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Britz, of Headquarters

By

MARCIN BARBER

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
1910

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MEMORIES AND IMPRESSIONS

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BRITZ, OF HEADQUARTERS

CHAPTER I

IN THE DIAMOND HORSESHOE

A GIRL'S scream clashed with the soprano's high note in the Jewel Song, and in a moment the Metropolitan Opera House was in confusion. The cry, half suppressed, broke the spell peculiar to a "Faust" night. The somewhat portly Marguerite, her voice soaring like a cage-born bird suddenly freed, was decking her mature person with the glistening stage gems left on her scenic doorstep by the suavest of devils. As the singer hung about her neck the rope of pearls with which Mephisto planned to fetter her soul, Mrs. Missioner, swinging her fan with a freer motion, struck the slenderest part of her diamond collarette. The blow was sharp. The golden thread on which the choicest of the Missioner jewels in their perforated settings were strung, snapped. Instantly most of the freed drops of frozen fire that constituted Mrs. Missioner's magnificent necklace—the one with the Maharanee diamond—were rolling on the floor of the box.

Mrs. Missioner, as the little scream broke from Dorothy March, a débutante she had taken under her wing for the evening, clutched at the few diamonds that fell into her lap. Miss March drew her skirts

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tightly about her ankles and shrank into a corner of the box, making room for the man who sprang to Mrs. Missioner's aid. Before another moment sped, Curtis Griswold was on his knees scooping together the scattered jewels with snow-gloved hands. Bruxton Sands, slower of movement, bent with more dignity to the task. In the next box, separated from Mrs. Missioner's only by a low velvet rail, a man of Oriental features and complexion turned to watch the scramble for the jewels. Though he did not stir from his place, his hawk-like face seemed to thrust itself into the center of the excited group.

The confusion throughout the house died slowly. By that subtle magnetism that inspires masses of humanity, everybody seemed to know whence the scream had come, and all eyes were turned from the stage to the Missioner box. They saw the usually tranquil mistress of a hundred millions yielding publicly to emotions that her poorest sister on losing her only trinkets might have shared with her. So distracting was the excitement in the Missioner box that for a second the great soprano paused in her cadenzas, and the conductor halted the beat of his baton. There was danger of the orchestra committing the crime of a break in its strains. But the musicians, deterred by discipline from imitating their leader's swift back glances at the auditorium, played steadily on.

"Someone has fainted," came in ill-repressed tones from somewhere in the orchestra seats. Marguerite, her fingers at her throat, paused almost imperceptibly, but long enough for a quick look at the focus of excitement.

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"Continue! Continue!" she urged, as she bent her gaze from the box to the conductor.

"What's the matter? Go on! Go on!" the stage manager cried in undertones from the wings. Ushers in the back of the house sought to cover the confusion with ill-timed applause. The moment was big with potential tragedy. One cry of "Fire!" might have sent those thousands of startled women and men battling along the aisles in an elemental fury of self-preservation. Mere prolongation of the situation without that terrible tocsin might have ended in a smaller panic. But the liquid notes of the soprano soaring again in the pyrotechnics of the Jewel Song reclaimed the attention of the audience. The conductor, evidently eager to hide his own momentary loss of poise, fairly lifted his men through the intricacies of the accompaniment. Promptness of action by the stage manager restored order behind the scenes.

Nothing of all those incidents struck the sense of anyone in the Missioner box. All four of its occupants were concerned for the immediate recovery of the diamonds that had sprung from Mrs. Missioner's neck to her lap, and then stampeded across the floor. Griswold, still on his knees, rescued the greater number. Sands, a man of action as well as of millions, picked up the larger gems. Miss March shrank further into her corner of the box, and dragged her petticoats ever more closely until her immature form seemed chiseled in tulle.

"Look in all the corners—look everywhere," Mrs. Missioner urged. "There's one behind the chair," she pointed.

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"There's another," cried Dorothy, pointing at Griswold's feet. A glance from the dark stranger in the next box directed the searchers toward still another part of the floor, and every move was rewarded by the recovery of a gleaming stone. One by one, by twos, by threes, the diamonds were gathered, and still the search went on. Fast as they scooped them up, Sands and Griswold poured the glittering treasure into Mrs. Missioner's lap.

"Are they all there?" asked the millionaire.

"No, no," answered the widow. "There are several more. Please look again—look everywhere. Dorothy, help me count them."

The women sorted and counted the gems, indifferent to the thousands of eyes as if in the seclusion of a boudoir.

Griswold and Sands renewed their search, peering into the remotest corners, pushing chairs about, looking, reaching, grasping with the zeal of Klondikers, urged again and again by the owner of the jewels.

The glittering horseshoe of the Metropolitan deserves its name. The Kaffirs of Kimberly, the pearl-divers of Polynesia, the gold-seekers of the Klondike, the diggers into earth's secrets the world over toil ceaselessly to maintain the brilliance of that big jewel show. They send their diamonds and rubies and emeralds and sapphires, their pearls and opals and gold, to gleam on the heads and breasts and gowns of women whom the industry of one generation, or the stock-market luck of another, has crowned with riches. A night at the opera is a parade of the wonders gems

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can work and of that which, too often, gems can buy.

In all that electric sparkle, no gems outshone the Missioner jewels, of which the necklace Mrs. Missioner wore that night was the masterpiece. For in its center blazed the famous Maharanee diamond.

"I think we've found them all," said Sands, rising and emptying his cupped hand into the miniature mountain in Mrs. Missioner's lap.

"No more in the box, that's certain," supplemented Griswold, dusting his knees studiously.

"Are you sure?" asked Dorothy.

"Please be sure," begged the widow. "I must have them all."

Sands and Griswold nodded in chorus. Neither noticed the fascination with which the eyes of the Easterner, like twin searchlights, swept the floor.

Sands and Griswold returned to their chairs. Reluctantly realizing the thrilling little by-scene was at an end, the other members of the audience again focused their attention on the stage. Mephisto befooled Dame Martha, Faust won Marguerite, and the curtain descended on an operatic triumph, only to be raised and lowered and raised again as boxes, orchestra, and balconies recalled the singers for their meed of praise.

As they passed, bowing and smiling, before the curtain, a low cry came from Mrs. Missioner's throat.

"O-o-oh!" she exclaimed, half-rising in her ex-

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citement, "the largest of all is gone! The Maharanee!"

Instantly the turmoil was renewed. Dorothy sprang to her feet and, before either of the men could anticipate her, began pushing the chairs about until all save Mrs. Missioner's were grouped in a corner of the box. Then the little débutante, regardless of her fluffy frock, raked the floor with her fan, with her free hand, her feet, in almost hysterical quest of the still missing diamond. Griswold, nearly as excited as the women, recommenced his own search.

All the energy of the thousands of women and men in the house was in their eyes, and those eyes were concentrated on the box where the millionaire widow, half-frenzied, was sacrificing her Paquin gown to the hunt for her more treasured possession.

All the action in Sands leaped to the fore. Stretching a long arm across the bent backs of Griswold and little Miss March, he thrust a thumb against an electric button.

"It can't be in the box," he said decisively, and when a breathless usher rapped on the door, the millionaire tore it open and whispered, "Run down to the orchestra and look everywhere around this box. A diamond has fallen over the rail."

"What *can* be the matter?" asked a thousand women of a thousand escorts. In many parts of the audience, they were standing between the seats for a better view of the box around which the little tempest of excitement swirled.

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Quick questions rained on the searching usher from a group that surrounded him ten deep as he poked among the programmes that strewed the orchestra floor under the Missioner box.

"Keep cool, Doris. We'll find it," said Sands to the widow.

"Bravo!" came as an inspiration from a far corner of the balcony, as the great soprano made her final bow. Instantly it was taken up by hundreds. "Bravo! Bravissimo!" screamed delirious standees over the length of the orchestra. The firemen stood tensely at their posts in readiness for a life struggle. Ushers hurried to and fro in vain efforts to quiet those nearest them. Above all the clamor in the Missioner box, the nervous inquiries of women, surged that swelling roar, "Bravo! Bravo! Bravissimo!" until most other sounds succumbed to it, and only the noise of the diamond hunt survived.

"Dorothy, Dorothy, I cannot go until we find it," sobbed Mrs. Missioner. The woman who, with a sweep of her pen, could summon all the artists who had sung their souls out on the stage to sing as soulfully in her salon, who, with another pen-sweep, could recompense them beyond their most arrogant demands, was in tears because she had lost a diamond.

But such a diamond! Its prisoned fire held the history of an alien race.

"After all," said Griswold in a swift aside to Dorothy, "she has recovered the other gems, and even if she cannot find this one——"

"Don't you know?" returned little Miss March

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excitedly. "Don't you really *know*, Mr. Griswold?"

"Know what, Miss March?" asked the clubman.

"Why, the history of that stone! Don't you know Mrs. Missioner's husband bought it from a Maharanee, that they brought it all the way from India? Don't you know it's the finest diamond in America?"

Griswold shook his head. He was pursuing the search perfunctorily. His hands were busy, but his eyes roved over the house. Idly he noted the slowly ebbing interest of the audience, the departure of hundreds by twos and threes and larger groups, the thronging toward the lobby for the usual visits between the acts. It was with faint interest that he saw several swarthy faces weaving through the crowd. Had his eyes been able to follow those faces, he would have seen them converse in the corridor behind the box—the box in which sat the Oriental with the face of a hawk.

The hawk watched the Missioner box. So steadily did he direct his gaze at Mrs. Missioner that she was on the point of averting her glance when the stranger's flashlight gaze struck a spark from her memory. She bowed, coolly as she began the inclination of her head, but in the end graciously. Her dark neighbor was satisfied with that dubious encouragement.

"You are fond of your jewels as ever, I see," he said, in a low tone, as of one claiming a share in intimate memories.

"Yes," she answered with an abstracted air. She was harking back to days long gone, and evidently the recollection was not unpleasant.

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"I cannot blame you," said the Oriental. "Everyone knows you have the most wonderful jewels in the world—one of them, at any rate."

Little Miss March listened wide-eyed. Sands bent toward Griswold with a brief whisper.

"These," returned Mrs. Missioner, "are among my very finest diamonds. But they are nothing to the Maharanee, and that is gone."

A leaping flash in the Oriental's eyes soon faded to a gleam of polite interest.

"You are brave," was all he said, "to wear them in public. Many a woman, save in her own ballroom, would content herself with the duplicates."

"Duplicates!" There was unmistakable contempt in Mrs. Missioner's tone.

"I trust," the Easterner continued, "you will recover the Maharanee, too."

Mrs. Missioner had no time for more than another slow bending of her head when the usher who had gone to the orchestra hurried into the box.

"I've looked thoroughly, sir," he said to Sands, "and I can't find the diamond anywhere."

The millionaire slipped a banknote into the man's hand.

"Try again," he said quietly. "There's a good deal more than this in it for you if you find it."

Griswold, as he moved to let the usher pass, stepped backward with such abruptness as to drive his heel sharply down upon something that slipped under his tread like a peach kernel. In the very moment when Mrs. Missioner, resuming her talk with the Oriental, said, with emphasis, "I leave imitations to others,"

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that blundering heel crushed into and through the velvet carpet, crushed, against the unyielding hardwood of the floor, what had been the most conspicuous diamond in all the richly jeweled collarette—crushed it until only a tiny heap of pallid powder lay there, save where a great flake had slipped from the pressure and remained to betray what the little pile of dust had been.

"Jove!" exclaimed Sands.

"The Maharanee!" gasped Dorothy.

The widow paled.

The light in the Oriental's eyes flared to a flame. With a smile as inscrutable as his thoughts, he leaned across the low partition, picked up a pinch of the powder and the telltale flake and laid them deferentially on Mrs. Missioner's outspread fan.

"Your maid is more cautious," he said, his smile softening slightly, "or, it may be, your jeweler has made a mistake."

Mrs. Missioner did not faint. She only clutched the soft hand of little Miss March so tightly that the débutante with difficulty suppressed a scream. This time there was silence in the Missioner box, for Griswold, even as he began to stammer an apology for his awkwardness, let the words die on his lips as he saw the cruel pallor of the widow's face. The silence of Sands was grim, that of the Oriental suavely self-effacing.

"Then," said Mrs. Missioner at last, in a low, tense tone, "this is—this is——"

"Not the Maharanee diamond," replied the Oriental. "In a sense, madame, I congratulate you."

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She stopped him with a look.

"This—this thing is——" She could say no more.

"Paste!" thundered Sands.

"I have been robbed," said Mrs. Missioner in a stifled voice. "Take me home, Bruxton."

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CHAPTER II

THE MAN OF ACTION

THE conference that followed in the quiet of Mrs. Missioner's library threw no light on the mystery of the Maharanee's disappearance. Mrs. Missioner was not of the fainting type, and when she entered her Fifth Avenue home, followed by Dorothy, Sands, and Griswold, she went straight to the room in which she kept her jewels. Half library, half boudoir, the big apartment was a triumph of the decorator's art. It was lighted by slender vacuum tubes running along the walls, which could flood the farthest corner with noonday brilliance or soften the gloom to the faintest twilight gleam. A grateful glow from logs of giant Georgia oak ruddied the Colonial fireplace.

Mrs. Missioner herself switched on the lights to their full radiance. She hastened across the room, her opera cloak slipping from her white shoulders, and paused in front of the safe.

"You don't expect to find your diamond there?" inquired Griswold amazedly.

She flung a glance over her shoulder.

"Perhaps all the other stones are paste," she answered. "I am going to see how many have been stolen."

She dropped to her knees before the steel door of the bank-like vault built into the wall, and turned the nickel knob to right and left. The door, painted to

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harmonize with the Flemish oak of the wainscot, was ornamented with only the widow's crest. Silence held the others as her gloved fingers whirled the little knob. Not until a click announced that the bolts were thrown did Sands speak.

"You are sure all the other stones are here?" he asked, picking up Mrs. Missioner's lorgnon bag, into which she had slipped the recovered gems on leaving her opera box.

"Yes," the widow replied, "but, Bruxton, the Maharanee, the beautiful Maharanee diamond! If you could know how I prize it!"

Sands, absently counting the lesser jewels, did not see the massive safe door swing open. His disciplined mind was working slowly, steadily. Dorothy, her small face cameo clear in the intense light of the mercury, watched the shining gems as the millionaire's strong fingers flicked them delicately from the silken bag to the table. Plainly she, too, was groping for a clew. Griswold alone, therefore, saw the widow's gloved hand tremble as, swiftly, she turned a smaller knob controlling the combination of the compartment in which she kept her jewels. His eyes still upon her, he felt for a cigarette.

The match fell from his fingers as the inner door opened to his searching glance. Lances of many-colored light slashed the comparative gloom of the compartment as Mrs. Missioner brought forth tray after tray from the jewel vault. The steel box in the center of the safe was an Aladdin's cave in miniature. It held stones of every sort in settings of every fashion, ranging from the product of twentieth cen-

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tury jewelers back to the loved works of Byzantine artificers. Little Miss March gasped again as the widow spread the trays on the Persian rug.

The widow's guests saw what few persons other than Mrs. Missioner had seen—all the Missioner jewels at once. The gems were the collection of a lifetime. Missioner, in the intervals of amassing millions, had devoted himself to gathering them from the earth's four corners. It had been his only hobby, and he had pursued it with the enthusiasm of a man to whom an extra numeral or two on a check meant little. Globe-girdling trips to which the financial and industrial press attached mysterious importance had meant nothing more than jewel hunts to Missioner. He bagged railroads from habit, he stalked diamonds for pleasure. And, despite her fondness for social conquests the multi-millionaire considered trivial, so sympathetic had been the bond between Missioner and his wife that at his death not only the great collection, but the passion of augmenting it, passed to her.

"You have an inventory, of course?" asked Sands. Even his sturdy individuality paid passing tribute to the magnificence of the collection. He left the stones of the necklace on the table and strolled over to stare at the rubies and emeralds, the sapphires and tourmalines and amethysts, above all at the unrivaled group of diamonds graded from a firefly's sparkle to the gloryburst of radium. Little Miss March, true daughter of Eve, sank on the broad rug beside the shining trays and gazed at them in an ecstasy of adoration.

Mrs. Missioner drew from a shelf in the jewel box a

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catalogue of her treasures. Item by item she read from it, the others checking tray by tray until the last stone was accounted for, the last save the wonderful Maharanee diamond.

"The big stone gone," mused Sands. "Then, Doris," and there was conviction in his tones, as he gathered up the jewels scattered on the table, "these others are false, too."

"Oh, do you think so?" asked Dorothy, her fingers interlacing in repressed hysteria.

"Sure of it," said Sands, holding one of the suspected gems to the light. "I'm not an expert, but I haven't the slightest doubt."

"Let me see them," Griswold interposed. He scrutinized three or four for more than a minute. "They look genuine enough to me." He offered them to Miss March, whose fingers did not unlock to take them.

"We can be certain very quickly," said Mrs. Missioner. She was studying Griswold's whitening fingers—steady enough, but deadly white. It was a peculiarity of the man that he turned pale only in his hands. "I will send for a jeweler."

"My dear! At this hour?" came in Dorothy's child treble.

Mrs. Missioner smiled in a way that said there were jewelers of no small importance in commercial circles who would be glad to answer a summons from her at any hour—that it was not in vain she was known to dealers as one of the most liberal collectors in the world. She turned to a rosewood desk and took up a telephone.

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"Gramercy, 9—7—4—6," she called. "The Effingham?—Mr. Ranscome, please.—This is Mrs. Missioner, Mr. Ranscome.—Yes, I am at home.—Can you come up for a few minutes?—Thank you," and as she returned the receiver to the hook, she explained: "Ranscome is the oldest expert in New York."

"While we are about it," said Sands slowly, "we may as well call headquarters." He reached for the telephone, but his hand was stayed by Dorothy's fluttering fingers.

"Oh, Bruxton," she said, "please don't call the police," and as his eyebrows went up, she added, "I am so frightened."

"I wouldn't be hasty, Sands," said Griswold. "The newspapers follow the sleuths, you know."

The millionaire hesitated.

"Have you thought of anything better to do?" he returned. Then, as the widow's silence made itself felt, he turned to her. "Your pardon, Doris. Perhaps your own wishes are—but it seems such a natural thing to do."

"I'm not thinking of the newspapers," replied Mrs. Missioner, "but maybe we'd better wait for Mr. Ranscome. You see," and there was perplexity in the glance that swept the group, "this is no ordinary theft."

"Not a burglary, you think?" asked Griswold quickly. He had lighted his cigarette, and, leaning back in a cozy corner of the inglenook, was smoking with little abrupt puffs that contrasted with the ease of his position. He studied the widow covertly through weaving wreaths.

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"If a burglar could reach this room, I must reorganize my household," she murmured. She was gazing into the flames. Her shoulders drooped, and Sands, noticing her weariness, switched off the lights. The rainbow sparkle of the jewel trays varied fantastically the pattern of the rug on which they lay, but the background of dusk rested her.

"And there is no one you suspect?"

"There is no one in the house I can suspect."

"You are to be congratulated," Griswold commented, with a smile discreetly divided between sincerity and satire. "And, of course, having such an impeccable household——"

"If I were you, Doris," Sands broke in impatiently, "I'd send for the police at once." His slow logic had carried him to the fact that even now the thief might be on the road to escape. Little Miss March glanced at him admiringly. Swift or slow of wit, the man of action appeals.

"I think Mr. Sands is right, Mrs. Missioner," she said softly. "It frightened me at first, but Bruxton knows."

"Advise me," said the widow, her satin slipper tap-tap-tapping the fender of burnished brass. "I am not jesting when I say I am in the hands of my friends. All this is more than puzzling."

"Puzzling!" echoed Dorothy. "It's a mystery—and it's all very dreadful, too." Sands looked at her, smiling. There was eloquence in those rare smiles of his, much more than in his speech. Not without cause did Wall Street know him as "Silent" Sands.

"Why not a private detective?" Griswold sug-

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gested. "It is the best way to recover stolen property."

"Not always," Sands objected.

"Almost always," Griswold pursued. "The police usually are useless in a case like this." Turning to Mrs. Missioner, he continued, "I can recommend an excellent agency."

"Mr. Ranscome, madam."

A footman of conventional pattern stood on the threshold as if on a pedestal and looked at Mrs. Missioner from a carven face.

"Let him come up, Blodgett," she responded. The carven features blurred into the background. A round little man with the face of a dreamer and the eyes of a student entered, almost on his toes. Mrs. Missioner greeted him pleasantly, and as she pressed the button that filled the room with light again, she presented him to her friends. "Mr. Ranscome," she added, "is an expert of experts."

Briefly the widow recounted the accident in the opera box, the discovery of the supposed Maharanee diamond's worthlessness, and her suspicion as to the other stones of her necklace. During her recital, Ranscome's glance caressed the gems in the scattered trays, and it was by a visible effort that he wrested his eyes from them to look at the stones on the table.

"Are they real?" asked the widow.

The little man seemed not to hear her.

"Did you say, madam, the Maharanee diamond?"

"Yes," she answered, and waves of pain rippled across her face. "Oh, Mr. Ranscome, think of it—think of it!" She clasped her hands so tensely the

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rings upon them bit her flesh. "Think of it, Mr. Ranscome!"

"The Maharanee!" he murmured—say, rather, groaned in an undertone. "A glorious jewel, a wonderful jewel, a queen's jewel! Gone, did you say? Absolutely gone—not a trace of it?"

With the flat of his hand, he spread the smaller stones on the table, stroking their gloss with sensitive fingers. He held three or four to the light, then, with a disdainful gesture, smeared the glistening pile broadcast across the board.

"None," replied the widow. "And those?"

"These, Mrs. Missioner," the expert said, as if waking from a dream, "are the most beautiful imitations I have ever seen."

Sands reached for the telephone again.

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CHAPTER III

A SEARCHING EXAMINATION

WHEN the millionaire stopped talking over the telephone, he turned to the widow with an air of finality.

"I have taken it on myself," he told her, "to inform the Detective Bureau. This is no time for Sherlocking. There'll be a couple of detectives here in half an hour."

Mrs. Missioner looked at him admiringly. But her eyes turned to Griswold with a light it would have taken a woman to read, a woman more experienced than little Dorothy March.

Ranscome, ignoring the counterfeits, stood in absorbed study of the jewel trays' kaleidoscopic contents. That peculiar pallor returned to Griswold's hands. With fingers that bent and straightened ceaselessly, he drummed his fist.

"The robbery is the more incomprehensible," said Mrs. Missioner thoughtfully, "because of the extraordinary precautions I have taken against burglars. I cannot understand how the thief got to the necklace."

"Your safe seems strong enough," Ranscome ventured. Stepping around the trays, he passed his hand over the outer door and looked at the twenty-four steel bolts curiously.

"It should be strong," returned Mrs. Missioner. "It was built on the lines of the great safe in the

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Gramercy National. It differs only in size and in the absence of a time lock."

Ranscome, staring at the safe, shook his head. Sands walked over to him and, thrusting both hands in his pockets, stood gazing at the bolts. Griswold, smoking quietly in the inglenook, mustered a show of interest in the safe from time to time, but always his glance returned to the glittering trays.

"I wish you'd put those away, Doris," said Griswold suddenly. "With all this mystery in the air, I don't like to see them lying around."

Mrs. Missioner laughed.

"Surely they're safe among us," she answered, graciously including Ranscome with an extra smile. She drew off her gloves decisively and, rising as if from folds of conjecture, rang for Blodgett. "I think——" she said, then stopped with her hand on Dorothy's shoulder.

Inquiry reached toward her from four pairs of eyes.

"I think," she went on, "Miss March wants some tea, and—I think we all need something to drink."

It was when Blodgett, tray-laden, was tinkling his way to the library that the detectives arrived. The hostess and her guests, the footman having been bidden to show the policemen in, heard heavy breathing outside the door, where Donnelly and Carson, of the Central Office, were gripped in a panicky pause. Next moment, a large man with a small head, and another so aggressively average as to be a nondescript, came in. Donnelly, the big man, turned out his toes as he walked. A charm the size and shape of a double

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eagle, bearing a Bacchante whose pose would have been indecorous if it had not been impossible, swung from his equatorial waist line. One could tell at a glance he used perfume. One could tell nothing in many glances about Carson. There was nothing to tell.

"We've come up here, Mrs. Missioner," said Donnelly, addressing Miss March, "to find your diamonds."

"Oh, thank you!" murmured the widow, sweeping toward him. "I am Mrs. Missioner. Won't you be seated?"

"Why,—huh!—no, Miss Missioner—Mrs. Missioner—no, thanks!" answered the sleuth, with all the airy ease of a highly embarrassed man. "We'll just —huh!—walk around a little, thanks—just walk around." Carson, neutral echo of his colleague's words, did walk around. Donnelly, as if, having announced the action, he had done his share, stood still.

Dorothy and Griswold exchanged glances. Sands stared stolidly at the sleuths. Mrs. Missioner, with a permissive inclination of her head, began chatting with Ranscome. Even as he spoke with her, the veteran expert could not drag his eyes from the jewels.

"Now, then, Mis' Missioner," said Donnelly briskly. "Who—huh!—do you suspect?" There seemed to be a sort of astigmatism in his breathing. Carson faced the group with an expression that said bluntly he suspected everybody.

"I don't suspect anybody," Mrs. Missioner replied, resuming her talk with Ranscome.

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"You notice that—huh!—Carson?" said Donnelly, wheeling on his mate. "Nobody suspected—huh!" He breathed in dialect.

Carson, instantly complaisant, banished suspicion from his look.

"Now, you know, there's always somebody, ma'am — huh! — Mis' Missioner," Donnelly persisted. "Somebody suspected in every case. Think a moment. Have to suspect before you convict, you know. Never heard—huh!—of a case without suspects—*eh?*"

The "eh" was meant to be a javelin hurled straight at the widow's inner consciousness. It fell short.

"There is no one to be suspected—no one I *can* suspect," she said.

Carson, the reticent, unbosomed himself.

"Somebody," he said assertively, "did it."

"Oh, well—huh!—ma'am," chugged Donnelly, "we'll just look around—just look around a little."

And Carson looked.

Feet at right angles, Bacchante dancing desperately as the fob rose and fell, the large man from the Central Office moved toward the safe. Mrs. Missioner shuddered at thought of the peril to her jewels from his plate armor soles. Her imploring eye-sweep brought ready response from Sands and Griswold, and in a second's fraction they were piling the trays on chairs and tables. Ranscome, helping, handled the morocco cases with loving touch.

Donnelly stopped short at sight of the gems in the trays. An interrogative snort vibrated somewhere inside him, but found no oral expression. He passed

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on to the safe. With a masterful grasp, he swung the great door to and fro.

"We'll soon know," he said reassuringly, "who to —huh!—yes, who to suspect. Carson!"

The echo crossed the room with whispering tread. Both detectives began an examination of the door. Eyes close to the daintily tinted steel, they dragged their combined gaze along its front from top to bottom, from side to side. Then they shifted their eyes to the thick edge of the door, and their scrutiny bored its way past bolt after bolt until it switched to the inner panel. That done, they examined the rectangle into which the big door fitted as thoroughly. During most of this procedure, the Bacchante stood on her hands and flourished her heels in the air, as Donnelly doubled himself until the equator of his waist line almost touched the poles.

The big man straightened abruptly. Bacchante's heels came down and her hands fluttered aloft. The catch in his voice, characteristic of him when in the presence of the rich, was brushed out of his throat by a burst of professional zeal. He recognized a situation that enabled him to play inquisitor in a home of wealth.

"Where were the jewels stolen from?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Missioner.

"When did you miss them?"

Again the widow recited the incident of the opera box.

"Who was in the party?"

Mrs. Missioner told him. She did not mention the Oriental in the next box. It did not occur to her.

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Donnelly stroked a heavy jaw ponderously.

"I understand your diamonds are worth a pot of money, ma'am," he half inquired.

"They are valuable," said the widow.

"What do you value them at?"

"Half a million dollars."

An appreciative "Huh!" broke from Donnelly. Carson echoed it in his face.

"Isn't there anybody you can think of," pursued the big detective, "who could have taken them?"

"Nobody who would," answered Mrs. Missioner.

"Did anybody else have the combination of the safe?"

"One," responded Mrs. Missioner. She answered defensively, like a witness under hostile cross-examination, volunteering nothing. Donnelly seemed not to hear her. He was examining the safe again. He passed his hand over the door and its frame again, turned the handle that shot the bolts, noted their strength and smoothness, turned them back, and wheeled on Mrs. Missioner abruptly.

"There's been no forcing here," he said sagely. "It's an inside job."

Mrs. Missioner's eyebrows went up.

"Yes'm," the detective went on, "an inside job. Who did you say had the combination?"

Mrs. Missioner hadn't said, but she answered naturally:

"My secretary—Miss Holcomb."

"Oh!" said Donnelly. Carson's lips rounded in mute repetition.

Sands, impatient of the detective's awkward ques-

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tioning, shook himself lion-like and went to a window. Griswold swung his foot idly, and smoked in shorter measure. Ranscome looked nervously at the inquisitor, then swung his gaze back to the jewel trays. Dorothy listened with wide-eyed interest.

"What do you know about this Miss Holcomb?" asked Donnelly, squaring himself as if for a trial of strength with the widow and turning out his toes farther than ever.

"I have known her many years," said Mrs. Missioner quietly, adding with warmth, "She is a young woman of high character."

"Oh, she is, is she?" returned the sleuth. "And how, may I ask, ma'am, do you know that?"

"I say, I have known her many years," said Mrs. Missioner.

"Oh, you have? And are you sure you know her thoroughly?" Donnelly manifestly was enjoying his rôle to the utmost. Carson's face became a supercilious interrogation point.

"Mr.—what did you say your name was?" replied the widow.

"Donnelly, ma'am—Detective Donnelly, of the Central Office."

"Thank you." The exact shade of Mrs. Missioner's meaning was indeterminate. She may have been genuinely grateful for the information. There was nothing uncertain about her next words. "If you think, Mr. Donnelly," she said, "Miss Holcomb can be connected with the disappearance of my jewels in any way, you are on the wrong course. She is above suspicion."

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There was a man in Mulberry Street who might have told her nobody was above suspicion in the eyes of the ordinary Central Office man. But Mrs. Missioner had not yet met him, and when she did, both were too interested for philosophical observations.

Donnelly did not reply. He held whispered consultation with his mate. Then he asked if he might question the servants.

"Certainly, if you think it necessary," assented the widow. "But I should warn you that I cannot bring myself to suspect any of them."

"Everybody seems to be above suspicion," snapped Donnelly. "It's always the way, until we begin to get on the trail, and then everybody becomes suspicious. I think I'll question the servants, ma'am. Shall I have 'em in here?"

Mrs. Missioner bowed and sent Blodgett to summon his comrades.

"One at a time, please," said Donnelly. The first to enter was the housekeeper, a staid woman in a black gown with narrow white ruching about her withered neck. She knew nothing of the jewels save that madam always locked them in the safe herself, unless Miss Holcomb was there to do it for her. Yes, Miss Holcomb put them away pretty often. Took them out pretty often, too, when madam wished to wear them. No, none of the maids had access to the safe. They were proper young women and knew their place. It was out of the question to think any of them would meddle with madam's jewels. Yes, some of the maids had followers, but always respectable young men, who worked for a living. No, she herself would not ven-

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ture to disturb any of madam's possessions which madam had not placed under her immediate care.

The answers of the other servants were equally straightforward. The butler, under-butler, chef, second footman, pantry-boy, parlor-maid, chamber-maids, and kitchen-maid, and the majestic Blodgett himself were interrogated persistently, minutely, doggedly, even bullyingly, and in the end the net result of what they had to tell was zero. That is to say, as far as Mrs. Missioner and her friends and the diamond expert were concerned. Donnelly thought otherwise. Carson's mind was a receptive blank.

"Are these all the servants?" asked the large detective.

"All at present," answered Mrs. Missioner. "My own maid is away on leave. Oh, yes, there's Ali."

"Is Allie the name of your maid?"

"No, Ali is a man—an Indian."

"And what's his job?" This aggressively.

"He is a courier."

Donnelly was puzzled.

"When I travel, he looks after the transportation and baggage," Mrs. Missioner explained.

The detective stroked his jaw and whispered with Carson again.

"How long has your maid been away?"

"About a month," the widow told him.

"Have you had the real sparklers since then?"

"The real——"

"Sparklers—shiners—diamonds?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Missioner doubtfully.

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"How can I be sure? I do not know when the substitution was made. I thought I had the genuine necklace to-night."

Exactly why Donnelly and Carson examined the safe a third time must remain a mystery to everyone outside the ranks of headquarters sleuths. Perhaps they were seized by a common idea. Perhaps they only did it to gain time. At any rate, there was a world of wisdom in the big Central Office man's expression as he faced Mrs. Missioner again.

"This advance agent of yours—this Ali—where is he?"

"Blodgett," called the widow, "send Ali here."

The presence faded into the perspective of the passage and in a few minutes materialized on the threshold—alone.

"Ali is not in the house, madam," the footman reported.

"Ask Mrs. Janason when he will return."

"Mrs. Janason does not know, madam. She did not know he was out until I inquired for him."

"Ask Miss Holcomb if she sent him anywhere."

"What tribe does this Indian belong to?" Donnelly inquired importantly. "Choctaw? Cherokee? Sioux? Maybe he's an Apache?"

Mrs. Missioner smiled. It was not an unpleasant smile, but it jarred an unconscious "Huh!" out of the detective. All the others save the serious Ranscome smiled too, and Griswold laughed aloud.

"He isn't that kind of an Indian," Sands enlightened the sleuth. "He's a native of India—a Hindoo."

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"Of course," rumbled the Central Office man, indignantly. "I know that. What I want to know is what kind of a Hindoo?"

"I should say he was a Sepoy," remarked Griswold. There was a malicious gleam in his eyes.

"Sepoy—huh?" Donnelly turned to Carson. "What do you know about that?" he asked. Carson knew nothing whatever about that. It would have been disloyal to know more than his colleague.

"If these investigators have all the information they require," said Sands to the widow, "I suppose they're anxious to be off at work on the case." It was plain he half regretted having rung up 3100 Spring. Griswold glanced at him triumphantly.

"Well, ma'am—huh!—I guess we'll search the rooms," was Donnelly's next inquisitorial venture.

"Which rooms?" Mrs. Missioner was not at all pleased.

"The servants', of course. That's the next step." Donnelly was back in his routine now, and the catch left his voice again. He was effective, too. Mrs. Missioner really gasped.

"That is entirely unnecessary," she said icily. "I told you I could not suspect anybody."

"Never mind that, ma'am. We'll do all the suspecting that's necessary. Needn't disturb you, I suppose. This gentleman can show us the way?" and Donnelly turned inquiringly to the footman.

Blodgett's face, always stony, became adamant. But Mrs. Missioner made no sign of dissent, so he glided away with the Central Office men in his wake.

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Sands gazed after the detective ruefully, Griswold watching him with unmistakable malice. Little Miss March began asking questions, but the widow stopped her with a playful caress.

"Let them look, dear," she said resignedly. "They won't find anything, of course, but I suppose they would not be contented otherwise. Tell me," she added to Griswold, "are there any really intelligent detectives?"

"Ask me something easy," he replied, lapsing into the vernacular of the clubs. "Mulberry Street has many men of many minds. I suppose it must have some without any. Bruxton is unlucky, that's all."

There was a man in Mulberry Street Bruxton was to find much more efficient than the present visitors from headquarters. As the widow did not know that, she was a good deal bored, and some of her first distress at the loss of her jewels, particularly the Maharanee diamond, returned. She was almost despondent when the detectives, after an exhaustive search of the servants' quarters, returned. They had ransacked even the room of Mrs. Missioner's absent maid, but to no purpose. Blodgett, frozen in the doorway, gave no other sign than a malignant side glance without turning his head. It was apparent, however, Blodgett didn't like Central Office men. Whatever his reasons, he didn't like them, and only the presence of Mrs. Missioner and her guests deterred him from manifesting his dislike. Still, Blodgett was nobody's fool. He had submitted to a search of his room without protest.

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"Is there anything more you wish to know?" asked Mrs. Missioner, rising. Donnelly was oblivious to the hint.

"Yes, ma'am, Mis' Missioner," he answered. "I think we'll talk to your secretary now."

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CHAPTER IV

"THE CHIEF WANTS TO SEE YOU"

ELINOR HOLCOMB, tall, graceful, gray-eyed, stood framed between crimson portières like a Velasquez portrait. Her refinement differed from Mrs. Missioner's climatically, but, despite the polaric oppositeness of their coloring, there was a resemblance between them. Mrs. Missioner's eyes turned to her apologetically.

"I regret to disturb you so late, Elinor," she said, "but these gentlemen insist on seeing you. I suppose you were sleeping?"

"I was dozing, I fear," smiled the girl. "I had been reading." She held a book in her hand.

"The necklace with the Maharanee diamond is gone," the widow explained, "and paste jewels have been put in their place. This is Detective Donnelly, of the Central Office, and this is Detective—ah——"

"Carson, ma'am," said Donnelly. Carson himself had been about to speak, but his big colleague, as usual, hastened to do the talking for him.

"I'm sure I'm very glad to see Mr. Donnelly and Mr. Carson, since there has been a robbery," said Elinor easily. She moved softly to the center of the room and stood looking at the Headquarters men. "Are you sure the real diamonds are gone?"

Mrs. Missioner made a gesture toward the safe and indicated the heap of false gems on the table.

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"Is it likely," sneered Griswold, "that whoever put the paste stones there would neglect to take the real ones? I see you read De Maupassant, Miss Holcomb. Stories like 'The Necklace' don't happen."

Elinor laughed as she turned the book in her hand so the others might see the name of the great Frenchman on the cover.

"Yet the way the young couple spoiled their lives to pay for the false necklace reads plausibly," she retorted. "You are growing more observant, Mr. Griswold."

Sands was overcome by his growing impatience.

"If the detectives have any questions to put to Miss Holcomb, I suggest that they waste no time," he said. "There can't be much to ask."

"No, there isn't much, Mr. Sands," retorted the large Central Office man. "I'd just like to ask the young lady who she thinks took the diamonds."

Elinor looked amazed.

"How should I know?" she queried, a little irritated by the man's abruptness. "This is the first I've heard of the robbery."

"The very first?" inquired Donnelly pointedly.

Miss Holcomb was standing close to Miss March. She only turned part of her face to the detective as she answered decisively:

"The very first."

"Then maybe you'll explain, miss, why you didn't come in with the other—huh!—that is, why you didn't appear before?"

"I have told you I was reading in my room," she replied. "I knew nothing of the robbery, nor even of

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Mrs. Missioner's return from the opera, until the housekeeper knocked on my door with the information Mrs. Missioner wished to see me in the library."

"Housekeeper a friend of yours?"

Elinor regarded him freezingly.

"You evidently misunderstand," she said. "I am Mrs. Missioner's secretary." The widow looked at her protectingly.

"Well, you're one of her employés, ain't you?" growled Donnelly. "I'm not here to split hairs, miss. A necklace worth a half-million dollars has been stolen, and I'm here to find out who stole it. Get me?"

Miss Holcomb "got him" in the sense he meant. A deep flush started below her well-chiseled chin and mounted to the soft, dark waves of her hair. She turned an apprehensive glance upon the little circle of Mrs. Missioner's friends, ending with an appealing look at Mrs. Missioner herself.

"I really regard this as wholly unnecessary, Mr. Donnelly," said the widow, with slow insistence. "Miss Holcomb is not only my secretary, but my trusted friend. Her elder sister was in my class at Smith. I have known the Holcombs many years."

"You may think you know them, ma'am," Donnelly persisted, "but my experience is you never can tell who you know in a case like this. Me and my side-partner have been sent here to recover your jewels and locate the thief, and if you don't let us do it in our own way, we can't be held responsible."

"I'm afraid you'd better not interfere, Doris," said Sands.

"Can't expect results if you do," observed Griswold.

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It was difficult for him to hide his enjoyment of the turn the affair had taken. He watched Elinor as if he reveled in her distress.

"Besides, ma'am, if you'll pardon me," said Donnelly, "the case is out of your hands now; it's in the hands of the Detective Bureau."

"Very well," Mrs. Missioner submitted. "But I know you're wasting your time. If Miss Holcomb could aid us in any way, she'd tell all she knew without being questioned."

"Perhaps she would," Donnelly rejoined, shooting a glance at Carson that seemed to say, "And perhaps she wouldn't." Again there came that squaring of himself, coupled with an occasional "Huh!" of embarrassment, as he plunged into an examination of the widow's secretary. "Do you ever wear diamonds?" he asked mysteriously.

Elinor was on the point of saying that if she were the possessor of diamonds, she would not be a secretary to the kindest of employers, but she reflected useless words were undesirable to such a man and contented herself with a gentle "No."

Elinor then did something that was unaccountable to the widow who thought she knew her so well, and which rather startled Sands. She turned to little Miss March and, laying her head on the younger girl's shoulder, wept unrestrainedly. Dorothy, patting her shoulder, stood looking helplessly at Mrs. Missioner.

One of those awkward pauses followed in which nobody seemed to know what to do. Sands stared hard at the floor. Ranscome wriggled in his chair uncomfortably. Even Blodgett's carven features

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twitched for an instant. Mrs. Missioner gazed at Elinor, plainly perplexed. Sympathy struggled slowly to the surface of her gaze. She went up to her secretary, and put her arm about the weeping girl's waist.

"This cannot be necessary, Mr. Donnelly," she said. "I would rather lose jewels twice as valuable than have Miss Holcomb distressed in this way. She knows nothing she will not tell us."

"Then why——" began Donnelly.

"Your accusing tone frightens her," explained the widow. "She has never been subjected to such treatment. You should recollect you are talking to a gentlewoman—and my friend."

Donnelly and Carson whispered fervently to one another at a little distance from the central group. Blodgett's eyes, turning slowly in a graven face, traversed the length and breadth of them as if nothing could please him better than to still the Bacchante with a mighty blow and jolt Carson out of the room. The only person entirely at ease was Griswold. He smoked tranquilly, his glance traveling from one to another in rotation with the appreciativeness of a connoisseur studying a great picture. There was something of the dilettante in the man. He was the opposite of Sands in every particular save breeding, and even in that respect there was a difference.

Sands broke the tension with a suddenness that fairly shouted his whole character. Rising so abruptly that his chair fell backward with a crash, he strode to the telephone and seized the instrument savagely. He was calling Police Headquarters before either of the detectives recovered from his surprise.

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Donnelly hastened toward him, the Bacchante in great agitation. He pushed out a fat hand as if to stop the millionaire.

"What are you going to do?" asked the sleuth, visibly anxious.

"I'm going to have Manning call you fellows back to Mulberry Street," said Sands, his jaw hardening. "He's sent the wrong men. This isn't a Tenderloin case."

"Now, see here, Mr. Sands——" snarled Donnelly threateningly.

"I'm seeing straight enough," returned Sands. "I asked the Detective Bureau to send up on an important case, and the wires crossed before my message got to the Chief. Somebody told him it was a Chinatown hold-up. Now I'm going to talk to him straight. Hello, Spring! What's the matter with that number?"

"You're going strong, Mr. Sands, even for a society man," said Donnelly, doing his best to quiet the Bacchante, "but I don't see any shield on your shirtfront, and me and my partner ain't got any call taking orders from you. We're on this case, and we're going to stay on it. And if you start anything with Manning, you want to be sure you can finish it." He was white, shaking—whether with rage or fear no one could say. Turning to Mrs. Missioner, he went on: "I suppose you know, ma'am, interference with an officer is a pretty serious thing. We're here on duty, and it's up to you to see we're not bothered."

Mrs. Missioner paled. She dreaded, not the law, but a scene.

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"I think we would better let them have their way, Bruxton," she murmured, the light of admiration in her eyes in contrast to her words. "Mr. Donnelly knows Miss Holcomb's standing now. He will remember."

Donnelly didn't know precisely what he was expected to remember, but he realized gentler tactics were safer toward the widow's secretary while Sands was around. It did not escape even his observation that neither Ranscome nor Griswold had said anything in Miss Holcomb's defense.

"Now, this is all wrong, young lady," he said to Elinor, bearing on the soft pedal as much as he could. "It isn't right for you to go on like this, you know. You'll get yourself all worked up and then you won't be able to answer our questions. Take my word for it, it's best for you to keep yourself in hand."

Elinor couldn't keep herself in hand while that raucous voice was thrust into her self-respect like a rusty file gripped as a poniard. She fought for self-mastery, but the shock was too much for her determination. Dorothy's sisterly comforting only made her tears flow more freely. Her whole form quivered with staccato sobs. Carson, still on his little journey around the room, came full within range of Blodgett's right-angled gaze. As he sensed the footman's expression, he started violently, and, stepping back swiftly, turned away in confusion. Not a muscle of Blodgett's other features moved, but his eyes seemed to reach for the detective.

Donnelly was rapidly recovering his place on the pedestal. Hands wrist-deep in his pockets, he rocked

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on his heels and looked at Elinor piercingly with his little eyes. The girl, in an interval between sobs, raised her head and saw that gaze. A slow flush swept her face. She detached herself gently from little Miss March, and lifting that graceful head of hers higher, ever higher, faced the sleuth with composure as startling as had been her loss of control.

"If you have anything more to ask, sir," she said in a low tone, "I will try to answer."

"Thanks!" came the curt reply. "I knew you'd come around. You see, Miss Elinor——"

"Miss Holcomb!" burst from Sands in a thunder tone. "H-o-l-c-o-m-b—you understand—Miss Holcomb." Donnelly pretended not to notice the interruption, but he did not address Elinor by her first name again. But Carson seemed as perturbed as he had been under the malignant gaze of the motionless Blodgett.

"What were you doing in Maiden Lane the other day?" asked Donnelly sharply.

"I was not in Maiden Lane. I haven't been downtown in weeks. The last time I went south of the shopping district was more than a month ago."

"That is true," said Mrs. Missioner hurriedly, "Miss Holcomb went to the Battery Trust Company for me."

"Much obliged, ma'am." Donnelly was learning to show more deference to the widow. Carson had whispered to him something of her social importance. Yes, Carson, although he was only a neutral tint in the human color scheme, knew a few things.

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"Was that the day you took the diamonds to Tiffany's?" queried the big detective quickly. "To have one of the small stones made tighter, you know."

Miss Holcomb's disdain had given place to dull wonder. Where had the man got his misinformation? Could it be he really thought—but, no. It was impossible. She felt as if something suffocating was closing about her. She lifted her hand to her throat to force back the sobs that would come.

"I am completely confused by your questions," she stammered. "I—I do not know how to answer. What you say is so strange." She looked at the others with a world of appeal in those gray eyes. Astonishment, sympathy, affection, cynicism, mutely replied. Stretching both hands toward Mrs. Missioner, advancing with faltering steps, the victim of the detective's persecution cried, "Mrs. Missioner, is it possible you can think—do you even imagine I—I—oh," with a swift turn to Miss March, "Dorothy, Dorothy!"

To the credit of little Miss March be it remembered she met Elinor's second appeal with undiminished tenderness. Mrs. Missioner, too, was kind, but her gentle "No, Elinor," was not as reassuring as the loving pats Dorothy squandered on the bent shoulders of the distressed girl. Sands swore in his thoughts. His big fingers bent a gold penholder into wavy lines. Ranscome, with alternate finger-tips, traced lines in his palms. Griswold turned his cigarette 'round and 'round with agile fingers and thumb. Blodgett's eyes seemed to lunge at the detectives.

"I guess Miss Holcomb isn't ready to tell all she knows—yet," said Donnelly meaningly. "While

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we're waiting for her to steady her nerves, we'll just have a look in her room."

Mrs. Missioner was about to negative the suggestion, but a glance at Elinor's shaking form stopped her. She did not reply, and the detectives walked out of the room in silence. A look from the widow sent Blodgett stalking in their wake. The footman kept his eyes on Donnelly's turned-out toes as if calculating how much strength was required to seize those thick ankles with a sudden heave. Not until the Central Office men were at the end of the passage did the sobbing secretary start in great agitation toward the door. On the threshold she paused and turned slowly till she faced the mute group.

"Since they are going to search my—the room," she said, in a choking voice, "I wish you would all come there with me. I—I feel that—won't you all come—please?"

The men hung back, but Doris and Dorothy joined her on the instant and together the three women followed the detectives into the lift. Blodgett backed from the car and stood staring at the detectives through the rose-tinted grill. A boy in quiet livery threw the lever and the steel cage shot upward. The car stopped at the third floor and the little party proceeded to a room at the end of a softly lighted corridor.

It was a charming little boudoir into which Donnelly's spreading feet and Carson's flat tread carried the detectives. Mrs. Missioner, Elinor, and Dorothy went only a little way in and looked on silently. The men made their search according to their natures, Car-

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son with moderate indifference and dispatch, Donnelly exhaustively, lingeringly, gloatingly. When the large sleuth's thick fingers and beady gaze became more than ordinarily intrusive, Mrs. Missioner seemed about to protest, but each time she checked herself.

"It is better to let them search thoroughly," said Elinor. "Since this is considered necessary, I wish it to be made complete. Please do not interfere with them." She handed to Carson a small silver keyring. He passed it to his mate, and Donnelly's enjoyment of the situation increased by leaps and bounds. No single key on the tiny ring escaped use of his hands. He unlocked boxes, a dressing-case, and other places of possible concealment. His method would have drawn a derisive smile from Chief of Detectives Manning. But Manning was far downtown in Mulberry Street, and could not know the course his subordinates were pursuing.

From a drawer in Elinor's Chippendale secretary, Donnelly took a box of rare lacquer and fitted a key to it. He stopped to gaze searchingly at Miss Holcomb for a few moments, then he unlocked the box.

"I hate to pry into any young lady's little keepsakes," he said in a ponderously patronizing manner, "but, as Miss Holcomb hasn't been to Maiden Lane in such a long time, I know she won't object. Now, this little box, of course, contains nothing but trinkets or odds and ends—love-letters, maybe?" Elinor's heart sickened at the leer in his face. She turned her eyes to Dorothy's loving little face, and clung to the débutante's hand. Donnelly, fumbling with the key for awhile, opened the lacquered box.

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"Just what I said, you see," he exclaimed. "Nothing but trinkets and other little souvenirs—huh! —of old romances, perhaps. Eh, it's great to be a summer girl, Miss Holcomb. If only you had jewels like Mrs. Missioner's, you'd shine with the best of them. Gee, but that must be a beauty, that necklace, if the imitation is so pretty."

He stirred the contents of the box idly. Nothing else remained to be searched. He had ransacked the intimate sanctity of the girl's room. He felt baffled and sorely irritated. At the thought of failure, he thrust his fingers into the box with such violence that everything it held fell to the floor. Carson stooped to pick up the scattered jewelry, placing it in Donnelly's hand to be returned to the box. After recovering several bits of jewelry he laid in his big colleague's greedy clutch a small, round object wrapped in silk tissue.

"Hello, what's this!" exclaimed Donnelly, rolling the fairy parcel between finger and thumb. "You won't mind if I peep in the paper, young lady? Of course you won't. And this is only a—say, what the mischief is it? Oh, glory!"

Even Carson was startled into an echoing "Oh!" and the three women almost screamed. For, nestling in the folds of the tissue, its facets twinkling in the insistent green glow of the vacuum lights, flashed a diamond—an unmistakable diamond—which Mrs. Missioner and Dorothy and Elinor recognized as one of the lesser gems from the Maharanee necklace —much smaller than the Maharanee diamond, but twice the size of an ordinary stone. And

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it was a diamond even a novice could tell was genuine!

All the blood left Elinor's face. The muscles of her throat leaped and knotted as if she were strangling. She swayed for a moment, then took a long step toward the detective and stood trembling, covering her face with quivering hands. Donnelly, holding the diamond to the light, was about to speak—in what words, what manner, one can guess. But the misery in the girl's attitude struck the triumphant grin from his face, and there was momentary compassion in the tone in which he said:

"We'd better go back to the library, I guess. Will you go with my side-partner, Miss Holcomb?"

Carson's advance to the secretary's side was checked by the violence with which she whirled toward Mrs. Missioner, again with outstretched hands. This time the widow was slower in meeting the appeal. She was stunned by the detective's discovery. All the finer sensibilities of her womanhood were benumbed. Astonishment, large and compelling, was all she could feel for the moment. Still, she took Elinor's imploring hands in hers and stood motionless, listening to the girl's passionate entreaty not to believe the evidence of her eyes, not to believe her kindness could be outraged in such a way, not to believe that Elinor for all the jewels in the mines of the world could be tempted from the high honor in which she had been reared. Clasping the younger woman's locked fingers in her own soft palm, she slipped her arm about Elinor's waist and walked with her to the lift. Dorothy, crying almost childishly, controlled her voice once or twice long

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enough to beg Elinor not to give way to such torturing emotion.

But Elinor Holcomb, shaking, sobbing, wildly beseeching, was oblivious to the silent watchfulness of the Central Office men, the covert glances from Blodgett's mask-like countenance, the amazed stare of the liveried youth in the elevator. All the way to the room in which Sands and Griswold and Ranscome waited, all the way across the old English library to the ruddy zone before the fireplace, she continued her prayers to Mrs. Missioner to hold her guiltless. That was the one thought that shaped her thoughts; that the woman to whom she owed the shelter of her later youth should not think her capable of such ignoble ingratitude. There was no slightest shade of appeal to the detectives, no regard for the conclusions others in the room might draw. But that Mrs. Missioner should give credit to the cold accusation that glittered in the diamond Donnelly had found—that plainly was the unbearable thing in the wretched young woman's present position.

"You won't have to telephone the Chief, Mr. Man," said Donnelly to Sands with as direct a sneer as he thought advisable. "This has been one of our easiest cases."

His fat hand was extended toward the millionaire. In a crease of the palm, the diamond blazed as if indignant at such a setting. Sands glared at the stone, Griswold gazed at it as if spellbound. Ranscome polished his glasses with much deliberation and, adjusting them with equal precision, looked at the gem fixedly.

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"This one's the goods, eh?" the detective went on. Ranscome, with marked fastidiousness, took the jewel from his hand and examined it as if his reputation as an expert depended on his test. Reluctantly, he returned the gem to Donnelly and said, gently, with a pitying glance at Elinor:

"It is a diamond."

A sweeping gesture from Sands as he sprang to his feet flung the telephone from the desk. He reached Donnelly in two strides and appeared on the point of gripping him by the throat. But the big detective, for all his bulk and mental slowness, could be quick enough on his feet when he must, and he readily sacrificed dignity to safety. With a single backward spring, he clutched a light chair and confronted Sands.

"It'll pay you to remember I'm an officer!" he shouted. "You ain't dealing with club stewards here, Mr. Sands. I know you and I know how much you think your money can do. But you can't put anything like that across with me."

Sands, breathing hard, took another step toward him. Donnelly gripped the chair for a defensive swing.

"I don't care if you know a million Mannings," said the sleuth huskily. "If you can't behave like one gentleman to another, it'll be the worse for you. If you don't want to be run in, keep away."

Mrs. Missioner's annoyance and Dorothy's fright, no less than Elinor's distress, restrained Sands again.

"What does all this mean?" he said to Carson, ignoring the other. But Donnelly was not to be ignored.

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His successful defiance of a millionaire had heightened his desire for the center of the stage.

"It means," he rasped, "that we know who took Mrs. Missioner's diamonds, and all we've got to do now is to find the rest of 'em. And I guess that won't be hard. Where there's one bird, the flock won't be far away. Come, Miss Holcomb, we and you'll be getting downtown. The Chief wants to see you."

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CHAPTER V.

THE BROWNSTONE HOUSE

WHILE Elinor, helpless in the reaction from her grief, was speeding to Mulberry Street in a taxicab with Donnelly and Carson, a swart, slim man glided out by the servants' door of the Missioner home. His modern garments, Oriental only by faint suggestion in the English looseness of their cut, caught the eye merely by contrast with the snowy turban that covered his head. He moved with the cat tread of one long accustomed to walking on his own soles. His shoes were conventional enough in appearance, but of softer leather than that of ordinary American make. It was evident that he relied on the silence of his footgear and, judging from the caution with which he let himself out of the house and looked up and down the street before quitting the threshold, he wished to get away without trumpeting his departure. Seeing no one in the block, he walked swiftly toward Fifth Avenue and turned the corner so sharply that he bowled over a district messenger. A few words in a foreign tongue were his response to the select vernacular the rising youngster hurled at him—words so mysterious that a final "Ah, garn!" was the utmost of which the astonished boy was capable by way of reply. To be flung to the sidewalk by a personage in a British tourist's suit with a headgear out of the Arabian Nights

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well may be disconcerting, even to No. 4762 of the A. D. T.

The dark man hailed a hansom, muttered "The park" to the driver, and sat well back in the vehicle, closing the apron doors and lowering the upper curtain until he left only a narrow space for observation. In the interior gloom, laced by chance lances of light from arc lamps, he sprinkled himself freely with many drops from a silver vial that smelled of the East. He readjusted the folds of his turban, settled his collar and scarf, and shook himself more closely into his clothes, which, despite their loose cut, seemingly were tighter than he liked.

North of the Casino, in the East Drive of Central Park, the Hindoo pulled the check strap and gave new directions to the cabman. The hansom turned out of the park at Seventy-second Street and rolled on rubber tires in an easterly direction, crossing several avenues before it stopped in front of a brownstone house exactly like several dozen others in the block. The Oriental paid the cabman and stood on the sidewalk until the hansom turned the corner. Then he walked east a few yards, crossed the street, turned west, and darted into the vestibule of a house that was the twin of the one at which the cab had stopped. He did not ring the bell, but scratched lightly on the ground glass pane of the inner door. The door swung inward and he entered a hall lighted only by a glimmer that filtered through the glass from a gas lamp in the street. A voice in the dark asked a question in a language somewhat like that the Hindoo had flung over his shoulder at the messenger boy. The visitor answered

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with a single word, and a sunburst of light burst upon him from a cluster of incandescent bulbs above his head.

"If you are false, turn back," said the voice in one of the higher tongues of India.

"True though lowly follower of the Light am I," the Hindoo replied, with a profound salaam toward ink-black portières at the far end of the hall. He moved slowly toward the curtains and stretched forth his hand. Again the voice spoke.

"If there be aught of doubting in your heart, turn back ere it be too late," it said. "There is no repentance this side of the screen. Beware! Turn back!"

But the Hindoo, with another deep bow, parted the heavy curtains and stepped through the opening. Without a single glance at the sumptuous Eastern furnishing of the room, he bent his body forward with touching, outstretched hands until his fingers well-nigh reached the floor. In that posture he remained until, in the tones of the voice that had sounded through the outer darkness, a man sitting cross-legged on a divan at the other end of the room murmured an acknowledgment of the salutation. Slowly the visitor straightened himself and looked at the divan, without raising his eyes to the face of the man upon it.

"The peace of the Immutable One be upon you," he said in his harsher dialect. "Your servant Ali comes to report upon his mission."

"Peace be to you, faithful one," answered the other. Not until then did Ali look his master in the face.

The master seemingly did not wear the evening

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dress of the Occident in which he had appeared in the opera box adjoining Mrs. Missioner's. His slender, well-knit figure was swathed in the clinging garments of the East—garments of silken stuff that fluttered and rippled with every movement, that seemed to rustle in echo of his thoughts.

"What are your tidings, Ali?" asked the man on the divan. He gave little thoughtful tugs at a punkah-string and the resultant breeze stirred the smoke wreaths from his narghileh.

"The jewel, O Swami!"

The other's eyes glistened.

"What of it?" he inquired.

"Gone!" returned the humbler Hindoo. "Vanished!"

"And you did not get it?"

"Swami, I did not. Your servant is a dog and the son of a dog, but he has done his best."

The man on the divan watched his servant through slitted eyes.

"Where is the jewel?" he asked sternly.

"Who knows, holy man?" replied the visitor. "It has taken unto itself wings and in its place a false stone was left. The wit of your servant is completely at fault. I know not where the diamond is."

The Swami did not tell him he had seen the destruction of the false Maharanee by Griswold's heel in the Metropolitan Opera House. He smoked thoughtfully, his fingers knotting and raveling the punkah-string in an absent way.

"And you have come straightway with the news?" he asked.

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"As the hawk flies, master," said the servant. There was trepidation in his eyes, but he answered unhesitatingly.

"It is well," the Swami said, between rings of blue smoke. "Wait without, Ali, and I will have speech with you in a little while."

The visitor, with another low salaam, withdrew as he had entered, backing across the threshold. In the hall, his figure shot to its full height and he flashed a glance of uncertain meaning at the outer side of the portières. He passed silently up the stairs and slipped into a room above that in which the Swami sat. His catlike tread carried him to a closet, into which he crept. Flattening himself on the floor, he applied his ear to a hole so small it scarcely widened the crack between two boards. He could not see, but he could hear the creak of the punkah as, after a violent tug by the man on the divan, it continued swinging to and fro.

Hardly had the Hindoo left the room when the Swami, like a mummer throwing off a mask, arose briskly from the divan and cast aside the silk robe that enveloped him. The silken turban remained on his head, but in all other respects he was dressed like a Wall Street man. His feet, drawn beneath his robe as he sat on the broad couch, had not shown the patent leather shoes in which they were encased. He lighted a European cigarette and puffed as if he enjoyed the change from the pungent Eastern tobacco.

Up and down the room he walked springily, pausing from time to time with puckered forehead and thumbs resting on the edges of his coat pockets. Then

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he walked softly to a door at one side of the room, and opening it a little way, called softly:

"Kananda."

A man of mature years came in quietly and looked inquiringly at the Swami. He was of portly build, but his vigor still showed traces of the athletic training he had followed in English schools and colleges. His Western manner and excellent English were not in surprising contrast to his Indian swarthiness among those who remembered the vogue a British education had among India's petty princes in the reign of Victoria, Queen and Empress. Prince Kananda had been one of the best batsmen on the Cambridge eleven. His popularity among the democratic young aristocrats of the period had sprung from the day when he remarked it was not his fault his father was a Maharajah, and that it shouldn't be treasured against him, even though he couldn't live it down. Nandy, as they called him on the banks of the Cam, was voted a good sort. The classification had stuck to him wherever men foregathered, from the Strangers' Club of the Straits Settlement to White's and the Union League.

"What's the row, your reverence?" he asked. On the surface, he took the faith of his fathers lightly, Oriental though he was in the marrow.

"The Maharanee has disappeared," said the Swami.

"Whee-ee!" returned Kananda. "If that blessed stone isn't the Wandering Jew of jewels! How long has it been missing this time?"

"Nobody knows, unless it be its present possessor. Moreover, prince you are, ruler you may be, but I cannot overlook your levity in connection with so

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sacred as a gem. Besides, my friend, remember the brethren."

Nandy's face became serious immediately.

"I wasn't exactly poking fun at the Maharanee," he apologized, "and they who suffer are never long absent from my thoughts. It's a Western habit, this flippancy—comes from trying to graft a Hindoo sprig on a British oak, you know."

"We are of the Orient," said the Swami, still rebukingly. "We should not copy the barbarisms of the Occident."

Nandy's eyes twinkled as the humor of such an observation in the heart of Manhattan flashed upon him. In a moment, he was grave again, however. He swung himself to a table, lightly for one of his bulk, and sat kicking his heels as he awaited the Hindoo priest's narrative.

"There's little to tell," the Swami went on, himself dropping into the easier speech of the West as his companion stopped smiling. "The great diamond is gone and Ali has no idea of its whereabouts. Night and day on the watch in the woman's home, he has nothing to tell further than that the jewel has disappeared and an arrest has been made."

"So they've caught the thief?"

"Perhaps. The bunglers of this uncouth country may have stumbled upon her by chance. She's in custody, anyway."

Nandy slid from the table and balanced himself on his toes.

"A woman, eh? Good-looking?" Not without influence on his ideals had he taken a post-graduate

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course among London's Gaiety girls. He was a connoisseur in the femininity of the "'alls." Serious women bored him. But surely a young person clever enough to get away with a diamond the size of the Maharanee couldn't be stupid?

"Mrs. Missioner's secretary," the Swami told him. "A close friend of hers, too, says Ali."

Kananda's whistle was expressive.

"Is there evidence to convict?" he asked interestedly.

"A paste necklace was substituted for the one containing the Maharanee," replied the Swami. "One of the real diamonds was found in the prisoner's room."

"Now, that's funny," said the Prince. "Devilish funny! And they took her in tow for that?"

The priest nodded.

"What rotters these American policemen are!" snapped Kananda in the slang he had used as Nandy of Cambridge. "Fancy any self-respecting Oriental doing that! Why, the bulldoggiest little terrier in the Mikado's secret service wouldn't make such a break!"

The Swami nodded again.

"Ali searched her room, of course, before the detectives got there," he continued. "Soon after Mrs. Missioner's return from the opera, he went straight from the hall outside the library to Miss Holcomb's apartment and investigated thoroughly."

"Look here, old man," jerked Kananda. "If Ali has the stone, it's all well enough to put it over on——"

"He hasn't it," the Swami answered. "The thing for us to do now is to find out who has."

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"Good old guesser!" grinned the Prince. "Well, Ali knows his business."

The Swami strolled back to the divan and lay at full length, his hands pillowing his head. He blew smoke rings at the punkah.

"I'm not so sure of that," he retorted. "I don't like his failure to keep better watch on the stone."

Nandy swung himself back to the table.

"How long's it been gone?" he asked.

"I tell you nobody knows. Its absence was discovered to-night."

"You've just learned of it?"

"No and yes. I knew about the Maharanee before Ali came." He sketched the incident of the opera house in crisp sentences. Kananda listened eagerly.

"So there's nothing left of the bogus Maharanee," he observed.

"Nothing but this splinter I palmed," returned the priest. "It was easy—elementary legerdemain."

Both laughed. The facility of Occidentals was a standing joke.

"Well, we need more help on this now," said the Prince. "Ali will have to go back to the house."

"Yes, Mrs. Missioner can't spare her Oriental curio just yet," the Swami assented.

Kananda reached for a cigarette.

"I guess we'll have to put Ramsetjee on the men," he mused. "Don't like to do it, for Ram isn't exactly what we'd call an adept. Now, would we?"

"Hardly."

"But Ali can't be spared from the Missioner place. Sands and Griswold can be watched by one man."

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"Oh, yes," replied the priest. "I wish the man were a little brighter than Ramsetjee, though."

"Can't be helped—what?" anglicized Nandy. "I'll have an eye to them in the clubs from time to time. You look after the social end."

"Yes." The Swami smiled. "They'll hardly get away from me in society."

"My word, but you're coming on!" chaffed the Prince. "Right in the social swim. See what it is to be a Swami. Dare say the Duchess of Drygoods and the Countess de Brewery are head over heels in love with the newest Eastern mystic. Too bad they're not in Delhi."

The Swami frowned. He refused to laugh at jests bordering on lack of respect for the faith. Even the Maharanee's son feared to try him too far in that direction.

"Omitting personality for the moment," said the priest pointedly, "I will participate in the gregarious mumming of these barbarians for the sake of our purpose. It is not well to concern ourselves with the frivolous affairs of life. We may have to do much more serious things than we are doing now to get the Maharanee. If it should come to the last resort, we would not hesitate, you and I. Remember the brethren!"

"I shall remember," said Kananda bravely.

The Swami sounded a gong. As its muffled music came to him through the tiny hole in the floor above, Ali rose cautiously from his crouching position and hastened downstairs. Next minute, he was entering the presence of the higher caste Easterners with an-

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other profound salaam. In measured tones, the Swami, who had resumed his Oriental robes, gave him instructions to which the Hindoo servant listened with intent respect, the Prince from time to time emphasizing the priest's orders with a nod.

"You may go, Ali," said the Swami in conclusion.

"I go, master," the Hindoo replied, backing through the portières. He maintained his respectful bearing all the way along the hall, out the door, and down the brownstone steps. Then, when he had walked quickly to a point several houses on and his face was well out of the angle of vision of the conventionally curtained windows at the front of the strange dwelling, a peculiar expression spread over his features. Once round the corner, he wheeled and gazed piercingly toward the house he had quitted, as if his eyes could penetrate the intervening walls.

"Is thy servant a dog or the son of a dog?" he said under his breath menacingly.

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CHAPTER VI

THE THIRD DEGREE

POLICE HEADQUARTERS—the old headquarters of Mulberry Street—was one of the architectural monstrosities of New York. Fronting Mulberry Street, its faded brick walls presented a forbidding aspect to the ancient, tumbledown rookeries across the way. Its rear walls faced Mott Street, harmonizing with the squalid tenements of that narrow, ill-smelling thoroughfare. It was a type of public building now happily obsolete, which an awakened artistic sense is rapidly relegating to the scrap heap. Its rigid lines were a monotony of ugliness, unrelieved by column or capital. One viewed its hideous bulk with a shuddering sense of apprehension, almost expecting to see it crumble on the unfortunates penned within.

Visitors to the Detective Bureau entered a dingy room, approached by a narrow hall, on the Mott Street side of the building. Its most conspicuous furnishings were several brass rails which crossed one another in bewildering fashion. Half-open doors led boldly into other offices, as if to dispel the atmosphere of secrecy that hovered perpetually over the place. Two uniformed lieutenants of police were constantly on guard at oaken desks backed against opposite walls. On the morning following the Missioner diamond robbery, the two guardians were busy sorting piles of documents scattered on their desks.

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"Guess it's time for the line-up," remarked one of the lieutenants.

He entered the adjoining room, a large, square chamber, in which the rays from clusters of electric bulbs mingled with the pale, shivery light of the sun.

"Here's the list," he called to the desk lieutenant, at the same time throwing a bundle of documents to him.

Massed against the opposite wall in listless attitudes were fifty or sixty detectives, their faces covered by long masks. They shifted about uneasily while waiting for the hapless prisoners captured the night before to be lined up for inspection. This daily spectacle, terrifying to the innocent suspects, amusing to the old-time lawbreakers, marks the beginning of the morning's routine of the men detailed to prevent crime and hunt down criminals. Not a pleasing exhibition, but a necessary one. For the opportunity must be provided for the detectives to become familiar with the countenances of the lawbreakers. And by the simple device of the masks, the hunters are shielded from becoming equally familiar to the hunted.

The opening of the door at the rear of the room brought the waiting detectives to attention. Their forms stiffened to military erectness, their manner became watchfully alert.

"Good-morning," greeted Chief of Detectives Manning. The men saluted in return.

With quick, nervous strides the Chief made his way behind the long desk that ran half the length of the room, and took up a position of survey. His eyes, of hawk-like penetration, swept the room while the desk

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lieutenant called the roll. The absentees having been entered on the blotter, the process of lining up the prisoners began without further ceremony.

A line of bedraggled, disheveled men and women, their eyes bleary from a night of wakefulness in narrow, ill-ventilated cells, shuffled into the room.

"Michael Noonan," droned the lieutenant.

An emaciated, weak-faced man, the wretchedness of his lot emphasized by the frayed clothing that hung in loose, broken lines from his form, stepped forward. A look of dull misery was stamped on his countenance, a hopeless disregard of the fate in store for him showed in his manner.

"Take a good look at this crook," commanded the Chief. "Never was pinched before. Caught with the goods on, however, by Wiggins and Wolf. Swipin' lead pipe from a half-finished house."

The eyes of the detectives bent on the human wreck as he shrank back into line.

"Philip Pratt," called the lieutenant.

A young man, not more than thirty, whose sullen mien and restless eyes betrayed his occupation even before the Chief announced it, faced the masked battery of eyes. His thin lips curled into a disdainful smile as the Chief read his record from a slip of paper.

"Another old friend back," the head of the detective force commented. "Philip Pratt, alias Morse, alias Charlie Dodge, alias Toledo Phil. Confidence gent. Did a term in Elmira, two short stretches up the river, and a long leg in Joliet."

The particular offense for which the prisoner was

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in the toils again was described, and he, too, retired to temporary obscurity in the lines of unfortunates.

"Carrie Chase," came from the lieutenant.

Member of that frail sisterhood whose shame is no deeper than that of the civilization from which it springs, she carried herself with an easy dignity born of familiarity with her surroundings. The heavy lines of her face were drawn into an expression of grim defiance, but her eyes, dulled by long dissipation, could not hide the dumb fear that lurked in her soul.

"Got away with a gent's super," the Chief drawled. He displayed a gold watch as if it held all the triumph of his years of pursuit in the underworld. "But we found the goods on her," he added smilingly.

Her career was part of the elemental knowledge of the assembled detectives and the Chief dismissed her quickly.

"The chances are she'll do a long stretch this trip," he commented.

Every condition of moral obliquity was represented in that shifting line of prisoners. There were youths, still in the formative period of their criminal careers, vying with the old-timers in the forced bravado of their demeanors. Others there were, shamefaced and sad, overcome with remorse and praying silently for the termination of the painful spectacle. Still others, old men and young men, regarding the proceedings with the indifference of disinterested spectators. And there were women, too, from the bedizened "badger queen," her hair and complexion as false as the jewels shimmering from her fingers and throat, to the tremulous, weeping restaurant cashier accused of some

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petty defalcation. They represented types as varied as the emotions struggling within them, but as they stood side by side facing the expressionless masks, they seemed headed toward the same ultimate destiny. One after another they stepped forward for inspection until the line was exhausted. When the last of them had filed out of the room, the detectives did not remove their masks, as was the custom. Instead, they stood about in a high fever of expectancy. Quizzical glances were cast in the direction of the door leading to the cells. Suddenly the men bulked forward, as if inspired by a common impulse of curiosity. The swish of skirts, accompanied by the tread of masculine feet, sounded in the doorway. A woman's form, her head bent to her breast, her limbs unable to bear the weight of her frail body, was being half dragged, half carried into the room. All the life seemed to have drained out of her. Her hair hung disordered over her shoulders, her hands swung limply, like loose pendulums.

"Elinor Holcomb!" cried the lieutenant.

Donnelly and Carson, each with an arm under her shoulder, propped her sinking form.

"Lift your head," commanded the Chief.

The order fell on deaf ears. She seemed as one in the last agony of a mortal illness.

"Lift it for her," came in a voice of mingled sternness and compassion.

Donnelly's hand flew to her chin, tilting her face upward. For an instant she raised her heavy eyelids; then recoiled as from a blow. The crowd of masked spectators floated before her eyes like hideous specters of a horrid dream. A low groan, like the last lament

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of a tortured soul, came from her lips. She seemed turned into a mass of jelly.

"Take her away," commanded the Chief, and the two detectives carried her out of the room.

"Accused of stealing the Missioner diamonds," was the curt explanation of her presence. In a harsh monotone, the Chief read the various Headquarters orders to the force, and then the men not engaged on old work received their assignments of new cases. As abruptly as he had entered, the head of the Bureau left the room and retired to his private office. Then he summoned Donnelly and Carson.

"Takes it pretty bad, eh?" he asked.

"Like all the swell ones when they're nabbed the first time," answered Carson.

"Had to call the doctor twice during the night, the matron tells me," informed Donnelly.

"Did she make any statement on the way to Headquarters?" inquired the Chief.

"Nothing but hysterics," Carson answered.

"And she's in no condition to be questioned now," added Donnelly.

"Anyone been inquiring for her?" the Chief suddenly snapped.

"Yes," flashed back Donnelly. His eyes lit with a crafty glow. "Some guy who says he's a doctor and engaged to marry her has been hanging around here all morning. Wants to know how he can get her out. Looks as if he might be mixed up in it, so I'm having him shadowed."

"Good!" commented the Chief. "If any lawyer calls, tell him she's in no condition to be seen. We

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don't want anyone to see her until we've questioned her."

It was late in the afternoon before Miss Holcomb was escorted into the inquisitorial chamber. She had fallen into a fitful slumber on the rude iron bed that projected from the wall of her cell, when Donnelly and Carson opened the grated door and called her out of her sleep. She gave a startled gasp when she saw them, a convulsive shudder racked her frame. A sudden influx of painful memories overwhelmed her with a pitiful sense of helplessness as she dragged herself to the office of the Chief.

With a weak show of courage, she eyed Manning resolutely, and then sank into a soft leather chair close to his desk. Donnelly and Carson occupied seats at her elbow.

"What did you do with those stones?" blurted the Chief.

Her lips framed a reply, but it died without utterance.

"Come, come!" he cried impatiently. "We don't want any acting here. I know you're only a tool in this matter. We've got the principal under arrest and I'm giving you a chance to save yourself. You turn State's evidence against him and I'll see that no harm comes to you. He's the fellow we want to land. Now tell me just what you did with the jewels."

In the midst of his outburst, a door opened silently and a sharp-featured, smooth-shaven man of middle age entered and seated himself in an obscure corner of the room. His form seemed to merge into the shadow of the walls as he dropped noiselessly into his chair.

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Miss Holcomb did not see him enter. Her increasing terror gave her a fictitious energy and she lifted her head with a sharp jerk.

"I didn't steal the jewels," she said. "I had nothing to do with their disappearance."

The mocking laughter of three deep voices sounded in the room.

"Does it well!" chuckled Donnelly.

"Too bad she ain't an actress," joined Carson.

The Chief's beady eyes narrowed on her as if he would read her innermost thoughts.

"There's no use trying to lie to me," he snarled. "I know who's got the diamonds. The man who hired you to steal them is locked up now. He says he didn't know they were stolen——"

"Who says that?" she interrupted.

Donnelly and Carson nudged each other in boisterous glee.

"She wants to know who says it!" piped the former.

"Ain't she the slick one!" laughed his partner.

The Chief's face hardened until a menace seemed to lurk in every one of its deep-cut lines.

"Now, you know who says it," he informed her. "I don't have to mention any names. It's simply a question of you going to jail or of sending him to jail. I don't take any stock in what he says. He can't tell me he didn't know you stole the jewels. I ain't as easy as all that! Now, I'm giving you a chance to make a full confession and save yourself. Will you confess?" His tone carried the weight of a threat, but her unresponsive mind was unable to grasp its sig-

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nificance. She stared blankly before her, as if her eyes were chained to some distant spot.

"Will you confess?" the Chief repeated with added menace.

As if roused from a long abstraction, she gazed appealingly at her tormentor.

"I have nothing to confess," she murmured weakly.

The Chief drew back in studied anger. His fist banged the desk as if the blow was meant to convey a sudden resolve.

"Very well!" he burst forth. "Go right ahead and be the goat if you want to. Look here, little girl, I was just kiddin' you when I said we had the principal under arrest," he said with a quick change of tactics. "You're the only one that's locked up. I don't believe there's anyone else mixed up in the case at all. I believe you did the job alone. If there's anyone behind you, you'll have to show me. There's only one thief involved, and that's you."

An expression, as of a hunted animal, crept into her face. She turned to the left and met the fixed stare of Donnelly. Averting her head, her eyes looked into those of Carson. Directly in front, close to her face, the cold gleam from the Chief's eyes fell on her. So she turned around, only to look into an impenetrable background of gloom, sinister and depressing.

"I haven't done anything," she pleaded. "I don't know who took Mrs. Missioner's diamonds." As if cut by a sudden thought, Miss Holcomb bent forward in her seat. "She can't believe I did it?" she moaned.

"You bet your life she believes you did it," the

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Chief announced. "And I know you did it. So what's the use of denying it?"

"I do deny it, I do deny it," she protested. "How can they think me capable of it?"

The Chief opened a drawer of his desk and brought forth the accusing diamond. He held it close to her face, permitting the rays to distribute themselves on her features.

"Pretty fine stone!" he commented. "A peach of a shiner! Looked good to you, didn't it? Came so easy it was a shame to take it—eh? Now how did it get mixed up with your trinkets?"

"I don't know," she moaned.

The Chief turned from her wearily.

"You take her in hand, Donnelly," he said.

The detective bent over the woman, his face so close that she felt his warm breath against her cheeks.

"Don't try any nonsense down here," he snarled. "We got the goods on you, and we ain't going to stand any fooling. Now, where are those diamonds?"

She eyed him in mild protest.

"I don't know, sir," she murmured weakly.

Donnelly shoved his clenched fist under her chin. His face contorted into an expression of tigerish ferocity; he peered at her with an intensity that chilled her blood.

"You're a liar," he snapped. "You think you're a slick one, but you'll be sorry you was ever born if you don't cough up the goods. We know how to handle customers like you down here. We're used to 'em.

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We get 'em every day. Now, just save yourself a lot of trouble by telling the whereabouts of the diamonds."

"They ain't going to do you any good," interjected the Chief. "They don't wear diamonds where you're going to. The less trouble you give us, the less trouble we'll make for you. And we can make more trouble for you than you can make for us."

A look of such utter helplessness overspread her face that even the detectives realized the utter futility of their attack. She seemed as one under the influence of a torpifying drug. Her capability for new feelings had been crushed out of her by the crowded incidents following her arrest. All she felt was a dull pain of body and mind.

"Don't sit there like a white mummy," burst forth Donnelly. "Come, now," he added impatiently, "don't exhaust our patience; we haven't treated you roughly, but we know how to bring you out of your silence."

He seized her wrist, his clenched hand squeezing it until she uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"Are you going to answer my questions?" he blurted.

She sank back in the chair with a despairing moan. Her heavy eyelids dropped, a tremor contracted her brow, then her head fell limply to one side.

"I guess we won't gain anything by going any stronger with her to-day. Take her back!" commanded the Chief.

Donnelly and Carson shook her into consciousness. They steadied her as she dragged herself through the

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dark corridor and down two flights of narrow iron stairs to her cell.

When she was out of the room, the silent visitor came out of the obscurity of his corner and seated himself in the chair vacated by Miss Holcomb.

"What do you think of it, Britz?" asked Manning.

Detective-Lieutenant Britz stared hard, as if trying to concentrate his thoughts. His keen face, screwed into an expression of uncertainty, contrasted sharply with the big heavy features of his superior. Side by side, the two men suggested the delicate surgeon's probe and the heavy blacksmith's sledge.

"It's a great mystery," Britz declared. "A great mystery," he repeated in a tone of deep conviction. "The most puzzling one that has ever come under my observation."

"Very well," the Chief drawled. "It's Donnelly and Carson's case, but you go out and solve it—you go out and get the goods."

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CHAPTER VII

REMANDED TO THE TOMBS

LIEUTENANT BRITZ, seated at the flat-top desk of his office, peered steadily at the ceiling, as if he expected to find written there the solution of the great mystery into which he had been called. A worried expression was on his face, as if anxiety had taken possession of his soul. He became submerged in deep meditation, in which he sought to arrange in consecutive order the information gathered by Donnelly and Carson. The conviction forced itself on his mind that Miss Holcomb's arrest was based on circumstances from which more than one inference might be drawn. The fact that she knew the combination of Mrs. Missioner's safe did not mean, of course, that she took the jewels. On the surface, it looked as if hers was the exclusive opportunity to possess herself of the gems, outside of Mrs. Missioner herself. But Britz felt that the depth of the case had not been sounded; in fact, that the surface had not even been penetrated. Whether there were others who had equal opportunity with Miss Holcomb, or had even a remote opportunity to help themselves to the necklace, must be determined by careful investigation.

The only thread that connected Miss Holcomb with the theft was the diamond found in her room. But to Britz's experienced mind, this circumstance pointed

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rather toward innocence than guilt. For, he argued, if she had taken those jewels, she would not have been so careless as to leave one of them in her boudoir. That diamond, Britz was convinced, was placed there intentionally and with sinister purpose by a hand other than Miss Holcomb's.

Britz rose from his seat, donned his topcoat and hat, and made his way to the tier of cells one of which held Miss Holcomb. He encountered Donnelly and Carson on the way.

"What time are you going to arraign her?" he asked.

"Right now," Donnelly replied. "We got the magistrate to hold court an hour longer for us."

A turnkey swung open the iron door of the cell. The detectives found Miss Holcomb huddled in a corner, the wan light of the corridor falling on her tear-bathed face.

"Don't take me back! They want to harm me! I haven't done anything!" she cried, when she saw the visitors. Britz stepped forward with an air of command and waved the other detectives back. He scraped his shoulders through the cell door and sat on the rude cot, facing the woman.

"Miss Holcomb," he said pleasantly, "there will be no further inquisition in the Chief's office, no more third-degree methods will be applied to you. It is necessary under the law to bring you before a magistrate within twenty-four hours after your arrest. Now, brace yourself, please, for the ordeal. If you are innocent, you have absolutely nothing to fear. You will have an opportunity in court of consulting

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with your friends and engaging a lawyer. Your interests will be protected."

Instinctively, although in the gloom of her surroundings she could make out only a dim outline of his face, she felt a confidence in the detective that braced her like a tonic.

"I have a carriage waiting for you, Miss Holcomb," Britz informed her. "It will enable you to avoid the many curious eyes in the street."

She murmured her thanks as she stepped out of the cell and followed Britz and his companions through a maze of corridors to the street. They were driven rapidly to the Jefferson Market Court and ushered into the private room of the magistrate. A crowd of reporters was already on hand for the hearing. The curious eyes aimed pitilessly at her inspired in her a terror that made her shrink behind the broad shoulders of Donnelly. The magistrate motioned her to a seat close to his desk, and said:

"Madam, it is your privilege to engage counsel. I would advise you to do so at once, for anything you say may be used against you."

"I have done nothing wrong," she murmured.

The deep lines of her face, the lusterless eyes red from long weeping, the anguished expression of her countenance, combined to arouse a feeling of pity among the onlookers. Her features seemed instinct with candor. It was impossible to reconcile the velvet smoothness of that artless brow with the ruffle of an unworthy thought, or the faultless carving of those frank lips with the blemish of an uttered lie.

Her simple expression of innocence carried convic-

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tion to all, save, perhaps, the detectives. It was plain that her bewildered mind could not fashion clever deceits for her lips to speak. Whatever came from her mouth must be the natural outpouring of thoughts aroused spontaneously, without effort of will, without any conscious attempt at evasion or falsehood.

"You had better get a lawyer," the Magistrate urged.

As if in response to his advice, the door opened abruptly and two men entered. One was sharp-faced, gray-haired, nervous, with the unmistakable air of the lawyer. The other was a young man, his face marked with heavy lines of worry, as if he also had passed a sleepless night. At sight of him, Miss Holcomb sprang forward and threw herself in his arms.

"Oh, Lawrence!" she exclaimed. "How I have missed you!"

"Don't worry," he soothed. "Everything will turn out all right. I have engaged a lawyer for you. I believe in you implicitly."

Donnelly and Carson asked for a week in which to work up the case against the prisoner.

"We are informed that the stolen jewels are worth close to half a million. There was one big diamond in the bunch that is said to be worth a quarter of a million alone. I think she ought to be put under heavy bonds."

"On what grounds do you base your accusation of theft against this young woman?" demanded the lawyer.

Donnelly displayed the diamond he had found in her room.

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"She was the only one, outside of Mrs. Missioner, who knew the combination of the safe," he said. "We found this diamond, which is one of the original stones, in her room."

"Does Mrs. Missioner charge this girl with the theft of the collarette?" asked the lawyer.

"The police make the accusation," Donnelly replied. "Mrs. Missioner is too upset to appear in court to-day."

Following the usual course, the magistrate adjourned the case for a week, and held Miss Holcomb in $50,000 bail. There being no bondsman present, she was committed to the Tombs.

"May I speak with Miss Holcomb in private a few moments?" asked the young man into whose arms she had fallen.

"Who are you?" gruffly demanded Donnelly.

"I'm Dr. Lawrence Fitch, the fiancé of Miss Holcomb."

"You can see her in the Tombs," Donnelly retorted.

Lieutenant Britz did not accompany Donnelly and Carson with their prisoner to the jail. When the court hearing was over, he returned to his office, summoned two subordinate detectives, and gave them hasty instructions. Then he sauntered slowly to the Tombs.

As the barred steel door swung open to admit Britz, Dr. Fitch crossed the stone-flagged courtyard that separates the women's wing of the prison from that of the men.

"Was it Dr. Fitch who called to see the prisoner in the Missioner diamond robbery?" he asked the doorman.

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"Yes," came the prompt response.

Britz waited in the shadow of the massive gray front of the jail until the young physician came out. He observed the pallor of the doctor's cheeks, his uncertain gait, as if the turmoil of his mind had exhausted his physical energy. The detective noted, also, the clear-cut, straightforward features of the physician, the resolute aspect of his face, and the purposeful gleam of his clear eyes.

"Just a moment, doctor," Britz said, tapping Dr. Fitch on the shoulder.

"What can I do for you?" asked the doctor.

"I am Lieutenant Britz, of Headquarters," the detective explained. "I am in charge of the active work on this case. I want your help."

"My help?" A gleam of anxious inquiry darted from the doctor's eyes.

"You can be of great service to Miss Holcomb," Britz said.

"How?" quickly asked Dr. Fitch.

"By following my orders," flashed Britz.

"What are your orders?" asked the doctor.

"Don't try to get bail for the young woman," said Britz. "It is absolutely necessary that all suspicion be directed toward her. No effort must be made at the present time to clear her."

"What!" exclaimed Dr. Fitch. "Permit my fiancée to suffer the tortures of this prison and live under the stigma of this terrible accusation?"

"It is necessary," assured Britz.

"The two detectives who arrested her seem to be convinced of her guilt," Fitch said angrily. "They in-

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flicted tortures on her that might have crushed a stronger woman; she told me as best she could what took place at the inquisition in Police Headquarters. Were you present at that brutal scene?"

"I was."

Fitch eyed the detective suspiciously.

"Then you, too, believe she is guilty?" he asked.

"I have come to no conclusion with regard to the case," answered Britz. "I am simply going to ascertain the truth. Are you willing to help?"

"If it is a search for truth and not an attempt to convict an innocent woman, I am willing."

"Very well," said Britz. "I am working independently, regardless of anything Donnelly and Carson, the two men who made the arrest, may do. They blundered grievously when they arrested the young woman. We must overcome that blunder, but the time is not ripe for her release. If she leaves the Tombs, it must be with her name cleared of suspicion."

Dr. Fitch looked gratefully at the detective.

"I know your reputation, Lieutenant Britz," he said. "This terrible blow came out of a clear sky. I feel as helpless as a little child. The first intimation I had that my fiancée was accused of theft was when I picked up the morning papers. I could hardly believe my eyes; it seemed to me my senses were deceiving me. I read and re-read the newspaper accounts until I seemed to know them by heart. I could not understand why she did not send for me at once."

"She was too dazed to think," Britz said. "I will pursue my inquiry on my own lines, and I want you

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to hold yourself in readiness to respond to any call I may make on you. Furthermore, I would advise that you see Miss Holcomb again and inform her that if she is innocent, all the resources of the Police Department will be used in her behalf. I am looking only for the real thief. It may be necessary for me to see her occasionally. If she is innocent, she may be entirely frank with me. I will not see her, however, until she has had time to compose herself."

Dr. Fitch returned to the prison and was permitted to see the prisoner in the little reception room on the ground floor of the women's wing. Her lawyer had left instructions that the physician be allowed to consult with his fiancée at any time. On his first visit, he had found her distraught, hardly able to tell a coherent story. His call had a cheering effect on her, however, and she entered the reception room with a firmer step.

"I hope you have brought good news," she called.

"I have just talked with Lieutenant Britz, who is in charge of your case," he replied. "He has assured me he will do everything to prove your innocence and find the real criminal, but he wants you to remain here until you can leave with your name entirely cleared."

For an instant her face clouded. She felt a painful contraction of heart; a mist floated before her eyes.

"Remain here?" she murmured questioningly. Then, as if a sudden thought illumined her mind, she added, "I would rather stay here than go out and face the world with this charge hanging over me."

He pressed her hand as if to instill into her new confidence. She sensed the meaning of that encouraging pressure and rewarded him with a responsive smile.

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"You believe in me, don't you?" she murmured.

"All those who know you must believe in you," he answered. "The very innocence of your nature is sufficient reply to the accusation against you."

"It is good to have you with me," she said, and he saw tears welling in her eyes. Her suffering touched the tenderest chord of his nature, and he felt a pain as of a hundred knife thrusts.

"Don't lose courage," was all he could say. "I'll be here every day."

As he hastened down the steps of the prison, he again met Britz. The two men walked to Broadway and up that thoroughfare to Twenty-third Street. When they parted, Britz knew the life history of Miss Holcomb.

She had been born in good circumstances, and was a graduate of Smith College. All her life, she had been reared to the belief that her future was well provided for. As the only child of a Boston banker, she lived in an environment of tranquil ease that seemed her permanent heritage in life. Her father and mother died within a year of each other, during the stress of a financial panic. When the estate came to be settled, it was found insufficient to meet the outstanding obligations of the father. Left penniless, amid the luxuries of her birth, she found employment as a governess, and two years before the discovery of the substituted paste jewels, she was engaged by Mrs. Missioner as secretary.

Fitch met Miss Holcomb in Boston, and their friendship was renewed in New York. Their engagement was announced only a month before her arrest. Britz,

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trying to square the circumstances surrounding her arrest with the conclusion of guilt, decided that if she took the jewels, it must have been in a sudden temptation born of the luxury of her past. But, on more mature reflection, he concluded that her birth, her breeding, all the training of her life placed her above any such temptation; and when he entered his home to study the case in the quiet of his library, he was possessed of the strong conviction that Miss Holcomb was guiltless of the charge entered against her on the records of the Court.

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CHAPTER VIII

BRITZ TAKES ACTION

LIEUTENANT BRITZ occupied a unique position in the Detective Bureau. His official grade was the same as that of Donnelly and Carson, but, by sheer force of his ability, he had lifted himself so far above them that when working on a case they accepted his orders like subordinates. Britz was one of the four or five men of the entire detective force who could not be classed as a "stool-pigeon man." That is, he did not depend on the use of stool-pigeons for his results. He needed no staff of thieves to inform him of the doings of other thieves. His detective ability was developed to a high degree, combining an acute analytic sense with remarkable industry. These talents were reinforced by a rare detective instinct, which often led him irresistibly to the goal of his pursuit.

He was a bundle of twitching nerves beneath a placid exterior. Nature had endowed him with an inscrutable countenance, an iron will, and a restless energy that seemed to flow from an inexhaustible inner fountain. He matched his resourcefulness against the tricks of the criminals he pursued and, having the keener mind, he invariably won.

Britz's enthusiasm never bubbled to the surface. He carried himself with an appearance of masterly ease, as if he held his impulses in complete subjection. There was nothing striking in his stature, yet he left an im-

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pression of hidden strength as of a steel framework behind a light coating of plaster. His eyes, set deep beneath the arched outline of his eyebrows, seemed to emit a mysterious, inexplicable current that circled around one and drew one closer within its constantly narrowing circumference. The shade of melancholy that gloomed his nature was not hidden by the mask of superb indifference that rested on his well-defined features, with their crowning breadth of lightly furrowed forehead. It revealed itself with the slightest twitch of his facial muscles as well as in the drooping line of his mouth. By some peculiarity of the blood, his complexion ran a yellow ivory, never varying its color under the stress of the strongest emotions. It required superhuman courage to meet the steady gaze of his eyes and lie to him. Though somewhat abrupt of manner and speech, there was something engaging about him, some subtle magic of personality that brought one under the thrall of his mind. Almost without the utterance of a syllable, he could bend weak natures to his will. Only the strongest persons were able to resist his domination.

Crime to Britz was something impersonal, like an abstract problem in mathematics. Relentless as was his pursuit of criminals, he felt no personal animosity toward them, regarding them rather as shadow-beings playing his game.

He was one of those strange beings who live mostly within themselves, yet there were times when he felt a desolation of heart, a longing for companionship, for intimate association with his fellow beings. On such occasions, his life seemed to lack something of the

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beauty of other lives, as if it had been cast in a more somber shade. He could feel a wave of melancholy coming on him, and to avoid its depressing influence, he turned his mind resolutely to his work, feasting on the crime at hand as on some tempting dish. Without knowing why, the Missioner diamond robbery held for him a fascination more powerful than that called up by any other crime within his memory. He recognized surface indications of a deep cunning in the conception and execution of the theft. His experienced eye saw that no ignorant or vulgar mind had engineered the substitution of those marvelous diamonds. The pursuit of the criminal fairly sparkled with exciting possibilities, and Britz felt the thrill of the chase even before he started the pursuit.

Britz paced nervously up and down his room, revolving the incidents surrounding the discovery of the theft in his mind, but he was unable to pick a clew on which to work. Nor did the occurrences in which Donnelly and Carson participated furnish any promising material.

"I'll begin at the very bottom," he murmured, "and work gradually to the top." He sauntered out of the house, walking with the air of one trying to lengthen moments of reflection. In front of the Missioner home he stopped, surveying the massive stone walls, as if trying to figure the possibility of nocturnal intrusion. The front door was of heavy bronze and was swung open by the butler in response to the ringing of the bell.

"Is Mrs. Missioner at home?" asked Britz.

The butler eyed him suspiciously.

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"Who wishes to see her?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Britz, of Headquarters."

After a long delay, he was ushered into the same room in which the incidents preceding Miss Holcomb's arrest had occurred.

"I have come to inquire more minutely into the disappearance of the jewels," he explained.

Mrs. Missioner's face showed lines of deep suffering. Heavy rings encircled her eyes, deep furrows scarred her forehead.

"I am more than anxious to supply you with all the information in my possession," she said. "It is meager enough, and I almost despair of ever seeing my jewels again."

"Madam, no case is hopeless," Britz soothed. "The immense value of the diamonds will make their recovery all the easier. I feel safe in surmising that none of them, or only a very few of them, have been disposed of as yet. Now, do you recall the last time you wore the collarette?"

"It was a week ago, at dinner in my home," she replied.

"And when before that?"

"About two weeks before, at a dance in the home of a friend."

"How long have you owned the collarette?"

"About ten years."

"It was a gift from your husband, I believe?" Britz asked.

"It was," the widow answered.

"Where was it purchased?"

"The Maharanee was bought in India. The other

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stones were gathered from time to time, and were strung together in the form of the collarette at Tiffany's."

"That was ten years ago?"

"It was."

"Since then, has the collarette been out of your possession at any time?"

Mrs. Missioner sank into deep reflection. Her slippered feet tapped the floor, her hands opened and closed automatically.

"I recall only one instance," she replied.

Britz bent forward eagerly.

"When was that?" he asked.

"About two years ago. I sent it to Tiffany's for resetting."

"The substitution was hardly made there," he smiled. "You are absolutely sure the collarette, with that one exception, has been in no one else's possession?"

"Absolutely sure," the widow answered.

Britz moved thoughtfully about the room. He tapped the walls with his fist, alert for a hollow sound. Bending to his knees, he examined the floor carefully, after which his eyes lingered on every inch of the windows.

"May I examine the safe?" he asked.

Through a magnifying glass he studied the steel door of the compartment, after which the widow set the combination and swung open the safe. The interior was as bare of suspicious marks as the exterior.

"Donnelly and Carson are right to this extent. It is an inside job," he pronounced.

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The detective seated himself in a nook of the broad chimney-place, facing the widow.

"We must ascertain the day of the robbery as closely as possible," he said. "Two years ago is too remote a time on which to begin work. I understand that you called in Mr. Ranscome the other night? Has any other expert seen the jewels in the last two years?"

A flash, as of the return of a vanished hope, lighted Mrs. Missioner's features.

"No other expert, but Mr. Ranscome and I looked over the collection before I went abroad eighteen months ago. He saw the collarette at that time."

"Did he observe it casually, or examine it carefully?" Britz asked.

"He had it in his hand, and I recall he spoke admiringly of it," the widow returned.

"Good!" flashed Britz. "Of course, he said nothing as to the jewels being paste?"

"Nothing," answered Mrs. Missioner.

"Then it is almost certain that the real jewels were in your safe then," pronounced Britz. "Since then, who has been with you when you wore the collarette?"

"Mr. Griswold and Mr. Sands were my escorts to the dinner two weeks ago. They and Miss March also were my guests at the opera."

"Now, please tell me exactly, who was in the room when you put the collarette on and when you took it off on coming home two weeks ago?" Britz inquired.

"Miss Holcomb was in the room when I opened the combination of the safe. I believe the collarette lay on the table until I was fully dressed. Then Mr. Sands

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and Mr. Griswold arrived, and were shown into the room. I recall that I had difficulty in adjusting the clasp, and Mr. Griswold snapped it shut."

"Were you out of the room for even a moment while the collarette lay on the table?"

"No," Mrs. Missioner answered.

"Did you observe anything suspicious in the movements, actions, or conduct of Miss Holcomb that evening?"

"Nothing."

"What occurred after you came home? Who helped you to undress?"

"My maids were asleep," said Mrs. Missioner, "and I called Miss Holcomb, who occupies the room next to mine. She helped me take off the jewels and she saw me place them in the safe."

"And with the exception of yourself, Miss Holcomb is the only one who knew the combination of the safe?" Britz flashed.

"Only Miss Holcomb," responded the widow.

"On the night of the opera, who was with you when you put on the collarette?"

"Miss Holcomb, Mr. Griswold, Mr. Sands, and Miss March," the widow informed him.

"Did any of those present help you place it about your neck?"

"No. Mr. Sands had taken the collarette from the table, and was looking at it. I took it from him and fastened it myself."

Britz meditated a second or two, then asked:

"After you took the collarette from the safe on those two nights, did any servant enter the room?"

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Mrs. Missioner's brow contracted in thought. It was difficult for her to recall such small incidents as the passing of servants through the room.

"The footman, of course, announced Mr. Griswold and Mr. Sands. I remember, too, that my East Indian servant brought my new dress."

"Do you believe Miss Holcomb is the thief?" suddenly fired Britz.

Mrs. Missioner started as if a coil of flame had shot through her. Her pale lips trembled and she shook her head negatively.

"I cannot believe her capable of it," she said.

"Then if we eliminate her," Britz retorted, "we must look for the thief among Mr. Sands, Mr. Griswold, the footman, and the East Indian servant. Miss March, of course, is out of the question."

"So are Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold," came in positive tones from Mrs. Missioner.

Britz made no comment. His eyes moved restlessly about the room, falling finally in a steady gaze on the widow.

"How long has the footman been in your employ?" he asked.

"More than fifteen years," she responded promptly.

"And the other servant?"

"About a year. He came very highly recommended, and I do not see how he possibly could have substituted the paste necklace for the real one."

"Neither do I," agreed Britz. "Did either Mr. Sands or Mr. Griswold ever have opportunity to pass through Miss Holcomb's room?"

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"Not that I am aware of," replied Mrs. Missioner.

Britz eyed the woman impressively.

"We must bear in mind," he said, "that whoever stole the jewels must have been in possession of the real necklace long enough to have a duplicate made. Either that, or he must have been so familiar with every stone in the setting as to enable him to have duplicates made from description. The only reasonable supposition is that the duplicate was made directly from the original. It is barely possible, however, that some other means were employed."

"That is the most puzzling feature of the theft," said Mrs. Missioner.

"How long have you known Mr. Sands?" asked Britz.

"From girlhood."

"And Mr. Griswold?"

"About five years."

"Both saw the necklace on you frequently?"

"Very often."

After several thoughtful moments, Britz remarked:

"The only one who could have taken the necklace out of the safe without your knowledge was Miss Holcomb. One of the original diamonds was found in her room. It is absolutely clear to me that she is innocent."

"Do you really think so?" the widow asked eagerly.

"It is as certain as that someone stole the necklace," answered Britz.

"Then we must get her out of jail at once!" exclaimed the widow.

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"We must do nothing of the kind," corrected the detective. "We must allow all suspicion to be directed toward her."

"But it is cruel, it is inhuman, to keep her in prison," protested Mrs. Missioner.

"It is necessary," assured Britz.

"I will not permit it, even if it means the loss of the necklace," said the woman.

"My dear madam," Britz returned, "don't excite yourself. My blundering colleagues have done all the harm they can possibly do to Miss Holcomb. Far more important than the recovery of the necklace is the establishment of her innocence in the eyes of the world. With all the suspicious circumstances of this case woven about her, your mere belief in her innocence will not clear her. Therefore, you will have to leave this entire matter in my hands."

The widow bowed submissively. A shade of sorrow crept over her face as she contemplated the plight of her secretary.

"May I go to the jail and assure her of my belief in her?" she asked.

"That would be fatal," replied the detective.

"Then what can I do—I must do something for her," groaned Mrs. Missioner.

"The only thing we can do for her is to find the real thief," said Britz.

"I trust it won't be long," sighed the widow.

"Kindly give me the addresses of Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold," asked the detective.

"You surely don't suspect either of them?" returned Mrs. Missioner.

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"I suspect no one, as yet," Britz hastened to assure her.

He wrote the addresses of the two men on the back of a card and left. Britz headed straight for Headquarters and entered the office of the Chief. He threw himself wearily into a chair with the air of one vainly trying to discern a glimmer of light in the enshrouding darkness.

"It's going to be hard work," he said.

"I expected it would be when I put you on it," the Chief replied.

Britz recounted the information he had gathered from Mrs. Missioner and then walked into his own office. Summoning two subordinates, he directed them to go to the Missioner house and trail the footman and the East Indian servant. Two other men were assigned to shadow Sands and Griswold.

"That's all I can do to-day," he murmured.

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CHAPTER IX

WORD FROM LOGAN

A WEEK of agonized suspense in the Tombs seemed drawn into an eternity of suffering to Miss Holcomb. Conscious of her own innocence, she had, nevertheless, ceased to struggle against the relentless fate that marked her as its victim. Her sensitive nature recoiled from contact with the miserable creatures into whose midst she was suddenly thrust. No longer could she find solace in tears, for the long drain had exhausted the supply. The gloom of her surroundings penetrated the innermost sanctuary of her soul, and she became possessed of a deep melancholy which even the encouraging words of Dr. Fitch could not relieve.

"Don't give up to despair; truth and justice will prevail," Dr. Fitch had urged every day. But the grim prison walls shut out hope as effectually as if the knell of her final fate had been sounded. Only one prop remained to sustain her through the long days and nights of confinement in the Tombs. It was the belief that she would be speedily freed at her second hearing, but even that prop was rudely torn from under her. Instead of regaining her liberty, she was sent back to the Tombs under heavy bail to await the action of the Grand Jury. It was the work of a few brief minutes to make out a *prima facie* case against her, and in her benumbed state of mind, she hardly

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knew what was transpiring in the courtroom. Her eyes had a vacant stare, as if peering into a heavy mist. When court adjourned, she followed the jailer automatically back to her cell. When the door clicked behind her, a violent tremor shook her frame and she gave herself up, body, mind, and soul, to the bitter spirit of despair that had seized her.

She was recalled to her senses by the matron, who announced that Dr. Fitch was in the reception room. Hastily coiling her disarranged hair into a knot, she passed along the narrow corridors and descended to the visitors' room. This chamber, filled with the echoes of past tragedies, marked with the invisible footprints of the surging undercurrent of human life, is the gateway through which pass innocent and guilty alike, to freedom or to penal servitude. Here the world within meets the world without; here messages of hope are poured into tears of despair. Here is said the final farewell of the woman condemned; through this room the innocent pass out of the grim shadow of the barred corridors to the welcome sunlight of the street.

No woman may enter this room without a shudder of despair; none may leave it without a prayer of deliverance. Bare of furnishings, there is nothing to relieve the drab monotony of its walls. A gray-haired matron of buxom form sits stolidly at the door. Her cold eyes carry no message of encouragement. She is not there to encourage; she is there to watch. Even to visitors, the room imparts a feeling of misty terror, a longing to escape its sinister aspect.

A groan, as of physical pain, came from Fitch as

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he beheld Miss Holcomb in the wan light that filtered through the window. Her distress reacted on his sensibilities; he could utter no word of encouragement.

"It is awful," he moaned, as he led her into a corner of the room.

"And they all believe me guilty?" she asked despairingly.

"Not all," he returned, "there is one whose faith is unshaken."

"Mrs. Missioner—what of her?" she asked.

"I don't know," Dr. Fitch replied.

"Have the police discovered no clew to the theft?"

"I haven't heard a word from them," Dr. Fitch said.

They remained silent, as if fearful of inflicting pain on each other by further discussion of the discouraging outlook. The doctor's eyes were fixed on the tips of his boots; hers roved aimlessly about the room.

"I talked with the lawyer to-day," he broke the silence. "He says they haven't sufficient evidence to convict, and that while the case looks ugly, there is nothing to fear. He is in favor of a speedy trial."

"Then even if I am set free my name will remain smirched," she declared.

His spirits sank lower as he contemplated the dark outlook of her future. With a heroic effort he brought himself out of his dejection, and, eying her intently, said:

"Your name will be cleared of all suspicion."

She could read encouragement in that purposeful face and the set determination of those lips. His resolute features were eloquent with promise in her be-

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half. No matter how fierce the fires of accusation blazed about her, there was one whose belief would remain unshaken. The finger of contumely might point at her, but in his eyes it would carry no reproach. Yet, as she realized how deeply her future was interwoven with his, she felt an anguish of heart more poignant than the pain of her own predicament.

"What a terrible blow this must be to you," was all she could say.

"It means to me only the opportunity to prove myself worthy of you," he replied.

"But suppose," she breathed, "they do not find the thief and the world is made to believe me guilty?"

The mere suggestion of failure to clear the woman he loved aroused all the combativeness of his nature. He brought his clenched fist down on his knee and thundered forth an eloquent challenge to the world.

"I'll stand between you and the creatures who are trying to crush you!" he exclaimed. "Let them come like a thousand furies! Your fight is my fight," he whispered, bending closer to her, "and your victory will be mine."

His eyes darted points of fire that kindled a responsive light in the glance she turned on him.

"You will never desert me?" she murmured gratefully.

"Never!"

She felt his arm about her waist, and with a sigh almost of happiness she surrendered herself to his embrace. He pressed her close to him, his lips seeking hers in the fading light of the room. The faint kiss

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that broke the stillness glorified the love of these two souls and struck a divine radiance that seemed to bring a message of hope from above.

"It is so good to have you near me," she said. "I feel as if no harm could come to me."

They became vaguely conscious of a man's form outlined in the murky light of the room. As the figure gradually shaped itself to Fitch's eyes, his hand slipped from her waist and he rose to his feet.

"Lieutenant Britz!" he exclaimed.

The detective came out of the obscurity of the opposite wall, and, doffing his hat, respectfully addressed them:

"It is unusual, I know, for a police officer to ask information of a prisoner held for the Grand Jury. Before Miss Holcomb replies to the questions I am about to ask, I think it might be well for her to seek the advice of counsel."

"Miss Holcomb will answer any questions you may ask," Fitch replied. "She has nothing to hide."

The impenetrable face of the detective gave no insight to his thoughts. He drew a chair close to the expectant couple, shifting his gaze from Fitch to the face of the young woman. Though he gave no sign of it, he read the acute suffering she felt.

"Miss Holcomb," he began, "when were you last in Europe with Mrs. Missioner?"

"A little less than a year and a half ago," came the quick response.

"Was that before or after the East Indian servant entered the employ of Mrs. Missioner?"

"He was engaged after we came back."

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"Did you meet Mr. Sands or Mr. Griswold abroad?"

"We met both of them in London and Paris."

"Did Mrs. Missioner have the collarette with her? I mean the one with the Maharanee diamond?"

"She did."

The detective settled back in his chair, his chin in his hands, as if lost in deep thought. The strange pallor of his face, shaded by the waning light, gave him the appearance of a dark clay image. Miss Holcomb looked inquiringly at him, seeking some explanation of his puzzling questions.

"The case is more baffling than ever," he said in response to her questioning look. "When I began my investigation, I was firmly convinced of your innocence——"

"And now?" interrupted Dr. Fitch.

Britz replied with an equivocal shrug of the shoulders. A moment or two passed before he spoke. "I am seeking the light," he said.

"Do you wish to ask Miss Holcomb any further questions?" Fitch asked. "She is only too anxious to enlighten you."

The detective's eyes narrowed on the young woman.

"There is some information that I want, Miss Holcomb; I believe you can supply it." After brief reflection, he asked: "Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold are frequent visitors at the house of Mrs. Missioner?"

"Both call very frequently," Miss Holcomb replied.

"And their visits are inspired by a feeling that is stronger than friendship?"

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Miss Holcomb looked at Fitch as if in doubt what to say.

"Be perfectly frank," he advised.

"I believe both have proposed marriage to her," she informed him.

"And Mrs. Missioner—she prefers which one?"

"I don't know," came the prompt response.

"You mean she has never indicated her preference to you? Come now, surely in a burst of confidence she dropped some hint as to her inclinations?"

It was plain to Britz that Miss Holcomb revolted against violating the intimate confidences of her employer. To reveal the secrets that had come to her through association with the woman who seemingly had turned her back on her now was so inconsistent with Miss Holcomb's entire character that Britz recognized the necessity of urging his question.

"I am not asking this out of any motive of idle curiosity," he said. "It is of vital importance I should be informed of Mrs. Missioner's relations with Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold, as well as of the opportunity each had for obtaining the diamonds."

"I am sure neither of them would or could have taken them," Miss Holcomb said.

"That may be perfectly true," replied Britz. "I do not say either of them took the diamonds, but I must follow every line of inquiry that reveals itself to me. Now, isn't it a fact, Miss Holcomb, that Griswold was the preferred suitor?"

"I do not think so," she said in a low voice.

"You mean she preferred Sands?"

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"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Her general demeanor toward the two men."

"You mean she showed more fondness for Sands?"

Miss Holcomb knitted her brows. Her perplexity made her slow and hesitating of speech.

"I cannot say that," she answered. "Sometimes I thought she cared more for Mr. Griswold, and then again I would feel certain she preferred Mr. Sands. In the main, however, I always believed that Mr. Sands held her affections; while Mr. Griswold simply pleased her with his attentions."

"Possibly Mrs. Missioner didn't know her own mind?" the detective asked.

"Perhaps not," agreed Miss Holcomb.

"Did she ever make any remarks to you that led you to believe she cared more for one than for the other?"

"None that I recall."

"Miss Holcomb, do you know the history of the Maharanee diamond?" he suddenly fired.

A quick spark of memory kindled her mind, and with the first flash, she understood the import of his question.

"Mrs. Missioner told me the history of the stone," she said. "I believe there was some scandal connected with its purchase in India. She told me that when her husband obtained it, there was some talk of it having been stolen from a temple and that the provincial native government tried to regain possession of it. Mr. Missioner succeeded, however, in retaining it as part of his collection."

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"What opportunity did the Indian servant have of obtaining the necklace?"

"None at all," she answered hopelessly, "unless he broke into the safe, and I believe that was not done."

"Mrs. Missioner informed me that on one occasion, when the necklace was lying on the table, the servant entered the room with a box. You were in the room at the time. Was he close enough to the table to touch the necklace?"

"I remember the incident very well," she replied. "I took the box from him at the door and he turned around and went downstairs. I do not believe he was within ten feet of the table at any time."

"I don't know what to think," Britz said, after some reflection. "Almost as soon as a new clew bobs up, it falls down and I have to begin all over again. I have no more questions to ask to-day."

Fitch accompanied the detective out of the prison, begging vainly for some word of encouragement. Britz answered his questions with monosyllables, as if he feared to commit himself with regard to the outcome of his investigation. Just before parting, however, Britz said:

"Every line that develops in this case, you can rest assured, will be followed to the end. So far, nothing has been discovered that changes the aspect of the case in the slightest degree."

The detective walked to Headquarters and entered the office of the Chief.

"Has Donnelly or Carson reported anything new?" he inquired.

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"Nothing," answered the Chief. "And you?"

"Nothing that throws any light on the case."

"Britz," the Chief remarked, as though delivering some weighty conclusion, "I think you're working on the wrong hypothesis. You seem to have decided that Miss Holcomb is innocent. If you will survey the case as it stands, you will have to acknowledge that absolutely everything in it points to her guilt. I do not undertake to say what her motive was in stealing the jewels, unless it was simply the feminine lust for ornaments. I feel certain, also, that she was not alone in the crime. My belief is that she took the necklace out of the safe, turned it over to Dr. Fitch, or someone else, to have the duplicate made, and then returned the false jewels to the safe."

"But where were the paste gems made?" inquired Britz.

"That's for you to find out," snapped the Chief.

"I have personally visited every manufacturer of paste gems in this city and in Philadelphia, Boston, Buffalo, and Washington. My men have been to all the places in the smaller cities. Manufacturers in all the other cities of the country have been visited by the local police, and I feel absolutely sure that the duplicates were not made in this country. Logan is on the way to Paris now, and until we hear from him I don't think we are safe in venturing any opinion as to the identity of the thief. I am receiving daily reports of the movements of Sands, Griswold, the butler, and the Indian servant, but they show nothing."

"Why do you think Logan will discover anything? Has the real necklace ever been abroad?"

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"Mrs. Missioner had it with her on the other side, but I don't know that it ever left her possession."

The Chief's lips coiled into an amused smile.

"Kind o' looks as if you're on the wrong scent," he baited.

"Wait till we hear from Paris," Britz returned.

"You're 'way off the trail," the Chief persisted. "You're not even following the lines of your own deduction. The other day you said you were convinced the necklace was stolen within the last month. How do you suppose they got it to Paris, had it duplicated, and then had the counterfeit sent back here in four weeks? You don't give them any time for the manufacture of the pastes."

"The crime was not conceived and executed in a day," Britz returned. "It is the work of long thought and careful planning. The duplicates may have been made any time within five years. The substitution was made since the expert saw the necklace fifteen months ago. A man like Ranscome would have detected the paste at a glance. I saw him yesterday and he informed me the stones he saw were genuine."

"Then, following your line of reasoning, we must conclude that the original was out of the possession of Mrs. Missioner without her knowledge long enough to enable the thief to have the duplicate made? And if that is the case, then only one person could have succeeded in the crime. The secretary was the only one who had access to the safe, and she also would have known Mrs. Missioner's plans well enough to enable her to judge the length of time she could withhold the necklace without detection. Of course, the

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theft would have been discovered at once if Mrs. Missioner wanted to wear the necklace while it was gone."

"The original stones were never stolen from the safe," Britz said in a positive tone.

"Then how was the substitution made?" queried the other.

"I don't know," replied the detective gloomily. "I have yet to discover the time of the substitution."

"It seems to me," said the Chief, "you have still to discover a good many things with regard to this case. As a matter of fact, you're as much at sea as on the day you took charge."

"I have only begun to throw out my lines," Britz declared. "I'll land the fish before I'm through, and it won't be Miss Holcomb."

As the detective left the office, he could not help a feeling of depression at the slow progress of events. As yet, the intricacies of the mystery were vaguely outlined in his mind. He saw them as a floating mist, heavy with possibilities but charged with delusive signs of beckoning trails that he instinctively knew led to nowhere. He was still treading lightly the mazes of the case. One false step might be fatal, and he preferred to remain in a crouching attitude of watchfulness, ready to spring from cover at the proper moment.

Much as he deplored his enforced inactivity, he nevertheless had faith in the final outcome. A quick mental survey of the case convinced him that the first necessity was to find the maker of the paste stones. Whoever made the duplicate Maharanee would surely recall having done so. There were few European

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firms that could have made the stone. It was doubtful whether any American manufacturer could have turned out a substitute to fool the eyes of Mrs. Missioner, even for a night. It is hard enough to get the compact brilliance of the diamond in a small paste gem; infinitely more difficult is it to manufacture a counterfeit Maharanee. Britz knew that whoever copied the cut and luster of that marvelous stone was an expert of high caliber. No faint shimmer of glass could have availed to deceive Mrs. Missioner. The laboratory fire that gleamed from the duplicate was the work of years of experiment, and only in Paris, Britz believed, was the art of manufacturing paste gems sufficiently developed to bring forth a satisfactory duplicate of the Maharanee.

Three weeks, at least, must elapse before word would come from Logan. The emissary sent abroad was himself a diamond expert. Before entering the Detective Bureau, he had been a foreign agent of the United States Treasury Department. If the duplicate necklace was manufactured abroad, Logan would find the manufacturer without delay. Britz had faith in his man, and he waited impatiently through three weeks of torment for the first cablegram. It came finally, and he opened it with nervous fingers.

"Missioner necklace manufactured from drawings by three firms. Original never in possession of manufacturers."

Britz let the telegram flutter to the floor.

"I knew it!" he burst forth. "They wouldn't have dared to take the original out of the safe without immediately replacing it with the duplicate."

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He picked up the message and burst into the Chief's room.

"Read it!" he exclaimed.

The Chief's eyes drank in the words, but his brain failed to grasp their underlying meaning.

"I don't see that this proves anything," he remarked.

"It proves everything," volleyed Britz. "It proves that the thief was a clever draughtsman. It proves that he spent weeks sketching the necklace, stone by stone, and it proves, too, that he went to Paris to have the duplicate made."

"It proves all that," agreed the Chief. "But who had the opportunity to see the necklace a sufficient number of times and long enough to make the sketches? Who but Miss Holcomb?"

"I will find someone who had almost as good an opportunity," Britz returned confidently.

"And if you do, what will it mean?" asked the Chief.

"It will mean something to work on," the detective said.

The next twenty-four hours Britz spent in the quiet of his home, his mind focused on the problem before him, trying to map out his line of procedure. Plan after plan he discarded as worthless. He could have struck out blindly in the hope of stumbling on a trail, but that was not Britz's method. Crime mysteries were to him scientific problems to be solved by scientific means. Step by step he went over the ground already covered, and then swept the outlook with the keen searchlight of his mind.

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By a process of elimination he tried to sift the real thief from the group of suspects on whom his mental efforts were concentrated. He was unable to drag forth the culprit. Then he sought to discern the motive for the crime in the action of each possible criminal, but he could come to no satisfactory conclusion.

"More information, more information is needed before the real work can begin!" he murmured.

In his preoccupation he did not observe the door open and the servant show in a subordinate from Headquarters. Not until the visitor spoke did he become aware of his presence.

"Two cablegrams for you, sir," the subordinate said.

The first cablegram aroused no emotions in the detective.

"Have obtained original drawings. Will sail tomorrow with them," the message from Logan read.

He opened the second envelope and read the contents half a dozen times, as if to stamp them indelibly on his mind.

"Drawings for duplicates taken to manufacturer by young woman. Gave name of Elinor Holcomb."

Britz dismissed the visitor, left the house, and hastened to the office of Dr. Fitch. Taking the important cablegram from his pocket, he handed it to the physician. The doctor's eyes lingered on each word. His face paled, his eyes bulged forward, a violent tremor ran up and down his frame.

"This is awful!" he groaned.

"It's great news for you and Miss Holcomb," the detective smiled.

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Fitch eyed him in perplexity. The detective met his inquiring gaze steadily, and, slowly folding the cablegram, he said:

"It proves beyond question she had no part in the crime."

"How?" Fitch demanded eagerly.

"If Miss Holcomb had been clever enough to plan the theft, she'd have known better than to go about Paris ordering the duplicates. Also, if she had taken the diamonds, she'd never have permitted one of them to remain in her room in Mrs. Missioner's house. No, whoever stole those gems deliberately tried to throw suspicion on her."

"But who could have conceived such a dastardly crime?" Fitch blurted, a wave of anger sweeping his frame.

"Whoever it was," Britz returned, "either was actuated by enmity toward the young woman, or knew enough about the Missioner household to realize that suspicion would naturally fall on her, and therefore he decided to use her as a cloak to hide his own identity. However, I now have something to work on, something that will produce quick results. Dr. Fitch, you may tell Miss Holcomb that in my calculations she is entirely eliminated from participation in the crime. You may inform her also that the hunt for the thief has begun."

Before the physician recovered from the pleasant shock of the detective's words, Britz was hurrying down the steps.

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CHAPTER X

DOROTHY MARCH TALKS

MATINÉE girls in the Forrest Theater differ from their sisters of other New York playhouses in that they are far more serious than anybody in the evening audiences. Caramels, marshmallows, chocolate creams are forbidden by the unwritten law of their cult. The utmost nourishment one of them can allow herself is a salted almond nibbled surreptitiously between decorous little outbursts of kid-gloved applause. It is not the sort of gathering in which one would expect to find the busiest sleuth of the headquarters staff, especially with a great diamond mystery on his hands. Yet, on one of those warm January afternoons that make the metropolis wonder if it is being metamorphosed into a winter resort, one of the most interested auditors in the select little theater was Detective-Lieutenant Britz, of Manning's staff.

On the surface, that is to say. In reality, he was not listening to a word of the Thespian culture that trickled over the footlights. But if his ears were unoccupied, not so his eyes. His glance circled the auditorium like a ramrod swung on a swivel, resting on the stage at long intervals in a perfunctory way. Manning could have told in a moment that his alert lieutenant was not at all interested in the unfolding of the attenuated plot on the boards; that Britz was looking for somebody.

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Britz found the somebody he sought when his gaze fell on a slim little figure in the trimmest of dove-colored gowns, sitting in the fifth row off the center aisle. Instantly his last pretense of attention to the play vanished. Keeping his eyes on the gray curves of the girl in the fifth row, he quitted his post at one side of the house and walked slowly to the main exit, whence he watched her until the curtain fell on the first act. Meanwhile, he scribbled on a card, slipped a liberal tip into the receptive hand of an usher, and indicated the object of his interest. When the curtain fell on the first act, the usher hurried down the aisle, and presented the card to the girl in gray.

"If Miss March," read the young woman, "will spare a few minutes to Britz, of Headquarters, she will confer a favor and serve her friend, Mrs. Missioner."

Dorothy gathered her wrap, glasses, and program quickly and followed the usher to the back of the theater. The youth led her to the famous detective, whom, though she had heard of him through Doris Missioner, she beheld for the first time. She had expected to see a man whose cleverness was writ large on his exterior; she was disappointed by the almost commonplace appearance of the man who faced her. But she acknowledged his self-introduction with the sweetness inseparable from her mignon features, and, at his request, strolled with him to a corner of the lobby, where they seated themselves on softly tinted bent-wood chairs.

"You wished to see me?" inquired Dorothy. It was a banal question, and a flush tinged her cheeks as she realized its superfluousness could not escape the

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greatest detective in New York. But Britz seemed not to notice it, and the simple directness of his manner put the girl at her ease.

"I took the liberty, Miss March," he said pleasantly, "because I saw you across the orchestra, and I need a short course in social knowledge." His smile robbed the reply of flippancy.

"Fancy!" said Dorothy. She was so utterly at sea as to the detective's purpose she could think of nothing else to say save, "I fear you have sought a poor teacher."

"Well, I don't know now," Britz returned, looking at her with respectful admiration. "You see, you're a society girl, and I know nothing of society, and there's something I want to know—something I ought to know."

"If there's anything I can tell you, Mr. Britz, I'll be glad to do so," Dorothy volunteered. "Especially if it will help you to find Mrs. Missioner's diamonds."

"I'm not sure it will," said Britz. "It may, however, save me from seeking them in the wrong place. You seemed to enjoy the play, Miss March."

This shift of subjects was so abrupt that if Dorothy's breath had not already been coming in catches, she might have gasped. It was evident detectives were more original than society men. She wondered absently if the type was worth studying.

"Why, yes," her hesitating answer came. "I believe it's considered one of the best hits of the season. Very elevating, you know, and—well, different."

"Modern, Miss March?"

"It has two periods. The first deals with the life

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of to-day, the second harks back to the early Victorian period, with, I understand, an abrupt return to the present."

She was chatting quite easily with the detective now. Had she been reared in Mulberry Street instead of on Murray Hill, she could not have felt more natural.

"Now, this society subject—by the way, Miss March," Britz switched again, "is there as much difference between social life then and now?"

"Oh, a great deal, I should say." Her eyes twinkled. "Of course I cannot speak with authority —from personal observation."

"I wouldn't ask you to tell me anything about Ward McAllister from personal observation, Miss March," said the sleuth. His gallantry on occasion was the wonder of the Central Office.

Dorothy looked alarmed. Could it be great detectives wasted time on compliments, too? But a side glance at the detective's serious expression reassured her. It was manifest even to a débutante he had no idea of making an impression along that line. She laughed frankly and looked at him again in the friendliest way.

"I know you don't want to ask me about anything so recent as the Spanish War," she said, "now, do you?"

"Candidly, I don't," he rejoined. "To tell you the plain truth, I don't know exactly what I wish to ask you nor how to ask it, but I have an idea you can help me, and I'm sure you will for Mrs. Missioner's sake."

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"And Miss Holcomb's?" asked the girl eagerly. "She, too, you know, is a dear friend of mine."

"And Miss Holcomb's," answered the Headquarters man warmly. "Let me say, too, my dear young lady, as one old enough to be your—your——"

"Don't say my brother, Mr. Britz," interposed Dorothy mischievously. "I—I—well, I don't really see how I can be a sister to anybody else." She felt impelled to treat this strangely natural man naturally—she, who despite her inexperience, could freeze presumption with a glance, felt that way. It was a tribute to his adaptability.

Britz laughed.

"Miss March," he said with more heartiness in his tone than had colored it in many a day, "if I were not so busy, it would be a delight to be an elder brother to you. But I guess you're not interested in my impulses, and we were talking of the play."

"Oh, yes, 'the play's the thing,'" Dorothy countered with keen relish of the situation. If subtlety was his intention, she would show him what a woman—Dorothy was all of nineteen—a *woman* could do. "I never would have supposed," she added, allowing herself full measure of mischief, "that a famous detective could be a matinée man."

Britz winced. His ready good nature parried her shafts, however, and it was with the same slow smile that he replied:

"Does the author reconcile the manners of the two periods, or, is the piece one of those problem plays that leave everything to the audience? You see, Miss

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March," he went on, "Mulberry Street gets to Broadway occasionally."

"I don't know, Mr. Britz." She tried to recall the advance notice of the production. "This is the first time I've seen it. I dare say the playwright has bridged the gap somehow."

"It's a wide gap to bridge," observed the detective thoughtfully. "From reading nineteenth century novels, I should say it would be hard for the writer to hold interest with such a groundwork for his plot. Things were so different fifty years ago."

"Exactly what my grandfather says," Dorothy retorted, fun flashing in that mignon face. "But we'll know soon how the author has succeeded," she added. "The orchestra is nearing the end of this selection."

"Even their amusements were different," mused Britz. "Instead of golf, tennis, autoing, yachting, they had archery, croquet, sketching, and square dances —I don't suppose anybody in society sketches nowadays, Miss March?"

"I'd hardly say that," she replied. "There are a few talented men——"

"And many women——"

"Oh, almost all women are more or less artistic," said Dorothy with conviction. "But one must not be unjust to the men on that account."

"I'll venture to say—well, of course, you're in society, Miss March, and I'm not," Britz apologized, "but still I feel pretty certain you can't think of——"

"Of course, if you don't think I can think, Mr. Britz," said Dorothy with mock indignation that accented her prettiness as a shadowy background em-

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phasizes a jewel, "why, you can't expect—but I told you you'd find me a poor teacher."

"Now, Miss March, Miss March," Britz protested, hitching his chair around to gaze at her more directly. Over his shoulder he saw curious eyes, and he realized their tête-à-tête soon must end. Lobby flirtations were not approved by Forrest audiences.

"Well, Mr. Britz?" This challengingly.

"Well, Miss March," and his smile from a younger man would have been called caressing, "we've started with discussion of the play, and we touched on authorship, the founder of the Four Hundred, the War with Spain, and a dozen other subjects. Funny how chatter zigzags, isn't it? I was about to say that from all I understand the society men of to-day are not as accomplished, even if they are as talented, as the beaux of good Queen Victoria's girlhood. Come, now, I'd be willing to bet a box of bonbons you don't know half a dozen men who can draw anything except checks."

"Oh, yes, I do!" she cried gayly. Then, meditatively, "Half a dozen, you say? Do you know, Mr. Britz, I think you win."

"You don't know as many as six?" Britz inquired, as if the fate of empires hung on his winning the wager that as yet was only a hypothesis.

"It's humiliating, isn't it?" she said naïvely. "But I don't. There are two or three, though—Teddy Lorimer and Mr. Griswold, and that queer little Frenchman, Anatole—Anatole—oh, you know whom I mean?"

"Anatole Daubigny?"

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"Yes—he draws the funniest, dearest little dogs."

"And his monkeys, Miss March. Don't forget his monkeys."

"Aren't they simply—simply ravishing?" the girl returned. "And have you seen his newest satire on the Newport set—a lot of apes and baboons and chimpanzees in evening dress sitting at the table with several men and women? 'A Family Reunion,' he calls it."

"Delightful!" said Britz with enthusiasm equaling hers. "I perceive we enjoy a good many things in common, Miss March."

She smiled. It was not every matinée girl who could interest a man who solved world-famous mysteries.

"Isn't it strange!" she said. Then the training of years recalled her to a sense of what she was doing. "I fear we've been very unconventional, Mr. Britz," she said as primly as her prettiness permitted. "But I've enjoyed our little chat very much."

"Which means I must be going," said Britz promptly, "if I'm not to spoil your enjoyment of the mid-Victorian scene. The orchestra has finished speaking its little piece."

"Yes, there goes the curtain," agreed Dorothy, rising hastily. "So glad to have met you, Mr. Britz. I hope I've been of some assistance about dear Mrs. Missioner's jewels. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, Miss March, a very good afternoon." And he was stepping quickly toward the door when her sweet voice arrested him.

"But, Mr. Britz," she cried, "there was something

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you wished to ask me—something that was to help you find the diamonds?"

"Some other time, Miss March, thank you," said Britz, smiling. "I won't detain you now. Perhaps we'll meet at another matinée soon, with a longer intermission between the acts. Delighted to have made your acquaintance, Miss March. I know you're in a hurry to get back to your seat. Forrest audiences don't like to be disturbed, you know. Good-afternoon, Miss March, and—thank you so much!"

"Good-afternoon, then, Mr. Britz," and she flitted down the aisle.

"Yes, thank you so much, Miss March!" murmured Britz as he left the theater and merged himself with the afternoon tide in Broadway.

He had cause to thank her, he believed. For, in her girlish talk, she had given him the first Missioner clew of the week—or, rather, she had extended for him a thread in the mystery that had occupied much of his thoughts from the moment when he received Logan's cable saying the paste jewels were made from sketches. For days, he had sought to learn who among Mrs. Missioner's intimates was artist enough to make such delicate draughts of the diamonds as would be required by an artificer for the manufacture of imitations. With that object, he had ascertained Dorothy's intention to go to the matinée in the Forrest and had gone to the theater to meet her under conditions not likely to interfere with such gentle questioning of her as he meant to do. His veiled interrogation of the society girl had brought forth the fact that Curtis Griswold could sketch—that the clubman was suffi-

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ciently master of his pencil to have his skill pretty generally known among his acquaintances. Lorimer and Daubigny, the other society artists she had mentioned, were not, he knew, in Mrs. Missioner's circle.

It was fortunate for Lieutenant Britz, as well as for Elinor Holcomb and Dr. Fitch, and everybody whose hopes hinged on the detective's success in solving the great Missioner diamond mystery, that long custom made him thread the traffic of the city's throbbing artery automatically, for so deeply did the sleuth ponder the possibilities of his newest information that he had several close escapes from taxicabs, private automobiles, and trolley cars as he crossed Broadway and bent his steps toward Fifth Avenue. The case had cleared a little, but his course was not much plainer than it had been when he had dropped into the theater in quest of further knowledge.

"It won't do to call Miss March as a witness," he mused, walking north in the carriage-crowded avenue, with that briskness characteristic of him when his brain was most active. "She can't absolutely prove anything." It was necessary to obtain tangible evidence of Griswold's ability as a draughtsman. How to do so without alarming the clubman was the present problem.

Britz by no means was prepared to suspect Griswold of the robbery. He realized thoroughly that Dorothy's information was all he had to indicate Griswold any more than Sands, or two or three others. He did not even know whether Miss Holcomb could draw, and it was no part of his purpose to distress the im-

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prisoned girl with questions betraying the smallest belief in the accusation against her. No; Britz, always honest with himself, could not say he suspected Griswold. His method was the opposite of Donnelly's and Carson's. Instead of suspecting everybody, as they invariably did in cases at all mysterious, he would not attach suspicion to anyone without satisfactory proof. That was the secret of his success. He was more than a detective; he was prosecutor, judge, jury, and counsel to the defense. It accounted for the fact that he rarely made a mistaken arrest, and that when he caused man or woman to be placed in the prisoner's dock, a conviction almost always followed.

"Griswold, Sands, Ali, Blodgett——"

The names presented themselves to the sleuth's mind in that order as he hastened along with no particular place as an objective—merely walking to stimulate his mental process. It always brightened Britz to pass the panorama of fashion in Fifth Avenue. It was with an almost fatherly feeling he glanced at the rich, the debonair, the gay sauntering along the sidewalks or rolling in automobiles and carriages up and down the asphalt. The safety of their wealth, sometimes of their very lives, depended on the vigilance, courage, and efficiency of himself, and of the few men like him on the police force of New York. So far as the rank and file of the Department were concerned, those carefree sons and daughters of opportunity might be at the mercy of the ablest birds of prey in the human flock. It was because Britz and his compeers worked and watched and waited so patiently, so devotedly, so

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ceaselessly, that fashion and finance, coquetry and commerce, could bask in the sunshine of metropolitan prosperity.

A dark-blue limousine standing at the corner of Forty-fourth Street caught his attention. For a moment he studied it as he slackened his pace. Then he stopped short, retraced his steps, crossed to the east side of the avenue, and, through the windows of a waiting cab, trained his gaze on Sherry's fashionable restaurant in front of which the costly automobile stood. Dimly, through the filmy lace curtains, he saw the figures of those lingering over afternoon tea, with a few early diners. He could not distinguish their faces, but something in the bearing of a woman at the first window held his glance. Then a waiter, moving silently about the table, chanced to part the curtains with his elbow, and in the momentary gap between the folds of film Britz saw clearly the blonde beauty of Mrs. Missioner, and the clear-cut features of Curtis Griswold.

Britz settled himself to wait. The cabman, whose vehicle he was using as a redoubt, looked at him inquiringly, but the detective fished out of his pocket a fat cigar with a scarlet-and-gold band, and in a moment he and the cabby were chatting amiably. The Headquarters man had not long to wait. Before the cabman had gone far into discussion of the current political crisis, the door of the restaurant across the street was swung open by a boy in many buttons, and Mrs. Missioner appeared on the threshold. She was followed closely by Griswold and, after a moment's pause to gladden the heart of the much-buttoned youth,

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by a man the watching detective was somewhat surprised to see—Bruxton Sands.

"Home," said Mrs. Missioner to her chauffeur. Britz could not hear the word, but he read it from her lips. He saw the widow step into her limousine, saw Sands and Griswold follow, saw the chauffeur throw his clutch, saw the big car glide swiftly south to wheel for a northward trip along the avenue. Before the automobile reached a turning point, the detective sprang into the cab, whispered an address to the driver, and added in a low tone:

"Double your fare for speed."

The cabman lashed his horse and, knowing his craft, threaded his way through the traffic so quickly that in a short time he was several blocks ahead of the limousine. All the way up the avenue the race continued, Britz well in the lead. At the Fifty-ninth Street entrance, the automobile swung into the park, but the cabman urged his horse straight up Fifth Avenue, and so great was the gain made by the short cut that a few blocks further north he dropped his fare in front of a mansion of imposing ugliness, touched his hat in acknowledgment of a generous fee, and was bowling eastward, halfway to Madison Avenue, when the Missioner car reappeared from the Park's Seventy-second Street gate.

"You at least can stop for a minute of gossip," said Mrs. Missioner over her shoulder as she preceded Sands and Griswold into her library. "Finance and club affairs can wait a little while, and—oh!"

She stopped in the act of throwing off her furs, and stood gazing at the middle of the room. There,

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absorbed in his task, at ease in a big chair before the crackling grate, sat Detective-Lieutenant Britz. Pad in one hand, pencil in the other, he was sketching busily.

Mrs. Missioner extended a hand behind her to silence her companions. She turned her head with a smile almost as mischievous as Dorothy could flash.

"Hush!" she whispered. She and the others watched Britz quietly as his pencil moved slowly, awkwardly over the paper. From his frequent glances at the end of the room that held the big safe, it was evident he was making a drawing of it. The laborious dragging of his pencil point proved he was not accustomed to such work—at least, so it seemed to one of the three who watched him. But the sleuth stuck to the task doggedly, and at last he bore so heavily on a corner of his sketch that the point of his pencil broke.

He laid down the pad, took out a pocket-knife, and began to sharpen the pencil. When the point was fashioned to his liking, he looked up. Then and then only did he seem to see the widow and her friends. He arose instantly and bowed to Mrs. Missioner, following that with a short nod to the men behind her.

"I told your man to let me come in, madam, because I had no time to spare," said the sleuth.

Mrs. Missioner inclined her head in assent.

"You wish to see me?" she inquired. "There is something more you wish to know?"

She was not in the mood for discussion of the detective's quest this evening. The afternoon tea in Sherry's, the short ride home, including the turn in the park, with her two most persistent admirers, this

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cozy home-coming in the dusk of a winter day, however unreasonable the weather, had made her meditative. Even as she spoke to the detective and sank dreamily into a conversation chair beside the fire, her eyes strayed from Sands to Griswold, from Griswold to Sands, with the vague look of a woman trying to decide a momentous question. Griswold, ever ready to seize the smallest advantage, promptly occupied the other end of the chair. Facing the beautiful widow, he ignored both Britz and Sands, and he threw into the glances he showered upon the woman all the caress at his command.

Britz eyed Sands sharply before replying. He gripped his chin with thumb and finger, and seemed studying the big millionaire. As a matter of fact, he was watching Griswold. His gaze, even as it appeared focused most strongly on Sands, in reality was concentrated on the clubman who shared the serpentine chair with the wealthy widow.

"I want a plan of the room," said Britz at length. "A sketch of the safe, too. One of my men was to have made draughts for me, but I had to send him out of town at short notice on another end of the case. So," and he smiled slowly at his poor workmanship, "I'm doing the best I can."

"May I see what you have drawn?" asked Mrs. Missioner pleasantly. "Oh, Mr. Britz," she laughed, holding the paper at arm's length, "I'm afraid you'll never make an artist. I hope," she added hastily, "you have no professional pride on that point?"

"None whatever," returned the detective. He liked a woman with a sense of humor, and there was some-

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thing about Mrs. Missioner that appealed to him anyway. "I told you I was merely a substitute."

Sands, towering above the widow on the hearth-rug, shot a single, indifferent look at the drawing. Griswold's glance brushed it carelessly, but the widow's interest in it was echoed by him in so far that he took the diagram from her and examined it for a few seconds. Then, with a short, harsh laugh, he half turned to Britz, alternately bending and straightening the paper in his fingers.

"Ever hear of such a thing as perspective, detective?" he asked condescendingly. Britz overlooked the air of superiority. He shook his head thoughtfully. There was inquiry in his eyes as he waited for Griswold's next words. "You'd starve to death in a studio," the clubman continued scornfully.

A crisp little laugh from Britz was the only reply. He crossed the floor and made a microscopic examination of the safe. Then he circled the room, tapping the walls again, moving pieces of furniture to look behind them, turning up corners of the rug, and gazing reflectively at the ceiling. Ali, the Indian servant, appeared noiselessly at the door, started slightly at sight of the detective, and vanished as silently. Britz pretended not to see the Hindoo, but, in his movements about the room, he paused at the threshold, and glanced quickly down the passage. There was no one in sight.

All that time, Curtis Griswold, having ripped off the sheet on which Britz had drawn the rude diagram, was sketching idly as he talked in an undertone to the widow. His words held her attention. She took no

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note of the detective's wandering, the heavy silence of Sands, the soundless appearance and disappearance of the Hindoo. Ripples of laughter revealed that she, at least, was amused by what Griswold was saying. It was when Britz, having finished his detailed examination of the room, stopped close beside him that they looked up.

"I see *you* are an artist, Mr. Griswold," remarked the sleuth, his eyes on the paper under the clubman's pencil.

Griswold was genuinely surprised. For the first time, he seemed to become aware of the shape his idle tracing on the pad had taken. In the course of his brief chat with Mrs. Missioner, he had sketched clearly, accurately, artistically, not only the room, but the great safe at its farther end—sketched them far better in those few minutes than Britz could have done in as many hours. His drawing, almost automatic, showed the subconscious skill of—to say the least—an excellent amateur.

"Why, that's so," he said, holding up the drawing indifferently. His prowess with the pencil was an old story to the widow and his rival. Griswold tossed the pad and pencil on the table, and resumed his talk with Mrs. Missioner, turning the coldest of cold shoulders toward the sleuth.

But Britz was not to be shouldered aside so easily. He addressed himself to the widow, winning her instant attention with his first query:

"Has Miss Holcomb ever told you much about her last year in Smith?" he asked.

Mrs. Missioner's eyebrows arched.

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"Nothing important enough to remember, Mr. Britz," she said, staring incredulously. The detective had already assured her warmly of his belief in Elinor's innocence. Could it be he was not going to clear the girl after all?

"You know nothing of her engagement to a Harvard undergraduate, then?" he persisted.

The widow shook her head.

"Before her father lost his fortune, I mean," said the sleuth.

"Neither before nor after, Mr. Britz," replied Mrs. Missioner, rising impatiently. "Miss Holcomb, being a beauty, naturally received a great deal of attention, but I never heard of a betrothal."

Lieutenant Britz, still standing before the hearth, moved to let Mrs. Missioner pass. The widow pushed aside the heavy hangings of a window and peered into the twilight backed by the trees in the park. Britz, having moved, took another step. Those gray eyes of his shifted so rapidly they were upon the three others almost simultaneously. So gradually, so slowly did he approach the table that no one noticed his hand upon it. Resting that hand upon the edge, he went on.

"I am sorry you are not more minutely informed concerning Miss Holcomb's university days." Slowly his fingers extended until the tips rested on the tiny pad. "In a case like this, the smallest knowledge may be of value." Slowly, ever so slowly, the fingers contracted, drawing the pad with them. "Perhaps if you make an effort, you can recall something about the—the prisoner's past, Mrs. Missioner?" The pad was in his hand. Deftly, he tore off the top sheet and

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inclosed it in his fingers. As the widow started to speak, and entirely unobserved by Griswold or Sands, the detective slipped that agile hand into his pocket. When the hand came out, it was empty.

"No," said the rich woman with more emphasis than would be expected of her large good-nature, "I can recall nothing. I am sure there is nothing to recall. You must look elsewhere if you seek to forge links in a chain of evidence against Miss Holcomb. I have told you all I know—all I could possibly know."

"That being the case," said Britz briskly, "there is nothing more to say. With your permission, I will send a draughtsman to make plans of the room and diagrams of the safe." He hesitated. "I suppose these little art gems of mine," he resumed with a dry smile, "may as well meet the fate they deserve." With a quick movement, he threw all the sheets of paper on the table and the pad as well into the heart of the fire.

"Guess I'll say 'Good-afternoon,'" and with a bow to Mrs. Missioner and the coolest of nods to the men, he left the room, the widow's detached "Good-afternoon, Mr. Britz" floating after him.

Was he mistaken, Britz asked himself as he walked quickly along the passage, or did he see a pair of eyes beneath a towering turban peer at him from the corner of a cross-corridor? He made a mental note to have the Hindoo servant watched more closely as, treating Blodgett's loftiness with exasperating indifference, he tripped down the steps of the Missioner mansion, and hurried along a path in the park. Once in the shelter

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of the shadows, the detective quickened his pace, heading south.

His hands were clasped behind him, and his thoughts kept time with his steps as he swung along under the scraping January boughs. On the whole, he was very well satisfied with his day's work. Not that he had any idea of calling a halt for the night. He allowed himself plenty of sleep, but he wasted little time on recreation. Work was his relaxation. He had an infallible specific against fatigue. When his duties became wearying, he crowded on more steam or switched to another phase of the case. A change of points was as restful to Britz as a change of air.

Grudging as he was to himself in the matter of praise, he had to admit, however, he had spent his afternoon profitably. From little Miss March he had learned that Griswold was a draughtsman, and from Griswold himself he had tangible proof of that fact in the shape of the tiny sheet of paper from the scratch pad. He took the paper out of his pocket and paused in the light zone of a roadside lamp. Yes, it was beyond question that the hand which in idleness had traced that plan of the Missioner library was able, with care, to make a precise drawing of the Missioner diamonds—even of the great Maharanee. On that count, Griswold was convicted by his own hand.

But Britz, as he resumed his swinging stride, did not delude himself with the idea he had a clear case against the clubman. All he had was evidence that Griswold could have made the sketches by means of which the Missioner jewels were duplicated without the necklace itself as a model. He was not even pre-

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pared to suspect the widow's admirer. He gave full weight to the lack of a motive as the case then stood, to the improbability that a man who sought to marry Mrs. Missioner would risk his chances by stealing gems worth even half a million, when by wedding her he might gain practical control of all her millions. Moreover, it was by no means certain that Griswold had found opportunity to substitute the paste necklace for the original. He was not satisfied with his mental picture of the moment when Griswold fastened the necklace about the widow's neck. It seemed hardly possible that the clubman, with Sands and Miss Holcomb in the room, could achieve the substitution undetected.

But the truth remained that Griswold's skill with a pencil sufficed for the sketches, and it was a clew Britz recognized as important. It was part of his policy to neglect nothing that so much as had room for the germ of revelation. All the time his upper mind was weighing and sifting the case as a whole, his under consciousness was busy with the facts pertaining specifically to Griswold's possible part in the mystery. It was an exceptional dual process, but Britz had that kind of a mind. It enabled him to proceed smoothly and steadily with the main facts of a case and, simultaneously, to weed out the unimportant points of his information.

Of Elinor's innocence, Lieutenant Britz still had no tiniest doubt. The more insistently new disclosures tended to connect her with the disappearance of the Maharanee diamond, and the other stones of Mrs. Missioner's necklace, the more resolutely he clung to

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his deduction that her course from first to last had been that of one guiltless of crime. He maintained the judicial attitude of his mind toward the successive discoveries he made, but he did not see how the sternest jurist could listen with patience to the strongest of briefs against such an open nature as Elinor Holcomb's. Donnelly's finding the genuine diamond in her room meant nothing, save that the real thief had left the jewel there by accident or design. To his mind, the exact whereabouts of the stone argued a deliberate attempt had been made to destroy the girl. It remained to be ascertained whether that attempt was born of enmity, or was due simply to a desire to throw off suspicion. He realized perfectly the possibility that it sprang from a combination of the two motives.

Who, then, was most likely to have placed the diamond in the secretary's room? Who could have most to gain by causing her arrest and conviction? Was it the purpose of the criminal to have the girl suspected only long enough for him to cover his trail permanently, or did he desire that she be found guilty and condemned to penal servitude? If the latter plan was formed, would the thief content himself with the almost overpowering circumstantial evidence already accumulated against Elinor, or would he venture to throw further suspicion upon her? And if the criminal contemplated pursuing the prisoner beyond the threshold of the Tombs, would he operate through the stupidity of Donnelly and Carson, or would he bend his energies on the District Attorney? Britz considered briefly the chance that the thief would be bold

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enough to appear as a witness for the prosecution, then dismissed it as too improbable to affect the present development of the case.

The detective flung himself on a bench and pondered the day's developments until the first ting of his Jurgensen, the gift of a grateful captain of industry, told him it was long past his dinner hour. Then he arose, lighted a cigar, broke the match meditatively into a dozen bits, and once more took up his southward stride. On two points he had made up his mind. The first was that, since Griswold's delicately manipulated crayon had drawn him far enough into the case to be a possible factor, he would have the clubman trailed more thoroughly than had been done thus far—he would set Merritt, tireless tracker, at Griswold's heels. The lieutenant's second decision came from that real or fancied glimpse of the turbaned head flicking around the corner of the passage. He would make a little visit to the home of the mysterious Oriental who had called Mrs. Missioner's attention to the falsity of the supposed Maharanee diamond she wore in the opera box, and—he would *not* go as Britz, of Headquarters.

He stopped under the low-hanging bough of a great oak tree to get a better light. As he was about to strike a match, his use for that particular cigar suddenly ceased, for, gripping, clinging, strangling, something soft and silky was drawn tightly about his neck, his elbows were jammed against his sides, his knees were squeezed together so closely he could not take a step, and in another minute, he found himself bound,

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gagged, helpless, with three men sitting on him, bowling rapidly in a cab along the park drive in a direction which, owing to the swirling excitement of the last sixty seconds, he could not ascertain. All he knew was that he was a captive; that he had been seized in a way unusual to city highwaymen, and that for the present, a struggle for release would be simply a useless—perhaps worse than useless—expenditure of his strength.

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CHAPTER XI

A WILD RIDE

ONCE he realized the futility of resistance, Britz busied himself with efforts to get a line on his direction. He was in an ordinary brougham, drawn by a pair of high-stepping horses. That much he could tell from the dimensions of the vehicle, and the peculiar ping of the hoofs on the hard-rolled park drive. He knew, too, the animals were traveling at a brisk pace. Despite its delicately adjusted springs, the carriage lurched violently at times, the weight of the three men who held him being thrown on the rear seat so suddenly as to threaten disruption of the superstructure. He was lying on the floor, but on a pile of rugs. The silk scarf with which he had been fastened had been loosed from his neck only to be drawn tightly about his mouth. A smaller strip of silk, rolled into a ball, had been thrust between his teeth, gagging him beyond his power to utter a cry. His wrists and ankles were bound with similar scarves. He was as helpless as if in the electric chair. His life, it might be, depended on his self-control and resourcefulness.

The carriage sped on, its swaying increasing as the driver evidently urged his horses to a faster pace. Britz speculated on the possibility of an arrest by a park policeman for violation of the speed law. A moment's reflection told him it was improbable. Unless the horses were running away, or the coachman was

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lashing them vindictively, no ordinary bluecoat was likely to stop them. Automobiles had educated the police to a new speed standard. What a dozen years before would have caught the instant attention of a mounted policeman, now, by contrast, would seem an ordinary gait. If Britz could smash a pane in a door of the brougham with a timely kick, he would attract notice from a policeman—provided there chanced to be one in sight. What would happen if he broke the glass uselessly the detective was confident would be disagreeable, if not disastrous. Besides, his feet were tied pretty tightly. He was not at all sure he could work them out of their bonds.

In the faint light that flashed from time to time through the windows of the brougham as it whirled past park lamps, Britz saw that all three of his captors were dark of feature and lithe of form. He strained his gaze to fix their faces in his memory, but he knew as he did it the outlines he visualized were too hazy to make future recognition certain. One moment he was convinced there was something foreign in the appearance of the men. The next, he was less certain they were not American. A hawkish sharpness of profile, however, inclined him more strongly to the former belief. He had seen recently, he thought, a face that in such a light would resemble those bending above him. As he was striving to recall it, and the circumstances surrounding it, a fourth scarf was passed about his eyes and knotted behind his head. The silken strip was light in texture, but folded so many times that he could not see the dimmest glimmer of light.

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That act assured the lieutenant that he was approaching the climax of his adventure. He had been blindfolded, he had no smallest doubt, because his captors were about to take him out of the carriage, and did not wish him to see where he was going. Their precaution, also, was directed against his study of their faces. Britz drew quick comfort from that reflection. If the three intended to kill him, they would not care how closely he scanned their features. That they wished to make it impossible for him to recognize them indicated it was their design soon or late to set him free. No sooner was that conviction firmly in his mind than he resolved to make the most of his captivity. It must be important to him as it was to the strangers. That it bore in greater or less degree on the Missioner mystery he hardly questioned.

"Every little helps," thought Britz, twisting to make himself as comfortable as possible. "I may be close to something worth while." That did not sway him from his determination to make one bold strike for liberty at the first chance. Profitable though his present situation might prove in a sense, it could not be as valuable as freedom to follow the case in his own way. Something told him it was urgent that he have his little chat with the Oriental of the opera box. The more he thought about that mysterious individual, and the part played by the Indian in the discovery of the false Maharanee, the more eager he became to talk with him about things in general, and diamonds in particular. Britz was not given to gossip, but somehow he felt the Oriental was a brilliant conversationalist, and that anything the Easterner might say would

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be interesting. He did not neglect to make allowance for the possibility that what the Hindoo might not say would interest him still more.

"It's a small world," said Britz to himself. "Who knows?"

A slight jolt, and three more in swift succession, told the detective the carriage had turned out of the park and was crossing Central Park West. That was certain because there were no car lines in Fifth Avenue nor in 110th Street, and in Fifty-ninth Street the stretch of asphalt between the macadam of the drive and the crosstown tracks was much wider than the brougham had crossed before the first of the jolts. By which gate the brougham had made its exit was another question. All the cross streets leading to park entrances were asphalted, and most of them were wide. The only way he could ascertain how far uptown he was lay in counting the blocks and listening for further aural indications. The trouble was he could not hear very well. The scarf that gagged him also covered his ears. He craned his neck gently, first to one side, then to the other, until he worked one ear free. Fortunately, it was the ear next the rugs. He rubbed his head patiently against the soft fabrics until he made a space through which he could press his ear to the floor. It was a cold application, but it enabled the sleuth to hear more clearly. The carriage floor served as a sounding board that microphoned the smallest noises with expansive emphasis. He could hear, amid all the thudding of the horses' hoofs, the slight suction every time a crack in one of the rubber tires left the asphalt.

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Britz focused his forces on the task of ascertaining his whereabouts and direction. One, two, three blocks the brougham sped westward. There had been no swerve in the course since the parting from the park. Britz knew he was headed for the Hudson. Had not his blindfolding convinced him his life was not in peril, he might have thought his captors were hurrying him to the river to make an end of him. He continued counting the blocks until, wheeling sharply to the right, the horses headed north, and a change in the sound of their hoofs betrayed that they had left the asphalt and were on the macadam again.

"The Drive!" Britz told himself with a slight glow of satisfaction. The distance traveled from the park, the change of direction, and the altered pounding of the highsteppers' hoofs could mean but one thing: the vehicle was bowling along the beautiful Riverside concourse New Yorkers have come to appreciate only in recent years.

It was at that point Britz made his first mistake of the trip. The latch of the left door was jarred loose by an uneven crossing, and the detective felt the door give slightly against his shoulder. He sensed in an eyeflash the door had not swung open. Probably an end of the rug had caught under it sufficiently to hold it shut. But it undoubtedly was unfastened, and that evidently without the knowledge of his captors. Had any of the three noticed the unlatching of the door, he would have drawn it close immediately. There was momentary danger of that. There was not a moment to spare. Britz had little time for thought. With a powerful contortion of his wiry

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frame, he threw off the men above him long enough to fling himself against the door.

Britz reckoned on the likelihood that his fall from the carriage would be seen by a patrolman—at any rate, that his attempt at escape would cause a commotion sure to result in police interference. He did not expect to get away unaided; he was bound too securely for that. It was more than possible bad bruises, if not broken bones, would be among the consequences. He was willing to take that chance rather than to hazard indefinite captivity with the great Missioner diamond mystery unsolved. In the very moment of hurling himself against the door, nothing was stronger in his mind than a yearning to see the Swami. He felt he positively must chat with that mysterious personage about diamonds and steel safes, and other things. Until he made the Oriental's acquaintance, his social development would be stunted.

The detective omitted from his reckoning the astuteness and readiness of his captors. He thought the surprise hinging on his desperate attempt at escape would be of sufficient duration to let him roll to the road. He was shocked mentally as well as physically, therefore, when his fall was stopped with a jerk, and the back of his head struck with cruel force against the carriage step. Just for a second's flight, reinforced steel and rubber though he was, he lost consciousness. When his senses returned, he was in the same position —head dangling, shoulders resting against the rods of the step, back bent painfully over the steel-shod threshold of the carriage floor, legs inside, gripped in a hold not all his struggles could break. His ankles

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still were bound. So, for that matter, were his wrists, with his hands behind him. The scarf bandaging his eyes had slipped partly to his forehead, so that he could see a little; but, in his upside-down position, he could not see the sidewalk; only the treetops and the dusk line of the Palisades were in his line of vision. The gag was fixed as firmly as ever. He tried to call for help, but the cry was smothered in his throat.

Then began as strange a struggle as any in which Britz had engaged in all his exciting career. The men in the cab strove to pull him inside; he battled against their efforts. Bound though his hands were, his fingers were twined tightly about the step rods. He had a grip on the rods as powerful as that with which one of his captors held his ankles. The crossing of his hands to bind his wrists had made his hold only the firmer. All the leverage of each sinewy wrist strengthened the other. The rods were so small they hurt his hands, but unless they broke his grip could not be loosened. Britz clutched them with an iron resolve not to be drawn into the brougham again. Safe though his life might have been at the outset, he was not certain it would be secure after his daring defiance of the odds against him. He still knew nothing of his captors. Even their nationality was problematical, to say nothing of their purpose. He felt that his grip on the rods might be his last hold on existence—and Britz, in any stage of his career, would have said he was tolerably satisfied with life, thank you!

"This," said Britz to his inner consciousness, with

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a touch of the grim humor his colleagues often found disconcerting, "is hill-climbing under difficulties." For the coachman, in spite of—perhaps because of—the silent struggle going on furiously at the door of the cab, had whipped his horses to a gallop, and was speeding them up a slope. Over the edge of the scarf that had slipped from his eyes, Britz got a glimpse of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. He knew exactly where he was then. Next moment his eyes fastened themselves on the faces in the carriage, and he tried with all his might to make out the dark features of the three in the gloom of the cab; but their features still were shadowy. He would not have liked to have to pick them out of a line in a police station. It was a point of honor with the lieutenant always to be sure of his man before making an identification. In part, that accounted for the failure of almost every defendant in any of his cases to establish an alibi.

Lean hands stretched forth from the dark interior and caught him about the middle. Other hands seized his legs, while the pair clutching his ankle tightened their grasp, but he only twined his fingers the more firmly around their slight circumference. By now the carriage was rolling and pitching like a seagoing tug. Had he not been held so stoutly by the six lean hands above, and his own iron clutch below, the motion might have swung his head against the step again with force to crack it in a dozen places. The very fury of the battle made for his safety.

The horses struck a slope that took them out of the Drive. Britz guessed they could not go far with-

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out encountering a policeman. If they did not meet a mounted patrolman or a bicycle bluecoat in the avenue, it was almost certain they would strike an ordinary policeman in one of the by-streets. Britz chewed the gag savagely in the hope of freeing his voice. Finding the bandage too tight to force it out of his mouth, he tried to swallow the silken ball inside his teeth. Gulp as he might, his reversed position distressed him so he could not get the ball behind his tongue. And, owing to the elusive texture of the gag, not all the biting and grinding of his strong teeth could shred it.

Abrupt as its beginning was the end of the struggle. Britz, his eyes still boring into the inner murk, saw one of the long, lean hands slip forth again. This time, the hand clutched something between thumb and forefinger. The arm extended until the hand was close to the detective's wrists. Suddenly, the sleuth felt a frightful burning pain in the back of his hand. The agony was duplicated in the knuckles of the other. Strive though he did with all his grit and strength to retain his grip, his fingers opened against his will, the tendons contracted by the biting agony, and Britz knew a powerful acid had been sprinkled on his hands. He could not close them again in the first moment of his torment, and before his muscles could recover from the shock, the sway of the brougham swung him clear of the rods. Then, by the united strength of the three inside, he was jerked upward, and dragged with a single tug into the carriage. The door was slammed, and the coachman brought his horses back to their high-stepping trot. Suddenly they slowed to a walk.

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"What's wrong here?" asked a voice at the window.

"Hallo, Rafferty," said the driver with the easy familiarity of a nighthawk toward the rank and file of the force. "Just a bunch of drunks I'm taking to their little white cots," he added in an undertone.

A patrolman pressed his face against the pane and looked inside. Already, the three dark, slender men who had kidnapped the detective were lolling and nodding in a way suggestive of safe but satisfied intoxication. Britz, trussed more securely than ever, was under their feet, well out of the policeman's range.

"They're sure a fine lot of rummies!" exclaimed the bluecoat to his friend the coachman. "The sooner they hit the hay, the better. On your way!" And, the driver flicking his horses in a leisurely way, the brougham resumed its journey with Detective-Lieutent Britz raging in enforced silence among the silk rugs on its floor.

It was just about then that Britz made his second mistake. He breathed too deeply. True, he was blown sadly by the desperate struggle as he hung headdown from the vehicle and his lungs had almost stoppped working when he was jerked so violently back into the carriage. The air near the floor was cool and refreshing. No ordinary man would have hesitated to renew his strength by drawing it as far down into his lungs as the cramped position would permit; but Britz himself, in cooler moments, would have observed sagely that air itself was not always an unmixed blessing. He would have told inquiring minds

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that, under suspicious circumstances, it should be taken with caution and, if possible, should be well shaken before taken. In this instance, the air Britz breathed was mixed with a subtle something that gradually stole his senses and left him, though healthily alive, an inert heap under the feet of his captors.

So potent, so gentle was the action of that strange something that the stoppage of the carriage, the lifting from its floor of the inanimate detective, the carrying of his limp form up darkened stairs in dead silence to a room at the remote end of a suite at the top of the building, and that which happened to the Headquarters man as, sodden with the subtle soporific, he remained at the mercy of the strangers three, were things Britz for many a long day could only guess. So groping was his conjecture through those weary days of uncertainty that whenever he recalled the experience, it was with a certain gliding movement of the jaws that boded ill for the three dark, slim men if ever he should be able to enfold them in the meshes of the law as they had wrapped him in their scarves.

No, Britz was not vindictive, but he was—human.

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CHAPTER XII

THE EMPTY APARTMENT

When Britz groped his way out of the soundest sleep he had known in many a year, it was in absolute ignorance of his whereabouts. One cause of that unpleasant fact was the inky darkness that covered him like a pall. Even if he had been able to put his hand before his face, he could not have glimpsed its sketchiest outline. The darkness wrapped him so closely it seemed to clasp him in a deadly embrace. He felt like the Inquisition victim in the steadily contracting room. The darkness pressed upon him. With the remorseless insistence of some murky monster of the deep, it forced its way into his eyes, his ears, his mouth. It made its way between his teeth and into his throat until he fancied he could taste it—until he almost suffocated. He gasped desperately several times before he returned to anything like his normal breathing.

Mingled with the peculiar taste of the smothering dark was a faint odor unlike anything in the Headquarters man's experience. Britz, in the course of his long career, had worked on cases in which subtle chemical agents were important factors. He had solved one mystery hinging on murderous use of poisonous perfumes from Persia and Asiatic Turkey, and in another instance duty had compelled him to study the fatal narcotics of South America. This ghostly scent

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that hovered about him was unlike any of those drugs or essences. Neither did it suggest any of the anesthetics that are the servants of surgery. So delicate was it that after the first whiff it was only by an effort the detective could make his doubting senses record its presence. Yet it had a persistence all its own, and when he tried to persuade himself his sensory nerves had played a trick upon him, it wreathed into his nostrils with unmistakable individuality.

Britz needed no effort to rise to tell him he still was bound hand and foot, and in the first instant of his full awakening he realized the silken gag still held his speech in thrall. So unlike all other waking was his return to consciousness that just for a moment he fancied his thoughts were spoken aloud. It was when he tried to call to whoever might be within earshot that the complete awakening came upon him and with it the knowledge he could not make himself heard more than a few feet off. He bit the ball of silk savagely, and strained his tongue until the roots ached in endeavors to force the gag out of his mouth. As well might he, helpless as to hands and feet as he was, have tried to shake off a gorilla's grip at his throat. Yet the seeming hopelessness of his plight did not disturb him greatly. He had been in worse places. It was a question of patience, perseverance, and pluck, and when it came to virile qualities the famous Central Office man was abundantly and alliteratively equipped.

"This," said the sleuth to himself, for want of a more appreciative auditor, "is a proposition that calls for both thought and action. It is both a theoretical and practical pickle. Much time might be spent in

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