with its requirements of routine. "Yes, I can do that."

"And meanwhile, old man"—the attorney flushed as though embarrassed at his own suggestion—"would a small loan help you out?"

Sevens flushed, too, and raised a hand in a gesture of refusal.

"No, no. Thank you just the same," he protested. "It's a thing that goes deeper than that need—and I've got to work it out myself."

"Until to-morrow, then, at noon—and to hell with Shell."

As he entered the elevator cage again, somehow Sevens felt as if he had opened a pressure vent and loosened the bursting tautness of his soul.

Mandelle walked away and turned the corner with an air of meditative engrossment. Before his steps had carried him far, he went into a cigar store and closed himself into a public telephone booth from which he called a number and announced to someone with crisp satisfaction, "I've seen our man and I'm to lunch with him to-morrow."

Listening to the other voice, he made a note or two, and when he had hung up, consulted his watch and hurried out as though his night's business was not yet finished. For some distance his course held to

Sixth Avenue, then it turned into a cross-street of the upper twenties between the elevated tracks and Broadway.

It was about ten o'clock and that cross artery, which at the noon hour was almost impassably congested with heavy-browed workmen of Slavic and Semitic features, was now sounding and empty. Russian and Polish names showed out from the street signs, and most of them proclaimed furriers of the smaller wholesale guild.

Mandelle looked up and down the almost deserted block, and altered his gait to stroll slowly along its darkly walled ways as if bent on reconnoitring a district where robbery had been prevalent. He even paused and lingered in a doorway for a little, though he smoked his cigar in the darkness, as a man would not have done upon whom rested any wish for concealment.

While he still stood in that fashion, a large motor car came westward from Fifth Avenue and about midway in the block it slowed down. Mandelle stepped out of his entrance alcove, and as he did so the light of a street lamp fell direct upon him, and made him clearly visible. The machine which was just now passing him rolled on at an even speed and then halted across the way, two thirds of the distance between Broadway and Sixth Avenue.

Out of it four men came hurriedly, one walking a few steps west, one an equal distance east, while

two others went, with unhesitant precision, to the doorway of a building whose windows were piled with pelts and skins, and fell expeditiously to work upon its lock with a jimmy.

Mandelle could see that the two sentinel figures were peering vigilantly up and down the street and that at the side of each, where a right hand swung easily at arm's length, there was the dull glint of light on blued metal.

From the doorway came the sound of violent assault, then, following tumultuously on the recent stillness of the street, the brazen clangour of a disturbed burglar alarm. It was as if the thieves belonged to some boisterous burlesque instead of to a profession of stealth and furtiveness, and as if they had started out warehouse-breaking attended by a particularly unmusical brass band.

The car at the curb, with its engine purring to a muffled throb, stood waiting, and the two sentinels remained as calm to outward seeming as though they were lawful peace-guardians on peg-post duty.

Mandelle, or any one else who had been reading the papers of late, would have recognized these manifestations as pertaining to an evilly dramatic enterprise which had recently been much exploited in news-print.

The method was one which had so far been repeatedly successful, and it looked as though it were proving successful once again. The attorney who

had been in quest of academic information for his professional work seemed to have stumbled, by fortuitous circumstance, upon a highly practical object lesson. He might have known the procedure from his daily reading and have seen it here exemplified in fact. The burglar alarm would bring the police hot-footing to the spot in four or five minutes In that time the door would have given, the pelts, previously reconnoitred by innocent-seeming scouts in the guise of customers, would have been gathered up and pitched into the waiting car.

The assaulting squad would have swung aboard and the getaway would have been accomplished. Incidentally, history showed that any meddling passerby would have been shot.

In that last detail perhaps lay a moral on non-interference for Mr. Mandelle. Certainly the sight of him standing under the arclight had in no way caused the occupants of the raiding car to halt or retard their undertaking. Now he felt as if he were timing a race of which he knew the terms and conditions.

Mandelle stepped back into his doorway, this time cupping his palm about the lighted end of his cigar, and watched unobtrusively, as one who avails himself of an unexpected illustration. His eye took in the pertinent fact that the license number on the car was obscured, as though it had been recently greased and driven over dusty roads.

Out of the breached door staggered one man

heavily laden with a shapeless burden of plunder. At each end of the block, echoing blatantly to the jangle of the excited bell, appeared inquisitive figures first drifting timidly, then running with emboldened speed toward the focus of excitement. The lookouts turned, each his appointed way, and each warningly brought up the hand that gripped its automatic pistol.

The vanguard of scurrying investigators caught the metallic gleam and prudently slowed down. From the car came a profane objurgation to someone to hurry. The operation depended upon its completion in a given, and narrow, margin of time. One of the two men who had hurried in through the jimmied door had not yet emerged, and his tardiness held the threatening seed of disaster.

Joe Mandelle had slipped unobtrusively out of his shelter and moved a short distance away. Now as the first of the hurrying casuals, urged on by his responsibility of citizenship, yet held back, too, by the monitory gleam of the pistol, came alongside, the lawyer passed him, crossing the street at a run, and calling out, "Thieves! Catch 'em, men! Stop 'em!"

As though his ardour were carrying him headlong beyond the zone of caution, Mandelle found himself suddenly the only man who had come close to the flanking outpost. As he arrived ten feet away, he saw the belated burden-bearer rush out and hurl his

loot into the car. This last to emerge had lost his cap and above his bundle of furs showed a mop of red hair. At the same instant Mandelle became conscious of a pistol muzzle directed at his breast, as the wielder of the weapon, his need of tarrying brought to an end, began backing toward the machine.

Mandelle sought to stop, but his running feet carried him a stride or two closer, and then the muzzle was almost against him. As if he had been a billiard ball striking a side cushion he caromed back, ostentatiously lifting both hands above his head, and backing off almost as rapidly as he had been trotting forward.

But in the interval, under the incandescent light, the lawyer had deliberately closed and opened one eye, as if in an elaborate wink, and under his voice had said, "Michell's—in an hour."

The sentry made a dash for the car and caught step on its running board as it lurched forward. The outpost beyond jumped for it as it passed him and was hauled expeditiously aboard. As the machine darted for Sixth Avenue, pistol shots sounded from behind Mandelle, and a light fusillade answered truculently from the fleeing car. The attorney flattened himself against the wall, and a moment later was telling the patrolman all he knew, except that he deleted from his narrative any mention of the wink and the whispered word.

In substantiation of his own reputable status, he

handed the officer his card upon which was engrossed the legend "Attorney at Law" and the address of his office.

"I'll tell the world you're a nervy guy, running right in on them guns," observed the policeman admiringly, and the lawyer shook his head in deprecation of the compliment.

"If I'd had a gun myself," he began, and the officer laughed.

"If you'd had a gun, buddy," he announced vigorously, "they'd be motoring you to a cooling board at the present time. I'll say they would."

CHAPTER VI

AS ALREADY recorded, Mr. Mandelle had whispered across the muzzle of the gunman's automatic, "Michell's—in an hour," and when the theatre crowds were spilling out into Broadway, he turned into the designated establishment and took his seat at a table as distant as possible from the dancing floor and the orchestra—though as yet he was alone. There within ten minutes he was joined by a companion of personable appearance and creditably inconspicuous dress. This newcomer who dropped into a chair across the table was not the same who had confronted the lawyer with a pistol between them an hour earlier—yet his first words indicated that he had arrived in response to the whispered summons relayed from that time and place. "I got your message," were the exact words, "and I'm here, though it's been a busy evening and I hoped to get home early."

Mandelle nodded. The long room of Michell's second floor was filling now and the orchestra was swinging into action.

"What did the job amount to?" demanded the lawyer, and the other shrugged.

“Paid fairly well,” he said. “It ought to run to seven or eight thousand, I should say—but the same effort might have netted double.”

“Nobody got winged, did they? The police were laying down a pretty heavy barrage on them as they made the getaway . . . Red was slow on his exit cue. It was like a stage-wait in a melodrama.”

The gentleman across the table shrugged again.

“That last load that Red brought out was the prize package,” he enlightened. “It had been moved to another shelf since our scout made his size-up of the shop . . . Red had to hunt for it . . . and he wasn’t the lad to pass it up. Red’s thorough-going.”

There was a pause. Then the lawyer’s companion questioned abruptly and almost with asperity: “Why did you send for me? I wanted to get a night’s rest.”

“So did I,” responded Mr. Mandelle quietly, “but I wanted to talk to you more about new business—that may need your attention.”

“Shoot, then,” instructed the other crisply. “What’s on your mind that couldn’t wait?”

“Who is the Tiffany of the fur business in New York?” demanded Mandelle in a manner of abrupt challenge, and the other man let his irritability declare itself in his answering voice.

“What’s the big idea of the catechism? However, I’ll bite, Mr. Interlocutor. Who is the Tiffany

of the fur trade? . . . Why, Beverly Brothers, who else?"

Mandelle nodded. "Correct, Mr. Bones," he responded lightly. "And is the best too good for you? Why shouldn't you do a little business with Beverly Brothers?"

The gentleman facetiously addressed as Mr. Bones favoured his questioner with a pitying glance of a moment's duration, then he shook his head commiseratingly.

"Now listen, Mandelle," he suggested softly. "You're a good snappy thinker but, after all, a lawyer is only half a crook. Breaking into Tiffany's and breaking into somebody else's boiled egg are all the same to you—because you're an onlooker."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"All right, I'll answer it. We haven't stripped the Beverly warehouses for exactly the same reason that Tiffany's isn't looted every night."

"Which is?"

"Which is because it's Tiffany's. Did you ever notice the steel window curtains they draw down there at eventide? Did you ever observe sundry other precautions that they uncharitably take against such laudable ambitions? Have you ever passed the place after dark?"

"Beverly Brothers have no steel curtains on their warehouses in Twenty-seventh Street and Thirtieth Street—nor yet in the Bronx."

“Righto. But Beverly Brothers have an investment worth safe-guarding—and I fancy they do it.” An avid light flashed in the speaker’s eyes. “Why, man, they have silver foxes in there!”

“They are dead foxes,” Mr. Mandelle offered casual reminder. “They can’t bite you.”

“Sheep don’t bite you either—but sheep dogs do.”

Mandelle leaned forward and his eyes narrowed.

“Suppose you had inside help,” he suggested.

His companion looked across the table with a face first amazed, then derisive, and after that his voice came up from unplumbed depths of scorn.

“Is Tom Shell going to help me?” he demanded, then he shook his head decisively. “No, even if Tom Shell decided to rob himself I wouldn’t work with him. He’s too dense.”

“Can the comedy relief, Joe,” ordered Mandelle with abrupt crispness. “Sometimes what I have to say may be worth listening to. It’s not Shell I’m talking about.”

He paused impressively and his face was neither more nor less conspicuously arresting of expression than that of the other diners about him, as he resumed:

“I mean Barbour Sevens.”

“Sevens! Listen, Mandelle, why don’t you suggest getting the Bishop of New York to help us loot St. Patrick’s?”

“Barbour Sevens,” went on Mandelle in unper-
turbed evenness, “is sore.”

“He’d have to be not only as sore as a crab but as
crooked as a dog’s hind leg, for that to help us.”

“I went to college with him,” proceeded the lawyer.
“He’s honest enough, but right now he’s unbalanced.
He’s nursing the kind of grudge that’s looking for
revenge—though he doesn’t realize it himself yet.
He needs money to send a sick wife south. The
man’s half crazed.”

“But you say yourself he’s straight.”

Mandell laughed shortly. “Wrangling over psy-
chology won’t get us anywhere. My idea is that
any boiler will burst if you give it enough pressure.
This man is ripe for bursting. He’s been gypped
and he’s ready to hit back—only he’s got to be made
to see it and that’s where you come in.”

Across the table his companion was drumming
thoughtfully on the cloth with his fingers—and that
trick was, with him, a confession of challenged
interest.

“This business is sittin’ right pretty just now,”
he reflected. “But I’m not saying it couldn’t be
improved. Elaborate your idea. I’m listening,
only remember you can’t always trust a straight
guy to play on the level with crooks.”

“Possibly,” commented Mandelle drily. “You
are unduly harsh of judgment. All I suggest is that
you give this man a careful once-over. He’s going

to lunch with me to-morrow at Piggott's. You know the place. If he looks like a prospect to you—we can talk again. If not, there's nothing lost but a half hour of daylight."

More detail of discussion ensued while the orchestra blared the length of the room away and finally Mandelle admitted a misgiving of his own.

"I'm bound to admit I don't see just how you'll go about entering into negotiation with him—if he strikes you as a ripe possibility. That looks ticklish."

The other laughed, or perhaps it would be better to say snorted, scornfully.

"Leave that to me," he directed. "You amateurs always fall hard for a proposition that's next to impossible and then you always flounder around and get excited about the easy angles. Leave that to me. If this lad's ripe, I'll gather him in. If he isn't, I won't even shake the tree."

When Hope Sevens awoke later than usual the next morning she found Barbour draped in one of her own kitchen aprons and busy over the gas-range.

While they breakfasted, as if by some tacit agreement, they smiled across the little table and said nothing of the news that yesterday had brought with the crushing impact of disaster. But Barbour's toast and eggs came near choking him as he thought how even this small apartment would be as widely

empty to him as the wastes about the Pole—if he should find himself alone between its walls. He had not told Hope of his quarrel with Shell and this morning he saw, in that lashing out of yesterday, the unforgivable folly of a man who, because he has been denied a full feast, has cast away his half loaf. He held her tightly close as he kissed her good-bye, and his cheerfully chosen words fell into a dismal bleakness which she pretended not to recognize.

When he entered the office of Beverly Brothers, the glass door to Shell's own cubicle of authority stood ajar and at the mahogany desk sat Shell himself with a morning paper spread before him and a threatening scowl on his face. He looked up as Sevens entered and nodded curtly but, in the quick glance that he cast upon his subordinate, he recognized that Sevens was haggard and pallid of seeming, and that under his eyes were puffs and smudges that reflected a sleepless night. Yesterday, the chief reflected, that same face with its square-blocked jaw had been a fighting face of revolt. To-day its features were stamped and haunted by worry. Its spirit seemed tamed, even cowed. Perhaps Sevens would come forward submissively now with his apology.

But Sevens proffered no apology. He went in taciturn fashion to his own desk and it was only when the chief called to him that he rose and entered the other room.

“Have you read the morning paper, Sevens?” came the first inquiry and the younger man shook his head in moody negation.

“Well, cast your eye over that.” Shell was sputtering with wrath. “Read about that fur robbery l-l-last night. That place isn’t two b-b-blocks from one of our own warehouses . . . ten thousand worth of pelts according to this report taken out and loaded into a car . . . while the burglar alarm rang . . . and the d-d-damned police took their ease in their station-house!”

Sevens glanced down the column of the proffered sheet and his only comment was, “Cool work.”

“Cool work! D-d-damn it, man, that’s the seventh such crime in two weeks, and the police have d-done n-n-nothing. Nothing at all!”

“No.” The monosyllable was dully unexcited.

“I’ve already had some telephone talk about it with the trade.” Shell gathered up some memoranda from his desk. “They all feel that the time’s come to take some action—some d-definite action. W-what do you suggest?”

“Nothing, ” answered the younger man bleakly.

“Nothing? H-h-haven’t you any ideas?”

To Shell’s fresh astonishment Sevens laughed ironically. In Sevens, who had come ready to eat humble pie, because the need was imperative, a sudden and gusty anger leaped anew. An uncontrollable impulse of rage swept him impetuously, and

once more he realized that in the moment of scrimmage he was playing offside.

“Why should I make suggestions?” he inquired in an edged voice. “I’m only a damned hired man—an office drudge.”

The chief’s face reddened hotly. He spun round in his swivel chair and gazed at his subordinate, then stammeringly he broke out.

“If you’re going t-t-to t-talk like that, p-perhaps you’ll be good enough to c-c-close the door.”

But Barbour, standing in his place, made no move to obey and slowly Tom Shell rose himself and slammed the glass-topped barrier of his sanctum. Then he went back to his desk.

“Sevens,” he began, with a slow utterance meant to be sternly forceful and also impressively temperate, “after yesterday and t-this m-morning, it’s hard to see any spirit in you except a d-determination to antagonize me b-b-beyond re-c-conciliation. In my place most men would—l-l-let you go. No man is indispensable to any b-b-business.”

Barbour made no response. There seemed none to make. He realized that in spite of all common sense he had asked for the decapitating blow which was about to fall and it was too late to retract. What he did not realize was that, for all his insubordination, Shell could not do without him.

But the man sitting at his desk did realize it even while he sought to disguise the recognition under the

spirit of one wounded by ingratitude. He could not bring himself either to dropping the young pilot or to giving him the full credit of his title, and so he sat wagging his heavy-jawed head in injured perplexity.

"I t-taught you all you know, Sevens," he added somewhat aggrievedly. "Have you other employment in view?"

The last question came in a surprisingly quiet tone, and suddenly the subordinate felt himself placed on the defensive, his frothy bubble of bravado pricked into nothingness.

He had moved a step forward and his face, which with its clean-cut jaw had been, for an instant, the fighting face again, went abruptly pale. With sudden giddiness he groped for a chair and dropped into it, covering his eyes with his hands.

The cumulative stresses and alarms of the past twenty-four hours, the sleeplessness and exhaustion of spent passion, had all at once struck him weak.

"No," he said dully, "I have nothing else in view."

Shell's jaw had dropped a bit at the unaccustomed sight of such agitation in this ordered place of business routine. It left him in a situation which called for something like subtlety, and subtlety was an attribute which he could not command. Then he rose and took a step forward.

"You're under a n-nervous strain, Sevens," he magnanimously asserted. "Your anxiety about

your w-wife has upset you. For the present we'd both better agree to overlook h-hastiness of speech. We're under fire right now—we're declaring war on these crooks, and you can't quit us on the eve of battle. When the fight with outsiders is over, we can take up things nearer home."

Sevens nodded and Shell, relieved at having held his man in line, told himself that he had behaved with a handsome generosity. To himself he mused, "Sevens is a hard child to nurse—but valuable. Most men would have broken with him, but I handled it more delicately. I gave him his head and now he'll come round all right."

Into Piggott's place at twelve-thirty Sevens turned with Joe Mandelle, and the two found themselves seated at a table which commanded an outlook through a street window. As they had paused to check their coats in the entrance a gentleman, who had already done so, stood waiting there as if by appointment with some one who was taxing his patience by tardiness. Before their order had been given this gentleman took his place, still alone, at a table next to theirs which, until his coming, had been labelled, "Reserved."

Once more, responsive to the seductive invitation of Mandelle's sympathy, Sevens found himself digressing from the topic he had come to discuss and reverting to that other and sorer topic which lay closer to his bruised emotions. His face was still stamped

with the after-markings of such rebellion and panic as attack and demoralize a man's reason and the tremour of his hand proclaimed the recent shaking of an equinoctial storm at the centre of his nerves.

While they still sat at table the man who had been intently, though unobtrusively, watching them, rose and left the restaurant. He had seen enough.

"The trusted employee is wobbling," he told himself as he went out. "The prospect is ripe, and I see the way to get to him."

CHAPTER VII

HAVING plumbed, as he believed, the depths of depression, Barbour Sevens had swung to a short-lived reaction of specious cheerfulness. Action of any sort has its tonic properties and Sevens had sought action in computing to dime and penny the forces of such financial reserves as he could, under the pressure of need, throw into the breach. There were the two low-denomination Liberty bonds and the cash surrender value of the voracious life insurance policy which he had doggedly kept alive on its diet of premiums since his marriage. Sacrificing it was like looting a temple, yet resolve brought the feeling of turning at bay to face an enemy, and an enemy faced loses something of its fearsomeness. In his pockets too were bright-coloured folders from a travel bureau proclaiming the charm and healing magic of certain mid-south resorts where the mocking birds sing in winter and the pictures showed women in sports clothes and men playing polo.

Hope had called up to say that her little sister Faith had unexpectedly arrived for a brief visit, and the pig-tailed child must not read his despair.

A fierce pride made it imperative that he should not stand branded as a failure in the eyes of even so young a representative of Hope's family.

But when he entered his apartment he came up short in astonishment, for his sister-in-law had, in the eighteen months since he had seen her, stolen a march on him. She was no longer the freckled kid, specializing in assorted mischief, but a transformed young creature grown into a rather dazzling and willowy beauty of first womanhood.

That was a situation he could ordinarily have met with a delighted laughter. Now it chilled and shocked him with an almost tragic realization of contrast, because it was as though this were not Faith at whom he was looking, but Hope, as she had stood, vividly colourful and youthfully palpitant in the pine woods on that day a few years back; as if, in the deadliness of parallel, he read how the years had touched and frosted the greater loveliness of his wife, and how sickness had paled her bloom. To his own heart he laid the blame for the agencies that had wrought this change. For a shaken moment, he could hear again the whisper of the wind through the pines, the voice of the sky-drifting gulls. He remembered the confident boast, which he had failed to realize, "Then it will be *our* Beverly Brothers."

"What do you think of me?" Faith demanded. "You haven't seen me since I was a mere child, have you?"

"I think," he responded with a mock gravity, "that you bear the weight of your years remarkably well. I suppose you want me to be brutally honest in my criticism, don't you?"

"You can be reasonably honest," she retorted, "but let your criticism be constructive."

"I don't think," he ruled judicially, "you'll ever hold a candle to your sister. But I believe you'll acquit yourself creditably in competition with your own class."

"And what might my 'own class' be?" she demanded.

"All the other beatitudes—except Hope," he made generous admission. "Except for her, the sky's the limit."

Outwardly it was a gay dinner, but the strain of its forced mirthfulness weighed on Barbour Sevens, whose spirits had ebbed with re-awakened thought of his own failure, and when Faith had begun putting jazz records on the phonograph, he slipped away for the burning out of his restlessness in exercise along streets that now lay snow-blanketed.

His steps carried him from Tenth Street, in which stood his own apartment house, to Fifth Avenue, where the arc lights were like opals, each circled with its halo through the snow-mist. He walked south toward the white solidity of the Arch and Washington Square, and as he passed the lighted doorway and pavement canopy of the Brevoort, he realized that a

man had fallen into step with him and was accosting him.

"May I have a word or two with you, Mr. Sevens?" came the courteous inquiry, and Sevens, racking his brain in the embarrassment of a futile effort at recognition, responded vaguely:

"Surely . . . I'm sorry, but I fail to place you, somehow."

The other man laughed.

"That's pardonable enough. You've never met me before. Shall we take a turn over there across the Square while I explain?"

Puzzled, yet with only a tepid interest, and following the path of least resistance, Sevens nodded his acquiescence.

The two had crossed the snowy area of asphalt and passed around the Arch before the stranger spoke again. When he did so, his words were couched in a calmness that contradicted their startling purport, and Sevens halted to draw back and scrutinize his companion through incredulous eyes.

"I know more about you than you would suspect, Mr. Sevens, because I've made it my business to find out. My profession makes exactions of that sort. You see, I'm a crook."

"A crook?" echoed Sevens. Then in an unreceptive tone he inquired, "What do you want with me?"

"That takes a bit of explaining, but first let me say, though you don't look like a timid man, that

I've no idea of trying to victimize you. We talk under a flag of truce and you needn't have any anxiety."

"I haven't," retorted Sevens shortly. "But I'm sure you're wasting your time and mine."

"I won't waste much, Mr. Sevens. That's a matter I guard against. You are asking yourself, 'Why does a total stranger introduce himself with a confession of dishonesty and permit me to study his appearance?' I'll answer that question this way: I make the declaration because we can go no farther until it is understood. As for the second matter, I might walk into any police station in New York to-night as safely as yourself. Headquarters has no dossier recorded opposite my name—no thumb-prints or Rogues' Gallery portrait. Whatever statement you might make to the desk sergeant, assuming that you went with me for that purpose, would be hearsay."

"You are interesting at least."

"I hope to be more so. Have you arranged yet to send Mrs. Sevens south?"

Barbour started in fresh surprise, then he halted in his tracks. "What the devil——" he began, and broke off short.

"I had a sister similarly threatened," the stranger went on meditatively, "and the long-leaf pine country of South Carolina worked such wonders for her that—given the chance—I never fail to say a word for that climate."

He paused, then suggested with an abrupt change of tone, "Suppose we go into one of these Greenwich Village tea rooms and sit down with a table between us. At this hour the place won't be over-crowded and what habitués are there will be deep in radicalism and paranoiac art."

Barbour Sevens nodded. Life for forty-eight hours had partaken of the garishness and grotesquerie of nightmare. This business stood on all fours with the general sense of unreality, and he found himself, after a short walk through the irregular angling of streets west of the Square, turning in at a place which had once been a livery stable and which now seemed only half converted in spirit to its new destiny of human entertainment.

The self-confessed crook might have offered to lead his companion a few blocks east, instead of west, into dingy places that smacked more sordidly of the underworld, but it was significant of his methods that he made no such proposal.

Sitting in a corner booth with a hum of talk coming from the long table at the room's centre, Sevens had a better opportunity of observing his man, and though he availed himself of it to the point of candid staring, his companion seemed in no degree disturbed. The stranger was middle-aged and it occurred to Sevens that any description of him would have been difficult. His clothes and his features were alike well modelled and inconspicuous. In any business house down-

town, or in any church along the Avenue, you might have found his double, and Sevens, seeking to fix the portrait in his mind, found no distinctive handle by which to grasp and retain a definite impression.

The stranger must have read his thought, for he smiled. "You are sizing me up," he commented urbanely. "You will notice that I am extraordinarily ordinary—uncommonly common. If six casual witnesses undertook to identify me from memory, they would be apt to contradict one another in six separate ways. You, for example, would stand out as an individual in a crowd. I would sink into it. You're a distinctive human model . . . I'm a human Ford, and that's an advantage in my business."

At the last word Sevens glanced somewhat anxiously about him and again the other laughed quietly.

"Don't be disturbed," he reassured. "There is no safer place for confidential talk than a spot where everyone else is also talking—if one guards one's play of expression. Our fellow guests are passionately in earnest—as only trivial people can be. They're not thinking of us."

"I begin to suspect," suggested Sevens drily, "that your whole attitude is a hoax, and that you are staging some sort of cumbersome joke. If so, I don't feel like joking. You don't talk like a crook."

"That is why," interrupted his companion, "they

haven't my thumb-tracks and portrait at headquarters. There are consulting lawyers who never go into court. I'm a consulting crook who never breaks in and steals. I only confer and direct—and in these days the commander-in-chief doesn't operate on the firing line."

The stranger began to talk. His was an almost psychic faculty for suiting and focussing his plea to the mood of the listener, and he knew his present listener to be crowded between closing jaws of anxieties and resentments. Upon those anxieties and resentments, as upon the frets of a violin, the speaker played, and in his conversation there was nothing of mediocrity. At times it touched the fringes of eloquence. This man would have made a success in the pulpit—and he was in the pulpit now, though his text was one suited to the devil's advocate.

Switching with abrupt ease from the diction of well-chosen words to the crude vigour of a sort of argot, he summed up:

"As I see it, you've been gypped and foxed by this man-driver you work for. Now, with a question of life and death, perhaps, for your wife, hanging on a little money and a little time, this skunk insists on exploiting you without kicking in in the pay envelope. You stand for it because you can't ethically enforce your rights. My proposition is the primitively simple one of cutting the Gordian Knot. With inside help we can make a haul there that's worth the gam-

ble. By supplying that inside help you can remedy your situation. Since you're an outsider we're ready to fix your share definitely—" he paused and added slowly—"at five thousand cash. Does it tempt you?"

Sevens sat with a sudden dewing of his temples and a paling of his cheeks. The instinct of all his training and the code of decent generations behind him required of him an instant and indignant denunciation of this man and this man's overtures. Yet somehow it seemed impossible to move because of an unaccountable torpor of amazement and he heard his own voice replying, with none of the ringing force that it should have held, but with the unconvincing flatness of perfunctory habit:

"No . . . It doesn't tempt me."

His companion spread his hands in a gesture of acceptance.

"That ought to settle it," he said easily. "It would settle it—except, my friend, you're lying. Your 'get thee behind me, Satan,' comes from the lips out, and comes feebly. Your heart knows that your loyalty to Beverly Brothers is a convention only and your loyalty to your wife is the tap-root of your life. Your heart knows you've got to choose between them. Your head knows that even Blackstone says it's no crime to steal back your own from a thief—and this man Shell is a thief who has plundered you of much more than this five thousand."

Sevens raised a hand in a gesture meant to be peremptory, but it somehow failed of its force.

“What is to prevent me from giving you over as a bribe offerer?” he demanded shortly.

“You have yet nothing to tell that is not the merest hearsay,” came the calm response. “You yourself said it smelt of hoax and should you seek tangible evidence of evil associations by having me shadowed you would learn nothing. That I assure you is true, and you are welcome to verify it by experiment.”

Sevens sat silent for a time, as though the spell of some hypnotic force was choking off the repudiation which he ought to be voicing. He saw no advantage in heroics.

“I wouldn’t advise your going crooked—professionally,” he heard the other voice making meditative announcement. “I don’t think you’d succeed at it. I’m merely suggesting that on one occasion and one only, you endanger your amateur standing by taking money for playing the game. Your part would be prepared for you by us and reasonably safeguarded by us. It wouldn’t be difficult.”

Barbour pushed back his chair.

“Your time has been wasted,” he announced with a cold and low-voiced fury which sounded futile in his own ears. “I thought an hour ago that I’d commit murder to get money and get it quick, but——”

“But now, when the proposition becomes concrete,

you feel the recoil of a New England conscience," the other finished for him. "Very well, then. That's that."

Sevens rose and unceremoniously left the place, but he found his companion still walking at his side. His own hands were clenched in his overcoat pockets and his jaw was rigidly set. The other talked but he did not answer and when the two had come to the door of his apartment house, Barbour Sevens fell to trembling as with a nervous chill.

"Good-bye," he said perfunctorily.

"It's not just good-bye to me," observed the other. "It's good-bye to five thousand iron men. Maybe it's the beginning of good-bye—to more."

Sevens's nails bit into his palms. He licked his lips with his tongue. "Hold on," he gasped. "Just a moment." One could not guess from his manner whether he was bent on assaulting the other or surrendering to his persuasion, but his companion answered easily:

"I'm waiting."

Barbour Sevens stood there with his face working spasmodically.

"After all," he murmured half aloud, "it was practically stolen from me—and her."

"Actually stolen—in all but form. As ruthlessly filched as if it had been taken at the pistol-point," prompted the other.

The trembling in Sevens's legs and body suddenly

stopped. His pocketed hand unclenched itself and came out. It was steady, and slowly he thrust it out.

"You're on," he said. "But it must be done quickly."

"If you'll take a short stroll—alone—in this same neighbourhood each evening for the rest of this week," said the stranger promptly, "I'll drop into step with you again in a night or two and we'll arrange to carry on."

He paused, then added quietly: "If you undertake to have me watched, I'll have my own way of knowing—and I won't be there."

CHAPTER VIII

FOR years Barbour Sevens had spent the office hours of every business day in the Fifth Avenue establishment of Beverly Brothers, separated by a door, which usually stood open, from the mahogany-panelled sanctum of the chief.

Two days ago Tom Shell would have said that the face of his assistant had nothing surprising to offer him. He would have said that he knew this man inside out, and could read his thoughts forward and backward. Since then each day had shaken that comfortably rooted conviction. Day before yesterday that face had flared with the eruptive fires of a supposedly extinct volcano. Yesterday it had been haggard and tortured, seemingly cowed, only to break unexpectedly into gusts of weakly violent passion, and this morning it was the stony face of a Sphinx. This morning Sevens had come into the office with only a nod and a brief "Good morning," and had addressed himself to the first of his tasks with a direct energy that told nothing of his mood.

But when he had finished his morning dictation, he sat down at the typewriter beside his desk, and for a brief time his fingers pounded rapidly on the keys.

After ten minutes of that, he read over the result of his activity, made a hasty correction or two in pencil, and came into Shell's office, closing the door quietly behind him. The chief glanced up, grunting interrogatively, and Sevens sat down.

"It has come to my attention," he announced crisply, "that an employee of this concern has been conducting himself in a fashion which calls for your consideration."

Shell turned in his swivel chair attentively to face his companion.

"How's that?" he inquired.

"I've made a brief statement of facts," declared the younger man, "in the form of a typed memorandum. Please read it through before you make any comment. It calls for complete digestion."

Shell reached out a hand for the proffered paper and adjusted his shell-rimmed glasses, but at the end of the first paragraph, his face lost its stolid self-complacency and he stopped reading to stare over the margin in baffled incredulity.

"Is this a j-joke?" he demanded, "or s-softening of the brain?"

"Be good enough to read it through," prompted Sevens imperatively, "and judge for yourself."

Shell went back to the beginning as though second sight might add to the comprehensible quality of a mystifying screed and read the initial paragraph twice.

Re Investigation of robbery epidemic: Memo of facts brought to attention of Mr. Shell. Our Mr. Sevens after some years of service as confidential and advisory assistant to the head of the concern, made demand for such promotion as he conceived was due him—without result. Our Mr. Sevens became somewhat violent in the assertion of his rights as he saw them, and used language at the Loyal League Club, where the two had met after luncheon, which Mr. Shell found objectionable.

“I don’t see anything here that’s news to me,” broke out Shell irascibly, and the younger man insisted grimly,

“Go on. You will.”

Mr. Sevens pressed his urgent need of money, made intensive by the verdict of a pulmonary specialist that Mrs. Sevens must go south and take a cure which Mr. Sevens’s present salary does not permit. The argument partook of the character of a quarrel and remained unsettled.

Again the reader looked up from his document, then, repressing an impulse of protest, resumed his perusal.

The need having arisen of some course to galvanize into effectiveness the efforts of the police in curbing the present epidemic of robberies upon fur warehouses, a conference was arranged among members of prominent firms and Mr. Sevens was designated by Mr. Shell to give attention to this matter for Beverly Brothers. On the night of January 12th, Mr. Sevens left his apartment in West Tenth Street and at Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue he was accosted by a stranger, who asked to be allowed to talk with him. Mr. Sevens and the stranger walked

together in Washington Square and went from there to the "Old Barn Tea Room" west of the Square. There the stranger announced to Mr. Sevens that he was associated with an organization of fur thieves, though safely detached from them by any ties of incriminating evidence. He argued with Mr. Sevens that Beverly Brothers had in effect robbed him of his dues, and offered him a cash sum of \$5,000 to coöperate as inside man in an effort to rob one or more of the Beverly Brothers Warehouses—said payment being contingent on success.

Barbour saw the perplexity in the eyes of his superior harden into amazed indignation, saw him gulp excitedly and he himself interpolated, "Go on, there is more surprising matter to come."

It was represented to Mr. Sevens that the part which he would be called upon to play would involve only slight personal risk. Mr. Sevens indignantly repudiated the proposition in the tea room—but later by the door of his own apartment house underwent a change of heart and agreed to enter into such a conspiracy in which he would be schooled in his proposed duties as an accessory before the fact.

Tom Shell dropped the paper on his desk as though its touch had scorched his fingers, and shoved a cut glass paper weight over its edge. His lips twitched grotesquely under the paroxysm of fury that swept him, and when he spoke his impediment of speech tattered his words into almost unrecognizable rags of sound.

"Wh-wh-what th-th-the hell does th-this mean?"

Barbour leaned forward in his chair and a some-

what enigmatical ghost of a smile played around his lip corners.

"It means," he said slowly, "that yesterday you asked me whether I had been offered other employment and I said no. Since then I have been offered other employment."

For an instant the chief's hand went out and hovered over a push button on his desk, but there it hung suspended while his face became livid with rage.

"D-d-do you know what th-they do with blackmailers in New York?" he spat out furiously. "D-d-d-do you think you can bull-doze me into raising your salary by th-threatening to-to rob me?"

There was a quick-flashing thrust of Barbour's right hand, though he did not move the rest of his body. He caught up the paper from the desk while Shell half rose out of his chair in an impulse to seize it back. Reflecting that the call button was still there and held, too, by something in the other's face, the chief sank back and sat panting in excited silence.

Sevens drew out the sliding flap of the mahogany desk and, laying down the sheet of his typed memorandum, deliberately inscribed upon it a post-script with his fountain pen: "Barbour Sevens, having read the foregoing statement, hereby makes full confession of its truth. Signed, Barbour Sevens."

Having done that surprising thing, the lieutenant spread the document once more before his chief and

said quietly, "When a man undertakes blackmail, he doesn't start by signing and delivering a confession."

Shell slumped lower in his seat. His face went from its livid anger into the brick red of mortification.

"N-n-no, of course not," he stammered. "I should have known. I apologize, but for God's sake explain."

Sevens was examining the point of his fountain pen. Suddenly he demanded, "Do you want me to go on with it? Do you want me to try matching my wits against these fellows that the police can't or won't bag? There's just a chance that I might be able to decoy them and trap them. It's just a slim chance but it's up to you. At least that occurred to me last night as I was about to part with this crime-promoter—and I didn't close the door on the possibility."

"You mean that you'd be willing to try?"

Barbour nodded and his voice was grim as he amplified:

"It might be done . . . and it might not. They aren't fools, you know. They have already proven that they are either cleverer than the police - -or protected by the police."

"This g-gang's at war with us." Shell rose abruptly and fell to pacing the floor. "We are leaders in our business and must act as leaders . . . If they've approached you, it's m-more than likely they've got inside men in other houses. Sooner or l-later some of

those men might come to us as employees—p-perhaps as n-night watchmen, even. It's up to us to unravel this thing—if we can. You've got a good head on your shoulders, Sevens, and you've got nerve. I believe you're the man to do it."

Sevens had gone to the window and now he turned with his back against it and spoke in the clipped syllables of clarity.

"This may sound like blackmail, too. If it does, construe it so and be damned. I've got a wife whose life can be saved now; whose health can be restored. Six months from now it may be too late. She has no support except me—and yesterday I arranged to turn in my life insurance policy for its cash surrender value. I did that to get her South. It won't keep her there long. What are you going to do for my wife if—they get me?"

"Get you? They won't get you, Sevens. You mustn't take too great a risk, of course."

Sevens was still standing with his back against the window. He drew out a case and lighted a cigarette, while a somewhat ironic smile glinted in his eyes.

"Either I drop the matter where it stands," he announced bluntly, "or I play the game out—as it develops, and it's not likely to develop into a pink tea."

"Wh-what do you suggest then?"

"Mr. Shell," said the subordinate with an impressive quiet, "last night I felt desperate enough to commit any crime to raise money, and the things that

made me desperate haven't changed—but I found that a man's inherited code of decency isn't a suit of clothes to be discarded at will. It's a coat of skin and it sticks. I claim no credit. I'm merely reporting the result of an experiment. I didn't smash the crook who took me for his own dirty kind . . . instead of that I stalled."

"Yes, I understand that, now. I ought to have under-s-stood it all along."

"Well, I'm not a hypocrite, Mr. Shell. I think that spokesman for the high-binders came fairly near stating the case when he said that if I robbed you I'd only be stealing back what you've stolen from me."

"S-s-sevens," burst out Shell, "th-that's intolerable . . . No m-m-man can accuse me——"

Sevens shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't claim to be infallible. I may be wrong, but it's what I feel . . . None the less I'm employed by Beverly Brothers and it happens that when the attack is ordered a man can't quit—until the attack is over."

"That's the way t-to t-talk, Sevens. That's what I'd expect of you."

"Thank you." The acknowledgment was quietly sardonic. "But that brings us back to the same starting point. You say they won't get me. Don't make any mistake. There is a very good chance that they will get me. This is a well-organized gang of

highly trained professionals . . . and their fighting ethics aren't pretty. I've got to feel my way as I go . . . and feel it largely in the dark . . . and if my foot slips, there's my wife to be thought of."

"Of course, of course," acceded Shell. "You say you arranged to c-cash in your insurance p-p-policy. D-don't do it. The company will sup-p-ply you with funds for your present needs."

"The company must do better than that, Mr. Shell," Barbour announced calmly. "The company must insure me for \$50,000 against death or accident, naming my wife as the beneficiary—for the space of one year. That year will see me through this hazard. You see my drift, don't you? I ask nothing for myself, and for this sort of work I wouldn't accept extra pay—but if I die—" he broke off and added with a touch of bitterness in his voice—"perhaps she'd have more money than I could earn for her by living."

Shell sat at his desk and rapped upon it with a pencil, his forehead corrugated. He figured for a few minutes on a desk pad, multiplying and dividing rapidly. Then he swung the swivel and leaned back.

"That's fair enough," he declared, "and as to salary increase, we'll talk about it again and open-mindedly when this thing is ended up. Does that satisfy you?"

Sevens nodded.

"So far so good," he agreed, "but there's one thing more, one very important thing. I've got to

go into this conspiracy deep enough—seemingly—to satisfy these crooks that I'm with them up to the hilt. I may have to do decidedly incriminating things. If by any chance I'm unable to speak for myself I've got to rely on you to clear my reputation."

"You may rely on me. There's n-never been any question of m-my trusting you. You c-can trust me, too."

"You're the one person in the world who knows why I'm doing this," insisted Sevens. "You're the one person in the world who can show that I haven't actually gone into a felonious partnership."

Shell held out his hand but now it was his face that was most thoughtful. "You have my word. Still, there ought to be someone else who knows," he said soberly, "I'm in g-good health to-day—b-but I might die to-night. Our lawyers are civil p-practitioners and this isn't in their line. Do you know a good criminal lawyer who c-can hold his tongue? If the insurance p-people knew you were undertaking this business, th-they might make a fuss; might call it an extra hazard."

Sevens tossed away his cigarette.

"A classmate in college came to see me the night before last," he said tentatively. "I lunched with him yesterday, and, oddly enough, he's working on this robbery investigation himself . . . I'd be willing to trust him. His name is Joe Mandelle."

Shell acted promptly. He touched the push button on his desk and when a stenographer answered the call he ordered shortly, "Get Mr. Joseph Mandelle, attorney, on the wire and find out whether he can call here at once." Then he turned back to Barbour.

"You g-go into this with a free hand, Sevens," he announced. "B-b-but to-night you and I must visit the warehouses and form our own impressions about the night watchmen. I'll take the Twenty-seventh Street house and you can take Thirtieth Street and the Bronx. Perhaps we'll want to hire some extra men later . . . but to-night we must satisfy ourselves of their morale. You have your k-keys, I suppose?"

Forty minutes later, while the two still talked, a light tap on the door interrupted them and Shell's secretary announced, "Mr. Mandelle is here. He says he has an appointment."

"Show him in," ordered Shell crisply, "and don't let us be interrupted."

CHAPTER IX

FROM his conference at Beverly Brothers, Joe Mandelle proceeded directly to the downtown office which bore his own name on its ground-glass door and went to the back of his suite where he closed himself into a small room hardly larger than a generously proportioned linen closet. It was a room suited to and sometimes used for confidential consultation, for, with its door closed, it was approximately sound-proof.

This quality of the small room was not one which had specifically recommended it to its tenant for any reason of ultra caution. Mr. Mandelle had valued its sound-deadening construction for a more prosaic reason. He was accustomed to dictate both letters and briefs on the talking machine and here he could let his voice out forensically without having it sound noisily through the suite.

Now he sat down before the instrument, made some slight adjustment of its running-gear mechanism, and began talking clearly into the mouthpiece. After a little Mr. Mandelle emerged and spoke to his stenographer.

“Miss Statewell,” he directed, “you will find

two letters on the records standing by the talking machine that I'd like to have transcribed at once."

It occurred to Miss Statewell that her employer must be preoccupied, for he had turned away from her desk before he added in afterthought, "I seem to have used up all the fresh phonograph records. Are there any more?"

"No, Mr. Mandelle," she answered, "but there's a box of used records ready to be re-shaved."

Mr. Mandelle nodded.

"I wish you'd send them out to Jennings . . . and ask him to get them back for use again as soon as he can."

When the stenographer laid the letters on Mr. Mandelle's desk for his signature he glanced at them and appended his name. They were routine communications and uninteresting. Mr. Mandelle, as it happened, did not use the private extension of his telephone that day and he received no callers with whom he talked privately. He sat for some time studying the record of a case at bar, with his office door open, but occasionally he dropped the thick sheaf of depositions and let his glance stray meditatively out through the window upon a prospect limited by a canyon steepness of walls. He seemed deeply preoccupied and perhaps a little worried, as though some problem remained unsolved, which grew in complication with the passing of time.

Barbour Sevens, through the same day, found his spirits steadily rising, with the definite prospect of action. His troubles burdened him less morbidly and the sagging curve of his shoulders seemed to straighten to a hint of their old athletic erectness. At the dinner table that evening he spoke of Hope's going South as a settled plan and gaily assured her that the marvel was made possible by Shell's belated appreciation of his value, and by the meeting of his own terms.

"I laid before him," declared Barbour in mock boastfulness, "a statement in the nature of an ultimatum. I said in effect, 'May I not, under these circumstances, call attention to the peril of bankruptcy which would confront the firm if it lost so indispensable a guidance as mine!'"

"Oh, Barb," gasped his wife, "suppose he had refused."

"Refused?" The lord of this narrow manor raised his brows incredulously. "Refusal would have spelled calamity for Beverly Brothers. He knew it and I knew it and he knew I knew it."

There is comedy in the make-believe egotism of an overly modest man, and the audience of two laughed immoderately, but as they rose from the table Sevens looked at his watch, and for just a moment, unobserved by the others, an expression of doubt and foreboding passed across his face.

"I've got to make a round of our warehouses

to-night," he said with a yawn, "and look in on the night watchmen . . . I may be late."

When he kissed his wife good-bye he had to break his arms away from an embrace that closed hungrily about her and sought to linger. Then he left the apartment whistling, but the tune broke suddenly to silence before the elevator had answered his ring.

Perhaps he was to meet the stranger again to-night. Perhaps not.

There were certain things that he must remember, since to lose sight of them would be disastrous. He must make it clear to the man whose name he did not know that he came alone and unfollowed, and though that had seemed easy enough in prospect, it became difficult in practice as he approached the Arch.

Fifth Avenue, even here at its quietest point and at this hour, was not a street he could cut off and post with the sign "no thoroughfare," and for all his calculations he could not contrive to keep such an interval between himself and others that someone did not seem to be either just following or just preceding him.

Ahead loomed the solid bulk of the Arch rising into a cold night sky of brittle hardness and beyond the Square, capping a broken silhouette of roofs, showed the yellow beacon of the electric cross atop the Judson Mission.

In that space was approximate emptiness, into which Sevens went slowly, holding to the bright-

ened spots near the arc-lamps where he could be readily seen from a distance and could be perceived to be alone. He had walked back and forth until he almost decided that there was no use in waiting longer when he saw and recognized a figure coming under the Arch from Fifth Avenue. The stranger of last night's meeting seemed entirely free of that nervousness which obsessed Sevens, and as the young man waited, his confidence ebbed with a realization of his inferiority in guile and shrewdness. He felt like an amateur who has stepped rashly into a prize ring with a professional of tried reputation. But the stranger came up and grasped his hand with a reassuring smile.

"Hello, Sevens," he greeted easily. "I seem to have kept you waiting, but, as a matter of fact, I was here ahead of you."

"Ahead of me?" Barbour, who had taken the hand with a sudden shiver of repugnance, put his question in a tone of surprise.

"Yes. Before coming up to you, I reconnoitred somewhat thoroughly to make sure that you were actually alone. Safety first, you know."

Sevens forced a laugh.

"Well, you found me alone, didn't you?"

"Alone and punctual. I'm glad you haven't weakened."

"I need the five thousand," answered Sevens drily, and the other nodded.

He thrust a gloved hand into a breast pocket and a small packet of paper rustled crisply as he drew it out.

"As an evidence of solvency—and good faith," he made comment, "I brought the—honorarium along to show you."

Sevens caught the engraving of bank notes, though he was not invited to finger or count them. On that which he saw he read the impressive denomination, one thousand dollars, and there were other bills under that.

"Yours when you earn it," laughed the man who now thrust his bank notes back into his pocket, and with a well-simulated tremor of eagerness in his voice, Barbour demanded, "When do I get my chance?"

"I wish it could be at once," his companion replied seriously; "but it can't be this week. Time judiciously spent ahead often means time saved hereafter."

He paused a moment, then added grimly, "And the time hereafter might be up the river."

The two strolled about the four sides of the Square—for now the ambassador of crookdom made no suggestion of a café table—while the elder outlined a skeleton of plan and imparted rudiments of instruction.

"Some things I have already done in the interest of promptness," he vouchsafed. "A representative of ours, under the guise of a buyer from the Middle West, has been inspecting skins at your warehouses and he's drawn a working plan of the premises."

"When was that done?" demanded Sevens, but the other did not tell him.

"I might as well confess that I'm scared," announced the employee of Beverly Brothers abruptly. "I'm as nervous as a cat . . . I want to get my wife South . . . I told you I was coming through, but I'm fretting to have it over with. Can't you give me some idea of when it is to be?"

"I'm outlining your duties to-night. That ought to prove to you that we aren't dallying—the actual coup must wait a while. The commander who attacks prematurely invites disaster."

Sevens felt an inward leap of elation. This man's boldness was indisputable, and it was a boldness of one sure of his own judgment. Evidently he was gambling on his ability to read character, and this time he was reading it amiss.

"When the time comes," continued his instructor, "your rôle will be comparatively simple and comparatively safe, but you must understand it and carry it out without a hitch."

"Go ahead," prompted Barbour. "Outline it to me."

"When we go to the warehouse, you go with us—and open the door. That saves the need of breaking it in—and gives us leisure to work free from the unnerving racket of the burglar alarm."

"Yes, I've got that."

"On some reasonable pretext you get rid of the

watchman for a while. I suppose you can manage that?"

"That's easy, too," responded Sevens with seemingly ready enthusiasm. "I often do night work at the warehouses and when I do I usually let the watchmen step out for a short period of recess."

"Good," the other man smiled. "We are trusting you tolerably far," he made grave reminder. "But it's only honest to have our working basis clearly understood. From the moment we start over the top, there will be an eye on you every instant. If at any point you try to run out on us you will be killed with neatness and dispatch."

"That," assented the pretended convert calmly, "is understood. Proceed with the next item."

"When the watchman has gone, the rest of the boys, whom you will not see until then, will enter the place and go straight to the stuff we want. They will have been rehearsed and will move smoothly."

"Yes, go on."

There ensued fifteen minutes of crisply succinct detail, admirable in its sequence and upbuilding and, at its end, Sevens said thoughtfully, "It seems to me that everything you ask me to do might be accomplished without me—if you had my door key. You are offering me five thousand to go along and turn that key. Where's the joker?"

But the instructor in crime shook his head and smiled indulgently.

"You are an apt pupil—but you're still in a primary grade, Mr. Sevens," he observed. "Your presence is indispensable aside from your value as a hostage. It saves the probable need of bumping off a night watchman and we have friends on the other side of the docket whom murder would alienate. Even if you betrayed us in advance, you could only queer our game, but betrayal on that night itself would ruin us. We should be nervous without you, Mr. Sevens."

"My mistake," acknowledged Sevens. "I overlooked a material point. As you say, I'm still in a primary grade."

"We need you for another reason as well," amplified the instructor. "Once inside the door, undisturbed working minutes are worth thousands to us, and admission by you instead of through a jimmyed door extends our available time from four or five minutes to fifteen at least."

The two strolling figures had walked twice about the perimeter of the Square, and now as they approached the Arch again an empty taxi came slurring slowly along, its driver looking about him, watchful for a possible fare.

The stranger glanced casually at the vehicle and as if reminded by it of something forgotten he suggested, "I must get uptown, and there are still several things to say to you. I've only scratched the surface, so far. Suppose we take that taxi and

talk as we go. I'll have you set down at any point you name."

Sevens nodded amiably enough. Possibly some idea might be gainfully collected from noting at what point his instructor left him and once alone again he would drive on to the Bronx and interview the night watchman there.

His companion hailed the cab and ordered briefly, "Up Fifth Avenue to the Plaza and drive slowly."

Sevens was reflecting with definite satisfaction that he had learned one useful thing this evening. The time for the proposed robbery was yet uncertain and that gave him increased opportunity and latitude for study.

He wanted that latitude because in the robbery scheme as so far promulgated he saw what looked like a fatally clumsy defect—and this man was not a clumsy strategist. Presumably then that part of the plan, or perhaps various parts, had been stated only to mislead him, and for these possibilities he wanted the leisure of analysis.

Suddenly Barbour's companion rapped on the glass and shouted to the driver, "Hold on a minute."

Turning to Sevens he added in an undertone as if asking permission, "There's a man I want a word with. Candidly, he's been hovering near as a sort of bodyguard and strictly speaking I oughtn't to let you see him, but I've got to trust you on some points and this will only delay us a moment."

Sevens had caught a glimpse of a pedestrian turning west from the Avenue on Twelfth Street, and now as the stranger instructed the chauffeur to overtake that figure, the younger man realized that his own impression had registered no detail except that the man on foot was conspicuously red-haired. When the car drew over to the curb, a quarter of the way along the crosstown block, it was between the lights and in an interval of semi-darkness.

Barbour's fellow passenger flung back the door of the taxi, which had not fully halted, just as it came abreast of the pedestrian, and the pedestrian turned and stood still in response to his hailing.

Sevens had no opportunity to appraise the features of the man on the sidewalk. In height and breadth he was average, though well set up. In clothing he seemed inconspicuously well groomed, smooth of outline and texture.

Between him and the man who had emerged from the car and who walked alongside as the machine still crept, a very few unheard words passed, then came a swift development for which Sevens found himself absurdly unprepared.

Retrospective analysis served to explain the effect of this surprise in one way only. Sevens was looking forward to a battle of wits which would certainly tax his resources and quite possibly would defeat them—but it was in the sense of looking forward. One idea had become insidiously fixed in his

mind, and that idea was that all this conferring was preliminary and that the actual issue lay in the future. So far he was largely drifting and forming impressions which he hoped later to digest.

Suddenly the door of the taxi slammed and the passenger who had remained inside realized that a substitution had been effected with a sleight-of-hand celerity. The man who had been walking along the sidewalk sat beside him now, instead of the other, and the car, with no word to the driver, lurched forward as though shot from a catapult and was speeding westward.

Certain things proclaim themselves for what they are without explanation or admonition, and Sevens knew that the pressure he felt against his left side was the muzzle of a pistol.

His first realization was that the driver of this car needed no explicit orders. He had obviously been rehearsed in his rôle and was making good speed toward the avenues that lie closest to the North River docks, where things occasionally happen with unrestrained disdain of ordered codes.

CHAPTER X

BEFORE he had commanded his own voice for speech, and with the nuzzling caress of the weapon still proclaiming itself, Sevens heard a voice which he had never heard before speaking in monitory sharpness.

“Easy now, old dear,” it enjoined. “Don’t make no false break. You tried to double-cross us to-day but you’re going to kick in just the same, see?”

“Double-cross you?” Sevens was thinking hard and sparring for time under the stunning impact of surprise.

“Yeah, double-cross us. You sized us up for a bunch of poor fish that you could play for come-ons. Now we’re pulling the stunt to-night instead of later. You’re out of the job as a pal, but you’re still in it as a handy man—and if you bobble, my orders are to croak you. Get that straight.”

The elemental simplicity of the strategy dawned with sudden and illuminating fulness on Barbour Sevens. He had been given his instructions and now he was to be proffered no interval of counter-planning. The gist of the strategy lay in that instantaneous promptness of leaping from preface to climax.

Unless he could improvise with electric swiftness some defense against this amazingly launched aggressive, the game was as good as lost. It was commendably simple in conception and execution—this thing they had done. It was all based on the one alternative of which he had taken no forethought. He had started out on the premise of disbelieving every statement made by crooked antagonists, and yet he had swallowed whole the almost irritated assertion of the ambassador from the underworld that the job couldn't be carried through without deliberation; that it yet belonged to the future. Now he was being kidnapped and carried along willy-nilly. The taxicab was paralleling the waterfront as it lurched rapidly northward, and Sevens realized fully and with a blistering severity of assurance that the man at his side would shoot if he were called on to shoot. Something must be thought out under the pressure of need and thought out fast. Failing of a better solution, he must come to grips with his captor and chance the gun—but that was a last resort. In parley lay at least the gain of a few minutes for forced reflection and the slender chance of some fortuitous advantage.

It had been cold when he had started out from his apartment house and Sevens had buttoned his coat collar close about his throat.

In so protecting himself against the sharp bite of the night he had done another thing, which had

became habitual under like conditions. In order that he should not have to fumble later with gloved fingers under the thickness of his overcoat, he had transferred from his trousers pocket to his right-hand and outside pocket change for subway fare and two other objects—flat metal objects of small size—the street-door keys to the two warehouses he had meant to visit.

Now the hand across the cab from the jailer stole into that pocket and palmed the keys. It was not difficult, nor would it be difficult to make a further disposition of them—provided he could mask his action under a semblance of talk, arresting enough to distract attention.

He turned a steadied face to that of the gunman, which was rigid and truculent, and he managed to laugh.

“Do you only go as far as double-crossing?” he inquired with the insolent assumption of pure bravado. “Haven’t you crooks any higher mathematics than that?”

“How do you mean—higher mathematics?” The question was snarled out of twisting lip corners. “What’s the big idea? Trying to kid me?”

“By no means,” replied Sevens gravely. “I got you the first time you said this wasn’t a joke. I’ve reason enough to be serious . . . You say I’m double-crossing, and you aren’t doing me full credit. I’m triple-crossing.”

He saw the man with the gun bend forward with a pricked interest which he at once stifled, leaning incuriously back again. Sevens crossed his legs and let his hands rest idly on one ankle, in an attitude of counterfeited nonchalance.

"I say I'm triple-crossing," he repeated. "Doesn't that start your imagination to working?"

"It don't start nothing," came the surly rejoinder. "And don't you start nothing, neither—not if you're half wise to what's good for you."

"I'm only explaining," went on Sevens patiently. "It was agreed that we were to work together on this deal—not wrangle among ourselves."

"And you snitched and double-crossed. That lets you out."

"I snitched and triple-crossed. How many times do I have to tell you that?" Sevens's fingers, as they nursed his ankle, stirred a little—and the flat-shaped keys went inside his shoe top.

"I snitched to Tom Shell and told him I was going into this business to trap the rest of you. By making that play, I got full permission from him to handle it my own way. This is my way."

"Your way? How do you mean, your way?"

"I mean that I alibied myself with Beverly Brothers. Now I'm free of interference. I can work with you boys—and all that anybody will ever have on me will be the seeming fact that I wasn't as clever as I thought. You fellows get what you want

after—and Shell will only think that the game we framed up together flivvered.”

The man with the pistol laughed.

“You may double-cross and you may triple-cross, buddy, but you don’t four-time me. We wouldn’t believe you on oath now—and it wouldn’t pay us to believe you nohow.”

“Why?”

“It would cost us just five thousand grand to trust you for one reason—and that’s too high a price.”

“Five thousand grand?”

“Sure. Where’s them higher mathematics of yours now? If we trusted you we’d have to split with you, wouldn’t we? When we catch you snitching and strong-arm you through the job, we don’t owe you nothing. Chew on that, buddy.”

The gun muzzle accentuated the point with an emphatic jab in the ribs.

Sevens feigned a gasping outburst of spluttering rage.

Indeed there was a kernel of genuine chagrin in the thought that flashed belatedly into his mind, a thought that made him feel absurd, futile, and out-pointed at every move in the game.

“So that’s it,” he broke out. “You didn’t know I’d talked to Shell after all . . . You just pulled this double-crossing stuff to give you an excuse for bilking me out of my share. It was only bluffing on deuces.”

To this assertion the other offered no reply except for a dangerous glint in his eye as he thrust his face forward. That glint brought home to his prisoner the conviction that in a certain type of gunman—a type here exemplified—the itch of the trigger comes like a wave of the drunkard's thirst. It was as if instead of hanging back in fear of consequences, this man would actually welcome an excuse to fire.

The car turned into a cross-street and Sevens knew that it was that on which one of the Beverly Brothers warehouses stood. A ticklish moment lay ahead for the captive but also it held a surprise for his captors if Sevens succeeded in carrying out the plan that had been suddenly born in his mind. He would find that he had lost his keys. The crooks would presumably search him—and probably manhandle him as well, but if fortune played fair they would not find the keys and minutes wasted might count heavily in the result. He refused to think of himself. It was an unnerving prospect, but he had blundered and must bear the brunt of his own ineptitude, he must hold the door against easy access or any access without forcing it and sounding the burglar alarm.

Then he found himself stepping out of the car with an arm linked through his own. He felt the pistol still against his side as the whispered warning "Steady now—no bobbling," stole quietly to his ears. The street looked empty and normal save that some distance away and pointed west stood another car

with purring motor, and somehow he felt, or imagined, the presence of unseen men in darkened doorways and entries.

Now he and his companion stood at the door and with a sharp gaze bent upon him. Sevens began the farce of searching his pockets for his keys. As he did so, reacting to habit which often used that door in the day time when no lock held it, his left hand went to the knob—and to his amazement the door yielded and swung open without the need of being unlocked.

For an instant Sevens stood dumbfounded, but it was only an instant. He felt an urgent pressure at his back impelling him forward and when he had come into the hall, he looked into the office. At the desk he saw, not yet aroused by any alarm, the seated figure of Tom Shell.

Sevens realized with an ironic poignancy that his supreme resolution to defend the door by the pretense of having lost his keys had not even acquired the dignity of recognition.

So far as the thieves had been able to judge, he had functioned as directed and, with the sureness of a well-rehearsed fire drill, each process of the planned invasion was going forward, step upon step.

For Sevens, as for the hasheesh eater, moments became interminable stretches of time and he had eyes for the figure at the cluttered desk, a figure which had not yet turned or scented danger. His

familiarity with the plan of that building was entire. He knew that back of this office, which lay to the right of the narrow hall, were the storerooms, two in number and communicating with the freight elevator in the rearmost. Somewhere in that building there might be an unsuspecting night watchman, or he might have been temporarily relieved from duty by Shell and have gone out. Sevens felt rather than heard the swift and unflurried passage of feet along the narrow hall toward the rear. He could not even be sure that he was not merely fancying them. If they were genuine, they told of the actual thieves going like hiving bees to the shelves that had been drawn and located in careful plans for their use by the size-up man who had worked in advance.

He had not seen these men materialize out of darkness, but he knew they had come like jinns from the thick bottle of the night, and in the tense fragment of time that seemed protracted by his stress, his thoughts went racing until they were interrupted by that sensation with which he had already become familiar: the nudge of a pistol muzzle against his lower ribs.

“Go on,” prompted a ghost of edgy whisper in his ear. “Can the watchman.”

Suddenly Sevens understood that in one respect the burglars had misread the signs and with understanding came a flash of tenuous hope. Tom Shell was a fastidious man in the matter of dress, and not

easily mistaken for a warehouse night watchman. Now that very fastidiousness had wrought a deception. The desk upon which he had been at work was cluttered and grimy and before sitting down to it he had taken off his own coat and drawn on a shabby working jacket, left hanging on some hook by a minor employee. The house-breakers, as unprepared as Sevens himself to find the chief here where the chief so rarely came at such an hour, had mistaken him for the one man they had expected to encounter.

Possibly Sevens scraped his foot audibly on the floor, for at that instant Shell turned his head, presenting a face not yet alarmed but distinctly surprised. He saw his assistant overcoated and facing him while just behind his assistant stood another man whose appearance and dress were not in themselves calculated to inspire suspicion.

The significant fact that the stranger's right hand was prodding the man at his front with an automatic pistol escaped notice because Sevens's body screened that hand as did also the large pocket of the loose greatcoat.

"Hullo, Sevens," greeted Shell. "I thought you were taking the other two houses for inspection. Who's your friend?"

Sevens felt the pistol point jerk, then dig like a vicious spur against his side. The startled demonstration told him that his bodyguard had suddenly assimilated the whole truth of the situation, and that

he was now bent on dictating a disarming reply to Shell's question. Barbour had little reason to hope that he could win through by any bluff but he felt that he had bungled and must somehow undo his error.

"I brought this gentleman with me, Mr. Shell," he began in a conversational quietness of tone, and as he felt the muzzle ease away a little from his side, in relieved approval, he went on again in smooth tones that abruptly exploded in their effort to finish in time.

"He's a fur-thief, Shell. Beat it! Call the cops."

He had seen a pistol lying near the chief's hand—probably the watchman's which the chief had been inspecting. He had hoped that for once by reason of past events Shell's mind and hand might act quickly, and in concert—and as he spoke he himself leaped sidewise. He heard the gunman's pistol bark in the same instant—and the bullet tore his coat, but to his disgust he saw, too, that his employer was standing still in the dumfounded paralysis of a thick-minded man confronting sudden and unfamiliar peril. There was no instant help forthcoming from that quarter and Sevens lunged for the red-headed man, centring all of his energy and weight on a single drive of fist to jaw.

It was creditably quick work, and the red-haired one took the belting wallop fair on the jaw-point of his snarling face—but the pistol had barked again in

the part-second interval and Sevens heard the whine of the bullet in its passing as he crouched facing his adversary with his own back to the desk.

Then there was a rush of feet from the rear, a startled shout which he placed as the challenge of the night watchman somewhere back there in the darkness and he caught, as he grappled with his adversary, more gunfire and the splintering of wood by bullets, sent after refugees who were scurrying through the narrow corridor.

He saw things in confusion. The bared teeth of the man with whom he struggled gleamed white and desperate. The door that opened on the hallway, which was a channel of darkness, had been glass-topped and it splintered. Shadowy shapes were piling outward toward the street.

Then as the tight-gripped fingers of the other loosened around the pistol butt, under a clenching that made the wrist bones crunch, something happened and just as the weapon fell to the floor, Sevens gave back in a collapse of agony. His antagonist had sent a knee to his stomach and for an instant he was conscious only of a total disability of pain.

But his adversary did not follow him up. He used the moment to wheel and rush for the street, and at the office door he collided with the racing watchman, who was borne backward from his balance and who let the refugee slip by to his escape.

Then as Sevens straightened laboriously up, with

some subsidence of his own pain, he saw the sagging jaw of the night watchman and the fixedness of his gaze past himself to something that held it across the room.

Sevens had for those few crowded instants taken no thought of Shell. Now he turned slowly, following the hypnotized stare of the watchman, and saw his chief lying crumpled on the floor with eyes that had already rolled back in the signal of death.

Out of Sevens's own throat ran a strangling sound broken by his unrecovered breath. Sweating, dishevelled and paste-pale, he stood so unsteadily rocking on his feet that the night watchman took him by the elbows and piloted him to a chair into which he sank, still staring incredulously at the huddled shape on the floor.

Then in the doorway appeared excited figures, and through them with drawn revolver a policeman elbowed his way.

"What's this?" came the unoriginal and inquisitorial question from Patrolman Mahaffey. "What's happened here?"

He stood sweeping the place with his eyes, and while he waited for the answer which did not at once come, a brother officer appeared in the room and crossed hurriedly to straighten out the figure on the floor, and kneel with his ear at its breast.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS to Sevens that the questioner first addressed himself, and that was natural enough. A man was crumpled there in the inert grotesqueness of death, and a pistol lay on the floor from which, like unclean incense, still stole the stench of fresh-burned nitro powder. In the chair, with jaw hanging and the dishevelment of recent struggle upon him, sat this other man—quite readily assignable at first glance to the rôle of assailant.

For that moment Sevens found himself unable to speak. He licked his lips and his hand gestured foolishly toward Shell, who needed no pointing out. No words came, and now as other policemen pushed through the crowd that the noise had summoned he made a figure upon which it was easy to hang a presumption of guilt. There had been other noises outside—the scurry of the getaway in the two waiting cars—the usual fusillade of the belatedly attacking police—with the usual absence of result.

Barbour Sevens moistened his lips and over his confused mind settled a cramp of inaction. He could realize fully only one thing: that he had come here with thieves, that a murder had been committed,

and that with the dead man he had publicly quarrelled. Only two people, one of whom was now eternally silenced, could ever have spoken the word that would disprove his guilt.

Instinct warned him that his one present safety lay in sealed lips, until Mandelle had arrived to counsel him, and yet silence seemed also to deepen his seeming of complicity. He could feel the anger of the crowd lowering over him, none of whose members knew his name or anything about him, beyond his deleterious seeming, and he caught the suppressed wrath with which the officer enjoined, "Well, speak up, can't you? Or maybe you'd rather tell it at the station house."

He was still panting from his recent exertion and while he tried confusedly to think he fumbled at his collar with the clawing gesture of one seeking to recover breath and voice, but that only gained him a moment of respite.

Then he heard another voice, and in the pause that followed its first words he felt the sudden tenseness of a listening silence through which drifted the grind of the elevated a half block away and the drone of Sixth Avenue's traffic.

"Let me tell it first," volunteered the voice. "I'm the night watchman."

The officer turned his glance willingly.

"Snap into it then," he enjoined. "Who's the dead man and who killed him—this fella here?"

“No—the dead man’s Mr. Shell, president and general manager of Beverly Brothers . . . and the other gentleman’s Mr. Sevens, his assistant. He was knocked out, too, by the burglars.”

There was an out-breathing from the crowd, almost a disappointment as if the drama of the situation had been punctured.

As though a keen edge had snapped a tight cord, Sevens felt the coils of the crowd psychology loosen out of that hostile suspicion for himself which had seemed to strangle him. Until then he had been conscious of faces peering at him with the morbid interest which focuses upon a murderer. Now he blessedly sunk out of that prime interest to the lesser part of a fellow victim.

“Mr. Shell came in here alone to-night,” went on the watchman steadily. “He told me that on account of all these robberies, he wanted to make sure that us watchmen were right up on our toes. He brought me a new gun—that’s it layin’ there on his desk. He said Mr. Sevens was inspecting the other houses. I s’pose Mr. Sevens came here to meet him—and ran spang into the robbers.”

“Where was you when the racket began?” demanded the officer, and the watchman answered slowly:

“I was settin’ back in the rear playin’ Canfield. I heard a shot to’rds the front and I started forward, then I heard another right on top of the first. That

rear wareroom's crowded and in the dark I stumbled over something and fell down. I heard what sounded like two or three men rushing out of the room ahead of me."

He paused and wiped the face upon which the sweat was still stealing out.

"Yes, go on," urged the policeman.

"I still had my own gun and, when I got to the hall, I could make out that men were running through it and I shot down the corridor—but they got away . . . I could still hear noises like a fight goin' on here in the office and I rushed for it, but at the door somebody knocked into me and bowled me over against the wall. He got away, too."

The narrator paused and drew a long breath, then he concluded his recital:

"When I come in here things was just like you found 'em except that Mr. Sevens was pickin' himself up off the floor like as if he'd been knocked out . . . He'd been roughin' it with that last fella that got away . . . the same fella that must of shot Mr. Shell."

To Sevens the breathing spell afforded by the night watchman's narrative came like a new lease on life. His mind had cleared to conclusion and the spirit of the crowd's conviction no longer fettered him with helplessness. He must say as much as seemed needful and as little as possible, until he had conferred with the only other living being who knew the whole

truth. As the eyes of Officer Mahaffey turned toward him he nodded his head.

"I can talk now," he said, taking up the testimony of his subordinate. "I was out of breath at first." He lifted his overcoat where a bullet had torn it. "The thief was shooting at me—when he hit Mr. Shell," he added. "I clinched with him."

A new and kindlier note had come into the patrolman's voice.

"Take your time," he counselled. "I reckon you're about all in. When I seen you settin' there at first I took you for one of the guns."

The situation had changed. Sevens knew that he could afford to be conservatively brief.

"There isn't much I can add," he answered. "I found the front door open and I was surprised at that. I hurried in and saw Mr. Shell sitting at the desk, then I felt a gun poked against my ribs from behind and I called out and dodged . . . I grappled with the man that had the gun and we fought . . . He shot twice. It wasn't until the gunman broke away that I saw Mr. Shell had been shot . . . I was pretty busy myself."

"I'll bet you was, and lucky to be alive, at that," agreed the officer. "So you just run into it, like steppin' on a snake?"

Sevens inclined his head.

"Description of the man," commanded the officer.

“Red-haired—average height—well dressed. About my own weight, I should guess,” summarized Sevens.

“Features?”

“Can’t say very definitely. It was all going too quickly to see much.”

“Must have been,” the policeman growled, though with a sympathetic rumble in his voice. “Snap into it, boys. Get the coroner’s officer. Take the names of all these people . . . Stay where you are, everybody, until we get names and addresses . . . Call a taxi for Mr. Sevens . . . I shouldn’t wonder if he needs to get home and rest up . . . Maybe to have a doctor give him the once-over.”

But at that suggestion Sevens shook his head.

“I’ll wait for the coroner’s officer,” he said; then added thoughtfully, “Mr. Shell and I were talking to an attorney this afternoon about taking precautions against just such a robbery as this. I’d like to have that attorney come here, if I can get him . . . and see things as they are.”

Within an hour the crowd, which had pressed morbidly about so long as the body remained where it had fallen, thinned away, and Sevens sat alone with Mandelle. Mr. Mandelle had been at his apartment that evening and when the telephone summons reached him there he did not seem so amazed as might have been reasonably expected. Now he sat listening to the story of Barbour Sevens with a face

that grew graver with each sentence and it was a gravity not wholly induced by the predicament of his present companion.

The death of Tom Shell had put upon the face of affairs a new, unpremeditated, and highly disquieting expression, and to this altered expression Joe Mandelle was painfully alert. He had responded to the first and unexpected summons from Beverly Brothers because he had not known how to refuse and because he had reasonably hoped that he might enrich his store of valuable information. He had learned to his surprise that the "inside man" whom he had himself recommended to his criminal associates had welched on them and at the same time he had been drafted into the position of corroborating witness to the innocent motive with which Sevens was entering upon an apparent crime. At the time of being forced by circumstances into so dual a rôle he had construed it to mean only that the effort to rob Beverly Brothers must be abandoned and the conspirators warned. His great idea had merely collapsed and he had supposed that the matter would end there. Now the conspirators had gone ahead and murder had been the outcome. Joe Mandelle realized that he had overreached himself. He was advisor to both sides of an issue that involved life and death, and the side he dared not acknowledge was also the side he dared not abandon. He was in an awkward, a mischievously and deplorably awkward predica-

ment, and almost at once Mandelle saw the single plausible solution. Things must be so handled and jockeyed that Barbour Sevens would not by any chance become a defendant or need an advocate before a jury. It was one thing to mislead and deleteriously advise a man who was out of court, but it was quite another thing to betray a client when one stood as his attorney of record.

As for truly representing Sevens in good faith, that was out of any question. Mandelle knew the wolf pack with which he had been surreptitiously, though profitably, running. He dared not turn on them, and least of all just now, when he must seem to their directing spirit to have projected them into this malodorous mess.

But these were all thoughts that marched and countermarched back of a countenance discreetly grave and sympathetically attentive, while Barbour talked.

When the conclusion of that narrative was reached, Mandelle rose and paced the floor. As keenly and mercilessly as though he had been, in actuality, a prosecutor, he cross-questioned his man. This was proper enough. No attorney is capable of advising until he can see the case in the worst aspect it may assume to the opposition, and when this inquisition was over, Mandelle *knew* step by step all that had happened that evening.

“Why did you fall into the trap, when the gun-

man pretended to know that you'd double-crossed?" he demanded sharply, and Sevens answered shamefacedly, because he felt that a weak point in his conduct had been touched.

"He said I had, and I knew I had, and it didn't occur to me, at the moment, to deny it."

"How could he have known any such thing," questioned Mandelle, "unless Shell or you or I had given away the secret?"

"I don't suppose he could have known," admitted Sevens.

"Don't you see that the fellow was bluffing; that they simply meant to take that ground as an excuse for doing you out of your promised share?"

"I see it now and I saw it soon after it was spoken of," came the slow response. "But I didn't see it in time to save myself from falling into the trap."

"Don't you also see," went on the lawyer, even more insistently, "that the intent from the first was to put through this robbery to-night?"

Sevens gazed at the other out of surprise-widened eyes.

"Why?"

"Because otherwise the whole plan might have fallen of its own weight. It contemplated your getting rid of a night watchman, and had you been given a day's interval to coach and warn him they wouldn't have dared to risk his bringing help."

Sevens nodded his head in the bleak and belated

realization of his folly. "That occurred to me hazily when the first man and I got into the cab together," he confessed, "but I saw in it only a problem to reason out later. It all seemed a future thing, you see, and I assumed they were trusting me in some respects."

Joe Mandelle lighted a cigar and for a few minutes tramped the floor with his hands pocketed and his brow deeply furrowed.

At last he halted squarely before Sevens and spoke in a voice of final judgment.

"There's only one safe course to take, old man," he asserted. "Tell nothing more than you have already told. Confine yourself to that at the inquest. Keep absolutely mum about your effort to trap these fellows or about ever having seen any of them before."

Sevens narrowed his eyes. "I don't like that," he said quickly. "I don't begin to like it! Suppressing any part of my evidence would come pretty close to being perjury, wouldn't it?"

"If it comes to that," retorted the attorney crisply, "I don't like any of the situation. Tell what you have so far told. That is all strictly true and it in no way involves you. Volunteer nothing more."

Barbour's face paled and he barked out on a note of panic: "Suppose that infernal memorandum that I signed came to light . . . It would seem a confession . . . It would *be* a confession!"

"Shell destroyed that, didn't he?"

"He promised to—but in the hurry of the day I forgot to find out for certain."

"Let us assume," suggested the lawyer reassuringly, "that he kept his word . . . Let us assume it with the precaution of a thorough search . . . I suppose you have access to his desk?"

"Yes. But isn't it better to state the whole truth first off? You can corroborate me. That's why we sent for you in the first place."

The lawyer leaned forward and laid an urgent hand on the other's elbow.

"For just that reason," he declared earnestly, "I want you to manage this so that you won't need any lawyer. So that you won't ever appear as a defendant."

"Would telling the whole truth make me a defendant?"

"As sure as God reigns in heaven, it will." Mandelle paused, then went on. "Listen to me patiently for a few moments. The admirable theory of administering justice is that the law seeks to punish only the guilty. I'm a lawyer and I know the variances as well as the theories of practice. Here is a murder case with which the press will ring, and the District Attorney's office must needs make a showing. It dare not fail to produce and punish—someone. First of all, it must have a defendant to prosecute and so far it has none. Suppose you say that you had entered into a conspiracy with these men, but that

Shell urged you to do it. Shell cannot corroborate you. I am qualified to do that but I can and will be contradicted. They will accept just so much of your statement at the D. A.'s office as incriminates you and repudiate the rest—because you're at hand and in effect you'll have asked for it. Really guilty men will be quick to offer themselves as State's evidence to build the case against you and purchase their own immunity. You quarrelled with Shell. You seemed to yield to seductive offers to betray and rob him with the twin motives of cupidity and vengeance. The newspapers, once your name has been placed in nomination as the master-mind, won't relinquish you, because a fallen angel is worth columns of news where a chronic yegg is worth a stick. That case will develop and build itself—if you start it. If you keep your mouth shut it can't rise from any other source."

"Why not?" demanded Sevens in tense-toned apprehension and reply followed instantly on the question.

"No one else can possibly raise it because only the crooks know it and the crooks would be the last to come forward. Even if they are caught and put on trial, there's no element of defense for them in implicating you. You stand presumptively as a man who was in the fight *against* these crooks. Don't complicate matters by volunteering that, for whatever reason, you had traffic with them before the fact."

“I’ve called on you for counsel,” said Sevens slowly, “and I’ve got to abide by it, I suppose . . . but I don’t like it. I don’t like it a little bit! Even if it works as you say now, it can’t always remain a secret. When they bring somebody to trial, I’ll have to take the stand—and I can’t lie then under cross-examination.”

“True enough,” concurred Mandelle. “And I should certainly not advise you to withhold anything that’s relevant on the stand, at the trial of a defendant other than yourself. But by that time the prosecution will have its target in the culprit it is trying, and your place will be fixed as an important dependence of the commonwealth. Then the D.A. will be bent on sustaining and justifying you—but now, with no other being standing accused, he would assign you quite a different rôle—the rôle of the readiest scapegoat.”

“And at the inquest?”

“At the inquest it will occur to no one to press you with questions that will embarrass you. What you have already said is about all they will expect you to say. Meanwhile, it’s my most unqualified judgment that you must maintain a discreet silence. Did you succeed in identifying any one?”

Sevens shook his head. “No,” he said. “I couldn’t do much in that line.”

“Then merely sit pretty and remember that, at need, I’m here to state the facts and assume full responsibility for my advice to you.”

"For God's sake," broke out Sevens nervously, "don't let an untimely death overtake you, too."

"That catastrophe," acceded the attorney with a smile, "I shall, for more reasons than one, seek to avoid."

Barbour Sevens looked fixedly at the man who had crossed his path so unexpectedly after their courses had run untouched for these intervening years, and the appraisal inspired confidence. An alert light quickened in the attorney's eyes and a vigorous self-faith gave boldness to his face. He was obviously gifted with intelligence and energy and there was no reason to doubt that he knew the law.

"One thing more occurs to me," observed Mandelle meditatively. "Beverly Brothers was more or less a one-man power. Its autocrat has suddenly passed out. Who will step into his shoes? Are you the logical successor?"

Moodily Barbour shook his head.

"Shell saw to it that I always appeared a subordinate. The company is incorporated and the directors will have to act. They took Shell at his own valuation and I suppose they know of me only what Shell told them."

The attorney nodded. "That's just as well for the immediate present," he gave encouraging assurance. "Because I want you to go away for a while, and if you seemed too indispensable that might be hard to manage."

"Go away?"

"Yes. Your wife has to go South for her cure. It's logical that you should want to make the trip with her and see her comfortably established."

"I had expected to—before this happened," answered Barbour slowly. "Her sister was to be with her after I came back. I didn't want her alone—and Faith has a slender income of her own."

"Then insist on being allowed to carry out your plan. You've earned a short leave of absence and you must have it as soon as you've called the directors together and stated to them such facts as we've agreed you are to state at all."

"It seems a strange time to demand a vacation," demurred Barbour, but the other shook an impatient head.

"Quite the contrary. The directors will want to take prompt steps toward running down and punishing this outrage. You must realize that. They'll have to employ detectives and lawyers and in all likelihood offer a reward. Under the circumstance, that work ought to be in other hands than yours. How could you at once direct the pursuit and keep discreetly silent?"

The logic of that seemed irrefutable and as Sevens silently acknowledged the point, Mandelle went on:

"Shell and you were the only persons who knew that I was previously talked with as a lawyer. Now I had better stand clear of all phases of the case

except your interests. If I'm ever needed to speak for you I can then come in unprejudiced before the jury. Let the directors take over the prosecution, but before they meet you and I must assure ourselves of the destruction of that memorandum which Shell promised to destroy."

Again Sevens nodded.

"And now," ordered the attorney, "go home and try to get some rest. You need it."

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS well past midnight when Barbour let himself into his apartment, and because he had announced that he would probably be late, both Hope and Faith were sleeping without anxiety. He himself sat for a long while in the small living room with hot-eyed wakefulness and unrelaxing nerves, and though sleep stood far off, nightmare thoughts pressed close and savage about him. The doctor had said that upon rest, nourishment, and the avoidance of worry depended his wife's hope of recovery. Undoubtedly Mandelle's advice had been sound, at least so far as it affected her. It would have been devastating to her to see him standing in so ambiguous a position as the lawyer had forecast in the event of his admitting a participation which was actually so blameless and seemingly so damnable. It might even have killed her, had he been, just now, seized upon as a sacrifice victim to an indignant public clamour for revenge—upon someone.

He himself could not hope to avoid a depleting torture of worry until he could be sure that Shell had destroyed the memorandum which was as complete a confession as the law would need, or until

he had possessed himself of it and destroyed it himself.

The sheer idiocy of ever having typed and signed such a thing came over him now with a deluge of bitter self-contempt. It had been so needless, and yet it had appealed to him as so swift and sure a way of dispelling from the mind of the other the confused suspicions that were cumbering a prompt understanding. It had seemed a dramatic gesture—and he had made it. The purpose had been fully served—and then the unexpected train of after-effects had developed.

Through the troubled interminability of the night he sat in his chair in the darkened room, and if he slept at all it was only to dream that he was fretfully awake. In the hours just ahead of dawn, when the restless voices of the city dwindled into brief half-tones of semi-silence, a sort of exhausted coma engulfed him, but only to be broken with a wrenching start at the first rumblings of milk trucks in the street below.

With sunken eyes, he told the story of Shell's death to Hope, but by some merciful illogic she appeared to seize upon the realization of his own escape and thanksgiving for it, almost to the exclusion of horror and the shock of horror. Aside from its averted menace to himself the tragedy seemed, to her, remote and unreal.

He was scrupulously prompt in his arrival at the

Fifth Avenue establishment of Beverly Brothers, yet a stenographer, pale with the shocked excitement of the news she had been reading, told him that someone else was already waiting for him in the inner offices.

"Mr. Mandelle," said the young woman, "came ten minutes ago. He said he had been with you last night—after it happened—and had an appointment to meet you here. He's in your office now."

A sigh of relief and satisfaction broke from the lips of Barbour Sevens. He found himself leaning heavily on the judgment of the man he had known in freshman days, and he nodded as he passed hastily through his own door and closed it after him.

His office and that of Tom Shell were communicating rooms cut off from the outer spaces, and as Sevens came in Mandelle stood on the threshold between the two.

The attorney had arrived before the Fifth Avenue doors of the establishment had opened that morning and he had gone, with the earliest arrivals of the employee force, through the sales-rooms and up to the administration floor. He had been there yesterday as a lawyer at the invitation of the chief who was now dead, and it occurred to no one to question his confident assumption that all doors were open to him this morning. The margin of time which he had spent alone in Tom Shell's mahogany-panelled sanctum had been brief, but he had neither expected nor needed it to be long.

He was following an intuitive impulse just now. If Shell had not destroyed the memorandum which was causing Sevens such a torture of anxiety, the only assignable cause of such delinquency must have been an accident of oversight—and if such oversight had occurred, the thing might be still lying on the desk, forgotten.

Alone in the twin offices, he had gone straight to the flat-topped table with its trays of correspondence and its incidental furnishings—and there, anchored by the cut-glass ink-well, he had caught sight of the scrap of paper which he had scarcely hoped to find. Greedily, Mandelle glanced through it, with a gaze that identified typed paragraphs and pen-written acknowledgment. For an instant only, after that, he hesitated, then his eyes quickened with avid pleasure.

The first sentence was all preamble: all of minor consequence and, watchful that the right-hand edge of the page, bearing the date, remained intact, he tore a sizeable scrap from its upper left-hand corner and thrust the rest of the refolded paper into his breast pocket.

The waste-basket stood over against the wall beside the desk and swiftly Mandelle tore the scrap of sheet that he had detached into three or four smaller fragments which he thrust between the desk and the wall at its back.

Then he turned and waited.

Now as Sevens entered, with ringed eyes and an

anxiety-drawn face, Mandelle accosted him reassuringly.

"Let's get this search under way," he said. "I've already glanced about in cursory fashion, but naturally I waited for you before really starting."

"I have the keys to the desk," Sevens told him, almost breathlessly, "but we'd better search the top and letter racks first."

The attorney nodded, and stood meditatively looking over the shoulder of the other as he ransacked the letter-tray, lifted the blotter, and exhaustively inspected the limited area with fingers that were unsteady.

Then, in turn, the drawers were opened and rummaged to their bottoms, and after that procedure came to its vain end, Barbour straightened up and his face was chalk white.

"We don't—" he began and broke off to moisten his lips—"we don't seem to find it!"

"After all, the presumption is that he destroyed it, you know," the other reminded him reassuringly, but Sevens shook his head in a bleak and dogged despair.

"It's the suspense," he declared in a dry-throated voice. "Don't you realize the wretchedness—of never knowing?"

"Buck up, Barb," urged his companion. "I, above all else, realize the danger of growing panicky. Let's reason it out. If Shell destroyed this thing he must have thrown the pieces into the waste-basket

. . . that's premise number one. Where is the basket emptied?"

"The place is cleaned at night," Shell's assistant told him. "I don't know what the janitors do with the sweepings . . . What would they do with them?"

"In some fashion the waste stuff is destroyed; you may be sure of that. You might get hold of the janitor, but I dare say that wouldn't help much."

"He works at night," replied the other despondently. "I don't know where he is now. It would take some time to locate him."

"Let's search further for ourselves, then," suggested the attorney. "Some scraps may have fallen somewhere and escaped the janitor's eye . . . That's not likely though, is it?"

"It's worth a try. Anything is better than inactivity. Here, lend me a hand," begged Sevens almost wildly. "Let's move out the desk and look behind it—and underneath. Then there's the file-case."

Smiling indulgently, as though he were humouring a fretful child, Mandelle took one end of the desk and the two men hefted its massive bulk aside. Then with a stifled exclamation that was almost an outcry of relief Sevens was down on his hands and knees retrieving several small patches of ragged paper from the floor and cobwebbed wall.

Now his hand shook with a palsy that defeated his effort to handle the small patches of puzzle scraps, and it was Mandelle who pieced them deftly together

on the blotter, matching their edges into a whole, until certain words became legible.

Barbour Sevens straightened up slowly. A cold sweat stood out on his temples but a long breath ran between his lips as his tautness relaxed into unutterable relief, and his eyes were like those to which cool sanity returns after delirium.

"That's it," he exclaimed. "That's part of it, anyway! He *did* tear it up as he promised."

"Yes," the other agreed, "Shell undoubtedly tore the thing to tatters and tossed it into the basket. These scraps fell wild."

"Thank God," murmured Barbour fervently. "I was going to pieces, wasn't I?"

"Naturally enough, you were excited," the lawyer assured him. "But now you can meet the directors with an easy mind." He clapped a hand on the other's shoulder. "I congratulate you on the outcome of our search."

Sevens dropped limply into a chair.

"Yes," he answered, pressing a hand to his burning eyes. "I can meet them now, all right."

Suddenly he came to his feet again.

"I'm not usually so hysterical, Joe," he declared with self-scorn. "I've been wondering what all this would do to Hope if things went wrong."

"And I don't blame you," answered Mandelle. "You'd have to be a cold proposition to feel otherwise."

Before the morning had spent itself half way to noon, the men who controlled the affairs of the fur company sat in a grim-faced conclave about the long table in the conference room, and Sevens sat with them outwardly self-contained and imperturbable.

“If the thieves had gotten away with their whole plan,” fumed Jason Hubwell, to whom the directors’ table was an accustomed place, “we could better have taken our loss. They didn’t get the whole of their intended loot, but they got Tom Shell. We must make an example of these murderers.”

“A laudable and unanimous sentiment. But we need to get them first,” cut in John Richland drily.

“The Turner Detective Agency would seem our best bet now. Let’s get Turner here and start to work. I wouldn’t give a whistle down the wind for the city forces.”

Sevens had already made his brief and admirably modest statement, and there had been no disposition to catechize him on any point he had not volunteered. On the contrary, he found himself deferred to as something of a hero, but he waited for the arrival of the celebrated detective with the apprehension of postponed ordeal. When, at length, the door opened on a full-bodied man whose portrait he had seen in magazines and newspapers, he braced himself for inquisition. But again he found no spirit of questioning his own status as one of secure trust. Those questions which the investigator put to him, though

pointed and clean-cut, were neither hard nor embarrassing questions to answer.

“Now, gentlemen,” announced Turner, when the talk had run its course, “it’s due to a miracle of good luck, and his own ability as a husky scrapper, that Mr. Sevens didn’t go the same way as Mr. Shell . . . I believe the whole bunch went in that open door not far ahead of Mr. Sevens and that the fellow who followed him into the office and covered him was standing in the dark and flat against the wall as he passed by.” He paused, then added, “I’m going to call in, as an associate in this case, a man that isn’t connected with my staff. Unless you press me I’d rather not go into detail as to who that man will be or how I’m going to use him, except to say that he’s a ‘go-getter.’ All we’ve got to go on so far is that Mr. Sevens here saw that the murderer had a red head, and out of six million people—well, we’ll do the best we can.”

He had gone out and the board stood on the point of adjournment when Sevens, somewhat hesitantly, broached his request for permission to accompany his wife South and he was surprised at the readiness with which it was granted.

“When you’ve helped the detectives to get started, I think you’re entitled to a breathing spell,” announced Richland, and Hubwell seconded the proposal with cordial heartiness.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE so-called roaring Forties and, of course, within a stone's throw of Broadway, stands a café which was once famous when the white-jacketed men behind its long bar were kept strenuously busy from late afternoon to the verge of dawn. Someone esoterically versed in underworld intricacies had said, on one occasion, "It's at Tony's place that the word's passed to cut loose or lay low." This comment had been made a good while ago, but even in those palmy days the casual tourist and the respectable Broadwayite had patronized Tony's without anxiety, knowing that if it was a hangout for thieves, they were such thieves as could pass optical muster and mix discreetly with men outside their own guild. In short, Tony's conformed to modernity. Its fittings were elegant enough, its food good enough, and its policy conservative enough to warrant its standing where it stood. Even now there was the glamour of a certain adventure about the place. One could usually find about its door, or inside its lounge, faces and figures that had a distinctive if not distinguished character of their own. Here one saw close-shaven cheeks, bleached by unremitting avoid-

ance of manual labour, and hands with meticulously manicured nails proclaiming disdain of toilsome callouses. Here underworld characters of high localized repute, who might or might not make occasional forays across the border of the law's surveying, met as more conventional gentlemen foregathered at their clubs. There they blandly passed the time of day with policemen and detectives, who strolled in to glance about out of eyes seemingly negligent but actually alert and hopeful. In short, over Tony's place lay a spirit of armed and mobilized neutrality—and there much was told and much withheld. Men with some countersign or free-masonry of crime passed on information meant for no other ears, and others whose earnest desire was to penetrate these secrets encountered here the reticent spirit of a sphinx.

Into Tony's, on the afternoon after the death of Tom Shell, came Don Fogarty, and he might with equal appropriateness have belonged to any one of the three parts into which, like all Gaul, Tony's patronage was divided. He might have been one of those whose care it was to tread in light caution, for none of the rat-keen eyes that ever darted about the place held a shrewder or quicker light than his. Again he might have belonged to the sort that dropped in, silently watchful, seeking information and mingling in a false affability with crooks whose silence they sought to penetrate. Then, too, he might have been the casual patron who neither hunts nor hides

in that sporadic war that wages between the law and its breakers. This indeed seemed more probable, for he looked the keen young business man more convincingly than either law-breaker or sleuth.

It was that time which was once called the "cocktail hour" along Broadway when Fogarty entered Tony's and bought a cigar. He stood at the counter only a minute or two and then, with a glance at his watch, turned again toward the street door.

He was a compactly but slenderly built young man of medium stature, who moved with the bird-like quickness of a ready energy and a wiry muscularity.

His face was chiselled out in lines and angles, accentuated by leanness, and it was a face of rather pleasing homeliness, vigorous in its wakefulness of expression.

His hair was sandy but of the sort that fades prematurely into gray, and already, in spite of evident youth, it was rusting to an iron tone about the temples and neck.

The visitor, with his cigar kindled, went out, and at the door he nodded his greeting to a youngish man whose face was unhealthily bloodless. This one scarcely seemed to see him, but in a few moments he, too, passed out and a block farther north and a half block farther east, he came alongside and dropped into step.

"I want to talk to you," he asserted bluntly. "I want to spill an earful."

Fogarty lifted inquiring brows and hailed a passing taxi.

As he stepped in, without further invitation the man of the pasty complexion followed him, and leaning back against the cushions sat for a time looking moodily ahead.

“What’s on your mind, Max?” inquired Fogarty at last, and the other turned his beady eyes and answered in churlish fashion.

“The bulls picked Lou Stine up this morning—and they’re fixin’ to frame him. All the old stuff, see? Planted a gat on him and took him down to headquarters for a bully-ragging, see?”

“How come?” demanded Fogarty briefly. “Have they got something on this lad, or is it a fishing expedition?”

“If you ask me, it’s because he’s red-headed.”

“Red-headed? That interests me. If I’m not red-headed myself, at least I’m a sort of pale pink.”

“Now get me straight, see? All that this man Sevens could spill to the cops about the Beverly job was that the guy that bumped off Tom Shell had red hair, an’ the bulls are makin’ their usual bone-headed play at roundin’ up suspects.”

“Did Lou bump off Tom Shell?”

The rat-eyed man laughed scornfully.

“Bump off Tom Shell! Say, Lou ain’t no gun. He’s a cheap little yegg. The furthest he goes is sneak work on the ground floor—but he’s done a

stretch an' that's all the cops needs. A guy with a prison record ain't got no come-back, see?"

"A previous conviction, eh? Has he got a mouth-piece?"

"No. He had a lawyer—name of Mandelle—when they sent him up for grand, but to-day he rang Mandelle up from the station house and the bird turned him down cold. Said he was too busy."

"Why do you tell me all this, Max?" inquired Fogarty quietly. "What have I got to do with it?"

"Just this," retorted the other quickly. "You've got a good bean under your lid—and you've been thumb-tracked and strong-armed by the cops often enough to know the game that Lou's up against." He paused, then added: "Besides that, I've passed a tip or two your way in times gone by, and I don't mind asking a favour of you."

"Hasn't Lou any friends?"

The other paused for a moment, then answered sullenly, "None that wants to come forward just now."

"Oh," said Fogarty.

"It's like this. It's a frame. Lou's a crook. Nobody ain't denying that—but he ain't done nothin' this trip and there ain't no reason why he should have to go up the river."

"Just what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go down there and talk to him."

After a moment Fogarty nodded. "I'll go," he said.

Whatever were his relations to the underworld, Don Fogarty knew the ropes. Though it was true, as Max had intimated, that he had himself experienced police harrying, his record at the moment imposed upon him no fear in the matter of going to the Tombs and, having presented himself there, he found himself permitted to talk in brief confidence with Lou Stine.

"Give him good advice, Don," was the affable suggestion of the official who admitted him. "Maybe he'll take it from you. Slip him the tip that if he's disposed to talk out straight, it may go easier with him in the long run. We think he knows something about fur."

"The boys uptown claim this is a frame," replied Fogarty quietly. "If it looks that way to me, I won't advise him to fall for it, but if I think he's stalling, I'll follow your line. I only came because he doesn't seem to have many friends rallying around this morning."

Inside the cage-like room, where visitors and prisoners met, Fogarty found a sullen captive leaning toward morose silence, but after a little his mood melted into a greater spirit of communicativeness.

"The bulls planted a gat in my clothes and hauled me in," he complained, "and I don't own no gat. They're just making a blind stab in the hope that if they put the screws to me hard enough I might snitch on some other guy worth pulling in. It's the

fur business that's bitin' 'em, and that's why this bird Mandelle won't defend me."

"I'm not so sure that I get you, Lou. Why won't Mandelle take a case because the cops claim it's connected with a fur robbery?"

A flash of gusty wrath shot into the prisoner's shifty eyes.

"You come here as a friend of mine," he said, "and I'm talking to you straight. I don't know nothin' more about this part of it than what you do, and so I ain't makin' no wise cracks. I'm just guessin' myself. I ain't no fur thief. I wish I was. Them guys has been pickin' the berries, and it looks to me like they've got protection."

He paused, and Fogarty refrained from hurrying him. At length Stine went morosely on:

"All I knows is what I reads in the papers—but the bean can work out a guess or two. When these guns stuck up Slapinsky's house a few nights back, who was the guy that just happened to run in and get a gat poked in his ribs? Who was the guy that told the police he'd beat it up to the place before he thought about the chance of gettin' croaked? The papers says it was this same Joe Mandelle."

Fogarty nodded.

"Mandelle was one of the crowd attracted by the burglar alarm, according to the papers," he acceded. "But what of that?"

"Yeah, what of it, I ask you? What was Joe

Mandelle doin' strollin' round loose in that part of town just then? There ain't supposed to be much goin' on there at that time of night."

"What were any of them doing there just then?"

"The rest of 'em gave home addresses in the neighbourhood. They was on their own beat, but Mandelle he wasn't."

Fogarty shook his head dubiously.

"That's wild guessing, Lou," he said. "But why do you want Mandelle especially? Why not some other mouth-piece?"

"I knows him, that's all, an' I knows he's a sharp rat in court. But besides that, it makes me sore to have him turn me down cold when I'm an old-time customer of his."

"I'll see him, if you like."

"All right." It was a churlish acceptance of a kindness, but Lou Stine was graceless by nature, not by design. "See him an' slip him this message from me. Shoot it to him straight. I'm just takin' a chance shot—see?—but I've got a hunch. Tell him that maybe I'm wise to certain things that ain't generally known, an' maybe if friends don't come rompin' through, with a defense fund, I'll spill them same things to the bulls. Tell him that an' see if it means anything in his life."

Don Fogarty obligingly carried his message as envoy from the jailed suspect, but he found Mandelle urbanely obdurate.

“Your friend is barking up the wrong tree, Mr. Fogarty,” said the attorney equably. “I represented him once before and I’d be glad to do it again—except for the prosaic fact that I’m too busy. This case will be called for an early hearing and I have to leave town within a few days.”

“I don’t know what Stine had in mind,” suggested the visitor carelessly. “But as I left, he asked me to deliver one message as nearly verbatim as I could. ‘Tell him that maybe I know some things an’ maybe if friends don’t come through with defense money, I’ll spill my information to the bulls.’”

Mandelle lifted his brows with amused interest.

“What friends did he refer to, Mr. Fogarty? Have you any idea?”

“None. He seemed to imply that you might know.”

Mandelle shook a perplexed head. “It leaves me all at sea,” he declared. “I don’t remember now what friends of his I came in contact with at his last trial; I suppose I could find out by going over my records, but that would use up as much time as undertaking his defense.” He paused and added genially, “I’m afraid he must get word to these unknowns through another messenger.”

Fogarty was looking with a leisurely absent-mindedness about the office in which he had been received. The door into the entrance room was closed, but that into the dictation room stood open,

for the attorney had risen from the talking machine to receive him.

On the table lay a memorandum pad bearing several notations, presumably reminders of appointments, and though Fogarty had a trained and photographic eye, it was not capable, even had it been making the effort, of reading them all. One jotting, however, was heavily ringed round with a pencil mark, as though it were set apart as more important than its fellows, and the eye of Mr. Fogarty caught this scribbled jotting: "Sev. M. H." and a number of four digits. Also he saw a telegram lying open but could make nothing of it.

"May I ask," inquired Mandelle politely, "what your interest in the defendant is?"

"Surely," laughed Fogarty. "It's a natural one. I don't know much about Stine's civilian activities, but he served under me in France."

"And your civilian activities?" Mr. Mandelle put the interrogation courteously, but with a touch of rallying facetiousness, at which his guest laughed as he rose.

"Unemployed, just now," he answered. "I'm a peg that hasn't fitted into its permanent hole since the Armistice. Luckily for me I'm not one of the starving."

"No, you don't look it."

Fogarty did not look starving. His pin-checked clothes were of a soft and excellent fabric and cut

by a tailor who had done justice to the material. His scarf was knotted with careless effectiveness and pinned with a small but well lusted pearl.

“Of course if you’re leaving town you can’t defend Stine,” smiled the envoy. “I’m sorry.”

The open telegram on the table caught Mandelle’s eye and it occurred to him that the visitor might have recognized some of its purport. Now, as if in confirmation of his verbal statement, he picked it up and handed it carelessly across.

“You see, I’m called away,” he said. “That message is from an important client and it came a little while ago.”

Fogarty glanced at the thing with just that brief and impersonal attention which politeness required, but as he handed it back, seemingly unread, he knew not only its content but its signature.

“Meet me at Seelbach Hotel, Louisville, Saturday noon,” said the telegram, and the name was S. C. Cowes.

Having ushered his visitor out Mandelle returned to his office and stood for a few moments in reflection.

“Now who and what might this individual be?” He made interrogation in his thoughts. “He’s a pleasing enough lad, judged by his looks and his manners, but I don’t altogether like him. He’s got the quick eye—and my guess is that he lives by his wits.” He paused, wagging his head slowly, as he digested that surmise, then he added, “And evidently

enough he lives well by them. He's as smooth as silk, if you ask me."

As he went down in the elevator, Don Fogarty was in turn digesting his impressions of the man he had left behind. "I don't like the bird," he made emphatic mental note. "But Lou Stine is making a wild guess in suspecting him."

In the arcade of the office building Fogarty turned into a telephone booth and called a number. It was the number that he had seen scribbled on the desk pad upstairs and naturally enough he assumed that the M. H. which preceded it stood for the exchange, Murray Hill.

"Hello," he inquired when a voice responded. "Who is this, please?"

"Beverly Brothers, Furriers; administration department," came the crisp reply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Fogarty softly. "They gave me the wrong number."

But he stood for a little while in the closed booth, drawing absurd little figures on the back of an envelope, while his mind drew less haphazard designs.

"If there *should* be anything in Lou Stine's suspicions," he told himself, "this is interesting—*boucoup* interesting. I'll say it is. This bird's special appointment to-day is with Beverly Brothers. Now *if* he's in with the fur gang—and that's a long-shot bet—it looks like he's also in with the prosecu-

tion. If *that's* so, he's apt to be double-crossing the gang."

This latter idea seemed to interest Mr. Fogarty more directly and emphatically than the former. In a confederation such as that which had been so successfully pursuing a piracy in furs, there might be members unknown to the other members. Perhaps only one man knew definitely and exactly the whole personnel from top to bottom.

The old town of Camden in South Carolina is not given an impressive rating in the census for its numbers of busy inhabitants, but then the census fails to take note of the bird population. And one might fancy, as he walked along the streets where the long-leaf pines tower and the oaks wear a winter dress of mistletoe, that there are almost as many mockingbirds as people, white and black. Neither does the census enumerate those other birds, the human birds of passage who migrate from wintrier latitudes to the soft lure and charm of the mid-South. Now these birds were there, bright of plumage, and along the languid streets was much purring of expensive motors between the centre of the place and the heights where the cottages of the winter people cluster about golf links, polo fields, and the charming grounds from which the Palmetto Inn looks down on Camden as Marathon looks on the sea.

It was not on the more fashionable heights that Barbour Sevens and his little family had settled themselves to drink that fine air and bird music; it was down in the rambling old town itself in an ancient mansion which was now a boarding house, but as Hope pointed out it was that rarely found thing, a boarding house which is yet not a boarding house.

“Boarding houses develop a species of their own—generally,” she told Barbour. “In them people fade into the genus boarder and merge into a kinship of drabness.”

“I know,” he agreed. “They can’t get away from the petty spirit of being fellow prisoners to necessity . . . and most boarders are just that.”

He laughed as he lighted a cigarette. “But this house——”

“Oh, this house,” declared Hope delightedly, “is different. It’s darling.”

It was. Its front façade ran even with the sidewalk, but it was a soft-toned street lined with trees, each one a venerable colossus, and the hoof-thud of galloping polo ponies and saddle horses went cheerily along it instead of nerve-grinding traffic. The walls themselves rose soft with a stucco tint against which sunlight and shifting shadow played at a game of everchanging embroideries, and back of an old brick wall, grown mossy, there was a garden which in January was still a garden.

There the deodar cedars, mock orange, and cape myrtle were always green, and the huge walnuts and oaks refused to be winter skeletons, for their boles were ivy-wrapped and their spreading heads thick with mistletoe. About the birds' bath at the centre ran little brick-edged geometrics of hedge-bordered footpaths, and there was usually a chirping of cardinals and a swaggering of insolent bluejays about the place. Long galleries above and below looked out on this garden.

"It's almost as if we were taking the wedding trip we had to postpone years ago," smiled Hope. She was sitting in a steamer chair on the upper gallery and her eyes softened. Barbour threw away his cigarette and came closer.

"But for one thing it would be heavenly," he said.

"That one thing has been left behind," she laughed. "One can't be sick here."

He hoped her optimism was well founded, and he smiled because that spirit was the medicine she most needed, but in his heart he had meant two things when he said one, and he was not so sure that the second was left behind. He had leaned on Mandelle as a cripple leans on a crutch, but now with a thousand or more miles between him and the lawyer's assurance of manner, he looked back, and a disquieting doubt gnawed at his mind. Candour is always best. Concealment is not only unethical but dan-

gerous. Suppose Mandelle had, after all, erred in judgment? It was not Mandelle himself who would have to suffer the penalties of his mistake, and if Mandelle should die suddenly no living voice, except his own, which would be stultified by self-interest, could ever give the force of denial to the looming structure of false seeming.

“Look there,” laughed Hope suddenly.

Along the street cantered two ponies and on one of them rode Faith, booted and breeched, laughing up at a cavalier whom they had yesterday watched in helmet and silks in the *mêlée* of the polo field.

“Jumping Jupiter!” exclaimed Sevens, grinning. “Where did the brat raise the togs and where did she learn to ride like that?”

“The togs she borrowed here in the house,” smiled Hope, “but the virtuosity in the saddle is a surprise to me.”

Across the lobby of the Seelbach in Louisville a prosperous-looking business man was pacing impatiently about noon on Saturday with an eye that went often to the clock over the clerk’s desk. His general seeming was prosperous but unchallenging, for as he had told Barbour Sevens on an evening when they sat together in a Greenwich Village tea room, he was “extraordinarily ordinary.”

Yet for all this individual’s watchful impatience he was not on the lookout in the lobby but closed into

a telephone booth when he heard a bellboy paging his name: "Mr. S. C. Cowes! Call for Mr. S. C. Cowes!"

He emerged at once to follow the boy over to the desk where he saw Attorney Joseph Mandelle of New York awaiting him. There was only a perfunctory handshake between the two and even after they had gone up in the elevator and were closeted in the bedroom of Mr. Cowes, the man who had from a distance directed the epidemic of New York robberies seemed in no hurry to become loquacious.

He let Mandelle talk first, and it was not until, through the narrative of the new arrival, he had been brought up to date on every detail that he went further than the asking of brisk questions. Then it looked as if the tenor of his talk was not to be wholly amicable, for his eyes were smouldering resentfully.

"It's been a rotten piece of business," he began in sharp-edged testiness. "It's the first time I've ventured on outside advice and that advice was yours."

"It was a proposition that I put up to you tentatively," retorted Mandelle shortly, "and you accepted it on your own judgment."

"It ended in murder," continued the man who was registered under the fictitious name of Cowes, ignoring his companion's logic of self-justification.

"That was because when I gave you warning in due time you went bull-headedly ahead, anyhow—

and ran past the danger-signals. I supposed that when you knew Sevens was informing, you'd drop the thing."

"It seems," came the dry retort, "that both of us were fools. Let's cut out wrangling now and get down to business. The phase of the thing that I dislike most is the position in which you stand."

"As how?"

"As the ostensible adviser of the man we can't afford to have any traffic with."

"And yet that is the exact position that enables me to hold him in line. Suppose he had stated the thing in full from the beginning, and called on me to verify his statement?"

Cowes looked searchingly at his companion and his eyes narrowed.

"If he had done that—or if by any chance he ever does make such a statement—there is just one thing you can do. I hope you understand that very clearly indeed?"

"What thing?" Mandelle put his question a bit sullenly.

"I'm sorry you should have to ask. You must without qualification repudiate him and his story—repudiate him utterly."

Mandelle sat silent. That meant going deeper into the filth than he wanted to go. It meant out-and-out perjury; a perjury hard to stomach even for him. If it failed it must ruin him. If it succeeded and sent

Sevens to the chair it would be a form of murder upon which it was not pleasant to reflect. Moreover, there would always be many who would believe Barbour's unsupported story—outside the jury room.

“That,” he remarked, after an uncomfortable silence, “is a situation that must at all hazards be avoided.”

“At all hazards—but one,” Cowes made aggressive amendment. “If it comes to choosing between that and failing me, I'd advise you to do even so distasteful a thing as throwing Sevens to the sharks.”

Mandelle rose from his chair a trifle unsteadily, and went to the window, where he stood looking out over the town roofs to the rim of Indiana hills across the Ohio.

Then he turned, and his voice was low but stubbornly assertive.

“I take it we both understand that we can't afford to split or quarrel,” he said, “but I object to any tone of domineering. As I see it, you need me as much as I need you. So far as I have information only three men know what your part has been. Red, the actual murderer, is one. Sevens is another—and I myself am the third. I suppose you can answer for Red. I propose to answer for Sevens. As for myself, our interests are identical.”

“Correct,” affirmed Cowes. “I'll answer for Red. You say you'll answer for Sevens, but you also say he has gone South. Suppose he weakens?”

"I'm going South, too," answered Mandelle. "I'm going to stay South as long as he does."

"That's what I was about to urge," commented the other. "And if I were you, I'd go from here. The Carolina Special leaves Seventh Street about eight o'clock this evening."

He paused, then coming closer, Cowes held out his hand. "I think you'd better let me have the Sevens confession," he suggested. "It's wise to keep all the records together."

Mandelle drew back and his face paled, but he shook his head. He had no intent of surrendering that paper upon which, in certain circumstances, his whole power would rest, but neither had he any wish to risk a quarrel if he might succeed by more diplomatic measures.

"I think," he said in a conciliatory tone, "that would be a great mistake. A situation might arise in which it came to a final battle between Sevens and myself. In such a case I could always disarm him by telling him flatly that he must sit pretty, or I'd throw him overboard." He paused a moment, then amplified. "In such a situation, that paper flashed before his eyes would be better than a loaded gun—but that's only in case of desperation."

Cowes realized that for two men who must stick together there had already been too much the spirit of antagonism. Grudgingly he yielded the point, and Mandelle raised another.

“In one practice that has always been observed between us heretofore, you’ve defaulted, Cowes,” he said.

“I don’t get you.”

“On the day that Tom Shell told me of this plan to trap the thieves, I sent you a warning.”

The other nodded.

“And since it wasn’t sent in the form of a letter or a telephone message the tangible thing is outstanding. You’ve always returned such records to me before, so that I might, myself, destroy them.”

“It was in a safe cipher.”

“Yes, but all codes are breakable. I want it back in my own hands. I’ve just had a lesson in things presumably destroyed that aren’t destroyed.”

“I’m afraid,” said the chief slowly, “that went with other things that were sent straight through to St. Louis. Shall I trust it to the mails?”

“Yes, registered,” responded Mandelle. “I’ll trust the cipher as long as it takes the package to travel in the mail sack—but not permanently.”

After the two had parted Cowes talked with another lieutenant.

“I imagine Mandelle will stick all right,” he said. “But just the same, I want him watched. When you get back to New York, I’ll give you instructions. I want our learned counsel shadowed a bit down there in Camden, and the man to do it is in Brooklyn.”

CHAPTER XIV

BARBOUR SEVENS and his family had been at Mrs. Sangster's only a few days, yet already the restful charm of the old house and the older town had laid upon them a pleasantly familiar spell. Already they could recognize and call by name some of the polo ponies that went pattering along the streets. They were proud in that new and simple wisdom which enabled them to remark casually that Barstow was a "five-goal man" and that Carson always saved the bay mare Flash-light for the final chukker in a close contest. Barbour and Hope could go only this far in freshly gained knowledge, but Faith was more advanced. She not only knew the ponies by name but she had ridden several of them and fed them lumps of sugar at their stall doors. As for the owners of the horses, they were stamping their boot-heels and clinking their spurs along the gallery of Mrs. Sangster's house with the frequency of young adjutants about staff headquarters.

Sevens swung, pendulum-wise, between joy occasioned by Doctor Corbin's cheery pronouncements as he glanced in on Hope, and the canker-like germs

of anxiety that were gnawing away at his own thoughts with a toxin for which the physician had no remedy.

It was as he walked alone one afternoon toward the heights where the polo squads were to meet in a practice game on the Number Two field that surprise met him in human guise. Faith had motored up with some young man in boots and breeches and Hope was idling over a novel on the sunlit upper gallery.

So Barbour strode along the sandy sidewalk, gazing absently at the bark of the great pines which looked like alligator skin seen through a magnifying glass—when he came face to face with Joe Mandelle.

Since it is not given to the ordinary eye to see on both sides of a wall at once, Sevens did not recognize in the spruce figure and smiling face of the lawyer any portent of treachery. No psychic vibration carried a warning to his heart that this supposed friend and trusted guide was leading him slowly but inevitably down a blind alley of tragedy toward disgrace and the seeming of felony. He saw only the man upon whose assurance he had leaned and in whose absence he had felt assailed by unending fears.

In that spirit of relief he halted and stared and it was Mandelle who spoke first.

“Surprised to see me here, what?” he laughed. “I don’t blame you. But don’t look at me as if I were a ghost or an executioner. I don’t come bearing evil tidings.”

“What *does* bring you?” The question came quickly with a mingling of anxiety and delight.

“I was pretty well tired out by a busy winter and I decided to run away and ease up a bit in a place where I had friends.”

Mandelle smiled and paused, and then added in a tone of unstrained kindness: “It occurred to me, too, that you might be feeling nervous off here with your thoughts, and that I might reassure you while I rested.”

“Great!” exclaimed Sevens. “I have been worrying a little. I can’t get over the feeling that concealment of truth is kissing-kin to guilt in a way. But—” he broke off and his tone sharpened with apprehension—“but doesn’t someone have to watch things—back there?”

Mandelle laughed. “My office is keeping its fingers on the pulse of things. I shall know at once of any flutter that needs my presence. But your danger passed when we established the fact that Shell tore up your fool confession.”

“Thank God,” exclaimed Sevens devoutly, “that we laid that ghost.”

Mandelle was stopping at the Palmetto Inn on the hill but he became a frequent visitor at Mrs. Sangster’s, where he and Hope fenced blithely with lightly clashing blades of repartee while her eyes sparkled and his glowed in humorous appreciation.

On a Saturday evening, when the air held a softness of caressing warmth that seemed tinctured with magic to their more northern ideas of January, they all went to a dance at the hotel, and though Barbour sat out the numbers with his wife, who was not dancing, Faith maintained the family average for active participation on the floor.

Mandelle was sitting with them when, half way through the evening, he glanced up and started so abruptly that something he was saying came to a broken stop. Though he went on with almost immediate resumption, his eyes persistently held the door from the lobby proper to the smaller room in which their chairs had been placed.

Following that glance, Barbour saw the figure of a guest whom he had not noticed before standing on the threshold and looking idly about with the air of a man who has recently arrived and who orients himself deliberately in new surroundings.

It was a man who, though palpably young, had sandy hair graying about its temples and a face modelled in vigorous lines and angles to a rather pleasing homeliness. Out of that face the eyes, which were blue, shone with an arresting alertness and brightness, like strong lamps lighted in a plain, almost bare, room. The stranger was slenderly but strongly built, with a declaration of nervous force in his movements, and he wore the inconspicuous uniform of dinner-jacketed evening dress.

“Why the sudden interest in a new guest, Joe?” inquired Sevens, and the attorney smiled.

“No good reason,” responded Mandelle, self-annoyed at his abrupt manifestation of surprise. “That fellow in the door came into my office recently to try to get me to defend a suspected gunman, that’s all. His name’s Fogarty and for the moment I couldn’t place him.”

“Is he a gunman, too?” demanded Hope with a livened interest. “In these days of dressy criminals, one wouldn’t be surprised.”

The lawyer laughed. “Always questing after the romantic angle, aren’t you?” he challenged. “But I’m afraid I can’t play up to your demand this time. Mr. Fogarty explained that he was interested in the defendant because that defendant had served under him overseas.”

“Well, he’s a fast worker,” Barbour paid tribute with a grin. “He’s already met enough of the young bucks, it seems, to get himself introduced to the girls.”

For Fogarty had been joined at the door by a man who had been longer in residence here than himself, and now the two were shunting rapidly across the dancing floor to “cut in” on Faith. There was a hurried presentation and Fogarty was gliding away with Barbour’s kid sister-in-law.

“He dances like a streak,” exclaimed Hope admiringly, and Mandelle supplemented drily, “Yes—or a lounge lizard.”

The music reached its end, was encored, and after that the new guest came slowly over, with Faith, to the chairs where the older members of the family sat, and was bowing in acknowledgment of his introduction.

At sight of Mandelle, Mr. Fogarty lifted his brows in slight surprise.

"I've had the pleasure, once before," he said. "We seem to have struck a common orbit, don't we?"

"Do you ride horseback, Mr. Fogarty?" Faith was asking with just that touch of young eagerness that argued pleasure for a new acquisition, and the young man laughed.

"God and the horse willing," he made modest answer. "But it has to be a unanimous consent."

The dance was over and those guests from outside the hotel had motored away over the gravelled driveways or strolled to their near-by cottages when, in a second-story hall, Mandelle and Fogarty met again.

It seemed that coincidence had again brushed them with its touch, for now each of them was fitting a room key into a room door and they found themselves immediate neighbours.

"By the way, Fogarty," inquired Mandelle lightly, "did your man in New York get satisfactorily fixed up as to legal advice?"

Fogarty grinned. "As near as I could make out," he said, "the mysterious friends of whom he spoke

'came through.' I went to the jail to carry your answer—and I found a legal gentleman there who was already undertaking the defense."

When the two doors closed, Mandelle did not at once go to bed. He sat for a while over a freshly lighted cigar and a train of freshly kindled thought.

Was the arrival of this stranger who had, for no very definite reason, excited his suspicion on their first meeting, only one of the many coincidences of human goings and comings, or was it something more?

There had been a lurking disquiet in his mind since that talk with the man who called himself Cowes in Louisville. Cowes had assumed an attitude of half-threat, and having sent him here to watch Sevens it was quite within the character of that puller-of-wires to have, in turn, sent another liaison officer to spy upon him. If so, it was a thing that savoured of insult. Had Fogarty's first visit to him there in his office been really a reconnoitring trip, he wondered, undertaken at the behest of Cowes and his crowd to feel out his own discretion and reliability? And if that were true, as it might or might not be, was not Fogarty just the man to continue that most annoying espionage on his movements here?

At all events, Mandelle had felt, there in his own office, some indefinable spirit of distrust for this fellow whose shrewd eyes looked out lazily yet with a deviltry of keenness, too. He had bristled in antagonism, and had been conscious of a sense of relief

when Fogarty had taken himself off. Now Fogarty was again present.

Of course, argued the attorney, this was all just the action and reaction of a mind whose situation made it overly suspicious and given to the gusty play of prejudices. Yet he had, before this, experienced intuitive dislikes and had found it well to heed their warnings.

The presence of Don Fogarty under the same roof irritated him and made him fretfully wakeful, whatever the cause of the phenomenon—but for that very reason he resolved on a course of outward friendliness. To this Fogarty person, even more than to other chance acquaintances, he would extend overtures of comradeship, and for the present he would keep his suspicions tight-locked in his own consciousness.

The next few days did not alleviate his unrest of spirit, for, like the rest, Fogarty had discovered the Sangster house, and it was written plain to the observing eye that the Sangster house liked Fogarty. It was to see Faith that he probably made the old garden a port of call as he strolled from the heights to the post office and back again, but when Faith was not in evidence, he seemed content to sit and smoke with Barbour Sevens, and between the two there sprung into quick being the easy cordiality of a mutually agreeable association.

“They’ve all fallen for him hard,” reflected Man-

delle. "And if he did come here at Cowes's orders, that would be just the thing he'd be apt to play for. That would be the wise policy."

Perhaps it was only Faith who came near knowing the stranger, because it was to her only that he showed any guise except that of a ready wit and drifting carelessness. She saw the somewhat ruggedly patterned face in soberer phases, when the blue eyes grew almost gray like sea water under fog banks, but that was always when they were alone.

They drew their ponies to a standstill one day at a point called the Precipice. There from a sand bluff that was high only in comparison with the lowlands under it, the eye swung wide and the town itself sprawled distant and almost woodland hidden. But Fogarty's glance, after a cursory survey, came back to the face of the girl, who sat looking out with the rapt enthusiasm of her youth while her pony tugged at the reins, and, finding them loose, went to nuzzling in the grass.

She made an engaging picture, as the breeze stirred the hair at the smooth nape of her neck and the sunlight searched the delicate gorgeousness of her cheeks and betrayed no flaw in their dewy freshness. Perhaps that picture gave Don Fogarty thought, for his own eyes took on their fog-darkness as he looked at her.

"I never knew any one like you before," he found himself saying as though it were a soliloquy, and

Faith brought her eyes back from their ranging, to turn laughingly.

“That might be a very nice thing to say, or a very horrid thing,” she announced. “It’s like a door that opens both ways.”

“I meant it to be the nicest thing possible,” he told her, and the earnestness of his voice made it almost grim.

“If it comes to that,” she answered lightly, because his seriousness seemed to need the tempering of levity, “I never knew any one exactly like you before, either.”

“Meaning which side of the door?” he demanded.

“Perhaps,” she countered, “I wasn’t putting up any door between the sheep and the goats. I mean that you’re—well, it’s rather hard to say, but I like it.”

Mr. Fogarty’s eyes did not twinkle with their customary humour. They were still sober, as sober as though he were pursuing this light conversation toward some vitally serious end.

“If you like it—I mean the thing that makes me different—I wish you’d try to define it. I haven’t such an abundance of personal assets that I can let any one of them go unscheduled.”

Faith puckered her brow very prettily and nodded good-naturedly.

“I think the chief thing is that while you strike one as a—well, I suppose the term sophisticated will

have to do though it's a poor one—still you don't pretend to be bored at things. There's something sort of—well, eager about you."

He smiled then, not flashingly as he sometimes did, but slowly.

"I'm rather glad you said that," he assured her. "And yet I'm afraid when I tell you why I'm that way, it will spoil your opinion of me."

"Tell me why and see."

"I'm going to. I've got to in honesty, and with you I must be honest."

"Then why are you different in the way I tried so unsuccessfully to express?"

Fogarty's pony was nuzzling at the grass, too, now, while the reins hung.

"Because I haven't known these phases of life that bring social sophistication long enough to tire of them. They're still novelties to me."

"What do you mean?" She looked up, a little puzzled and more than a little interested.

"I mean that I've got to employ another term that's rubbed shabby with over-use—I'm what they call a self-made man. I came up from the street."

"So much the better," she rendered prompt verdict. "You *did* come up."

"Perhaps I only came far enough to ape and parrot fairly well the manners and conduct that ought to flow out of instinct," he smiled. "You see, all that I've got is front while you, for instance, have back-

ground that runs back for generations." He paused, but the thoughtful look in his eyes told the girl that he was not yet through and she waited for him to finish.

"I wonder if you realize what a difference there is between front and background? It's precisely the difference that exists between an elegant old house, with contents that have come slowly into it and with associations attaching to them all and—well, one of these make-believe house fronts that they build on the moving-picture lot—a single wall with nothing behind it—nothing inside it—just show."

The girl shook her head.

"There's more behind your front than that," she said. "There's whatever made you 'come up,' as you call it. There's the sort of kindly feeling and gentleness that isn't aped or parroted. It can't be."

The man smiled and gathered up his reins.

"Thank you again," he said. "I think I have a kindly feeling for most people. I'm not a good hater, though there have been times when I ought to have hated implacably—and couldn't manage to do it."

They turned the horses homeward, and Fogarty curbed his dangerous trend of impulse toward the personal. He was watching himself now because it had suddenly come to him to realize that he had not been far from making love to this girl, and that would never do. He had not supposed there was any

danger of it until this afternoon, but some wilful spirit had possessed him up there and made him want to cast caution to the winds and let his heart gallop loose-reined. He must not let that happen again, but he knew that the wish had come to him, and he suspected that it would stay and besiege him with augmented force, until, if he were not careful, his emotions would carry him by assault.

He was surprised and yet not surprised. Love and lightning never strike until they strike—and then they can't be recalled. Faith was easy to love and he loved her, but that was as far as it could go. Many people had come to Camden for pleasure or upbuilding of health. He had come for neither and, to him, any challenge of sentiment was a siren song against which he must stuff his ears and bind himself to the mast.

When all was said and done his business wasn't a very pretty affair—but it was urgent and he was committed to its completion.

CHAPTER XV

JOE MANDELLE saw, with the edged shrewdness of his own concern, that Barbour's sister-in-law listened to the conversation of Don Fogarty with an interest which she did not accord in like measure to the tourist polo players or the soft-voiced young Carolinians. Often when the two were together, the lawyer observed that, "his eyes were taking fire, and she flung him look for look"—and these were things that fanned Mandelle's anxiety into a resolve for action.

He had, for his own part, maintained a studied friendship with Fogarty, but that became a more and more difficult attitude to maintain as he realized with what penetration the quiet eyes were seeing and recording. When those eyes looked at him most lazily, they made him feel most hunted, and the inquisitiveness to know something more of this stranger mounted in him until it became an imperative obsession. Cowes had not yet sent the registered package containing the communication in code, and Mandelle began to fret under a growing conviction that he was being spied on and evaded by an arrogant tyrant. Quite suddenly a decision came out of these

simmering emotions, and under a plea of being called North on business, he left South Carolina.

It was not to New York he went, but Washington. He had friends there who could be of service to him in his present puzzlement, and he was bent on running down Fogarty's military history, and seeing if by any chance it might shed any light on other phases of his activities earlier or later.

His absence covered a few days only, and in Camden those were days of placid uneventfulness, at least in such outward manifestations as met the eye. But Don Fogarty, lounging over the cigar counter which went across the front of the hotel office, was keeping, with his seemingly indolent eyes, a watch as close as that maintained from the bridge of a ship, and he saw several things that were not trivial to him. He timed his goings and comings in such a fashion that whenever the station wagon brought incoming mail his educated glance noted what envelopes were shoved into the letter box just to the right of his own—that which held mail for Joe Mandelle. It was on the day after the absentee's departure that a coloured card was slipped into that box and Fogarty knew that such cards from the local post office bore notification to the addressee to call at the office and sign for registered mail.

Going back to his own room that morning, he waited patiently until he heard the key turn in the door to the right of his own, indicating that a

chambermaid was letting herself into Mandelle's quarters. The listener wanted, under excuse of speaking to her, to enter that legitimately opened door for a moment or two of swift survey—because, despite his show of friendliness, Mandelle had never invited him across the threshold.

As he entered with an apologetic, yet matter-of-fact air, the maid appeared on the bathroom threshold with towels draped across her forearm.

“I beg your pardon,” said Fogarty, “but I heard you in here and I came to ask you for an extra blanket on my bed. I like to sleep with my windows open—and sometimes I could use that extra cover.”

Fogarty's eyes were seemingly on the face of the woman as he spoke, and when he finished he turned and went out at once, but he had had time to notice where the occupant's trunk stood—and that it was, even in his absence, unlocked. That proved conclusively enough for his satisfaction that the trunk held nothing of a secret nature. The clothes closet also stood ajar and Fogarty reasoned that if Mandelle had had about him, during his stay in Camden, any documents of confidential value, they were either in the office safe or he had taken them away with him.

Now the investigator went downstairs and out of the door. He was bound for the Sangster house and a leisurely cigar on its veranda.

That night, though, he did not go to bed until the clock had stood two hours beyond midnight.

Through the extended spaces of the hotel there was now entire silence, and Don Fogarty, who wore soft-soled tennis sneakers, slipped noiselessly down the stairs to the office floor. The place was empty except for a night clerk who napped in his chair and it was dimly lighted. The prowling guest slipped so noiselessly into the office that the drowsing figure did not stir, and, extracting from Joe Mandelle's letter box the coloured card calling for registered mail, he deftly transferred it into his own.

To have purloined it would have been incautious, but to have it delivered into his hand by the clerk on the next morning would excite no suspicion. Then if any question arose the thing would stand explained on the reasonable assumption that, in the distribution of mail, one piece had been wrongly pigeon-holed.

The plan worked out as he had devised it, and on the next morning, with the card in his pocket, Fogarty went to the post office and handed it through the window—but when the book was pushed forward to him, for his signature, he raised his brows in surprise. The name of the addressee was not his own, but that of another. The clerk at the registry window had already turned away and come back, bringing a small cardboard box which he laid on the shelf before Mr. Fogarty.

Mr. Fogarty gazed at it absent-mindedly and rather stupidly. He even turned it about in his hand and quickly calculated its heft and weight.

He memorized the return address and postmark, then he shook his head and thrust it back.

“This seems to be a mistake,” he said. “This isn’t directed to me, after all. The card must have gotten wrongly into my box at the hotel—and I glanced at it too hurriedly to notice the fact. Sorry to have troubled you.”

Fogarty had not contemplated robbing the registered mails, but he had wished to identify that package so that when he saw it again he might identify it—and he meant to see it again.

But when Mandelle, upon his return, stepped out of the depot wagon and entered the hotel, Fogarty drew himself lazily out of an easy chair near the desk and lounged over to welcome him back.

The returned traveller was handed his mail and spoke in a low voice to the clerk, who nodded understandingly and turned to the safe. From it he produced and delivered to Mandelle an envelope of ordinary letter size and flat enough to indicate that it held no great bulk of content. This envelope, Fogarty saw, as the attorney thrust it into his breast-pocket, was sealed not once but three times with red wax.

As Mandelle climbed the stairs to his own room, a Negro boy preceded him, carrying his bag, and Fogarty followed casually after the interval of about two minutes.

Before the door of the attorney’s room had closed

behind the retiring bellboy Fogarty rapped lightly on it, and let himself in with the air of one who assumes a welcome before it is expressed.

The lawyer had thrown his mail down on the table, and, at the other's entrance, he wheeled from a position beside it, suppressing an irritated flash that shot into his eyes at the intrusion. In his hands he held the envelope that he had taken from the safe, and though he had been in the act of tearing it open, he now thrust it back again into his breast pocket. This he did with a deliberateness calculated to avoid any seeming of special significance, but Don Fogarty had seen enough to confirm his idea that whatever the envelope contained was of a private nature and of such importance that its possessor had not cared to risk losing it on his journey. Now in spite of its unbroken seals Mandelle's first concern on reaching his room had been to assure himself that in his absence nothing had happened to it.

Fogarty lounged forward and perched himself on the arm of a chair.

"Glad to see you back, old man," he declared. "You've got a registered package in the post office."

His inhospitable host looked up quickly and with a momentary frown. He had started nervously at the sudden irrelevancy of the announcement and now he grunted shortly, "Is that so?"

"Yes," chattered on Fogarty. "I know because that card got into my box by mistake and I walked all

the way down to the post office before I discovered that I was on a wild-goose chase. They shoved the book out to be signed and I saw your name. Was it an agreeable trip?"

"Tolerable," answered Mandelle. "Just business and tiresome. I'll have to ask you to excuse me now. I want to get into the tub."

"Of course, I just dropped in to extend the glad hand of welcome." Fogarty rose, yawned, and drifted out.

That afternoon the lawyer and Barbour Sevens took a long tramp into the pine woods, and it was when they had reached a place of seclusion and sat with kindled pipes that Mandelle came to his point.

"I've got a nasty bit of news for you, Barb," he said. "The thing shocked me when it began dawning, and I said nothing about it until I'd looked into it enough to be sure I wasn't imagining it all."

Sevens's face, sunburned and flushed from fast walking, paled a little with the sudden stab of apprehension. His fears had been dying down of late, but there was always the underlying smoulder of an anxiety ready to leap into fresh blazing.

"What is it?" The question came tensely. "Don't keep me in suspense."

"This fellow Fogarty seems to be an envoy of the fur thieves. I believe he came here to watch your attitude and relay his reports—to others."

"Fogarty!" Sevens snapped out the name like the

cracking of a whip. "I don't believe it, Joe. Fogarty's a decent chap. How can you know?"

"I can't *know* but I can feel morally sure. I've been looking into his military record, and it's bad. This suspicion came to me some time ago, but I kept my mouth shut until I went to Washington. I found that he was an intelligence officer during the war—and that through him news got to the enemy. That much is there on file."

"Why wasn't he court-martialled?"

"Charges were preferred for a G. C. M., but it was just at the time of the big shove, and seemingly he had influence. In a crisis of graver import the thing was put off—and finally it was allowed to die out altogether. They let him resign after the Armistice. There seems to be strong evidence of some crookedness in his youth. I couldn't run that down."

Sevens sat staring moodily ahead. His friendship with Don Fogarty had been brief and born of chance, but he realized that it had grown both rapidly and staunchly—and there was Faith. Faith would believe no such story without convincing proof, and of this, Barbour reminded the lawyer.

"I've thought of that, too," came the grave response. "And just now it would be unwise for either you or me to evince any sudden hostility to the man. He must remain without suspicion while we stand vigilantly on guard. After all, he can't do anything but look on, and if we know his purpose——"

“But Faith,” interrupted Sevens vehemently. “I can’t have Faith running about with a black-leg and a crook.”

“There’s one thing I can speak of—and prove,” suggested Mandelle slowly. “The military record can crop out. A girl like Faith wouldn’t stand for that. Suppose you leave it to me.”

Barbour walked home with a head that sagged forward in depressed wretchedness, and when he met Fogarty at the door, just taking his leave, it was hard to accept the hand that was smilingly thrust out to him.

The occasion which Mandelle had anticipated was offered him with unexpected promptness, for the next day he was driving in a dog cart several miles from town when he met Faith walking alone. She had tramped farther than she realized, and was tired, and she smilingly accepted his offer to pick her up and put her down at her own door.

When they had driven a short distance, Mandelle looked at her with a candid directness and asked, “Faith, how well do you like Don Fogarty?”

Her sudden flush was an answer in itself, but because he had spoken with an outright frankness she replied in like honesty.

“I rather think I—like him better than any other man I know.”

“I was afraid so.”

“Why afraid?” Her deep eyes flashed with a

sudden battle spark, and Mandelle regretfully shook his head.

“If there’s any rôle that’s particularly distasteful to me,” he made sober assertion, “it’s to speak critically to one friend of another, but——”

“But what?”

“I’ve just had occasion to make certain legal investigations in the archives of the War Department, and I came there on some records touching Fogarty. I felt you ought to know them.”

“Things you mean—that are discreditable?”

“Things that are discreditable.”

The girl looked silently away, then suddenly turned back to him eyes that were calm but dangerously clouded.

“When anybody makes an accusation—especially if it’s of a shameful thing—he ought to be willing to face the man he accuses. Don’t you think so?”

“Usually,” responded Mandelle drily. “But a lawyer’s work is largely confidential and sometimes he can’t be as outspoken as he’d like to be because of the interests of others. I thought you ought to know where these records could be found so that you might verify them for yourself. . . . Still I realized that you would feel as you do and I admire your loyalty. You can quote me if you choose.”

Again Faith sat silent for a while with her hands lying limp in her lap, then she said slowly in a dulled voice: “I won’t quote you. I suppose it’s cowardly

not to face the truth—if it is the truth. What were these things you learned?”

As the pony plodded slowly along the sandy and shaded way he told her, and her bright colour faded while she listened, but when she reached the house she nodded with a brief “Thank you,” and went at once to the cloister of her own room to sit there dry-eyed and unspeakably miserable.

That night Fogarty came to the house, and the girl went with him for a walk along the moonlit streets at whose sides stucco-soft walls loomed like a stage-set in flat-toned picturesqueness. When they reached the open square where stands the monument to the Mexican war dead, she sat on a bench and said with quick and direct bitterness: “I brought you here to say good-bye to you. It seems we’ve been mistaken in each other.”

“Mistaken?” he repeated. “I haven’t been mistaken in you. Perhaps you have in me, but I tried to warn you that I came up from beginnings that weren’t proud.”

“I don’t mean your beginnings,” she said. “So long as you *had* come up, that didn’t matter.”

“What have you heard about me?” he demanded, and his face under the moonlight looked stony in its angled modelling. “And from whom?”

“Does it matter from whom?”

He was silent for a moment. Then he answered briefly, “No.”

Faith found it impossible to go on just then, and after a little he reached into his pocket and drew out a small card. This he handed to her, flashing upon it, as she took it with a mechanical gesture, the light from a pocket torch.

She found herself looking at a highly glazed photograph of a shock-headed boy with a collarless shirt and features sneering out in an expression of cheap bravado. On one corner of the cardboard there was a number, and while she still looked, the man said: "Turn it over."

Faith obeyed, and on the back she found a series of dotted lines at the front of each of which appeared a printed word or two, followed by entries in ink. At the top were the words "Name and aliases," but the ink notation after that had been erased. Below were age, height, weight, and the like.

"It—it looks like a passport card—except for the aliases," she said weakly, and his own voice came strong and even by contrast though it was palpably forced.

"It's a Rogues' Gallery portrait," he enlightened her. "That boy was myself at the age of eighteen. I was a pickpocket and yegg."

The girl dropped the portrait and covered her face with her hands and Fogarty stooped and retrieved the thing, thrusting it back into his pocket.

"I wanted to tell you all of that—before someone else did," he said miserably, "but I was in a fool's

paradise and I put it off. Instead of in high schools I was educated in reform schools, and instead of from a college, I graduated from the gutter. My father was a newspaper cartoonist in the Middle West, a genius and a drunkard. He never had much time to give to his children and his wife was dead. You see, I didn't have the best chance in the world to start right and I didn't make the chance for myself. The only thing I was ever proud of in those days was being clever—as a crook.”

Faith gave a little gasp.

“I didn't know any of that,” she declared. “I hadn't heard you accused of anything of that sort. I couldn't even quite believe what I *did* hear, until you'd had a chance to speak for yourself.”

“So I'm convicted out of my own mouth,” he went on in a low-toned misery. “Well, as I said once before, I must be honest with you, but I'd hoped that it would make some difference when you realized that I did come out of that muck, in the end. What was it you heard about me?”

She took the hands away from her face and shuddered.

“I heard that you were an intelligence officer just before the war ended and that you were sent to investigate the possibilities of throwing forward a great attack at a certain point.”

“That was true,” he stated in her pause.

“I heard that ‘through the indiscretion of an

American officer'—those were the official words, I believe, the Germans knew all about the plan before it was ready—and it had to be abandoned."

"That's true, too," he corroborated. "I was the officer through whose 'indiscretion' the secret leaked. What else?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Enough and more, but it isn't quite all. Charges were preferred against me . . . but they were put off . . . they never came to trial . . . I was allowed to resign, without being cashiered, after the war was over."

"And you have nothing more to say than that?"

"I have only a story to tell you by way of allegory," he answered her quietly. "The same sort of thing happened once to another officer, and he wasn't a traitor."

"Not a traitor!"

"Not a traitor," repeated the man doggedly. "The plan for the attack, in the case of my story, was not a genuine plan. It was a feint to deceive the enemy and decoy him away from the true objective. It was a plan that was no good unless it leaked, and it must seem to leak very accidentally."

"You mean?"

"I mean that in the case of my allegory the officer was instructed to be 'indiscreet' but his fellows mustn't know it. The secret couldn't be shared even with brother officers. When the attack was launched

at the genuinely designated point, from which attention had been distracted, the officer who had been 'indiscreet' had to face charges. Only the staff knew the truth, and the staff saw that the charges were never pressed."

Faith sat suddenly forward and an eager light came into her eyes.

"Were you that officer?" she demanded, and Fogarty shook his head. "It's only an allegory," he answered dismally. "I told it to show that appearances may be very conclusive and yet very false."

Faith rose slowly and stood for a moment irresolute.

"If you told me that the allegory was true—of yourself, I'd believe it absolutely with all my heart. I want to believe it."

"I can't tell you that," he said.

Ten minutes later she had said good-night at the street door of her house and he had turned back toward the heights.

CHAPTER XVI

IN HIS own bedroom that night Fogarty sat for an hour or more in an attitude of silent dejection and cheerless thought. The cigarette that he had lighted died in his fingers, and when he tossed it away to kindle a fresh one, it was only to let the second go dead as had the first.

At length, however, he rose and shook himself like a dog that has come out of chilling water. It was as if, having permitted himself so much indulgence in personal despondency, he now pulled together his energies for the facing and undertaking of problems less close to his own feelings yet more exacting and imperative. His eyes were as hard and keen as edged tools and as devoid of any emotional quality. Trying his door to assure himself that it was locked and drawing the blind down to a complete cloaking of his window, he took from his trunk a canvas-wrapped package which he opened with fingers that moved in deft precision.

On his bed, as he unfolded the wrappings, the light caught and gave back reflections from metal points and edges and angles; things of chrome nickel and vanadium steel and wrought-iron—but most of these he disregarded, looking for something else.

Spread out there before him Fogarty had a collection of burglar tools, and of their sort they were implements that represented the highest technique and quality of illicit manufacture.

Scientific brains and finished craftsmanship had gone into the making of these things until they stood as small monuments to perverted art.

Fogarty first laid down a wax impression, and that was an impression he had surreptitiously made of the pass key, while the maid worked about his room. Then from a collection of blank-keys he selected one and rapidly cut into it with small but shrewdly biting files until he had produced a thing which answered to its pattern—a key that would, at need, give him access to the room next door. Yet that work seemed prefatory, and even while it engaged him, his thoughts were running ahead to more complicated matters.

He next selected and scrutinized carefully a strand of thin platinum wire which, in the hot breath of an acetylene blow-pipe, he proceeded to heat and cool experimentally to various temperatures variously tested.

Sitting at a table which he had swept clear, he conducted these investigations for a time and then passed to a new phase. Covering sheets of writing paper with patches of carefully stamped sealing-wax he waited only until they had cooled and hardened before he began, with an uncanny skill, cutting them

away from their foundations. This he achieved with the platinum wire heated to just that point that carried its edge through the locally softened substance without melting its impressed surface to disfigurement or scorching the paper. When he had satisfied himself of his ability in that delicate respect, Fogarty reheated the under surfaces of the removed medallions and replaced them. One would have had to study the results very suspiciously and closely at the end of his operation to have determined that any one of these wax impressions had been tampered with after its first placing.

But the experimenter worked long and patiently. This was all only rehearsal, and when the actual operation, for which he was making ready, came to performance, he could not afford any chance of failure.

Don Fogarty meant to pick the pocket of Mr. Mandelle of the envelope which he appeared to guard so carefully, to open it and make a copy of its contents, then to reseal and restore it in such time and manner that its loss should not be discovered—or if discovered, should seem accidental.

An opportunity to carry out the plan for which he was now equipping himself might come to-morrow or it might not present itself for days, but Fogarty was drilling himself in preparation for a prompt seizure of the moment. He sat for a long while thinking out a minutiae of detail not only for accomplishing the

thing itself but for building up such a structure of surrounding circumstance as would best suit his need and purpose.

In a crowded place the actual purloining could be most easily accomplished, but there were objections to that. If it could be made to appear that Mandelle had dropped his treasured envelope about the hotel, and if it could be promptly restored to him by a bellboy or an unsuspecting guest, he would be less stirred with suspicion. In such case he would almost undoubtedly carry it at once to his room, and tear it open to look to its contents. Impulse would lead him to that course without first going into a microscopic examination of the outside covering—and once the inside matter had been found intact the covering would be forgotten. Then the paper would go into a fresh envelope and the incident would, for the time, be closed.

Mandelle's policy of carrying a document of such evidently secret character about in his pocket in all his goings and comings, instead of leaving it in the office safe as he had done when he had gone north, was in itself significant. That he did so carry it on his person Fogarty felt sure because of the instinctive gesture with which, in abstracted moments, the lawyer sometimes let his right hand wander to that pocket as if to reassure himself that something was still safe there. The reason must be that whatever the envelope contained had its focus of importance

here in Camden, rather than elsewhere, and it was here in Camden that Mandelle wished to have it always and instantly available for whatever use he meant to make of it.

Fogarty had noticed that when Mandelle went into the general washroom on the ground floor he never took off his coat to wash his hands, but satisfied himself with drawing up its sleeves. That was a habit attributable to a caution which did not trust the pocket and its contents even so far away as a clothes peg. These small matters Fogarty carefully considered, and decided that the envelope, when he had obtained it and finished with it, should be found lying on the floor of that room, and restored under circumstances that were least calculated to inflame suspicion.

On the next day, just before luncheon, Fogarty met Mandelle standing in a small group in the front veranda of the hotel, and if his preparations had been tediously painstaking the first step of his actual work was admirably expeditious.

Coming up the stairs he stumbled, caught himself and passed on with an apology for his awkwardness, but it had been an artfully calculated awkwardness and one covering a consummately deft performance. Into the unseen activity of a moment went the training of dangerous years and the man who had seemed to stub a clumsy toe went into the door possessed of the envelope which he had decided by "hunch" and

deduction held the key to those mysteries he was bent on solving.

From the stair head, as he made his way to his room, he saw Mandelle enter the main hall, laughing with his chance companions, and stroll back toward the washroom door for his daily visit to the shoe-polishing stand. Whatever he might discover later, Mandelle was as yet untroubled by any alarm, and two minutes later Fogarty was working in his own room on a business in which every moment counted.

While his steady and educated hand went about its infinitely delicate work, Fogarty's ear remained acutely attentive. Any discovery of his loss would undoubtedly send the lawyer scurrying to his room to search all his pockets with frantic exhaustiveness. The absence of such sounds indicated that he had gone untroubled to his luncheon, and gave the busy workman an interval of fair safety.

The seals were expeditiously and successfully removed, the envelope was steamed, and out of it Don Fogarty drew a typewritten sheet of paper with one corner torn away.

But as he read it his brows drew into furrows, first of complete mystification, then of grim and sphinx-like hardness. He had found something here for which he was unprepared, and as the revelations of that paper unfolded themselves, he acknowledged a sickening disappointment gradually rising and overflowing a sense of incredulity. Before him, in the

form of a signed confession that was seemingly categorical and indisputable, lay the statement that with the men who had murdered Tom Shell, Barbour Sevens had acted as an accessory before the fact.

Fogarty felt as if, in following bloodhounds upon the supposed trail of an enemy, he had been led instead to an unsuspected friend.

But his liking for Sevens was only a collateral element of his present and amazed distraction. Faith was a member of Sevens's family, and, though he knew that for various reasons he must renounce Faith, he could not escape the realization that this thing brought her into the shadow of a tragedy which she in nowise deserved.

But his time was short. At any moment Mandelle might raise his own hue and cry, and before that happened there was much to be done in which considerations of friendship or even of love could have no recognition. Fogarty's present work was cut to a prearranged pattern and must not be sidetracked even if he found himself unexpectedly sickened by ugly discoveries along the way.

Before him on the table lay the confession in terms of bold assertiveness and attested by a signature, and while the pencil with which he was copying it down, word for word and comma for comma, raced, he steadied himself against impulses of repugnance.

He sealed the envelope again when that was done, replaced the wax medallions, and studied, with

critical severity, the results of his handiwork. The thing not only passed muster, it defied any discovery of having been tampered with short of a microscopic survey. Yet in Fogarty's own pocket reposed a true copy and in his mind dwelt unwelcome information. Later he must have the paper itself, but now a greater danger lay in keeping it than in restoring it, because the presently vital need was to allay suspicion in the mind of Mr. Mandelle, of whose affairs he had yet other things to learn. Upon the envelope Mandelle had inscribed his name and room number, but it bore no other marking.

Fogarty put away the tools of his craftsmanship, and went down to the lower floor, pausing to glance into the dining room and assure himself that Mandelle still sat unconcernedly at table, before he hurried into the wash-room, took off his coat, and washed his hands. The place was empty except for a guest who was having his riding-boots rubbed down with harness soap and the Negro boy who was polishing them.

While Fogarty wiped his wrists with the towel he nodded casually to the coloured boy.

"Jake," he said, "isn't that a letter lying over there in the corner—by the radiator?"

The Negro straightened up from his polishing and went over. He picked up the envelope and read aloud, "'Joseph Mandelle, Esquire.' I reckon he must have dropped it just now when he washed his hands."

"You'd better send it upstairs," suggested Fogarty, as he drew on his coat. "I saw him in the dining room a few minutes ago. I guess he's still there."

Five minutes later, as Fogarty sat at his own table, he saw a coloured boy approach Mandelle and hand him the envelope with a few words of evident explanation. He saw Mandelle start violently and cast about the dining room a glance of nervous apprehension. It did not escape Fogarty that the attorney's eyes went first of all to his own table and that the sight of him settled there, as though fully occupied with his food, seemed to bring a reassurance of vast relief. Mandelle rose and left the dining room at once and, lingering over his own luncheon, Fogarty followed him in imagination as he raced up the stairs and tore the envelope open in his own room, giving way to a luxury of allayed terror as he found its contents intact.

That afternoon Don Fogarty called at Mrs. Sangster's house and asked, not for Faith, but for Sevens, and Barbour received him with a sincere effort to mask all evidence of his disillusionment about this man whom he had liked and who had turned out, according to his information, to be a crook and a traitor.

"I want to talk to you confidentially," said Fogarty briefly, and Sevens nodded. He led the way to a glassed-in room that had been built as an

addition and afterthought upon the rear of the house. Separated by the dining room from the entrance hall, it was secluded at this hour from the body of the building and secure from unannounced intrusion.

Having entered this room, decorated with polo trophies and horse-show ribbons, the two men paused for a little, Sevens waiting to see what tack his visitor would take, and his visitor seemingly labouring under an embarrassment which was clearly disturbing.

When Fogarty spoke it was with a vehement abruptness.

"You and I must talk with a pretty naked bluntness, Sevens," he announced. "And I propose to start by telling you my own story. I used to be a thief and a damned good one."

"Used to be a thief?" echoed Sevens drily, and despite his resolution of assumed ignorance he stressed the past tense with an ironic significance.

"Used to be. For some years past I've practised on the other side of the docket. I'm a detective now, and I hope a good one, too. I came here on a robbery and murder trail—which has just led me to you."

Sevens, who had remained standing, jerked back as if he had been struck, but at once recovered his poise and smiled as though in acceptance of a somewhat obscure jest. Because he had nerved himself to face surprises he was able to sustain unflinchingly

the direct gaze that bored into him from the eyes of his accuser, but an unconfessed sense of disaster assailed him and bit deep into his morale.

He reasoned vaguely that this was a natural, even a somewhat obvious, attitude for a spy of thieves to assume. It enabled the pretender to investigate or even accuse, if need be, while maintaining a pretense of justifiable motive. Certainly it should be met and dealt with in a vein of amused contempt and non-committal caution.

"I suppose," he began smilingly, "that trails are interesting to both thieves and detectives. I don't happen to be either, but you tell me you are both, and you say you mean to tell your own Jekyll and Hyde story——"

"I'm going to begin that way," Don Fogarty reaffirmed. "But I'm going to end by telling you yours—-and you'll be surprised to learn how much of it I know."

Sevens laughed, but it was without any true impulse of heartiness and without any markedly successful simulation of mirth.

"I started out as a thief when I was a child," announced the other quietly. "I was gay-cat, yegg, and sneak thief, and finally attained the higher altitudes of crookdom—and became an artist. As I look back on my beginnings, they seem to have been determined by influences almost as inescapable as the flood and ebb of the tides."

“You take a fatalistic view of ethics, then?”

Sevens had lighted a cigar and settled back in a chair because that seemed to him to demonstrate the unconcern which he was seeking to counterfeit.

“Perhaps. At all events, I don’t feel that I drifted on the youthful tide of criminality out of any inherent depravity, and I don’t feel sanctimonious because I reformed.”

He paused with a thoughtful clouding of his eyes and his companion prompted him, “Why did you reform?”

“Because it came to me as I matured that no thief can hope to keep permanently out of prison. If I’d been clever enough to do it so far, it indicated that my mind was good enough to serve a better and less hazardous use. If, as a boy, I had outwitted the police, I ought to be able, as a man, to succeed at something that wasn’t a fool’s business. You’ve seen damage-suit lawyers who have become the scourges of railway companies until, to be rid of their attacks, those companies have made corporation counsel of them. My chance came along the same lines. The police respected my abilities and the opportunity came to use what talents I had on the safer side of the docket. I accepted it.”

“And became a detective?”

Fogarty nodded gravely, choosing to ignore the sarcastic bite of incredulity.

“My first moniker in crookdom was Red Ryan,

because I had carrotty hair," he said. "As I grew a little older that hair got duller and sandier and so I outgrew the name. Along with it, I outgrew other things as well—such as being content with illiteracy. At first I wanted to be a smooth guy, and when I'd cultivated the front and manner of a 'gentleman crook' I found I had a kind of hankering for something more substantial than the shell. Perhaps the use of the counterfeit stimulates a taste for the genuine—but we aren't here to moralize, are we?"

"I wonder what we are here for," observed Sevens.

"I'm here to tell you my story and yours," Fogarty made prompt response, "and perhaps to do more than talk."

He paused, then continued irrelevantly: "There's always been a quirk about me though, that perhaps sets me apart from the general run of sleuths. You remember your 'Three Musketeers,' I dare say?"

"Yes."

"Then you recall that when Aramis was a guardsman, he always hungered for the more spiritual life of priesthood—but when he took orders the old life called him back again. It was so with me. When I was preying on society I couldn't get over a sort of unreasonable sympathy for my victims." He paused and smiled.

"I had the name, as a young crook, of being the devil of a fellow who started out to plunder people and ended up by serving them—but that was an

injustice. I was a sincere worker and I got my share."

"That philanthropic bent was a unique characteristic—for a thief."

"Yes, wasn't it? The point is that now, when I'm a detective, the same rule holds. I sometimes sympathize with the men I start out to jail. I know that the law sometimes persecutes, and I don't like to be a part of any persecution. If I think an unfortunate is being 'framed' I find myself becoming his partisan. I suppose it's the old Aramis quality of feeling sentimental about the life that's no longer one's own."

"That's a very interesting story, and an extraordinary one." Sevens paid tribute as the narrator paused and gazed meditatively out of the window, but the slow-moving deliberation of talk was torturing him, and his next words betrayed something of that suspense. "Yet I don't quite see . . . where it touches me."

"You'd say," went on Fogarty as though he had not heard the interruption, while his eyes narrowed and darkened, "that a man of my experience ought to be proof against surprise—yet I was stunned today in a way that I haven't gotten over—when I learned—that you were an accessory to the robbery which led to Tom Shell's murder."

So it was out. That was what a thief-spy, posing as a law officer, would say, and yet expectation failed to discount the accusation or soften its shock.

Barbour Sevens came to his feet and his face paled and tightened with an emotion which might have been either fright or rage, and which was probably compounded of both. His hands knotted themselves into fists and he towered a half-head over the shorter and slighter man whom he seemed on the verge of assaulting. Fogarty met his blaze of wrath and storm-cloud of threatening truculence without change of expression or the movement of a muscle. He stood close and face to face, waiting.

“That’s a lie,” declared Sevens in a low-pitched vibrance of fury. “Your whole story is a lie, except its boast of past performances in crime. You aren’t a detective at all. You’re an emissary from the thieves that killed Shell—and you’re trying to involve me.”

“We’re wasting time that could be better spent, Sevens,” answered the other in an unflurried but chilled evenness. “Whether I’m a detective or not is a matter I can prove promptly and without argument. I have the power of arrest and I have proof enough to warrant taking you to New York. If I’ve come to talk with you alone first, it’s because I’m friendlier than I have to be. It’s because, in spite of all I’ve learned about the Shell case, I can’t help feeling that even guiltier men are trying to use and abuse you as a shield for themselves.”

“I’ve heard that third-degree workers usually take that tack,” retorted Barbour angrily. “They always

pretend they want someone else more than the man they talk to. Well, third-degree methods fail with me because I have nothing to tell."

"Hell itself couldn't stop me from doing what I've got to do," went on Fogarty in cold steadiness, "and I advise you to delay your denials until you hear the exact charge I'm making. I can't hit you from the dark. I believe I'm a fair judge of men—and to that extent I play my hunches. I have a hunch now, that, at heart, you're decent, and insofar as I can do it without treason to my job, I want to help you."

"I don't need your help," stormed Sevens with a bold-sounding but weak-hearted bravado. "And I wouldn't accept it. This accusation is pure slander and I ought to throw you bodily out of the house."

Before the inexorable and quiet force of the face that looked into his own Barbour felt abruptly shamed at his own bluster as Fogarty responded soberly, "Before you do that, perhaps you'd better let me read you a memorandum that I have here in my pocket."

While Sevens stood breathing excitedly but silent the other man drew several sheets of hotel note-paper from his pocket and unfolded them.

"This is naturally only a copy that I have brought with me," he said. "But the original isn't far away. The first sentence or two is torn from the paper but the important part, including date and signature, is left."

He paused, and Barbour braced himself against a nauseating sweep of premonition, and it was a foreboding which the first half-dozen words solidified out of fear into certainty. As Fogarty read on, sentence after sentence, to the end of the memorandum; as, at the end, he read the acknowledgment and the signature, Sevens stood like a groggy prize-fighter who is kept on his feet only by the doggedness of instinct after his eyes have gone blind with dizziness.

"But Shell understood that thing . . . and he destroyed it," he heard himself making weak and stupefied assertion when the reading was ended. "We found the torn scraps!"

"Does it read as if it had been destroyed?"

Barbour dropped into a chair and covered his face with both hands. His voice was flat in the tonelessness of despair.

"It's no good to try to explain to you that I went into the business at Shell's insistence—to trap the thieves . . . that Shell thoroughly understood it all and approved it all, and that if he were alive it would be easy to prove."

"Why isn't it any good to try?" inquired Fogarty quietly. "Haven't I said I wanted to help you so far as I could? Can't any one else give the testimony that Shell would give?"

"One other," came the slow answer.

"Why haven't you stated that, then, and called on him to corroborate you?"

"I was advised not to—by that other person. He's my lawyer."

"Is that lawyer Joe Mandelle?"

Sevens looked up with a startled expression, then, as if pulling himself out of a coma, he answered doggedly: "That's all I'm going to say to you. I've already talked too much."

Fogarty nodded.

"Because until to-day," he declared in an even slower tempo of speech, "I had not remotely suspected you. I came here to shadow Mandelle, whom I did suspect as a partner of these criminals. If you are leaning on Mandelle for God's sake break away. Mandelle is trying to frame you. Mandelle will never swear to your story in any court. He'll repudiate you, because he's one of the gang himself."

CHAPTER XVII

BARBOUR SEVENS turned his head and saw Mr. Sangster standing in the stable lot with his hands in his breeches pockets supervising the clipping of a chestnut polo pony, and the quiet proceeding seemed a keyhole glimpse of a remotely serene world. His own life was a chaotic thing rocking and smoking under destructive powers of turmoil. He had tried the refuges of silence and denial, and they had been as ineffective as gauze screens against artillery. He had, until to-day, anchored his confidence to the seeming proof of the destruction of a paper which had never been destroyed. Fogarty had, within the past twenty-four hours, not only read and copied that paper, but he said that the original was close at hand—presumably in his own possession.

Fogarty said, too, that Mandelle was betraying him; that Mandelle was suspected of complicity with the thieves. If he could not trust Mandelle, in whose hands he had wholly placed himself, whom could he trust? And if he could trust no one, what hope lay anywhere?

“Mandelle is foxing you, Sevens,” he heard the

other man insisting earnestly. "No decent lawyer would advise a client to suppress a truth that could be justifiably explained, and that would help to clear up a murder puzzle. It's as indefensible as for a doctor to give poison to a suffering patient."

"You warn me against Mandelle," broke out Barbour in a fever of bewilderment, "and Mandelle warns me against you. Mandelle's a lawyer in good standing, whom I've known for years. You tell me yourself that you've been a thief—and both of you seem to find me easy prey."

"You're such easy prey that I, for one, can't prey on you," replied Fogarty gravely. "And so, in spite of what looks like an open-and-shut confession of guilt, I can't see you as a criminal. The assumption doesn't suit you any more appropriately than pink tights would suit a bishop. I'm playing my hunch—and that hunch tells me Mandelle is guilty and wants to make you pay his freight."

He paused, then questioned earnestly: "You say you signed that statement in the form of a confession, but that Shell knew your intentions were straight. Do you care to explain that assertion more fully?"

Sevens stood irresolute, wavering between his previously fixed state of mind and the new but growing impulse of repudiation for Mandelle and all of Mandelle's works. After a long silence he put a strange interrogation and he put it with level-eyed directness. "Ought I—a technical suspect—to an-

swer any questions asked by you—an avowed agent of the prosecution?”

The answer came with convincing candour.

“Technically you ought not, but you’re not the usual sort of suspect and I’m not the usual sort of detective. If I were in your place I’d throw that caution away and trust an honest adversary before a Judas friend. If you’re guilty, I’m going after you. If you’re innocent, I’m your friend, and I want to believe you’re innocent.”

He paused, then added, though without the offensive seeming of threat:

“You know that all these questions can be put to you and put less considerately if I have to take you North with bracelets on your wrists.”

There was an inescapable declaration of honesty, clean and uncompromising as a surgeon’s scalpel, in the eyes of the speaker, and Sevens felt it.

This man might, as he had confessed, have to play his part as the law’s unrelenting probe, but he would at least play it without trickery.

Barbour nodded. He told, somewhat brokenly in his unbalance of excitement, of his quarrel with his employer about money to bring Hope South; about meeting the ambassador of the thieves and of his foolishly signing the statement to demonstrate to Shell what his motives had been, and as he talked the darkened eyes of his listener lightened into a clearer blue. But Sevens had, out of lingering cau-

tion, said nothing of Mandelle's counsel of silence. When he finished, Fogarty sat for a few minutes meditatively quiet. Then he spoke slowly.

"That's just the sort of improbable story that most jurors would sweep aside as a crippled and stupid defense yarn and—" he paused then added in a changed tone—"and it's just the way a thing might work out in actual life. It's just the sort of story I'm ready to believe."

He rose and for a few minutes stood looking out at the quiet proceedings in the stable lot, then he turned.

"Sevens," he said, "I put more faith in my judgment of men than I do in circumstantial evidence. You don't strike me as a man who trafficks in felony—but it's going to be almost impossible to prove your innocence—almost impossible but not quite. I represent the prosecution and I'm loyal to it, but I'm not just out to bag a scapegoat. I'm here to take back my man—but I want it to be the right man."

"I still have one witness," urged Sevens, weakly grasping after a hold on confidence. "Mandelle was there when Shell explained what I was undertaking and why."

Fogarty wheeled and his eyes blazed.

"Forget that fool hope!" he exclaimed. "Mandelle will throw you overboard. Mandelle will swear that he knows nothing whatever about it."

He broke off as if he had said too much, then laughed shortly and went on to say even more:

“The usual detective wouldn’t tell you this—but I’m still playing my hunch. You said that confession had been torn up. Who told you so? Was it Mandelle?”

“We searched for it together,” replied Sevens. “It was Mandelle who helped me move the desk on the morning after the murder.”

“I thought so,” declared the detective grimly. “Well, at noon to-day I picked Mandelle’s pocket—and what I got was that confession. He carries it around with him while he tells you it doesn’t exist. Now do you still pin your faith to Mandelle?”

“Mandelle knew it hadn’t been destroyed? Mandelle had it?”

Barbour’s eyes widened in amazement and he flinched back as though a flying timber had struck and stunned him. For a moment his reason seemed to be visibly crumpling like walls going down in an earthquake. Then slowly he recovered himself in some degree, and a new sort of fire burned in his eyes. He moistened his lips and spoke with a low hoarseness. “Don’t deceive me about this, Fogarty, because if that’s true, I’m going to kill Mandelle.” He broke off, and the voice filled with a volume of swelling fury. “If Mandelle kept me silent to victimize me—then nothing can save me. He’s my one living witness. Without his evidence I’ll be

convicted—and it will kill my wife!” The breath caught gaspingly in his throat, and his next words seemed spat out like a hemorrhage of the wounded mind. “Before that happens I’m going to have one satisfaction: I’m going to wring the life out of Mandelle with my own hands as you’d wring dirty water out of a dirty rag.”

Fogarty shook his head while he laid a steadying hand on the trembling shoulder. “You aren’t even going to let Mandelle dream that you suspect him,” he commanded sharply. “We’ll get the truth out of him in a better way and one that will do more good. But you must follow my advice now for a while. Tell me every detail of Mandelle’s connection with you and with the case.”

With no remaining vestige of hesitation Barbour went over the story with a whole completeness, and when he had finished it he answered many questions whose relevancy he could not fully understand.

“From what you tell me,” announced Fogarty at length, “I believe that after your first talk, at your apartment, Mandelle tipped off this fellow whom you met on the street the next night and advised him to approach you. I believe that after your consultation in Shell’s office Mandelle gave information to the thieves that you weren’t ‘coming through.’ I believe that in that short interval between his getting to your office on the day after the murder and your own arrival there he found and pocketed the con-

fession, I'm willing to gamble that he planted the torn scraps to disarm your suspicion and keep you quiet. He could have had only one motive for silencing you—to keep out of Court himself.”

“Then the only thing for me to do now is to make a clean breast of the whole thing to the District Attorney and take my chances—if I still have any chance.”

But Fogarty shook his head.

“No. That's what you should have done at first—but not now. It's both too late and too early for that course. Your long silence would discredit any tardy statement—until such time as we can trap Mandelle and wring the truth out of him. So far we have no hold on him—and it's going to be the devil's own work getting one.”

Sevens stood like a man may fronting a firing squad.

“I owe you an apology,” he said with the stiffness of strangled emotion. “I am in your hands. Issue your orders.”

“I want your parole to hold yourself subject to call,” replied the other. “As for apologies—forget them.”

In the awkwardness of men, who shied away from sentimental utterances, an understanding established itself in instinctive trust.

Barbour Sevens stood staring, with a strained fixedness, into space out of eyes that seemed to see

only pictures of nightmare grimness and shadow, but his thoughts were, just now, not of himself.

His own prison prospect and probable disgrace were secondary to the premonition of what life held for Hope. She was just entering on what seemed a winning fight, and buoyant health would come back to her if her chances were not blighted by intolerable complications. Assaults of unbearable anxiety would crush her mortally and break down every defense. Nothing could hold her away from him when they took him back to try and convict him—and as they wound around him the meshes of the net that would be woven with the deftness of spiders but with the strength of Vulcans, Hope would receive her own death sentence.

“It will kill Hope. . . .” he whispered. “And that’s what Mandelle counselled!”

Fogarty’s rough-hewn face looked as if, just then, he was finding himself capable of the powers of hating which he had said were not in his register of feelings, but his only response was an understanding nod.

Suddenly, though, Barbour seized his forearm with a grip that made him wince.

“But you have that paper now?” he demanded almost pleadingly. “You didn’t return it to him?”

The man who had once been Red Ryan shook his head gravely.

“Eventually,” he said, “I must have that evidence in the original. But this time I copied it and re-

stored it to him. It was essential that he have no suspicion to chew on—just yet.”

“For God’s sake, get it back—without delay,” pleaded Sevens. “Don’t let it rest in his hands another day—another hour!”

But again the detective shook his head. “Do you suppose I let the thing out of my keeping, once I had it there, without due consideration?” he asked. “If I were only looking for enough evidence to convict you, I might have stopped where I was—but if Mandelle is to be taken in the net, he must be played more adroitly—and he mustn’t be warned.”

Sevens dropped once more into his chair and sat in lethargic quiet.

“This paper gave me my first lead,” Fogarty told him soberly. “But it only leads to you and the trail must go farther. Somewhere, somehow I must find some other tangible thing on which the rest must turn. Until I reach that point you and I must remain good friends with Mr. Mandelle.”

He paused, then talked on rapidly. “The man you met in Washington Square would seem to be the head and front of this conspiracy—but his tracks are well covered and your description is no description at all. I’m morally convinced that Mandelle’s henchman and Mandelle could lead us to him if he would.” Again he broke off, but only to demand suddenly:

“What does Mandelle say about me?”

“He says that you are a spy for the thieves, watching me to observe my attitude and report it to them.” Barbour pressed a hand to his hot eyes. “But of course that’s only another lie. He doesn’t believe it himself. If he’s a member of the gang he must know the rest and he could do all the watching without help.”

But Fogarty’s brows suddenly contracted into the absorption of mulling over a new idea, and for once his voice rang with a note of excitement.

“And yet that may be precisely what he does think—that I’m a spy for the thieves,” he declared almost eagerly. “And if he does, it’s an idea that may deliver him into my hands.”

“But why would they have two spies on me?”

“They haven’t, of course . . . but quite possibly they might have one spy watching the other. This gang is uneasy. Mandelle may not be fully trusted and may feel that he’s under surveillance. . . . If so he’d want to discount my possible influence over you and the ground he took with you would be as logical a one as any. He’s not likely to be afraid of me as a detective because he believes himself safe from the law—but it would both gall and frighten him to be watched by his fellow crooks.”

“Then you want me to encourage the idea that you are a crook spy?”

“Yes. If I can make sure that Mandelle thinks of

me in that guise, I have only to steal that confession again and disappear. He will run like a frightened rabbit to the chief himself . . . and he might be followed."

Sevens rose abruptly out of his chair and a gleam of hope brightened faintly in his eyes.

"Can't you do that at once? Can't you force him to showing the way now as well as later?"

"Absolutely no. First I must read the next sign-board, whatever it is. I must have the Turner Bureau in New York do certain things there and send me an assistant down here. If I decoy Mandelle away, I can't both lead him and follow him, can I? And unless he's followed what's the use of making him run?"

"Of course," assented Barbour dully, "even I might have seen that."

Fogarty was pacing the floor now and Sevens, from his chair, followed the restless figure with eyes that seemed unable to break away from their gazing.

Presently the ex-thief halted before Barbour and spoke in a low but imperative voice. "When I give you the word, go to Mandelle with every evidence of deep agitation. Tell him that I've made dark hints, disguised as cryptic abstractions, that I know certain things about you and that, by indirection, I've tried to poison your mind against him. Assume to have construed it all as confirming his own explanation to you as to my purpose in being here."

"But," demurred Sevens confusedly, "wouldn't he simply assume that it's me, not himself, you're watching?"

This time Fogarty jerked his head impatiently. Then realizing that his mind was moving along blind trails of deduction at a pace his companion could not follow, he pulled himself up and explained.

"No. Don't you suppose that, if Mandelle is guilty, he realizes that any other thief ambassador who is here, and who is not working with him, must be working against him? Drop the hint as I say and let him work it out for himself. He won't fail to put on it the construction I want."

From the stable lot appeared Faith crossing the garden with a riding-companion, and Fogarty gave a quick gesture of warning with his lifted hand as he went over and opened the door of the sun room.

The girl who was coming up the few steps to the veranda met his eyes with a level glance, and in a low voice she asked, "Are you ready to tell me that the allegory was true, Mr. Fogarty?"

Her eyes were smiling so that, to the man who came with her, this question seemed only a reference to some previous joke between them, and Fogarty smiled, too, but his answer was serious. "No," he told her, "one can't always underwrite allegories. I wish I could."

Don Fogarty went to the telegraph office and from there direct to his room. The messages that must go

by mail and wire to New York were urgent and he devoted himself to them with both haste and care.

When late afternoon brought the truck with the day's consignment of freight and express for the hotel, he was standing at the service entrance pretending to fret over a delayed box from the North. This was a thing he had been doing of late almost as carefully as he watched the distribution of mail, and it was a precaution prompted only by a spirit of thoroughness. He was watching all channels by which Mandelle might receive anything from the outside and to-day, for the first time, his vigilance brought a result. A somewhat bulky thing was unloaded this afternoon addressed to the attorney, and Fogarty made out from the tag of the consignor that the crate contained a dictating phonograph.

That discovery gave Fogarty fresh and perplexing food for thought. What connection, if any, did this machine have with his own inquiries? He remembered, from his one visit to the law office in downtown New York, that the attorney used such an instrument for a part of his legal business, but it was a machine that recorded dictation on cylinders which must afterward be transcribed. This system predicated the employment of a typist, and presumably such dictation would not be apt to partake of an ultra-confidential or secret nature.

Yet any new thing warranted intensive study, the more so if at first glance it seemed meaningless, and

Fogarty inquired absent-mindedly, as though only to make conversation, "When does all this junk get delivered?"

The truckman laughed.

"Not till to-morrow morning—except the stuff for the chef. I expect the folks upstairs ain't sweating for their things unless there's hootch hid away in some of 'em."

The inquiring guest grinned and drifted away. He was feeling a new hunch, and that hunch told him that the slow march of events was about to break into a quick-step, and that what he wanted to do must be done speedily or not at all. Yet he could take no action until the arrival of his assistant, and that arrival could not be before to-morrow afternoon.

On the next morning Fogarty drifted down to the Sangster house at an early hour for another talk with Sevens, and on his return to the hotel he met Mandelle who, with a party of three others, was starting out on an all-day motor trip. Fogarty learned by casual means of his own that the phonograph had not yet been delivered at the lawyer's room and, though he had as yet no assurance that the instrument bore any significance, this news pleased him because it gave him more time for study. Late that day Jimmy Brice of the Turner Detective Bureau arrived and registered at the Palmetto Inn.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOGARTY was standing near the desk when Brice signed the book and was allotted a room, but the two men, whose eyes met without recognition, had no seeming of interest in each other and it was not until later, when they met strolling in the grounds, that they seemed to scrape an acquaintance. News came later by telephone that the motoring party, including Mandelle, had suffered a breakdown on the road, and would be detained overnight at Bishopville while garage repairs were made. So another day came with no development except that Fogarty's reinforcement had arrived on the scene.

But the morning brought Mandelle back from his motor jaunt and Fogarty was coming out of his open door as the lawyer entered his room. Mandelle's eyes fell at once on the dictating machine, and Fogarty thought a brief flash of pleasure livened in them with its discovery.

From the listening post of his own room the detective noted with what instant promptness his neighbour's voice telephoned to the office for a porter to uncrate his package, and the evident annoyance

with which he answered whatever the office said in reply. "Right after lunch, you say? Yes, I suppose that will have to do, then."

Fogarty's bag was packed, and when he heard Mandelle's door open and close, and heard the key turn in the lock and footsteps receding toward the stairs, he hurried into the hall with the key that he had made himself against just such a need and let himself carefully into Mandelle's apartment. Inside its door he glanced about and found that, in readiness for the use of the newly arrived dictaphone, the lawyer had already made certain preparations. On the table near the freight package stood a cardboard box, to which Fogarty went at once because in its wrappings he recognized the thing which he had seen at the post office, coming as registered mail to the man he suspected.

The package end had been broken and the thing which had seemingly been inside it now stood on the table behind it. It was a phonograph cylinder.

Fogarty smiled. Communication of some sort had been had by a phonograph record instead of by letter. Presumably, if it carried any importance, it would be in cipher—but the interesting point was that whatever it was Mandelle had not yet had an opportunity to avail himself of it because, until now, he had had no machine. It was not a blank record, for its surface bore the tiny indentations of the diaphragm needle, and the indications were that Mandelle was

impatient to hear whatever sounds those indentations had recorded.

Fogarty quickly pocketed the thing, secured his bag, hat, and coat and passed downstairs. The evidence of his intended travel he put out of sight but left word at the desk that he was going that afternoon into the country and might not return for a day or two.

The thing which was the most important of all had yet to be done and its doing was, in itself, difficult enough to have daunted a less confident spirit. When Mandelle came out of the dining room where he had lunched, Fogarty engaged him briefly and casually in conversation, then he turned away—but once out of sight he hurried.

Mandelle, on the other hand, answered to a mood of deliberate ease and smoked a cigar on the veranda. He had left instructions that when the porter could uncrate his box, he was to be called, and until then he could indulge himself in leisure. It was an hour later when he went to his room, accompanied by a man with hatchet and chisels—but once inside his mildly pleasant humour of well-being was stricken abruptly into consternation. He discovered at once that his phonograph record had been stolen. For an instant he stood with the drawn and pallid face of one utterly confounded, then because the porter was there to witness his agitation, he sought to cover it up, but the hand that went instinctively to his breast

pocket was violently tremulous. The sense of touch carried a second shock to his nerves that mounted like the rise of a climax and topped the realization of disaster which had just come through his eyes.

The envelope which should have been safely reposing there was also gone.

The place seemed suddenly to spin around him. Panic seized on Joseph Mandelle and shook him profoundly, but he held grimly to some instinct of self-control and when the telephone rang violently he moved automatically over and took down the receiver. It was the voice of Barbour Sevens that accosted him, and its tone was electric with excitement. "I've got to talk to you—at once. Immediately, do you understand? Will you come here or shall I go there?"

"I can't talk to you now," Mandelle barked into the 'phone. "I'm busy."

"You *must* talk now," insisted the other. "I tell you it won't wait. It's got to be now . . . right now!"

Through the consternation that was demoralizing Mandelle's brain came a realization which briefly steadied him. Barbour Sevens was as excited as himself. In every likelihood his message might bear on a common cause of alarm. Yes, he must talk to Sevens, and he called more composedly into the transmitter, "All right. Come here, then. I can't leave now."

After that he wheeled from the 'phone.

"Get the hell out of here," he stormed churlishly at the workman. "I'll finish that job myself—later."

While he stood alone in the bedroom from which the porter had just gone, Mandelle was trying desperately to pull himself together and take stock of his situation. He could feel the blood hammering crazily in his temples and the jumpy excitement of his heart, and he knew that he was on the brink of such a collapse as might ruin him. From a pocket flask he gulped down successive swallows of brandy; and as its warmth stole into his veins his senses seemed to draw once more out of blurred confusion into something resembling focus.

His room had been broken into and robbed. His pocket had been picked and not a doubt existed as to the identity of the thief who had despoiled him of both treasures. Yet as he hurriedly took appraisal of the place he knew that only two things had been stolen, an envelope and a dictaphone cylinder—and as it happened he could make no accusation, sound no alarm, because he dared not admit that either of these things had been in his own possession or had, for him, any unusual value. He had not the temerity to describe or identify for recovery either purloined article.

Hurriedly he went again to the 'phone and called

the office. His voice, held steady under a strain of concentrated effort, came near breaking as he talked. "I want to speak to Mr. Fogarty at once," he said. "Is he in the hotel?"

"Mr. Fogarty," replied the office blandly, "has just left. He said he was going into the country for a day or two. He didn't say where."

That was what Mandelle had expected. It was what fear had prophesied. He had only acted on the precaution of confirming his supposition by inquiry. He swallowed, gulping down the strictured knot that he felt in his throat, and again his voice came with seeming calmness:

"Thank you. When Mr. Sevens arrives, please send him up."

Sevens came almost at once, and Mandelle realized that with this man, too, he must continue to wear the mask of outward composure—indeed, with this man above all others; and already he was violently regretting the betrayal of emotion and excitement that must have carried over the telephone wires to Barbour's listening ears.

"I'm sorry if I sounded short when you rang me, Sevens," he began as he closed his door on his visitor. "But I'd been trying to get a long-distance call through and there were all sorts of irritating delays."

Mandelle was fretting to have done with this talk and be free for the more vital concerns. His major

agitation he had partially mastered, but a waspish irascibility remained which he had not controlled.

“What’s up, Sevens?” he snapped. “Why did you have to talk to me in such a devilish swivet of haste?”

“Because Fogarty’s been haranguing me,” asserted Barbour excitedly. “He talked to me in riddles. . . . He intimated that I was being watched . . . and for good reason . . . and yet he did it with such damned cleverness that everything he said might seem innocent enough if repeated. He said you’d bear watching, by the way.”

Mandelle forced a laugh, but it was dry-lipped and strained.

“He doesn’t care for me because I’m a lawyer and he’s a crook,” he said shortly. “There’s nothing remarkable about that.”

“Don’t try to choke me off,” Barbour’s voice flared out with a sting of hot temper. “This is serious. I’m not a child to be hushed up. I want your attention.”

For several minutes Sevens talked, and because he had been well rehearsed, he talked with effect and the seeming of overwrought agitation. As he listened, Mandelle’s inward fears stiffened and his inner indignation smouldered white-hot, for the seed that Fogarty had meant to plant was growing with tropical swiftness and rankness, to the bearing of bitter and poisonous fruit. In Fogarty he saw now with definite terror the watchman for the chief who

was seeking to get into his own hands all the evidence that might have value to coerce others.

When Barbour had ended his narrative, he demanded excitedly, "Will you talk to Fogarty and find out what he's driving at?"

"I just called Fogarty on the 'phone," answered Mandelle brusquely. "He's left Camden."

"Great God!" exclaimed Sevens with unbalanced vehemence. "At any time they choose to speak, my silence—the silence that you advised—will convict me of crime. You are responsible for that."

"Keep hold of yourself, Sevens," exhorted the attorney sharply. "They are trying to frighten you, that's all, but since they counsel silence and silence is what we've decided on, there's nothing to fear." He broke off, then added quickly, because he, too, must be on his journey of investigation, "I must run on to New York to-night—and there's hardly time to get packed. I've got to take depositions there—but I'll be back here in a day or two."

"So you're going to abandon me, are you?" The words came in a terror-stricken gasp, and the lawyer shook his head irritably.

"No, I'm not going to abandon you—don't be so confoundedly hysterical. You're safe so long as you keep your mouth shut. I told you I wouldn't be gone long."

Barbour Sevens pulled himself together and rose

from his chair, but his dull movements were those of an old and decrepit man. His seeming of despair was something of a credit to his newly assumed rôle as an actor. Absently he fumbled for and picked up his hat from the table and went unsteadily out without a word, but beyond the threshold his agitation left him and when he appeared in the hall below he no longer presented the aspect of a harried or panic-ridden man.

Jimmy Brice, in flannel trousers and norfolk jacket, lounged on the veranda stairs as Barbour emerged from the door and a few words passed between them. The man whom the Turner Bureau had sent to South Carolina, on the call from Fogarty, was a blond youth with a face of seeming vacuousness. He moved indolently and smoked incessantly, lighting one cigarette from the fag of another.

Upstairs Mandelle was packing with a frenzy of haste. The virus with which Sevens had inoculated him had already wakened a fever in his brain. His suspicions were building fast into a structure of conviction which he was no longer questioning. The man who had robbed him had done the thing which the chief of the robbery syndicate had ordered. That note of disapproval and distrust which had sounded through the Louisville interview had evidently grown into an ugly policy of unfaith which might end in disaster. Cowes had sent a pickpocket spy to get the confession which Mandelle had declined to sur-

render without compulsion, and one course only was left open to him. He must go to Cowes and have it out. Code telegrams and cipher letters were no longer to be trusted—and what understanding could be arrived at could only be attained in a face-to-face interview. Cowes could hardly afford to break violently with him. He would pretend ignorance of the whole matter, but Mandelle hoped to be able to beat through that disingenuous defense and have the truth.

It was the train to Columbia which Mandelle took and Columbia lies south and not north of Camden. A blond and vacuous-faced young man took it, too, but during the twenty-four hours that he had been here he had succeeded in escaping the notice of Joe Mandelle altogether and had Mandelle seen him he would not have been greatly interested.

Don Fogarty had a fair start when, with the fruits of his robberies, he left Camden. Certain definite things he wished to do, but the first and prime motive that actuated him was to give the appearance of fleeing to robbery headquarters. Secondary matters might be worked on in any one of several places, and he had selected Louisville as his objective because he wanted to see a man who might be useful to him there. Jimmy Brice was to communicate with him in Louisville and notify him as to what direction the chase had taken and at what pace it went.

In the Kentucky town where, as Red Ryan, he had in other days been less free to walk unmolested, he registered at the Watterson and went promptly over to a block in Fifth Street almost in the shadow of the old court house. In an office building there he called on a court stenographer, Lawrence Footman, who among other lines of versatility knew all that was to be known of dictaphone uses and mechanisms.

"Lawrence," stated Fogarty briefly, when he had brushed, as hastily as possible, through the ceremonies of renewal for a long-lapsed acquaintanceship, "I've a dictaphone cylinder here and I don't know what's on it. I'd like to run it on your machine—and I want to be alone when I do it."

"The machine's in there, Red—I beg your pardon. I mean Don. Shut yourself in and take possession."

Inside the small room where the paraphernalia of such dictation was scattered, Fogarty found himself surrounded by machines, record-shavers, and cases of used and unused cylinders. He sat down, slipped his record onto the metal core, adjusted the ear pieces, and touched the starting button. His familiarity with these devices was such that he needed no instruction in their use, yet when to his ears came the sounds of the machine's transmission, his brow wrinkled and his eyes clouded to perplexity. For the second time he listened to the record from beginning to end, and then he rose and called Footman to his aid.

“Lawrence,” he announced, “I have no idea what’s recorded here but I have reason to believe that it’s important to a case I’m working on. Will you listen in and tell me what you make of it?”

Footman sat down with the confident air of a man who was sure that from him this mechanical talker could keep no secrets. He listened to a meaningless sound-jumble, then pressed the button which stopped the motor and wagged his head in mystified disappointment.

“It’s all jargon to me,” he announced. “It doesn’t sound like anything I ever heard before. I don’t believe it’s anything rational.”

Fogarty stood at his shoulder with a deeply thoughtful face.

“How about running it backward?” he suggested hopefully, and the man in the chair shook his head with definite repudiation of the idea.

“It can’t be done,” he answered slowly. “The core that the record fits on isn’t a true cylinder. It’s a modified cone—smaller at one end than at the other. The record only goes on one way.”

“Could it, by any chance, be an obscure foreign language?”

Footman rubbed his chin dubiously, then suddenly his face lighted.

“If it is, there’s a man in this building who can fit the tag to it,” he announced with assurance. “Old Markwitz is one of the most versatile linguists

in the country. Law is his profession, but languages are his passion. Ancient or modern, they're his meat, and none of them are dead to him. Shall I have him down?"

"If he'll be so good as to come," Fogarty gave eager assent.

They had not waited long when the door opened and an elderly man of careless dress and strongly Semitic features entered. The newcomer wore thick glasses and at once Fogarty recognized in him that type of recondite scholar who is so often addicted to absent-mindedness and eccentricity. Now he stood blinking inquiringly with an owlish preoccupation as Footman rose and introduced Fogarty.

"Mr. Markwitz," said the court stenographer, "we have a problem here for you that looks abstruse enough to be interesting."

"So?" muttered Markwitz as he continued to blink, "So? And what is it?"

In a few words Footman explained what was wanted, and behind their thick lenses the beady eyes of the elderly man livened into keen interest.

Two minutes later he sat with the tubes to his ears as the cylinder ran its course from start to finish.

Having done that he set it back once more to its beginning and listened as to an absorbing encore, while the two men who watched saw his brow corru-

gate and his features settle into an almost trance-like intensity.

After that he stopped the machine and leaned back, staring ahead as though he had forgotten their presence, and when he spoke it was mutteringly, as if he were talking to himself.

"It's not German, French, or Spanish, of course," he mused abstractedly. "It's not Sanscrit or any derivative of Sanscrit. It's not Arabic or any child of Arabic parentage. . . . It's not Slavic, true or bastard. . . ." There was a pause, then again the voice addressing itself to space: "It has no kinship with Latin or Romance origins. . . . It's certainly not Hellenistic. . . . It bears no relation to any language source I know . . . and yet it's a language."

He paused once more and it was Footman who interrupted his thought with a query.

"Isn't it a plain gibberish, Mr. Markwitz?" he demanded. "Isn't it pure nonsense spieled on there at random?"

The elderly scholar looked up with a start and his eyes flashed as resentfully as though the stenographer had broken in on sacred services with a profane interruption.

"Gott, no!" he exclaimed. "It is no gibberish . . . I defy you to fool me with any gibberish! I shall at once recognize it."

The excitement died out of his voice and he looked

earnestly from one to the other; then, with an impressive seriousness, he said: "Gentlemen, this is a language. I have no hesitation in making that assertion. Moreover, it is not a barbaric language . . . or one spoken by a savage people. Gentlemen, this is a language with a grammar and a literature!"

Fogarty bent forward, responsive to the animation of the scholar's enthusiasm, but Footman demanded with a calm and irreverent skepticism:

"How do you get that way, Mr. Markwitz? If you can't recognize the lingo, how can you claim for it a grammar and a literature? That's a large order, you know."

Markwitz sat wagging his leonine head, and his voice came slowly.

"I know those things because any gibberish—even any barbaric system of speech—is crudely formed and more or less haphazard. . . . Here I find root recurrences and the observed laws of stress and motif. Those things argue a developed tongue with definite root-structure. . . . This, gentlemen, is human speech of long and cultural evolution, but beyond that I can tell you nothing."

Regretfully Markwitz rose. "I wish I could take the thing home with me and study it more closely. I'm afraid I have not helped you, after all."

"On the contrary, Mr. Markwitz," contradicted Fogarty, "you *have* helped me. You have satisfied

me that this thing is what I suspected: important enough to be wrapped in a mystifying code—and no code is unbreakable.”

Markwitz snorted. “Cipher codes, young man,” he offered reminder, “do not have a grammar and literature.”

The young man was standing gazing out of the window and abruptly he turned. “They are based on languages, though, that have both,” he rejoined.

When Fogarty was alone with Footman again he inquired, “How long can you let me stay in here and experiment? This is the laboratory I want to work in for a while if you can spare me its use.”

“I’m going to be in court all afternoon,” replied Footman. “The rest of my force is transcribing—so for the present, this place is yours.”

Don Fogarty closed the door and for half an hour sat unmoving with his eyes fixed on the perplexing cylinder of wax that had, at once, so stimulated and baffled him. It contained some message which, without doubt, Mandelle knew how to read, but presumably he had not yet read it, because the machine which gave it voice had not been unpacked in time. It might answer questions of principal identities, or it might hold only some minor clue; but almost beyond doubt it carried words so secret that they had been guarded with clever and extraordinary care. Perhaps it had bearing of a vital and illuminating nature upon the murder of Tom

Shell, but could the key to its translation be found?

When Footman returned, three hours later, from the courtroom where he had been working, he found Fogarty just emerging from the inner office. The detective's face was fatigue-worn and, in answer to the stenographer's: "What luck?" he shook his head blankly.

"I've put in a hard session—and I've got nothing yet," said Fogarty. "Now I've got to send telegrams and talk to New York over the wire . . . but there's one thing more I want."

"What is that? If I've got it you can have it."

"I want to get a phonograph to take away with me—one that I can run that record on—I'll send it back before long."

Footman nodded. "I've got an old one lying idle that will do the trick, and you can pack it in a comparatively small bulk. You're welcome to take that."

"Can I have a messenger carry it round to my hotel now? I'll stay in town overnight . . . and to-morrow I may be in again."

That evening Fogarty spent waiting for a word from Brice, but no word came. He talked to the Turner Bureau, too, over the wire and gave certain explicit directions, but except for that he sat in his own room tinkering an old-fashioned dictating machine.

CHAPTER XIX

BY DON FOGARTY'S plate the next morning a telegram was laid, and when he had torn it open a smile of satisfaction flickered briefly in his eyes. The message was succinct and it bore the signature and return address of J. Brice.

"Arrived St. Louis. Have seen both our men. Instruct."

On the back of an envelope the detective composed his reply. "Keep in close touch and await orders."

Other telegrams he also sent; and to Barbour Sevens, in Camden, he talked over the long-distance wire. That conversation, too, was brief, and to any listener in it might have seemed void of arresting significance.

"Hello, Sevens," he said. "This is Fogarty and I had to run out to Louisville. Will you tell them at the hotel that I'll be back soon?" When that had been answered, he went on in a conversational manner, "And by the way, Sevens, I wish you'd wire to our friend the attorney. Address this message to his New York office marked 'forward.' He may be out of town but he'll probably remain in

touch with his headquarters. Say, 'Have decided to consult other counsel unless I see you here immediately.' Yes, that's all. I'll be back soon." Then Fogarty strolled out of the hotel and once more shaped a brisk course for the stenographer's office, where he shut himself into the room that held the dictating machine. Certain mechanical matters seemed to occupy him for the better part of an hour, and after that he slipped a fresh record into the machine, and, having seated himself, grinned with an idiotic delight as he took up the speaking horn and with a solemn deliberateness began registering his own voice. This is what he declaimed:

“‘The time has come,’ the walrus said, to talk of many things,
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax and cabbages and kings——’”

There was more than that, because the cylinder ran some three minutes and he was bent on filling it with sound, but from time to time Don Fogarty stopped the motor while he racked his memory for more elecutionary selections. After that he and Footman were closeted together for an hour and Footman embarked on work in no way connected with phonographs.

In St. Louis Mr. Mandelle's meeting with the man whom he had come post-haste to see had been

both prompt and stormy—and it had netted him exactly nothing.

That interview took place in a comfortably furnished apartment to which Mandelle, believing himself free from observation, went openly in a taxicab, which, as it happened, was followed by another. Mandelle was spurred to such incautious haste by an anger that had been simmering near the boiling point throughout the suspense of his journey, and having arrived at his destination, he found himself unable to begin with diplomatic finesse. So soon as he and the man he had come to confront were safe from overhearing, his words broke out in torrential accusation.

“What’s the idea, Carrington?” he demanded truculently, using the name which was known only here in St. Louis and which had been altered to Cowes in Louisville. “Are you bent in gypping me to a point where I’ll break away altogether? Do you think you’re strong enough to kick me into open warfare?”

The poker face of the man with whom Barbour Sevens had talked in New York, and who had, by the way, used even another incognito there, held its calmness, but his eyes bored into those of his angry visitor with an inquisitorial chill.

“What’s biting you, Mandelle?” he inquired shortly. “It was clearly understood that you weren’t to come here. You not only violate that

agreement, but you charge in on me raving like a riddle-spouting maniac."

"Do you deny that you set a spy on me in Camden with orders to steal Sevens's confession and bring it to you? To steal back the phonograph record, too—before I had the chance to identify and destroy it?"

Carrington's eyes narrowed and his face took on a metallic hardness.

"In most unqualified terms, I deny every one of those things except one," he asserted crisply. "I did send a man to keep an eye on you, because there was a hint of insurgency in your manner when we talked last—but that man satisfied himself of your sticking qualities and in twenty-four hours he left South Carolina."

"That," broke out Mandelle wrathfully, "is an unmitigated lie. Your man Fogarty has been there all the while—and at your orders, he has robbed me of the evidence that gave me a balance of power. . . . If you can't trust me, no more can I trust you. . . . Now come clean with me, Carrington, or——" The lawyer's wrath overcame him. His face had gone purple and his voice broke. He stood with clenched hands and panting chest, abruptly speechless with fury.

"Mandelle," said Carrington, "I haven't the remotest idea what you're babbling about but there's one thing that seems worth threshing out. If you've lost the confession after refusing to trust me with it,

you've let me down into a mess of complications. Talk up, and talk plain. Who is this Fogarty you prattle about? What is this robbery business in which you seem to have played the simp?"

"Damn you!" stormed the infuriated attorney. "I didn't come here to render an accounting to you, but to demand one. I haven't crooked you. It's you who've crooked me, and now——!"

The wild light that spurted in the speaker's eyes was a flare of homicidal lunacy, ephemeral, perhaps, but menacing. He was trembling with uncontrollable rage and he lurched forward to whip his hand up from a side pocket, fondling an automatic pistol. "Now," he made hoarse declaration, "you come clean with me, or I do some killing myself."

Carrington stiffened as if a mild electric current had been circuited unexpectedly through his body, but his face lost nothing of its chilling composure, and his eyes dominated the madly shifting ones with an undeviating directness of inherently greater strength.

"So you're asking for the chair, are you?" he inquired in a hard voice that seemed equally scornful of the pistol and the man who flourished it in tremulous passion. "You'd rather take the death sentence than to take my word that I know nothing about this robbery. I know nothing about this Fogarty and I'm not afraid of any panic-stricken fool like you."

He paused, and his lip-corners curled into an ugly

smile though the blued metal of the automatic was close and the hand that held it was irresponsible.

“I suppose you think you’re roaring like a man-eating lion,” he commented in a withering tone. “Well, believe me, Shyster Mandelle, you’re bleating like a scared sheep, and you make me sick! Now shoot or explain yourself—but do one or the other damn quick!”

Just as a jet of cold water drives the frenzy out of fight-maddened dogs, the contemptuous dominance in Carrington’s face and voice cooled the lunatic fever in the veins of the crooked lawyer and made him shrink ignominiously into the shame of a rebuked child. After all, he wanted someone upon whom he could brace his disintegrating courage, rather than warfare with an enemy stronger than himself, and as he stood pallid and trembling with the pistol in his shaking hand, he knew that he was, in this parallel of wills, a pitiable weakling. His fingers opened inertly and the weapon dropped out of his hand to the table covering. Carrington had not moved and now he made no motion to pick the pistol up.

“You say—” faltered Mandelle with a sudden, almost cringing, change of front—“you say that—you didn’t have me robbed—that you know nothing about it?”

“I not only say that, but I might add that if you’ve let yourself be bilked in that fashion you owe me an

accounting. Shoot me this story and make it snappy.”

Ten minutes later Mandelle rose from his chair with a face still parchment white but no longer angry. He was frightened to the edge of lunacy, but his fears were now of other enemies.

“I’ve got to get my office on the wire,” faltered the lawyer. “Something’s going on that I don’t understand. Can I telephone from here?”

“You cannot,” came the prompt response. “Do your talking from your hotel—but I’ll go with you and find out if New York knows anything. You must get back there to Camden.”

Carrington was snapping out his words with staccato sharpness. “Your place is there. I’ll have New York get the dope on this Fogarty bird. If the State has that confession, it’s time to throw Sevens to the wolves, that’s all. They have nothing on you—or me, yet.”

“Nothing on me?” stammered Mandelle weakly. “But the paper was taken off of me.”

“Keep your shirt on, Mandelle,” enjoined Carrington, and his words were delivered like kicks. “You let that envelope fall out of your pocket once before. Perhaps you did the same fool thing again. Perhaps you’ll get back to find it reposing once more in your letter box, if not——”

“That’s likely,” snorted the lawyer. “Very likely indeed, isn’t it?”

"If not," went on the other imperturbably, "wrap yourself in your legal sanctity. You repressed this evidence in the interests of your man. What you have kept secret was a privileged communication between lawyer and client. They can't touch you. It will convict Sevens—but let it!"

"And the phonograph record?"

Carrington waved the question aside.

"It will mean nothing to them. They won't make anything of it."

But when Mandelle telephoned to his office from the hotel it was to receive another shock, for Barbour's telegram was repeated to him, and to his secretary he dictated a reply to be sent from New York.

"Take no step," it enjoined, "until I arrive. Imperative. Am coming at once."

To Carrington who waited in the lobby the frightened attorney reported these things, then, with as frantic a haste as he had run west from South Carolina, he started his rush back again east from Missouri.

The New York papers told of a blizzard that had swept the city, but at Camden the mocking birds were singing in derisive disbelief of winter, and out on the Number One polo field both men and ponies were sweating hotly through the fourth chukker of a game whose issue hung delicately balanced.

Hope and Faith sat in a car parked with a dozen

others along the side lines by the grandstand, and the eyes of both were animated with interest for the spirited picture of action on the green battle-ground between the goal posts. In their ears were the sounds of thudding hooves, shouted orders, and the sharp impact of mallet head on willow-root ball, and in their eyes was rapid motion and colour. By the running-board of the car stood Barbour Sevens, but repeatedly his gaze wandered away from the sodded polo field and turned backward to the railroad embankment which lay beyond, and his ears were straining, through the noises of the game, for the whistle of a locomotive. The afternoon train was a little late, and for its coming he was waiting with the fret of unconfessed suspense. In his pocket were two telegrams. One of them was from Fogarty, asserting that he would arrive on the mid-afternoon train, and asking Sevens to meet him at once at the hotel.

Suddenly the crowd in the grandstand came to its feet, shouting. Sangster had backhanded a ball driven straight to the verge of the goal line, and saved his team from the breaking of a tied score—but through the din of applause Barbour had caught the whistle of the engine west of the town, and he pulled back his shoulders to a braced erectness.

“I’ve got to go over to the hotel, Hope,” he explained. “When the game winds up you girls can drive on back, and I’ll follow on foot.”

It would take him just about the same length of

time to go around the end of the field and enter the hotel from the back that would be required by a man alighting from the train to reach it in the depot wagon. But as he walked along the vividly green turf and under the flawlessly blue sky, he went with a heavy anxiety that blinded him to natural beauties. Under a surface of composure stirred restless fears. He could only guess what Fogarty had to report, and his apprehensions pointed all his conjectures along the way of pessimism. Fogarty had said the truth would be almost, but not quite, impossible to prove. Fogarty had started out on an enterprise which must leave much to chance. Now Fogarty was coming back, and no hint had come ahead of him as to whether he returned in success or failure.

It was, after all, the depot wagon which first reached the entrance to the hotel, and when he had hurried in and glanced about the little crowd at the desk, Sevens did not, at first, see the boldly angled face for which he looked.

Strangers clustered there; all newly arrived guests with hand-baggage stacked near by, hovered over by waiting bellboys.

Then Barbour saw Fogarty inside the office proper and at the door of the private office. Fogarty's face was grave and the clerk, to whom he was speaking, was following his words with a gravity even deeper.

Something was being said there of a confidential nature, and Sevens did not doubt that now for the

first time this guest, who had been only a guest before, was revealing himself in his more official capacity, and that what instructions he was giving bore the force of commands.

He saw the former thief hand the clerk an envelope, and saw the clerk nod, then cross over and place it in the box which belonged to the absent Mandelle.

Then Fogarty came out and shook hands with Sevens, and as the two went up the stairs together Barbour's heart sank with a sickening premonition of disaster, because the eyes of the other wore that fog-darkness which argued, in them, a burdened responsibility of spirit.

They had entered the room of the newly returned man and had closed the door before either spoke. Then it was Fogarty who made the beginning.

"Everything is still in the air," he said briefly. "I've learned some things and I have much left to learn. Twenty-four hours ought to bring matters to a head and crisis—one way or the other. Turner tells me that New York is restive. They want an arrest made and made quick. They seem to care less who is arrested than that it be someone. The papers are riding the District Attorney."

Sevens nodded his head moodily. He had nervously drawn a lead-pencil from his pocket and stood fingering it—and it snapped under the unconscious tautness of his hand. Hope and fear had swept back and forth across his consciousness with such dogged

attack and counter attack and for such a period of stressful waiting, that in this moment of disappointment it seemed to him the verdict had been sealed, and that there was no more elasticity or vigour left in him for facing fresh assaults.

"I've had two telegrams to-day," he said bleakly. "One was from Mandelle—in answer to mine. It says he gets here immediately."

"That, at least, is good," encouraged Fogarty. "Until he comes we can only mark time and bite our thumbs. What was the other?"

"The other," explained Sevens dully, "was from Hubwell of our board of directors. I'll show it to you later. It orders me back to New York as promptly as possible. . . . It doesn't command instant obedience, but its tone is peremptory—and unfriendly. I believe they begin to suspect me there, too."

Again Fogarty nodded.

"They've been getting restive there," he admitted. "I've known that for a day or two through Turner. I've held them off so far by pleading my need for you here in giving me business details." He paused and shrugged his shoulder. "I haven't been turning up much at this end, though," he added. "And I shouldn't wonder if my advice is to be ignored. I may even be called in myself."

"And then my goose is cooked! What did you learn?" demanded Sevens, grasping after some straw

to support his submerging hope, and the detective laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I'd rather make no report to-day," he said. "I've by no means given up the game, but as I said before, the next twenty-four hours must tell the story. I want you to keep a grip on yourself and save all questions until to-morrow. I want your help in a way you can only give it if you act in blind obedience. We've got to bluff like hell, old man. There's a dance to-night, isn't there?"

"I believe so."

"I want you to come and bring the ladies. I want you to be seen there in the best of spirits and morale. Later that may be important."

Sevens shook his head despondently.

"You're casting me in a hard rôle," he answered, "but I'll do my best."

"It's got to be as good as anybody's best," warned Fogarty crisply. "And now I must be alone for a while and uninterrupted. I've got a little matter on hand that won't wait."

When Sevens had gone Fogarty took out of his trunk a small kit of tools and the counterfeit pass-key, and over the phonograph in his neighbour's empty room he worked for a few minutes with quick exactness. Whatever his undertaking was, it left no mark on the instrument which had now been unpacked and set up ready for use. Then Fogarty went back to his own apartment, where he bathed, dressed in

evening clothes, and sat by his window watching a gorgeousness of colour shift and brighten in the sunset sky over the western pines.

The grounds about the Palmetto Inn that night were bathed in a wash of cobalt and silver. The moon rode high and white, and formal hedges, deodar cedars, mock-oranges, and hollies stood massively low and slenderly tall in contours of amazing beauty.

Dance music drifted out on the quiet breeze that carried a spicy fragrance of pine needles, and after the first number Don Fogarty stood in the door of the dance hall chatting inconsequently with Hope and Hope's husband. Barbour was obeying his orders to the peak of his overstrained abilities, but Hope's glance anxiously noted the troubled crinkles that drew about his eyes. She forbore from questioning him, but she wondered and worried.

Fogarty's pupils clouded to their fog-tone as he saw Faith drift by on the arm of a polo player. He read eagerness in the man's eyes and guessed that the pair were going out there where there were influences of magic and langour in the silver moonlight. He himself, until certain developments had come and shaped themselves into a pattern which he hoped to dictate, must stay here indoors and think, not of love and moon mists, but of their opposites.

The evening was still young when Joe Mandelle came through the entrance door, convoyed by a coloured baggage-bearer; and Fogarty who, through

seemingly negligent eyes, had been watchful, stepped back out of the line of vision. He saw the lawyer go to the desk and call for his mail and key.

Fogarty had no need to overhear the conversation which ensued because it was a conversation one side of which he had himself arranged. The clerk, after handing out the collected mail, produced separately another envelope, bearing a name and room number, and sealed with three dabs of red wax.

As it was delivered into Mandelle's hand, that hand trembled violently and the recipient had to concentrate his mind to catch the low words to which the clerk, following explicit instructions, was giving utterance.

"That envelope was picked up in the hall near your door, Mr. Mandelle," he said, "just after you left the house. I suppose it must have been dropped."

The lawyer stood looking incredulously at the thing. He knew he had not dropped it, but conceivably Fogarty, in the haste of his flight, had done so after stealing it—conceivably but most improbably. Now he inquired pointedly:

"Are you sure it was picked up just after I left? Has Mr. Fogarty returned?"

"He got back this afternoon, sir—a few hours ago."

"And this was found while—while we were both away?"

“So I understand, sir. I didn’t find it myself, of course.”

Mandelle’s chest gave a spasmodic jerk of relief. At all events, he seemed to have back his envelope—unopened. He wheeled and went almost cheerfully up the stairs. Carrington had said that the thing might have been dropped and not stolen at all, but that suggestion he had dismissed as an absurdity. Now it seemed on the unaccountable face of things that Carrington had been right, and if only such a miracle of reassurance could come to him as to the other stolen article, he might once more rest reasonably immune from the corrosive heart gnawing of fear.

In the hallway above stairs, as Mandelle hurried by, he was surprised to see that Fogarty’s room stood open and seemingly empty. Its lights were switched on and as Mandelle paused for an instant, a sudden beading of astonished moisture came out on his temples. On the table that was otherwise empty, except for an ice-pitcher and drinking glass, stood a phonograph cylinder!

No one was passing in the hall at the moment and Mandelle listened. There was no sound from the bathroom, which was the only part of the apartment into which he could not see. Desperate curiosity invited him to enter, and he answered the call. The place was as empty as it had seemed and with a triumphant flash in his eye the lawyer picked up the

phonograph record and hastened with it into his own room.

Below, Fogarty had been standing idly smoking but with his eyes on the face of the clock. He was giving the lawyer five minutes in which to open and inspect the recovered envelope which had been so mysteriously restored to him, after driving him to desperation of fear by its disappearance.

Then with a nod to Sevens to follow, he deliberately climbed the stairs. At his own door he paused, but did not enter. He cast a quick glance at the table on which the cylinder had stood, then smiled quietly and went on.

Almost at his heels followed a bellhop, and this, too, was not by chance but by prearrangement. The boy knocked on Mandelle's door and Sevens caught the sharp note of unwelcome with which the occupant demanded, "Who's there?"

"It's me, Mr. Mandelle. It's Jim," answered the coloured boy. "They was workin' on the bathroom plumbin' this evenin'. The office sent me up to test it."

Reluctantly Mandelle opened the door, and as the Negro entered Fogarty slipped uninvited after him, and stood, with Sevens at his shoulder, just inside the threshold.

CHAPTER XX

MANY incidental arts which were needful feeders to more important strategies lay in the province of the man who had begun life as a gay-cat ahead of a yegg outfit. Among these lessons, taught by experience, was the maxim that in any surprising and delicate situation the burden of disadvantage lies on the first speaker.

Now while the Negro went into the bathroom, tested the faucets and came out, then while he was being tipped and withdrawing, no word passed among the three white men. The boy had closed the door and gone on and still the silence held. In that interval of useful pause Fogarty's eye noted that during the little margin of time since Mandelle's entrance he had already thrust upon the dictaphone the record which he had paused to confiscate as he passed the room next door. Fogarty inferred from that incident that the lawyer had been first concerned in assuring himself as to the contents of his envelope and next in reading the message of the phonograph cylinder. He knew, too, because of what he had himself done to the instrument a little while before, that it had as yet given forth no sound.

Now he waited and Mandelle waited, but being less educated in the principle of enduring the embarrassment of loaded silences, the lawyer spoke first.

“What do you want?” he demanded angrily.

“What should I want, my dear fellow,” countered the other with entire urbanity, “except to welcome you home?”

Mandelle stood irresolute and flushing angrily. He was not in the least beguiled by this tone of cordial friendship. He knew that he stood facing one proven enemy and one man whose last communication had argued disaffection. He felt oppressively the sense of cleverly masked ambush, yet he hesitated to lash out wrathfully, and he took refuge in the weak resort of sarcastic rejoinder.

“I’m flattered, of course,” he said. “I hadn’t hoped you’d be so speedy of welcome, especially inasmuch as I’m told you got back only a few hours ahead of me.”

“I see,” remarked Fogarty absently, “that you’ve paid me the compliment of stopping in my open room, and taking along my phonograph record. I suppose it’s on the principle of ‘take it home and try it on your piano’.”

Mandelle started, then his flushed face gave back an impulse of hatred that was stronger than his powers of control. “I’d be glad to know,” he retorted acidly, “how my dictaphone cylinders get into your room in my absence.”

Fogarty's brows lifted and over his face came the declaration of puzzlement.

"Your record?" he questioned stupidly. "My dear Mandelle, I'm afraid I don't get you. It looks just the other way to me. It looks as though *my* dictaphone record got into your room under circumstances that need explanation." He broke off, then laughed. "However, the explanation is clear. You lost one and you jumped to the conclusion that this was it."

"I haven't jumped to any conclusion," retorted Mandelle. "I still believe that is mine, and I still am curious to know how you came by it. It hasn't a nice aspect when things drift from room to room that way."

Fogarty's face blackened abruptly and he stepped aggressively forward. Even Sevens, who was perplexedly following the trend of events, believed that his companion had been momentarily sidetracked from a sure purpose to a personal irritation which threatened a physical collision.

"Mandelle, do you mean to accuse me?" began the detective vehemently, then catching himself up on the curb of self-control, he laughed in swift transition of mood.

"But this is sheer nonsense," he added almost contritely. "As near as I can make out each of us had a phonograph record. You lost yours and, seeing mine, thought it was the one you sought. That

was natural enough." He paused, then went on with thoroughly restored good humour. "And the solution is as simple as the mistake. I see you have a machine there and have already put the record on it. Touch the button. Then we shall soon know which of us is right. We won't have to cut the thing in two like Solomon's baby."

As he spoke Fogarty crossed the room, and swiftly Mandelle interposed himself between the invader and the instrument.

"Stop, Fogarty," he commanded. "You're not here by my invitation. Don't push your meddling too far!"

Again the detective paused in seeming irresolution and again his face wore its expression of puzzled rebuff.

"What's the idea?" he inquired with a renewed hardness of voice. "You pretend to think that, for some unexplained reason, I've taken a phonograph record that belongs to you. You haven't yet denied that the one you now have on your machine was taken from my room without my permission. The cylinder I had was one that I dictated myself. It's rather a foolish thing, but there's no secret about it. I'm willing to turn on the switch and let her rip. The first sentence will be enough to satisfy me as to whether it's yours or mine. Why not let the record speak for itself?"

Mandelle stood in front of the dictaphone in the defensive attitude of a man who means to hold his

ground against trespassing, but his face began to show incipient indications of some spiritual disintegration. Sevens, from his position of vitally interested onlooker, felt, with a creeping at his scalp, the dramatic realization that he was watching the beginning of a psychological duel which must go to a finish.

Mandelle, too, knew that he must say something. He was being led on with a disingenuous seeming of candour, yet he must make some reply and one that smacked of outward logic.

"We can't try the thing on that machine," he announced sullenly. "That machine has been tampered with. It won't work."

"Won't work? That's odd." Fogarty stepped forward. "Shall I see if I can make it work? I'm a handy sort of tinkerer after a fashion. Perhaps the tightening of a screw somewhere——"

"No!" The monosyllable ripped out like a shot. "Get out of my room. I don't want you here."

The man with the slim but compact figure and the sandy hair came to a halt, but his eyes narrowed to bright slits.

"That record belongs to the one or the other of us, Mandelle," he said quietly. "But this much is certain. It was taken from my room when I was not in that room—and presumably it was taken by you. Now I claim it and you claim it, and I don't propose to be bullied in the matter. One of two things we

must do. I have a phonograph myself. We will take the thing into my room and see, by testing it, whose it is, or I shall call the office and complain that you have robbed me. Which shall it be?"

"I robbed you!" Mandelle barked out the words with a choking passion of indignation for the insolence of such a statement from the man who had so boldly plundered him. "Why, damn you——"

As though an electric current had been snapped his voice fell dead, and his pale face altered to a spasmodic fright. This was perhaps precisely what his enemy was playing for, the effort to jar him off his mental balance and make him incautiously furious. With that realization he drew back his shoulders and began sparring for time.

"All right, Fogarty," he said with a poor attempt at composure. "Perhaps I was hasty. We're making a mountain out of a mole hill, after all. Let's go in and see what your machine indicates." He paused, then added sententiously: "I use the machine for my dictation, and much of my business is confidential. You say you can recognize your record at the first words. I can do the same. I shall require you to stop on the first few sounds."

"That suits me," agreed Fogarty. "Or, on the other hand, I'm equally willing to let it run its length."

"I'm not," came the short answer. "Come on. Let's go to your room."

Fogarty turned and led the way and once inside he brought from the bathroom where it had been concealed the old phonograph which he had borrowed from Lawrence Footman. This he set up on the table and wound; then to Mandelle, who still held the record in his hand, he turned, saying, with a smile, "There's the machine. Suppose you do the honours."

Sevens had been standing by, wondering, yet realizing that under all this outwardly trivial byplay moved some tide of major force and importance which he could not gauge or understand. He knew that in Mandelle himself some destructive process was steadily at work, some crumbling of moral fibre; some growing fermentation of terror.

Now the attorney moved forward and placed the end of the cylinder over the metal core designed to hold it as an axis, but just as it engaged, the lawyer impulsively snatched it back again and, with a stifled outcry, hurled the thing against the metal tubes of the radiator, shattering it into fragments.

To Barbour Sevens came the sense of sickening defeat. The lawyer and the detective had each known things unknown to him, but what he had seen proved beyond doubt that this wax cylinder held something of tremendous importance—and now the cylinder was irreplaceably destroyed.

Fogarty, too, stood there with a face that seemed momentarily distressed while Mandelle stared at him with a burning light of defiance in his eyes.

Then as the tableau became strained and pregnant, Fogarty's voice broke it, half humorously and half mournfully.

"All the king's horses and all the king's men," he observed, "couldn't pick Humpty-Dumpty up again."

"No," rasped Mandelle belligerently. "That's that!"

"Yes, as you say," echoed Fogarty. "That's that, and it's a pity, too, because there were two phonograph records, seemingly each of some importance; and it's hard to understand why you shouldn't have been willing to coöperate in sorting them out."

"There were never two of them," contradicted Mandelle tensely. "There was only one. You lied about the second. That one was mine, stolen from me by you, and it was a matter of legal business which concerned a client and was confidential. For that reason I broke it. You say I stole it. I did nothing of the sort. I saw it in your room and recognized it and took it back."

Barbour was standing by the door of the room. Now Fogarty glanced at him and instructed quietly, "Sevens, be good enough to turn the key and put it in your pocket. I can only assume that our friend here is for the moment acting irrationally, and I must convince him of his mistake."

Mandelle had taken a step toward the door, but he halted because he saw Sevens standing planted

against it with his arms crossed and a glitter in his eyes that was new and disconcerting.

“You say,” began Fogarty again—and now his voice was velvety in its smoothness—“that there was only one of these records. You say I lied when I asserted that there were two. You were wrong, Mandelle—and here is the second.”

He had moved, as he spoke, around to a dressing table and had opened a small drawer. Now he held a second cylinder with two spread fingers of his left hand thrust into its hollow core. His right hand was in the side pocket of his dinner jacket.

The lawyer's face worked wildly and his eyes flared into jets of half-madness. He seemed on the point of lunging forward in attack, but Fogarty's voice came again and this time it was like the ripping of canvas. As though many intervening years had rolled away, the detective's face wore a menacing snarl that bared his teeth, and his language reverted to the vulgar argot of the gutter.

“Steady there, bo!” he commanded in a rasping whisper. “There's a gat on you, see?” and the right hand in the pocket of the dinner jacket gestured dangerously.

Mandelle caught himself and stood, half rocking, and then surprisingly enough, as though he were waking suddenly out of an evil dream, Fogarty flushed brick red.

“My God,” he exclaimed in a voice of deep cha-

grin. "I forgot myself. I thought I was Red Ryan again. No matter." He paused and went on in the even tenor out of which he had permitted himself to be, for the moment, jarred.

"I have here the second record," he said. "And if this is yours then, since you have destroyed mine, it's a fair exchange. On the other hand, if it's mine, it belongs to me. Now I propose to see which one was broken and which one saved."

"Then you did rob me!"

"I did rob you, and I'm not through with you yet."

Fogarty glanced at Barbour and spoke crisply.

"Sevens," he said, "will you hold the gun on this bird? And if he bobbles shoot. We're right down to cases now, and there's stuff coming through here that's likely to excite him."

Since he had come up the stairs Sevens had not spoken. Now he laughed shortly and his voice was not reassuring.

"Will I shoot the damned Judas?" he questioned. "I almost hope he gives me the chance."

Mandelle stood, tremulous and pale against the wall with his hands raised, hardly daring to meet the smoulder in the eyes of the man who had been his client, as they looked at him across the short-barrelled pistol. The hand that held it was granite-firm. It was even easier to watch Fogarty, who fitted the second cylinder onto his machine and then, when his

finger rested close to the starting device, took it away again.

Fogarty, as if in afterthought, removed the cylinder and tried to put it on backward, but it would not fit the core, and the detective laughed.

"They tell me," he said meditatively, "that when these machines were first devised you could run a record backward or forward—and when you put it on backward you got a strange jargon." He paused, then added, "As you gentlemen both see, that can't be done with the more modern dictaphone. It's a one-way machine."

Sevens, mystified more and more, stood listening but holding with his eye and gun the man whose face was going from putty gray to sickly green against the wall.

"Now," continued Fogarty, with a drawling and maddening deliberation, "I shall put this record on the only way it will go—and start the music."

He paused again, and his pauses seemed to be, if anything, more calculated than his words. Then he laughed to himself with a low chuckling enjoyment, started the machine, and in the room which had become oppressively silent they were listening to the jargon of sound that had confounded Markwitz.

"A linguist of national reputation," observed the detective, stopping the machine abruptly, "assured me that that cylinder contains a message in a language which he cannot identify—but which he is

willing to take oath is some tongue that has a grammar and a literature.”

From the almost collapsed figure against the wall came a sound like a sob—but it was a sob of relief. It was the releasing of a terror-tightened throat into something like ease. Mandelle felt like a man reprieved on the gallows platform and his voice proclaimed his emotion.

“So you’ve had the sharks working on it,” he exclaimed, “and they couldn’t figure it out. I could have told you they couldn’t.”

“Just so,” acceded Fogarty. “They did their best and passed it up—so I had to bring it back and trust to you and myself.”

“Trust me and be damned,” exclaimed Mandelle, and the fishy eye of despair showed a reviving reflex of hopeful light. Into the gray pallor crept a hint of swelling colour.

“I said, trust you and *myself!*” Fogarty corrected him. “I have already said that you could only put the record on the machine one way but——”

There was another long silence through which Mandelle stood holding his breath. It was Sevens who at length demanded, “But what?”

“But,” went on Fogarty quietly, “I am going to give you gentlemen a little demonstration. It is possible to run the machine backward.”

Mandelle had forgotten to keep his hands high. Now, with the collapse of his brief mirage of hope,

they came down and began clawing idiotically at the wall beside him. He seemed about to fall, yet braced himself and continued to stand wobbling on weak legs.

As he talked, Fogarty had wound a string deftly and rapidly about the axle of the disconnected core and now he began slowly drawing the cord toward him in such fashion that the diaphragm needle was traversing the record from end to front. At first the sound was weak and incoherent, but as the motion steadied it came slow and strong. Sevens started violently as he recognized the unmistakably reproduced voice of the man who stood there in palsy and pallor before him; the man who was, himself, now voiceless with fright.

“Re: Beverly Brothers undertaking,” announced the inanimate tongue steadily and clearly. “Sevens and Shell have talked matter over—period—Sevens is double-crossing and means to go into affair for purpose of trapping you—period—I have been called in and this has been explained——”

Suddenly the sound stopped. Fogarty whisked the record from the machine and put it into his pocket.

“That’s enough to recognize it by,” he said. “The sharks gave it up, but *I* didn’t give it up. I found out some strange things, too, as I played with my experiments. For instance, you can dictate the word ‘antagonize’ in the usual way and it comes

back, reversed, as 'zine-o-gat-na'—but when you dictate 'zineogatna' it comes back antagyonise. I understand you can reverse syllables but not breathings."

Abruptly Fogarty rose, and the academic quiet which he had assumed dropped away. He stood before Mandelle, who trembled more violently and whose face had become piteously drawn.

"The confession that you have in your pocket, Mandelle!" he snapped out in staccato sharpness, "is a counterfeit, made for me by an expert stenographer. The added postscript and signature are traced forgeries. The original is now in my breast pocket."

CHAPTER XXI

HANGING on the brink of complete demoralization, Mandelle made one final and supreme effort to rally his broken spirit for a last stand. Slowly he pulled his sagging limpness into a sort of erectness and licked his ash-dry lips.

“You have robbed me,” he said, “and you are trying to bluff me. That confession incriminates only Sevens there. The phonograph record was faked by you—it’s not legal evidence.”

“Am I a ventriloquist—to fake your voice like that?” inquired Fogarty pleasantly. “Don’t you fancy a jury would regard that voice as a sort of vocal signature?”

“No Court,” asserted Mandelle with an unsuccessful try at categorical certainty, “would let it go to the jury. It’s incompetent.”

“Thanks for the free legal advice,” responded Fogarty. “But we mean to let the Court decide that in due time—and I might cite decisions indicating that you’re mistaken, at that.”

The lawyer went slowly over to a chair by the table and sat heavily down. His face was a study with its gray pallor and its dark-ringed eyes and

with its struggle to wear, over those evidences of defeat, the expression of one who still manoeuvres fighting forces with a prospect of success.

“This is all sound and fury, Fogarty,” he said, forcing his words. “You have no evidence that that cylinder ever passed between me and any other human being. Even you can’t pretend to connect me with this case unless you can show a conspiracy with some other definite person or persons. You’re conducting a clever fishing expedition . . . but the man you’re seeking to trap is a lawyer . . . and you don’t dare arrest me on what you pretend to know.”

“Thanks again for the legal advice,” observed the detective drily. “Yet before you leave this room I do expect to arrest you. However, perhaps, it would be better if I told you what I know.”

“Yes.” Mandelle’s voice was a tone less strong now. “Possibly it would.”

“When the Turner people called me in,” began Fogarty crisply, “I had no thought of you, and when I came down here my suspicion of you was the most shadowy of hunches. You made your first misstep when you turned down Lou Stine’s defense and when Lou Stine pointed out to me that your running into the thieves who stuck up Slapinsky’s place was a coincidence worth studying. You made your second when you let me see on your desk pad that you were also in consultation with Beverly Brothers—but all

that stuff was as thin and gauzy as cobweb—except to a fellow who plays hunches. You're quite right though in saying that I'm helpless unless I have evidence of a conspiracy, and conspiracy is a tricky thing to establish."

"So you're going to find," commented the lawyer.

"While I've been down here," went on Fogarty, "the Turner people have been pretty busy up there. It struck me as queer that you talked with Shell and Sevens as a lawyer the day before the murder; that you were closeted with Sevens on the night of the murder, as the police knew; and that you went to his office the next morning and yet that you dropped out of the case entirely after that. The others overlooked the significance of all this only because, in a fashion, Sevens vouched for you and it occurred to no one to suspect Sevens—not even to me."

He paused and there was a heavy silence in the room.

"You say I have no evidence that that cylinder was ever out of your hands—but you're wrong there. I saw the package at the post office when it came from St. Louis, and I made note of the sender's name."

At that assertion the attorney almost smiled, and Fogarty smiled quite openly. "You are thinking," he observed, "that since it was a fictitious name and address that didn't net me much. You're quite right. In tracing it I got nowhere—but it proved

that the thing was a communication—with someone.”

“Someone’s not enough, you know,” Mandelle cut in. “It must be a definitely identified person.”

“Quite so. Also I made a mistake in thinking of the cylinder, before I knew its contents, as a message from someone else to you. It did not occur to me that it was a message from you to someone else—a message so incriminating that you must have it back and destroy it before you could sleep soundly. It did not occur to me, in short, that in the hands of the prosecution that record was precisely as damaging to you as the confession that Sevens signed would be to him. That knowledge came later.”

“It’s not knowledge yet. It’s far-fetched inference.”

“For the moment, then, let that pass. When you first lost your envelope I made a copy of its contents. Then for the first time I had the guilt of Sevens seemingly established. Then for the first time he entered my mind as even a supposable conspirator—and in spite of the evidence he didn’t fit that rôle, but you did, and I talked with him.”

“All he could tell you was that I gave him sound advice.”

“Sound advice from the standpoint of a Judas who meant to make him stand for the collar,” amplified Fogarty. “And yet one part of it was as sound as a nut. You explained to him that the first man taken

under the shadow of suspicion would have the burden of proof on his shoulders. You pointed out that, once the D. A.'s office had a defendant, every particle of testimony that built into his defense would be under the guns of the State—and that every witness who appeared for the people would be bolstered up. That was really good advice. It was so good that I insisted Sevens should continue to follow it—until we had you and your pals safely in the dock as defendants and he could go as a prosecution witness.”

“And that you haven't yet accomplished.”

“Then I decoyed you away,” proceeded Fogarty calmly. “And you ran to the man we hadn't succeeded in locating, the man whom, but for your inestimable aid, we might never have located; the man who had mailed to you the phonograph record, the man whom you met at the Seelbach Hotel in Louisville. . . . Now we are coming to the conspirators.”

He broke off, and despite the best efforts of a desperately braced nerve, Mandelle sagged as though he had been bludgeoned. His gray face again took on the greenish shade of bilge water and his hands shook so on the table top that he withdrew them and let them lie in his lap.

“Who was this man?” demanded Mandelle with a broken-backed defiance, and Fogarty countered, “Don't you think it would be wise for you to tell us?”

The prosecution might be able to use you as a witness, and grant immunity, you know."

"Thank you." The attorney was moistening his lips after every sentence, but his eyes were as grim and savage as those of a cornered rat. "That's what I thought. It's a fishing expedition. Your arch has no keystone and you want me to supply it. I'll see you in hell first!"

"This individual, whatever his name, was the man you advised to approach Barbour Sevens. He was the man you warned—by that phonograph record—after your talk with Tom Shell."

"All which pretended knowledge is empty without his name."

"Pardon me a moment," exclaimed Fogarty, as if in sudden memory of an important matter which had been forgotten. He went to the telephone and, sitting cross-legged on the side of his bed, called the office.

"I was expecting a telegram," he said. "You know that I'm in my room if one comes, don't you?"

There was a pause. Then in simulated irritation Fogarty spoke again:

"No, I haven't been outside at all. I've been here waiting for that message and it's awkward to have had it delayed. . . . No, of course you didn't send it up as you thought I was out, but now just repeat it to me over the 'phone and send it up at your leisure. Yes, I'm ready."

He paused, and his gaze bent itself narrowly on Mandelle as he repeated the words aloud. Mandelle's eyes were fixed with a feverish burning on his own.

"Don Fogarty, Camden Scar. . . . Have arrested Tom Carrington in St. Louis. . . . Is bitter against Mandelle and ready to talk. Jim Brice.' Thank you. Will you immediately file my telegram already written and marked Number One?"

Fogarty set down the 'phone and Mandelle came up out of his chair as though half electrocuted, then sank into it again and sat in a clammy and nerveless sweat.

"So Tom Carrington would seem to be the name," commented Fogarty amiably, "Tom Carrington alias S. C. Cowes, alias Tom Rathbone. . . . Then there's Jennings in New York. I dare say he's under arrest as a material witness by now. After all, you can't blame these boys if they feel the time has come to talk—and are anxious to talk first. With the D. A.'s office, it's first come, first served, you know."

Mandelle was gulping and licking his lips. The mention of these names had been as destructive to his shredded confidence as exploding shells, and now he mumbled in a terror-stricken voice, "Jennings—what do you know about Jennings?"

"Turner looked him up, when we got interested in phonographs," answered Fogarty. "Your office didn't realize that there was any secret about who

shaved your used cylinders. We didn't have to throw a very stiff scare into Jennings to learn that he had also acted, on occasion, as a messenger."

Mandelle thrust his arms out limp on the table and let his face sink down between his elbows. His fingers twitched spasmodically and his shoulders shook. Fogarty went quietly over, taking from his pocket something that glittered with a nickelled brightness, and snapped the locks of the bracelets upon the extended wrists.

At the touch of the cold metal the lawyer raised his head and sat gazing at the handcuffs. Then, in a faint and broken voice, he inquired, "Not that it matters much . . . but how . . . did you know . . . about Carrington?"

"By shadowing you when you ran to him. My man was in the lobby when he waited for you to telephone to your office and when you dictated a telegram to Sevens to be sent from there."

Stupidly the lawyer nodded, then raising the manacled wrists and looking at them, he spoke steadily.

"You're right. It's every man for himself now. I'm ready to talk, and I want my statement to be dated early. Call in a notary to swear me."

Again Fogarty went to the 'phone. When he had given the call that the prisoner suggested, he added an instruction of his own.

"Now please despatch the telegrams that you have there marked Number Two and Number Three."

An hour later Sevens and Fogarty stood by the door as a local policeman led Mandelle out in custody and escorted him through a rear exit. For a little there was silence, then Sevens said, "God knows I oughtn't to criticise you in any detail—yet you must have known all this, this afternoon—and you might have saved me some hours in hell."

Fogarty laid a hand on his arm.

"I told you we had to do some tall bluffing. This afternoon I suspected, even believed it all—but Mandelle had to confirm it before I could act."

"But the telegram that came over the 'phone from St. Louis?"

"That came only from the office downstairs. I composed it myself. We had Carrington under surveillance, of course, but he hadn't been arrested. Until Mandelle broke down, we had no admission strong enough to go on. Telegram Number One gave Brice word to seize Carrington. Number Two called for the arrest of Jennings, and Number Three reported to Turner. Mandelle's statement will be the first and it's complete."

The music was still swinging its spirited beat across the floor where the dancers drifted, and its cadences came out on the long veranda that overlooked the moon-steeped grounds. At one end of this veranda, with no other chairs occupied near their own, sat Don Fogarty and a woman. The woman was not

Faith, but her sister Hope, and sometimes as he talked the detective could see the younger girl pass the frame of the lighted window in the arms of another man.

“Barbour has worn a troubled look of late,” said Hope uneasily. “Do you know what causes it, Mr. Fogarty?”

“At all events, it’s not yourself that would be doing it,” laughed the man who had been by his own acknowledgment a “damned good thief.” “You’re blooming like a rose of Sharon.”

“Yes,” she smiled, “I’m not even frightened about myself any more. This wonderful place must really have been Ponce de Leon’s discovery.”

“I’ll tell you what’s been plaguing Barbour,” announced Fogarty abruptly, and then for ten crowded minutes, while Hope’s heart hammered fast, he sketched for her the near-tragedy that had been acting itself out, all unsuspected by her, under her eyes, and which had a half hour ago come to its final curtain. When he was through she leaned forward and her hands fell on his arms.

“And we owe it all to you,” she declared, tears making her voice tremulous. “I wonder if there’s any way we can ever—even in a little part—pay it back.”

“Sure and there is,” he answered with a nervous laugh. “And I’m presenting my bill forthwith.”

“What can we do?” she questioned—and of a

sudden his utterance became halting with embarrassment.

“Has Faith talked to you about me?” he demanded. “Has she told you about my shameful war record?”

Hope nodded her head slowly. “I’m sure, though, I’m the only person in the world she’s mentioned it to,” she made answer. “She had to talk to someone—and I told her I knew there was no such fault in you.”

Fogarty laughed and studied the glowing cigarette end in his long fingers.

“As it happens,” he said, “I have right here in my pocket a clean bill of health in that matter. I told her the truth and I called it an allegory—but there were times when the temptation was strong to hand her this envelope.”

“In Heaven’s name, why didn’t you do it, Don?”

“Because——” For an instant his voice shook, then steadied and went on with a humour as light as down. “Sure, it’s because I’m in love with a girl that I can’t ask to marry with.”

“Who? Why?”

“Faith, of course. . . . Because I’m me.”

“Why again?”

“Because she’s young. . . . If I handed out that official justification I’d be nominating myself as a hero, which I’m no such animal. And, because she’s young, again, she’d fall for it.”

“And mightn’t she do worse?”

This time it was he who laid his hand on her arm, and it was his eyes that looked into hers with an earnestness that the forced laughter could not wholly belie.

“She needs a gentleman,” he said. “She thinks I am one but I’m not—at least not yet. Me, I’m just a gent—and it’s quite a different thing altogether. She’d fall for me now—but later, she’d know she’d been bunked.”

“You are a gentleman, Don.” Again Hope’s voice trembled and again Fogarty laughed.

“Oh, I’m going to be one,” he answered. “Give me time. . . . But so far I’ve only come half way. I’ve got the front, and I mean to build behind it. . . . When I’ve done that—if she hasn’t found someone already up to specifications, you’ll find me coming back. . . . Meanwhile——”

“Yes—meanwhile?”

“Meanwhile, I’m going to New York to send Mandelle and Carrington up the river. That will be busy work and I need right busy work just now.”

“And you aren’t going to tell Faith?”

“Not a word. But I’m going to leave my bill of health with you and—some day, not too soon, perhaps—well, I think you understand.”

There was a catch in Hope’s voice.

“I do understand,” she said.

After a pause Fogarty spoke irrelevantly.

“Once when I was a red-headed little snide of a pickpocket,” he announced, “I stole a mesh bag from a girl at a football game. That girl looked like you—or what I really mean is she looked like Faith—because she was just a kid then like Faith is now; too young to weigh things right. I robbed her and—since she looked like Faith—well—maybe, once more, you understand.”

Hope sat suddenly upright in her chair. “A mesh bag,” she exclaimed. “I lost a mesh bag at a football game at Cambridge. . . . It was because of its loss that I met my husband. . . . He found it in his overcoat pocket.”

Fogarty sat staring wonderingly into her face.

“Tell me now,” he demanded, excitedly, “was there a diamond pin in the thing, too, by any chance?”

“There was. It belonged to Tom Shell. . . . It was by giving it back to him that Barbour got his first job.”

The dance music stopped, but Fogarty sat staring at the woman in the chair at his side. Finally he said in a low voice, “You must excuse me, Hope, but I’m only a gent and I’m excited. I’ve got to say it. I’ll everlastingly, abso-blooming-lutely be damned!”

THE END