The OWL TAXI

HULBERT FOOTNER

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

WILLIAM CHARVAT
American Fiction Collection
The Ohio State University Libraries

Digitized by Google
Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

THE OWL TAXI

HULBERT FOOTNER

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

THE OWL TAXI

BY

HULBERT FOOTNER

AUTHOR OF "THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE," "THIEVES' WIT,"
"THE SEALED VALLEY," ETC.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COPYRIGHT, 1921,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

TO

G. M. F.

WHO FILLED THE TANK THREE TIMES A DAY AND KEPT THE CHILDREN MODERATELY QUIET.

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Transfer	11
II	Greg's First Fare	25
III	Greg's Second Fare	37
IV	In the House on Ninth Street	56
V	The Taxi Yard	74
VI	Greg's Rival	86
VII	The Undertaker	97
VIII	The Hold-up	110
IX	The Flivver as a Post-Office	122
X	Amy's Story	133
XI	The Ride Home	161
XII	What the Little Black Book Contained	168
XIII	De Socotra Hires T7011 Again	187
XIV	Through the Streets	205
XV	Nina	218
XVI	The "Psychopathic Sanitarium"	228
XVII	The Young Man with the Little Black Moustache	239
XVIII	Blossom's Report	251

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX	The Abduction	258
XX	Exit Senor Saunders	270
XXI	Up-stairs and Down	280
XXII	Nemesis	296
XXIII	Conclusion	305

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

THE OWL TAXI

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

THE OWL TAXI

CHAPTER I

THE TRANSFER

AT eleven o'clock of a moist night in December, Gregory Parr was making his way far westward on Twenty-third Street. At his right hand stretched that famous old row of dignified dwellings with pilasters and little front yards, and ahead of him was Tenth Avenue, the stronghold of the Irish. The wet pavements glistened under the street lamps, and the smell of influenza was in the air. The street was deserted except for a cross-town car at long intervals, hurling itself blithely through the night on a flat wheel.

Greg was on his way to the Brevard Line pier at the foot of the street to take passage on the great *Savoia,* premier steamship of her day and on this particular trip the "Christmas ship." The *Savoia* ran as true to the hour as a railway train, and was scheduled to leave at one A. M. in order to make the best rail connections. There was no reason why Greg should have walked to the pier except that at the last moment his heart was loath to leave little old New York, and even the least interesting of her streets called to him.

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

As he walked he communed with himself somewhat after this fashion: "Lord! I didn't know the old burg meant so much to me till I made up my mind to leave it! After all maybe I'm a fool to pull up stakes here. I know the folks on this side; their ways are my ways. I speak New York. Perhaps in London I'll be like a fish in the grass." But his baggage was on the pier and he had paid a deposit on his ticket. It never occurred to him that he could still change his mind. On such trifles do the weightiest human decisions turn!

He crossed Tenth Avenue and passed through the long block beyond with its escarpments of dark factories on either hand. At Eleventh Avenue the street opened into a plaza with the ferry houses facing him from the other side, and a long line of steamship piers stretching south, of which the Brevard pier was the nearest. Over the pier sheds Greg saw the masthead light of the *Savoia* gleaming brightly and heard the soft murmur of escaping steam. On the corner was a little waterfront hotel, the Brevard House, with inviting brilliantly lighted bar. Greg was irresistibly drawn to enter. "One last drink to my own town," he said to himself.

Within, the bar was absolutely typical, and therefore dear to Greg. There was the very red and well-wiped mahogany counter, finished with a round cornice to lean the elbows on, and with a brass rail below for feet. Behind the counter the usual elaborate structure of mahogany and plate glass reared itself to the ceiling, a super-mantel-piece as it were, while between counter and mirrors moved a pink-cheeked young man, in command, one might say, of the battalion of bottles behind

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

him. Bar-tenders used to be mustachioed, but now they are smooth and pink-cheeked.

To Greg's disappointment he found the place almost empty; he desired company; he longed to hear the racy speech of the Manhattan pavements before he finally shook their dust from his feet. There were two travelers, but they, having downed their drinks, were preparing to leave; across the room sitting at a table was a human derelict, without which no picture of a bar-room would be complete—but he was sleeping under his hat like a candle under its extinguisher. The only other customer present was a taxi-driver who was making friendly overtures to the bar-tender. For some reason the pink-cheeked one scorned him. These instinctive antipathies are impossible to explain; the bar-tender was perfectly willing to hob-nob with the two travelers—invited to drink with them he took a swig out of his private stock of cold tea with gusto and charged them fifteen cents for the privilege; but as for the poor taxi-driver, well, they did not belong to the same herd, that was all.

Rebuffed in this direction the driver turned eagerly to the latest comer, Greg. There was something almost pathetic in his anxiety to make friends. Every soul has those moments of desperate lonesomeness. Greg was not at all backward in responding. The driver was a spare little man in an overcoat sizes too big for him and almost reaching the ground. Greg was reminded of an old illustration of the Artful Dodger. He had a sharp, humorous, apelike face, much seamed, and in his eyes was a light at once childlike, impudent and deprecating. Taxi-drivers, that is to say "owl-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

drivers" like this one, wear no uniform, but they are unmistakable. It may be their overcoats which are full of character. This one was incredibly worn and shapeless. With it went a round cloth cap with a flap let down behind to protect the wearer's ears and neck.

"Say fella," said this individual with engaging impudence; "drink with me, will yeh, if it's not a libetty?"

"Sure," said Greg, "if you'll have another with me after."

"What are you drinking?"

"Rye high-ball."

"Well I don't gen'ally dilute my liquor but just to be high-toned—say Jack! Two rye high-balls."

The refreshment was duly served. Greg noticed that as the taxi-driver lifted his glass his hand trembled, yet he was a young and healthy-looking man. Greg wondered momentarily if he had a secret agitation, and then forgot about it.

They exchanged opinions upon the quality of the whiskey and the rottenness of the weather outside. These and other pleasant conventionalities, not to speak of two high-balls apiece, opened the way for more personal communications. They decided they liked each other.

"I'm Hickey Meech," said the driver. "Christened Robert at birth, but Hickey because I come from the country, though that's fifteen years ago, and I'm like to die before I see it again."

"I shan't tell you my name," said Greg. "Meaning no offense, you understand; but it's been in the papers lately, and I want it to be forgotten."

"Sure that's all right," said Hickey. "What's in a

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

man's label anyhow; 'taint guaranteed by no poor feud law." He glanced sideways at Greg's good clothes. "You're a bit off your regular beat to-night, ain't you?"

"I'm sailing on the *Savoia*."

"The Hell you say! Well some guys has all the luck!"

Greg laughed shortly. He experienced a sudden desire to talk about himself; to put his case before a disinterested party who did not know him, and whom he would never see again; it would help him to grasp his own situation, he felt. During the last difficult weeks he had not talked to any one.

"I don't know as anybody would call me lucky," he said. "I've lately had a good crack over the head. Maybe it was good for my character, but it hurt just the same."

"Oh, we all get those," the other replied sententiously.

"My Dad died when I was a kid," Greg went on. "He left us well-fixed as things go. The property was all in the hands of his partner as trustee. Well, since then I've been accustomed to sucking my silver spoon, as you might say; went to the most expensive schools and college, and didn't learn much except how to drive a racing car. I *can* drive a car, but that's not going to lay up any bonds in a safe deposit vault.

"Well, it's an old story, but, believe me, when it happens to yourself it has all the effect, if not the charm, of novelty! A month ago our trustee died and left his affairs in a snarl. Our property has just vamosed; he didn't steal it, you understand; it just naturally melted in his hot hands.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"I managed to save enough out of the wreck—it was my first experience of business and I don't like it—to keep the girls from actual want, but there wasn't a penny left for me. Of course I was well known in certain circles and there were plenty of men who would have given me a job out of charity; but I wasn't going to be a poor relation in the crowd where I had once kept my end up with the best. I was pried loose from my old foundations and I wanted an entirely fresh start. So I decided to try my luck in London. No small town stuff for me. It seemed like a good idea when it came to me but now—I don't know——"

The driver was all sympathy. "What's the matter? Leaving somebody behind you?"

"No," said Greg smiling; "only the old town. I didn't know it had such a hold on me!"

"Every dog loves its own lamp-posts," said Hickey. "It'll do you good to see the world. Wish to God I had the chance! And you'll make good. Even though you've lost your coin you've got the habit of class. Nobody can't take that from you. And people just naturally give up to a classy guy."

"I don't quite get you," said Greg.

"You've got style," said the taxi-driver. "Anybody could see you were accustomed to traveling with top-notchers."

"Nothing in it," said Greg. "My 'style' as you call it only gets in my way now that I've nothing to keep it up on. I'd do better if I could begin life over on a section gang."

"Don't you fool yourself," retorted the taxi-driver. "That's the way a swell always talks. 'Gee!' says he,

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

'if I was on'y a horny handed ton of soil I could make something of myself!' It reads well in a book. But take it from me, kid, the ditch-digger is the scratch man in the race of life; he's got twict as far to run. Why any ordinary fella born in a soft bed can keep it, but it takes one o' these here now Napoleons to win one. Look at me now. I may as well say I ain't no Napoleon and here I am. I was born to sweat, and I'm still sweating. Of course I got my vices. I shoot craps; that helps keep me poor. But it's the habit of being poor that's so hard to break. If I could only once get ahead far enough to buy me a real swell outfit nothing could stop me."

"You're dead wrong," said Greg. "There's not so much in appearances as people like to think. Why, the richest man I know goes around looking like a rag-picker. And there's many a fancy vest covers an empty stomach. A workman with a good trade is a king alongside one of those poor devils that clings to the edge of what is called Society."

"Well, I'd like to try a little clinging."

"There's nothing like honest work."

"For others. Anybody can have my share. I wisht I had your chances, that's all."

"I'd give my 'chances' as you call them quick enough for a trade."

Hickey favored Greg with a queer look. "Do you mean that?"

"Sure I mean it."

There was a silence of a moment or two while Hickey dipped his forefinger in a wet spot and drew

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

designs on the mahogany. At last he asked very offhand:

"Would you call driving a taxi a trade?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Well, why don't you try that? You said you could drive."

"Well, in London I don't suppose I could compete with the native article."

"I mean here."

"I'm going to London, I told you."

"But you don't have to go. According to yourself it's just a notion that you're sorry you took already."

"What are you getting at?"

"I'm just trying you out to see if you meant anything by your ideas. Are you willing to take a sporting chance?"

"Try me."

Once more Hickey hesitated, and then the proposal came with a rush. "Swap with me. I'll give you my flivver outside for three hundred and those clothes you're wearing. She's mine free and clear. Paid the final installment last week. She's not new, you may say, but all the better. She's well suppled up. And a bargain at the price. Got an elegant meter on her. Runs fast for fares and slow for the inspector. I'll let you try her out of course before you pay the money."

Greg drew a long breath and stared at the other with widening eyes. His life had come to the parting of the ways, and he was free to choose any direction. This offer presented fascinating possibilities. Like most young men Greg fancied—it would be hard to say why—that the life of a cab-driver must be full of romance.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"You wouldn't have to leave the old town then," Hickey went on craftily. "Believe me, you'd begin to see it for the first time. Inside *and* out!"

Greg needed little persuasion. His own imagination pictured the adventure in more glowing colors than the taxi-driver had at command. It was something else made him hesitate.

"Sorry," he said regretfully. "I haven't but two hundred in the world." An idea occurred to him, and his face cleared. "But I've plenty more clothes like these. They're in trunks and bags on the pier yonder. The outfit must be worth more than a hundred even at second-hand clothes prices. I'll give you the claim checks. I'll throw in the deposit receipt too, if you want to travel."

"I'll take you," said Hickey with suspicious promptitude; but Greg on his part was too eager to be warned by it. "I'll take a flyer among the English swells. If I make any breaks over there, they'll think it's just because I'm a Yank."

"Well, let's take a look at the flivver," said Greg. "I suppose she'll run."

"Run!" cried Hickey. "She can run like Duffy in the quarter mile! Before we go out let me show you my papers is all right." He exhibited cards for his car license and operator's license.

"You said your name was Meech," objected Greg. "These are made out to Elmer Fishback."

"Oh, a coupla fellas owned the boat since Fishback," said Hickey. "The cards always goes with the car. You'll have to be Fishback when the inspector comes round. Here's my receipts for the payments."

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

These were signed by one Bessie Bickle.

"She financed the deal," explained Hickey. "She keeps a little yard over on the East side, and I rent space from her. You might do worse than keep on with her. Bessie's on the level. It's Gibbon Street south of Houston. Jumping-off place on the East side. Better put it down."

"Gibbon Street; I'll remember it by the Decline and Fall," said Greg.

Paying their shot they went out by the front door. The taxi rested easily by the curb, like an old horse asleep. She had a slight list to starboard—"From the bloated rich climbing aboard that side," explained Hickey. Her absurd little engine hood was like a nose without character, and the smoky lamps at either side like bleary eyes. To complete the likeness to a head, the top projected over the windshield like the visor of a cap. Greg was strongly reminded of the human derelict inside the bar and his face fell. Romance receded into the background.

Hickey watching him close made haste to remove the bad impression. "Hell! Nobody expects looks in a flivver. Wait till you feel her move under you! She's a landaulet, see? The top lets down in fine weather. Take the wheel! Take the wheel! I'll crank her."

Greg remembered afterward that during this preliminary inspection, Hickey stood squarely in front of the door of the cab, thus blocking any view of the interior. But it never occurred to him to look inside. He took the driver's seat, and Hickey cranked her. They started.

They had not gone a hundred feet before Greg dis-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

covered, though Hickey kept up a running fire of praise to drown the myriad voices of the flivver, that her piston rings were worn and her transmission loose. She was indeed well suppled, a little too supple in fact. There were other rattles, squeaks and knocks that he could not at the moment locate. Nevertheless she ran; she ran indeed with the noisy enthusiasm characteristic of her kind. There is no false delicacy about a flivver. Greg never hesitated. He was a natural born mechanic, and the engine of a flivver held no terrors for him.

When, having completed the circuit of the long block, they drew up before the Brevard House again, Hickey said anxiously: "Well?"

"It's a go," said Greg curtly.

A little sigh escaped the other. "Where'll we change?"

"In the car," said Greg.

"Ain't room enough," hastily objected Hickey. "If we're going to change we can't dress one at a time or the other would have to stop outside naked."

"Well, I suppose we could get a room in this hotel."

"And let Nosey the bar-tender in on our business? No, sir! I tell you. Let's go down behind the hogsheads."

Below, along the deserted waterfront, were great piles of heavy freight which had overflowed from the pier-sheds. Here there were many secluded nooks suitable for their purpose. Letting the taxi stand in the roadway outside, the change of their outer clothing was soon effected. Greg handed over money, baggage

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

checks and receipt for the deposit money; receiving in return the license cards and bill of sale.

"Don't forget you're Elmer Fishback to the inspectors," said Hickey.

In the light of an electric lamp overhead he strutted up and down the aisle between the rows of hogsheads, swinging Greg's stick and "getting the feel of his clothes" he said. They were several sizes too big for him by the way, but he seemed not to be aware of that.

"Well, come on," said Greg. "Hop in, and I'll drive you up to the *Savoia* in style."

His hand instinctively went to the door handle as he spoke. Hickey hastily pushed it aside. "Oh Hell, I'll ride on the front seat with you," he said. "I ain't proud."

Greg ran her back to the Brevard Line pier. Many cabs were arriving now bringing luxurious parties direct from the theaters and restaurants. Greg took his place in the slow-moving line and in due course reached the first cabin gangway. Hickey hopped off, and hooking the stick over his arm, squared his meager shoulders with a swagger.

"Well ta-ta, old chap," he said in a throaty voice; "I'll write you from dear old Lunnon."

"By-by," said Greg, biting his lip. He was sorry he had to miss the comedy that would be played out on the *Savoia's* promenade deck during the next five days.

The cabs pressing behind forced Greg to move on. Turning on the pier, he hastened away back to the town. As he went he endeavored to take stock of his sensations, but without much success; they were rather

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

confused. Here he was a taxi-driver on his own cab, looking for a fare, he told himself, but without quite believing it. The change had been too sudden. He couldn't quite rid himself of the feeling that he would wake up presently. He didn't feel like a taxi-driver inside. The whole thing seemed a bit unreal. He had an absurd feeling that the dark-windowed houses were racing past waving their stoops at him, while he sat still in the middle of the road.

Little by little he began to believe in what had happened. For one thing the flivver made a most convincing racket. Yes, there could be no doubt of it! Here he was starting on the bottom rung of the ladder just as he had always told himself he wished to do. Well, time would show how far he could climb. Meanwhile there ought to be fun in it, rich fun! Many a dollar had Greg spent in his day on the prowling cabs of night! Here's where he would get some of it back. He knew the very air, the confidential, everything-goes-between-good-fellows air with which he must touch his cap and say: "Cab, sir?"

The old flivver rattled and bumped companionably across town. Greg was making for the White Light district, of course, where fares were to be picked up after midnight. At Madison Square he turned north on the Avenue. With its disappearing perspective of twin lights in a double row reflected from the wet pavement it was like a Venetian canal at carnival time, but the old taxi was a noisy gondola.

Greg had gone no farther than Twenty-sixth Street when he was hailed from the sidewalk by two men in evening dress, who had come perhaps from the club

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

down the street. Greg pulled up beside the curb and leaned out to open the door as he had always seen the chauffeurs do.

"Where to, sir?"

"The Chronos Club."

One of the men made to get in and staggered back with a queer throaty gasp: "Good God, what's this!"

Greg hastily slipped out of his seat. "What's the matter?"

"A dead body!" the man gasped, and instinctively looked around for a policeman.

On the floor of the cab before them lay a bulky body queerly huddled on top of an old valise. When the door had been opened the feet pushed out uncompromisingly. The light of a street lamp fell full on the upturned, yellow, dreadfully quiet face.

Greg's mind after an instant's stand of horror worked like lightning. He shut the door pushing the feet in with it.

"Oh, he's only soused," he said carelessly. "I didn't know his friend had left him behind. I'll have to take him to the station house now."

Springing back into the driver's seat he opened her up wide. The two men looked after him with an uncertain air. The taxi leaped ahead. He turned the next corner on two wheels, and the next and the next after that. His blood was pounding in his ears. Finally in the middle of a quiet block he ventured to draw up and listen. No sound of a raised alarm reached him.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

GREG'S FIRST FARE

GREG had come to a stop beside a gas lamp in a long block of little houses. Not a soul was in sight, and no window showed a light. Slipping out of his seat he opened the door to have a better look at his gruesome freight. Perhaps after all he had been mistaken. When the door was opened the feet impatiently pushed out again. There was something piteously human in the aspect of these turned-up toes in common-sense shoes with soft kid uppers comfortable for old feet. There was no doubt that the man was dead; the slack, huddled attitude, the awful serenity of his expression proclaimed it. Greg ventured to touch his hand; it was death cold.

It was the body of a man of middle age, plump rather than corpulent. He was well-dressed in a somewhat old-fashioned style, the open overcoat revealing a cutaway beneath, while a silk hat not new, lay on the seat of the cab where it had fallen. A gold watch chain still stretched across his waistcoat, and the little finger of the hand Greg touched displayed a handsome ring. So he had not been robbed. This ring bore a curious red stone cut in octagonal form. The clean-shaven face had a notably benignant look—this had been a kind old gentleman in life; he was very dark and had a

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

slightly foreign look, a Spanish-American, Greg guessed. There was nothing to show how he had come by his death. The bag under his body was an old-fashioned suit-case with a collapsible side.

Meanwhile the question was hammering on Greg's brain: "What am I to do? What am I to do?" His obvious duty of course was to take the body to the nearest police station, but he shivered at the prospect of what would assuredly follow, the searching questions, the pitiless publicity. He could not hope to conceal his identity, for as yet the cabman Elmer Fishback had no background. And then to have his family and friends read next morning how Gregory Parr had become the driver on an owl taxi and was implicated in a murder—well, anything rather than that!

Why not dump the body out where he was, and let things take their course? The crime was none of his. But suppose, just as he started to drag it out of the cab, some one turned into the street, or came out of one of the houses? Or suppose, as was not unlikely, that the crime was already known, and the police even now were in search of a cab bearing his number? In that case to cast the body adrift would be to incriminate himself. For a moment or two Greg was inclined to abandon the whole outfit where it stood, but it now represented all he possessed in the world, and his native obstinacy would not permit of a surrender so abject. After all, he had done nothing wrong; he determined to see the thing through.

A hot tide of anger surged up in him against the man who had fooled him. What made it more bitter was the fact that he had liked the garrulous little cabman

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

and had taken his word, only to be betrayed. How easily he had been deceived—fool that he was! But if he could get hold of him——! Well, even now it was only half-past twelve, and if the man really intended to sail on the *Savoia* there was time——! At this point in his reflections Greg shut the door again, and sliding back into the driver's seat turned his car and hastened back across town.

His state of mind was very different from that in which he had so blithely set forth, for now he carried a burden of horror behind. The picture of that poor form of human clay seemed etched on his brain, and he could not forget it for an instant. He was frankly terrified too; the hardest thing in the world to get rid of is a dead body that you cannot account for. He conceived the idea of driving out in the country and abandoning it in a lonely road. In that case he would have to have gasoline. Suppose while his tank was filling, some one glanced inside. Perhaps he ought to stop and set the body up on the seat and put its hat on its head —but what was the use? At the first jolt it would fall over again. When Greg passed a policeman he instinctively slumped down in his seat, and his heart stood still for a moment as he awaited the expected peremptory hail. But he was allowed to pass.

Back outside the Brevard Line pier, Greg stopped, at a loss what to do with his cab. He could not bring himself to drive out on the busy, lighted pier again; that they had escaped discovery the first time seemed miraculous now. He finally decided to leave it outside in a spot a little apart from the procession passing in and out. If anybody happened to look in while he was

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

gone, well, so be it! The matter would be decided for him.

It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Gregory Parr, alias Hickey Meech, was not aboard the *Savoia*. As Greg looked for him voices were already warning all but intending passengers ashore. "Mr. Parr," Greg was informed, had not paid the balance of his passage money, and his reservation was therefore canceled. He was not in the stateroom that had been allotted him. His baggage still lay unclaimed on the pier.

"Safely hidden by now!" Greg said to himself bitterly, "leaving me to dispose of the issue of his crime! He knows of course that I dare not report the matter to the police! What a downy bird I have been!"

With a long earth-shaking rumble of her whistle the *Savoia* began to back out of her slip, while Greg made his way heavily back towards the spot where he had left his cab. He took a survey of it from a little distance, prepared for instant flight if necessary, but there was no one near it. He approached it gingerly, cranked his engine, and drove away, his problem still unsolved.

Once more the lights of the Brevard House across the plaza attracted him. The front door of the bar was now closed, but business was still being done by means of the side door. Greg went in with a foolish hope that he might find Hickey propped in his old place against the mahogany. It was doomed to disappointment, of course. The pink-cheeked bar-tender was still on duty. There was no use asking him if he knew where Hickey was, because Greg had seen on his first visit that they were not acquainted. The bar-tender

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

looked hard at Greg, and the latter had not even the nerve to order a drink, but walked out again.

As he came out he got a sickening turn. A man was standing close beside his cab, looking around. Had he looked inside? The windows were closed, and one could not see very well without opening the door. Greg's first impulse was to run for it, but once again his obstinacy forced him to stand fast, forced him to march up to the man. He was a tall, handsome, distinguished-looking individual of middle-life, with hawklike patrician features. He had a slightly foreign air. His dress was perfection without being in any way conspicuous. He did not look as if he had just become aware of something horrible; on the contrary as Greg came closer he saw that the man was slightly intoxicated. "He does not know!" Greg thought with a great lift of the heart.

"This your cab?" the man said in a thick voice. "Want to engage you." His voice retained only a trace of a foreign accent.

"I've got a fare," Greg said.

"Where?" asked the other trying to peer through the glass.

"He's drunk," said Greg quickly. "He's lying down."

The tall man sniggered in a foolish way. "Well, he won't mind waiting a bit then. Take me while he's having his sleep out. I'll ride in front with you."

Greg reflected that he needed the money, and moreover that the man riding beside him would afford him a certain protection. Not much danger that he in his befuddled state would discover anything.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"All right," he said. "Where to?"

"Jersey City," said the tall man pointing across the plaza to the Erie ferry.

They seated themselves side by side and started.

"Where did you pick up the drunken man?" asked Greg's fare.

"Had him all evening," replied Greg. "His friends beat it and left him on my hands. I have to wait until he sleeps it off before I can collect my fare."

"You'll have to wait a long time," said the tall man with his foolish snigger.

It gave Greg a nasty turn. Was it possible he had seen or was this just the maundering of a drunken man? Perhaps he was not so drunk as he seemed. Greg thought "detective!" and his heart went slowly down into his boots. But surely this man with his inimitable air of breeding and his proud glance could not be a plain-clothes man. And anyway why should a detective want to take him to Jersey City? And if he were not a detective, what interest could he have in merely tormenting Greg. After a moment of sheer panic, Greg's spirits rose a little.

In his turn he began to wonder what errand a man of this kind could have across the river at such a time of night. That quarter is not usually thought of as the abode of aristocrats.

"Where to in Jersey City?" asked Greg.

"I'll tell you when we get there."

"I just asked because I don't know the town."

"Neither do I."

By this time they were at the ferry house. There was no boat in the slip and they had to wait outside for

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

some minutes. When the gates were finally opened they were almost the first in line, but Greg's fare would not let him enter until all the express wagons, milk wagons, mail wagons and other late vehicles had gone in.

"Wait till the last! Wait till the last!" he said. "It's safer."

Greg laughed. "What do you mean, safer?" he asked.

"I wouldn't want to be caught in the middle of the boat if anything happened," the tall man said with the obstinacy of one in his condition. "Drive on last, and stay out on the back deck in the open. It's safer."

"There's nothing in that," said Greg.

"Well, you do what I tell you anyhow. I'm willing to pay for what I want. Here's five dollars on account."

Greg shrugged and took the money. He was sure then that he had the vagaries of a drunken man to deal with.

As his fare desired he let his taxi stand out on the after deck of the ferry-boat. As soon as she left her slip this part of the deck was deserted, for everybody else instinctively pressed up forward to be ready to land. Greg's fare lit a cigar of wonderful fragrance.

"This is nice," he said, taking his ease. "I don't like to be crowded on a boat."

But presently he underwent a feather-headed change of mood. "Let's stroll up to the bow so we can see where we're going," he said.

"But I thought you wanted to stay here," said Greg astonished.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"As long as the cab's here it's all right," he said with perfect inconsistency. "I didn't want to be penned up."

There was no making any sense out of this. Useless to argue with a man in his condition. "You go ahead," said Greg good-naturedly. "I'll stay with the cab."

"No, you come too," the other said with childish insistence. "I've got to have somebody to talk to. Mustn't be left alone."

Greg shrugged, and gave in.

The Twenty-third Street ferry to Jersey City is one of the longer routes, and the passage consumes upwards of twenty minutes. There were not many passengers at this hour—in the center of the deck a group of half a dozen drivers comparing notes, and at either side as many late commuters and Jersey citizens homeward bound. The overhanging bow of the ferry-boat trod the dark water remorselessly underfoot. On either hand it heaved in a silent tumult, like an agonized black breast. Along the shores the lights, yellow, red and green, sparkled with an incredible brightness, and over the center of Manhattan hung a dim radiance like the reflection of the embers of a burnt-out conflagration.

At Greg's elbow the tall man chattered on in the inconsequential way that accorded so ill with his aristocratic mask and falcon-like glance. "I hope the old boy's resting easily in the cab back there. He must be cramped lying on the floor." (So he *had* seen inside!) "Well, there's no accounting for taste in beds. You can't blame a man for taking a drop too much in

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

weather like this. The dampness gnaws your bones. In my country the sun never forsakes us like this."

"What country is that?" asked Greg idly.

"Er—Peru," came the answer after a second's hesitation. He went on with his snigger: "I guess maybe I've had a drop or two too many myself. Two too many! English is a funny language! I had my first cocktail at five this afternoon—no, yesterday afternoon, and after dinner I seemed to lose count. Oh well, what's the difference! We only live once. I'll buy you a drink, cabby, when we land on the other side."

In the middle of all this he pulled himself up short and a great breath escaped him—was it of relief? For a moment his foolishness seemed to fall away. "Well, that's all right," he murmured.

"What did you say?" asked Greg curiously.

"Nothing." He resumed his chatter. Greg scarcely remarked the interruption, but he remembered it later; remembered too, that the man had been listening.

They returned to the cab. As they rolled out of the ferry house on the Jersey City side Greg said:

"Where to?"

His fare seemed to have become a little drunker. "Fellow told me you could get a drink in Jersey City any time you wanted. Said there was a place called Stack's over here. Something doing there all night. Stacks of liquor, stacks of fun—that's how I remembered the name. I forget the address. But it must be on the main street. Drive up a way and look for the sign."

Greg, reflecting that taxi-drivers had more to put up

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

with than he had supposed, obediently drove quite a long way up the principal thoroughfare leading from the ferry. No "Stack's" appeared among the street signs. Greg's fare hummed snatches of a little Spanish song to himself, and did not appear to pay the slightest attention to the signs.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Greg at last. "We seem to be coming to the outskirts now."

"Oh, ask a policeman," said the tall man foolishly.

Greg couldn't get rid of the feeling that he was being made game of. "What do you think I am!" he said. "If he did know such a place he couldn't give himself away by letting on. Very likely he'd want to run us in for asking."

"Oh well, let's go back to New York then. We've had a pleasant drive."

For a moment Greg forgot his rôle of the submissive cabman. "What the Hell——!" he began thoroughly exasperated.

"What do you care so long as you get your pay?" said the tall man unconcernedly.

Greg reflected that it did indeed make no difference, so he shrugged his shoulders once more, and turning, drove back to the ferry at a smart pace. He privately determined to charge this capricious fare double rates.

On the return trip the tall man evinced not the slightest concern as to where the taxi was put on the ferry. He had got over his talkativeness. He sat deep in thought, smoking one cigar after another. When they landed on the New York side he curtly ordered Greg to drive him to the Hotel Tours at One Hundred and Second Street and Broadway.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

During the long drive to Eighth Avenue, to Columbus Circle, and up Broadway he scarcely spoke. He had apparently recovered from his drunkenness. The night air had cured him perhaps. As a natural result his spirits had sunk. Greg stealing curious side glances into his face as it was revealed in the light of the street lamps saw that his head was sunk on his chest, and that something grim and haggard and perhaps a little wistful had appeared in the handsome features. It suggested the face of a desperate gamester dreaming of the simple life.

Somewhere about Eightieth Street Greg's engine began to sputter. His fare was evidently an experienced automobilist.

"Gas running low?" he asked.

Greg nodded, and looked out for a garage. The first they came to was an open-air place in a vacant lot. A light was still burning in the little office, and Greg turned in. With a hail he brought a man out to the tank. He and his fare had to get out while the flivver was filled up. Afterwards the fare with true aristocratic carelessness handed Greg another bill and resumed his seat. Greg went back to the office with the man to get change. This was fifty feet or so behind the cab. It was dark in the vicinity.

As Greg stepped out of the office he felt a light touch on his arm. He beheld an eager young face looking up into his, a face whose speaking beauty went to his heart like an arrow. The glance of the brilliant eyes at once implored his assistance and enjoined secrecy upon him. Greg was won before a word was spoken. As for the rest he saw a slender, jaunty figure in boy's

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

clothes with cap pulled low over the head. Amazement grew in him, for he knew instantly that it was no boy. A boy's eyes could not have moved him so. He gazed at her breathlessly as at a lovely apparition. He did not realize that she was speaking to him. She had to repeat her question.

"That's your cab there?"

He nodded.

"Where are you taking that man?"

"Hotel Tours."

"All right. I'm following in another cab. When you drop him go on for half a block and wait for me, will you? I want to talk to you."

Greg nodded eagerly. Just here his fare looked around the cab to see what was keeping him, and the pseudo-youth melted like a shadow into the darkness. Greg resumed his place at the wheel in a kind of dream.

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

GREG'S SECOND FARE

HE made the rest of the run to the Hotel Tours in a high state of anticipation. That charming vivid face traveled between him and the asphalt on which his chauffeur's gaze was fixed. His delight in the prospect of the coming meeting was not unmixed with dread—for her. He shuddered to think of the risks she ran wandering about town alone in the small hours of night. Surely any one could see through her disguise at a second glance. Her character was written in her eyes—ignorant, innocent and daring. Clearly she had little idea of the dangers she was braving.

His fare paid him liberally without demur and disappeared within the hotel without giving Greg a second glance. Greg went on for half a block and drew up beside the curb. Presently another cab came to a stop behind him, and the seeming youth got out and paid the driver. He (she) made a feint of entering the nearest doorway, and when the second cab had gone on, returned, and slid into the seat beside Greg as a matter of course. She had much the air of a confident child who expects to find the whole world friendly.

"We'd better go back where we can watch that hotel," she said. "I don't think he intends to remain there long."

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Greg was utterly charmed by that "we." She took it for granted that he was willing to help her. Well, she should not be disappointed. Little did he care what it was all about; he was on her side anyhow. He burned to assure her of this, but prudence suggested it might be better to let things be taken for granted. He was glad it was to him she had applied; he trembled to think of how she might have been deceived in another taxi-driver. It did not occur to him that she might, like children generally (she was scarcely more than a child) have an intuitive perception of character.

He turned his cab around and they watched the entrance to the Tours from across the street.

She plunged into the middle of her business without any preamble. "You crossed on the Twenty-third Street ferry. I couldn't find a cab just at that moment, so I had to follow on foot. So I lost you when you drove away on the other side. Where did you take him over there?"

"Nowhere," said Greg. "It appeared he was just looking for a drink and when we couldn't find a place we came back to New York."

"Is that all?" she said, disappointed and puzzled. "What reason did he give for getting out of the cab on the way over?"

"No reason. He seemed to be a little drunk."

"Drunk? I can't understand it. He's not a drinking man."

"Who is he?" asked Greg with natural curiosity.

She gave him a look of appeal. "Don't ask me. I can't tell you the truth."

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Her speech had an alluring quality of strangeness. It was not that she spoke with an accent exactly; it was more like the speech of an American who might have lived long among foreigners. Greg could not read her race from her features; she had great brown eyes with a fleck of red in them when they caught the light; her skin was creamy. He could not tell the color of her hair because of the cap that she had pulled completely over her head in the style that youths affect, but he guessed it was dark red to match her eyebrows. She had a soft and babyish mouth that did not seem to go with the fiery eyes. Greg guessed that the eyes expressed her character, while the mouth had just been thrown in to make her adorable. Her voice was too deep for her size, but that was no doubt assumed. Sometimes when she forgot it scaled up. She was displaying a boyish nonchalance that was altogether delightful and funny. To tease her Greg offered her a cigarette. She declined it.

"I smoke a pipe," was her astonishing reason.

She did not, however, offer to produce it.

As she had forecast, the tall foreigner did indeed presently issue from the Tours, and hailed one of the cabs waiting below the entrance. Greg cranked his engine. The other cab turned around at the corner and passed down beside them. Greg took care to be hidden behind his cab as the other passed. Climbing in he followed it as a matter of course.

"What time do you suppose it is?" asked his companion.

"About three."

"What a night!" she murmured.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"You're dead right!" said Greg grimly. He remembered what he carried behind and shivered.

They sped down town over the smooth pavement of Broadway. That erstwhile busy street was deserted now except for an occasional motor car like themselves roaring up or down with wide open throttle and except for the ubiquitous cats prowling diagonally across from curb to curb on errands known to themselves. The street lamps shone down like moons as indifferently upon solitude as upon crowds; all the shop fronts were dark.

Greg, it need hardly be said, was fairly eaten up with curiosity concerning his passenger, yet he could not question her. Her air of friendliness and confidence disarmed him. Questions implied a doubt. She volunteered no information about herself, but seemed to feel the necessity of saying something.

"Perhaps I ought to be riding in behind."

"Oh, no!" said Greg very quickly.

"Well, I thought it might look odd, my sitting here in front."

"Why shouldn't a taxi-driver be giving a friend a lift, especially at this time of night?"

This seemed to make her uneasy. She said: "All right; but you know I'm hiring you really, just like anybody."

Greg felt a most unreasonable hurt. "I didn't ask for any pay," he said gruffly.

She was distressed. "Oh, you mustn't let your feelings be hurt! I've got to pay you, you know. You don't know anything about me."

Greg answered with a look that meant: "I'd like

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

to!" But she did not take the hint. Aloud he said: "I won't take anything."

She let the matter drop.

The cab they were following drew up at the great Hotel Meriden at Eightieth Street.

"I thought so," murmured the girl. "He is stopping here. The chase is over for to-night. Drive on for a block or two, then come back. It will give him a chance to get to his room."

Greg obeyed. As they returned and circled in front of the hotel she said:

"Don't stop at the entrance. Go on to the end of the building and wait there."

They came to a stop opposite the last of the great windows that lighted the lobby and the lounge of the Meriden. Greg wondered, if the chase were over, what they were to wait for. The answer came directly, conveying an important bit of information obliquely.

She said, pointing to two lighted windows on the third floor of the hotel: "I daren't go in until he goes to bed. Do you mind if I wait here with you?"

"Do I mind——!" said Greg.

His tone was perhaps a little too warm. She glanced at him suspiciously. Greg tried to look unconscious. Meanwhile he was revolving the significance of what she had just said. So she lived here too, and was, she implied, a member of the tall foreigner's household. It occurred to Greg that her speech resembled the man's: they used the same phrases as people do who live together. Certainly in no other respect was there any

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

likeness. Greg frowned. He resented the thought that man and girl might be related.

She broke in on his thoughts by saying in her abrupt, boyish way: "You don't seem like a common taxi-driver."

"Well, I haven't been one long," said Greg smiling.

He reflected that the surest way to win a person's confidence is to offer one's own, and he proceeded to tell her the story of his meeting with Hickey Meech, and how they had changed places, stopping short, however, of the grim dénouement.

The girl was charmed. "Oh, I like that!" she cried bright-eyed. "I'm glad you didn't want to leave America! I love America. I'm an American."

He wondered a little what impelled her to state this fact so defiantly, as if it had been called in question. It cheered him though, for certainly the man they had been following was not an American. So they could not be close relatives.

"I'm so glad it was you!" she went on.

"So am I!" he said smiling.

"A person like you can understand."

"But I understand nothing."

"Ah, don't ask me!" she said with a painful air. "I can't explain. It's a family affair!"

That put Greg back where he had started from. He was silenced but not satisfied.

"Suppose I need you again?" she asked. "Would you be willing——?"

"Try me!"

"How can I get you?"

"Well, I haven't any address yet. The man I bought

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

the cab from told me where he kept it, and I suppose I'll hang out there. Have you anything to write it down with?"

She nodded, and produced a tiny note-book and pencil.

"Elmer Fishback," he began.

She wrote it down, smiling to herself at the comical sound of the syllables.

"My right name is Gregory Parr," he hastily added.

"That's better," she said.

He continued: "Care of Bessie Bickle—he didn't say whether she was Miss or Mrs."

"I'll just put B. Bickle."

"Gibbon Street south of Houston."

She wrote it all down.

All this while Greg was wondering how she expected to get across the lighted lobby and by the hotel desk without discovery. The question tormented him. Finally he could contain it no longer.

"You can't go in—like that," he blurted out.

She instantly mounted on her high horse. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you know—anybody could see——" he stammered, "anybody could see that you were—well, that you were not a boy."

She sharply averted her head from him. He saw the crimson tide creep up from her neck.

"I don't see what reason you have for saying that," she murmured.

He strove stumblingly to put her at her ease. "Oh, it isn't your clothes. They're all right. You look out o' sight! But—but—well, a girl is different. It's not

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

altogether a matter of looks. I mean the charm of a girl sticks out all over you."

She ignored this. "I'm not going through the lobby," she said abruptly, "but through the service entrance. I bribed the watchman on the way out, and he will let me in again."

Greg breathed more freely. A constrained silence fell between them.

"I'm not altogether a fool!" she presently burst out sorely. "I didn't venture out until long after dark. And I kept away from all brilliantly lighted places. Nobody found me out but you."

"That's all right," said Greg. "But suppose—well, suppose I hadn't been, well—decent."

"I would have known exactly what to do!" she said with an intimidating air that made him smile broadly. "But I knew you were the instant I looked at you," she added.

"Thanks," said Greg.

She was still sore. "I don't see how you could have guessed!" she went on. "At home when we have theatricals everybody says I make a perfectly dandy boy!"

"That's different," said Greg smiling.

"What must you think of me!" she murmured in an humbler tone.

"Nothing but what is good," he said quickly. "I would be a fool if I thought otherwise. I was only anxious for you because I supposed you did not know the risks you ran."

"I knew," she said. "I armed myself."

Greg was both amused and thrilled at the diminutize size of her and her unquestioned courage.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"It seemed necessary for me to do it," she explained further, "though after all I have accomplished nothing. I did it for some one—some one I cared for very much."

A sharp little pang of jealousy shot through Greg's breast.

Another cab drew up at the entrance to the Meriden in their rear. Greg's companion stuck her head out to see who it was. She quickly drew it in again.

"Two of the gang!" she said excitedly.

"What gang?" asked Greg involuntarily.

"His gang, the politicians. They've come after him, I suppose. We'll know in a minute."

Leaning forward in front of his companion Greg saw two men entering the Meriden, one of whom carried a heavy suit-case. They were inconspicuous-looking men, soberly dressed, both under the average height, one stocky, one thin. They had a foreign look like the man they came to see. As they passed back into the hotel they came within range of the big window beside Greg's cab, and the two could sit back and watch them at their leisure. They proceeded to the desk and made an inquiry. The clerk took down his telephone receiver. After a brief colloquy over the 'phone, he nodded to the two men, who thereupon seated themselves near by.

"He's coming down-stairs to them," murmured the girl.

Sure enough, Greg's former fare, the tall foreigner, presently stepped out of the elevator. He had his hat and overcoat on and carried a valise.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Going out again!" said the girl excitedly. "Going away, it seems!"

When the men met no greetings were exchanged; it was as if they had but lately parted. The three moved away from the vicinity of the hotel desk engaged in low-voiced conversation. They came to a stand not far from the window through which Greg and the girl were watching them. Here they stood talking with guarded expressions, never thinking of looking out into the dark street.

He who carried the suit-case exhibited it to the tall man, who thereupon called the single sleepy boy on duty at this hour and gave instructions. The boy took the suit-case and the tall man's own valise and, proceeding to the entrance, summoned a cab; the bags were put inside. Meanwhile the three lingered a moment to finish their talk. The heavier of the two newcomers took from his breast pocket a rather bulky little black book and handed it over to the tall man. The latter's eyes visibly gleamed with satisfaction as he hastily ran over the contents. He pocketed the book.

At sight of the book a startled exclamation escaped from the girl beside Greg. "Why—why, that's my uncle's book! How did they get it?"

Greg marked well the look of the book. It seemed to be a "loose-leaf" note-book with a number of miscellaneous papers of different sizes and colors, caught in on a patent fastener. It was somewhat long and narrow, of a size that would just fit a man's breast pocket, and it was bound in black seal leather.

After the transfer of the book the three men started to move towards the hotel entrance.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Shall we follow?" asked Greg.

"Of course!" she said.

Slipping out of his seat, he cranked his engine in order to be ready for them. The three men got in the waiting taxi, and it came on past them bound downtown. Greg fell in behind them, but not close enough to excite suspicion. Down that broad empty street one could see for half a mile.

The girl did not speak again during this part of the journey. She was staring ahead of her under knitted brows; the softness was all ironed out of the babyish mouth and her little hands were clenched. Greg wondered mightily what grim thoughts could be filling a creature so sweet and delicate. He felt that he could aid her twice as efficiently if he knew what it was all about but he would not risk a rebuff by asking again.

At Seventy-second Street the cab in front stopped beside the subway station, and Greg slowed down while they watched to see what the men would do. The two short men alighted and disappeared down the stairs. The cab went on.

"We follow the tall man?" asked Greg.

"Certainly. The others don't matter."

Straight down the long empty course of Broadway they were led at top speed; through the mile of automobile warerooms, now dark, and the half mile of theaters and restaurants where a few lights still maintained a dingy semblance of festivity, including the strange blue glare of the little photograph stores, which for some mysterious reason keep open all night. In this quarter a few revelers were still to be seen, bound more or less homeward, their loud and repetitious as-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

surances of regard only broken by violent quarrels; while owl taxis like Greg's own surreptitiously followed them on the chance of picking up business. Still they kept on down Broadway through the nondescript stretch between Herald and Madison Squares, the Tenderloin of a bygone day.

"He must be bound for Brooklyn," said Greg.

But at Twentieth Street the car in front turned to the east. Greg followed at a discreet distance. In that dark and silent quarter greater care was necessary if they wished to keep the man in front from guessing that he was followed. At Gramercy Park his car turned south again into Irving Place, and they lost it for a moment.

When they cautiously turned the Irving Place corner they saw that the other cab had come to a stop half-way down that short street. Even as they looked the tall man's bags were carried into a building on that side. His cab went on.

They drove slowly past the place where he had disappeared. It was a modest little hotel with a Spanish name: Hotel dos Estados Unidos. Through the windows of the lobby they saw the tall man standing by the desk, apparently being assigned to a room.

"What does he come here for?" murmured the girl more and more perplexed.

Greg went on for a block, and turning, came slowly back on the other side. The hotel lobby was now empty, except for the dozing clerk behind the desk. Greg brought the cab to a stop just beyond the hotel where they could still command an oblique view of the lobby.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"What now?" he said.

"I don't know what to say," she murmured. "I can't imagine why he should come here to sleep. I can't believe that he does mean to sleep here. I believe he'll be out again. Let's wait and see."

They continued to discuss the situation, a discussion with little profit as far as Greg was concerned, for he lacked a clue. The burden of her cry was:

"If only I knew what he was up to!"

By and by another cab drew up to the little hotel and a man and woman got out; innocent belated travelers these, who have nothing to do with the story; but the sight of them gave Greg an idea.

"I might slip into the lobby while this man's registering," he said, "and glance over his shoulder. I could find out then what name the other registered under. I could make out to be after a drink of water or something. That is, if you wish me to."

"Yes, do so!" she said eagerly. "It might give us a clue."

Returning to her two minutes later Greg said: "He wrote himself down as Antonio Bareda of Santiago de Managuay."

The effect on the girl was startling. She fell back in her seat. "What! My uncle's name! Has he stolen that too? Oh, something terrible is going on!"

Greg stood with a foot on the running-board at a loss what to say. He finally murmured diffidently: "If you could tell me what you suspect——"

"I can't! I can't!" she cried. "I don't understand it myself. It is too horrible!"

Presently more composed, she said: "One thing is

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

sure, I daren't leave here now. I must find out what he's up to if I have to wait till morning. But you must be tired out. Why don't you get in the back of the cab and sleep until daylight, then I'll call you, and you can relieve me. If necessary I can run the car. We have one at home to save the big car."

Greg reminded afresh of his original grisly passenger felt a cold chill down his spine. That problem remained to be solved. He hung irresolute.

"Go on, get in," she urged, putting her hand around like a chauffeur to open the door.

Greg hastily gripped it. "Don't open it!" he cried.

She looked at him in astonishment.

"The fact is there's something I didn't tell you," he lamely explained. "I've got a sou—I mean a drunken man in there."

"What! You mean we've been carrying him around all night!"

"I guess he didn't mind."

"Oh, bother!" she said. "We'll have to dump him out here. There's no help for it. This is important. It may be a matter of life and death!"

In speaking, she instinctively turned her head and looked through the glass behind her.

"Don't look!" cried Greg cold with horror.

But she only pressed her face closer to the glass. "There isn't anybody there," she said.

Greg astonished threw open the door. It was true. The cab was empty. He gasped; his jaw dropped; he stared at the empty place like an idiot.

"What's the matter with you?" said the girl laugh-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

ing. "I suppose he just woke up and walked off when you weren't looking."

"He was past walking," said Greg.

His grim air impressed her. "What do you mean?"

"He was dead."

"Dead!" she cried. "Are you mad?"

Greg shook his head. "Dead as mutton!"

Her lip trembled like a child's. "Good heavens, what a city this is!"

"So it seems!" said Greg grimly.

"What had happened to him?"

Greg told her what part of the story he had omitted before.

"Then that was why the man was so anxious to sell you the cab?"

"That was why."

"What has become of it?"

"God knows!"

They looked at each other in dumb amazement. Suddenly the girl's expression changed.

"Did my—did that man who was riding with you know?" she asked sharply.

"No. I told him the same as I told you; that my other fare was drunk."

"I wondered why he rode outside with you. It is not like him to do such things. You are sure he had no hand in it?" she persisted.

This was a new thought to Greg. "Why, no," he said. "How could he? He just happened to pick me up later. But I don't know. Why not? There was something queer about all his actions."

"What was he like, the dead man?"

Digitized by Google

Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"A nice old gentleman; plump, smooth-shaven, kindly-looking; looked like a Spanish-American. By Gad! they were all Spanish, weren't they?"

The girl's face gradually sharpened with anxiety now.

Greg went on: "There was a valise under the body; that's gone too."

"Like that you saw in the hotel up-town?" she asked breathlessly.

"The very same! I never thought of it!"

A low cry escaped the girl.

"He had an odd-looking ring on; octagonal red stone with characters cut in it."

"My uncle!" she cried despairingly. "I suspected it! They have done for him! I was too late!" She covered her face with her hands.

Greg gazed at her in silent sympathy.

The hands came down; the soft face hardened. "No time for mourning now. Since I couldn't save him, I mean to avenge him!"

"If I could tell you how sorry I am!" murmured Greg.

"Don't sympathize with me," she said quickly. "It brings the tears back. I must be hard. Help me to be hard."

"I am at your service in all ways," he said simply.

"You see what happened now?" she said.

"I am beginning to."

"I don't know yet how they killed him, but it's clear enough how they disposed of the body. That man learned in some way that it was in your cab. That is

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

why he hired you to take him across the river. The other two men were on board the ferry too. But I paid no attention to them because I was watching him, the man in your cab. When you and he left the cab I followed you up forward. Then the other two went to the cab, of course; searched the body, and then cast it over the rail. You see now why he made you drive on last."

"Of course!"

"Planned with devilish cleverness!" she cried. "That is like him! Why weren't my eyes opened to his true character earlier! But I'll make him pay! If the body is missing, will it be possible to bring the crime home to the murderer?"

"Difficult," said Greg. "It may be found floating in the river."

"How could one find out if it was found?"

"It would be taken to the morgue."

"Watch for it for me, will you?" she cried eagerly. "I couldn't go to such a place. You watch for it, and if it is brought there secure it for me!"

Greg promised. "What do you suppose is his object now in masquerading as the man he killed?" he asked.

"That I can't guess. I know what happened; I don't know what underlies it all. We've got to find out."

Once more that "we" inspired Greg to high deeds.

In speaking of the man they had followed it was natural to turn to the spot where they had last seen him. As he did so Greg saw his very figure reappear once more in the lobby of the little hotel. He called the girl's attention to it.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Quick! Crank your engine!" she said excitedly. "I thought he would be coming out again!"

The tall man spoke to the clerk, and the latter took down the telephone receiver.

"Calling for a taxi," suggested Greg.

Meanwhile he got his engine started, and climbed into the seat beside her.

"Better move down the street a little way," she suggested. "He might catch sight of us here."

Greg obeyed. They waited in the next block. In due course a taxi-cab drew up before the little hotel, and the tall man got in, without baggage. The cab turned west in the side street. Greg followed at a furlong's distance.

This time the chase was not very long. They were led around the lower side of Union Square and down University Place. The first cab turned west in Ninth Street, and crossing Fifth Avenue drew up before a residence on the south side of the dignified, old-fashioned block beyond. Greg kept on to Sixth Avenue.

"Did you get the number?" she asked.

"Five-thirty."

"I thought so. That's the headquarters of the politicians. I have seen him address letters there."

Meanwhile the other cab having dropped its passenger had returned eastward.

"Go back to that house!" ordered the girl. Her eyes were shining like embers. A great excitement possessed her.

They drew up before the door of five-thirty.

"Are you a brave man?" she asked abruptly.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Greg, much taken aback, answered as stoutly as he could: "I hope so."

"Then take this, and bring me back the little black book." She pressed a piece of cold metal into his hand.

For a brief second Greg hesitated. The strange command took his breath away.

"I do not ask it for myself," she pleaded. "The happiness of a whole people depends on it!"

Greg seriously doubted the wisdom of the proceeding, but being young he could not take a dare from a girl. He slipped out of his seat.

"Keep the engine running," he said. "Whom shall I ask for at the door?"

"Señor Francisco de Socotra."

He crossed the pavement. That which she had thrust in his hand was a small but business-like automatic revolver.

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

IN THE HOUSE ON NINTH STREET

THE house fronting Greg was built according to an old-fashioned plan imported from Continental countries, of which there are two or three examples still extant in the older parts of New York. Though but a small house it was laid out on a liberal plan. At one side great double doors carried a driveway through to the rear. In other words, in the old days the carriage and pair of the owners had driven right in the front door.

Greg pulled the old-fashioned bell, and presently one side of the big door swung open of itself operated by a lever within the house. This in itself had an uncanny effect. Inside Greg found himself in a well-proportioned corridor running through to the yard behind. He took the precaution to leave the big door slightly ajar behind him. At his right hand were severally a service entrance, a wicket and the main door of the house.

The corridor was empty. It was lighted by an electric globe in the ceiling. At the wicket appeared the head of a negro servant who with a villainous scowl demanded to know what he wanted. After all it was four o'clock in the morning; a servant might reasonably be indignant at being called up at such an hour

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

(though, by the way, this man was fully dressed), but there was more in it than that. Greg thought he had never seen so evil a face, and his hand instinctively closed tighter around the revolver in his pocket.

In a firm voice he named the man that he wished to see, and the negro after a hard stare directed him with a nod to the main door beyond. He closed the wicket. Greg waited with a fast beating heart.

After no great space of time the door was opened and de Socotra himself stood before Greg with an expression of strong curiosity. It was borne in on Greg afresh that he was an uncommonly handsome man; moreover, villain though he might be, there was a superb boldness in his air that commanded an unwilling admiration. Recognizing the chauffeur that had driven him earlier in the night, he fell back warily.

Greg gave him no time to think. Stepping close to him, he drew the revolver and pressed the muzzle to his ribs.

"If you cry out I'll pull the trigger," he whispered harshly.

The man's ruddy brown face paled yellow, yet he kept a certain measure of self-possession, his eyes did not quail. "What do you want?" he asked in a firm, low voice.

"The little black book."

The man's eyes narrowed. "I don't know what you mean," he said quickly.

Greg saw a tell-tale bulge over his right breast. "You lie!" he said. "It's in your pocket. Quick with it, or I'll shoot!"

A curious glint showed in the other's jetty eyes which

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

never left Greg's. His hand went slowly inside his coat and reappeared with the little black book. Greg with a leaping heart took it in his free hand; this had come easier than he had dared hope. He started to back down the corridor, keeping de Socotra covered with the gun. The latter came to the door and stood watching him with expressionless face.

Greg dared not look behind him. It was about twenty-five feet to the big doors; he had measured it with his eyes; say, eight long paces. He had taken five, when the sound of the door softly latching behind him caused his heart to contract sharply. He whirled around. At the same instant de Socotra sprang at him. Greg was seized from both sides before he could find a mark to aim at.

The second who had seized him was the negro servant, a fellow of gigantic stature with muscles like steel bands. As Greg started to run he had caught him in his embrace, pinning Greg's arms close to his sides and keeping the gun deflected downwards. De Socotra with a blow on Greg's wrist disarmed him. Greg's struggles were as vain as those of an infant. He ceased to struggle, designing to save his strength for a better occasion. Moreover he was afraid the sounds of a struggle might reach the girl outside and provoke her to some rash act. With her puny strength she could not help him now.

De Socotra repocketed the little black book, also Greg's revolver. He relaxed and laughed mockingly. "I don't know what your game is, my man, but evidently it was a little beyond you!"

Greg glared at him. "Murderer!" was on his

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

tongue's tip, but prudence restrained him from uttering it.

"Look here," said the other suddenly; "tell me who sent you here, and the door shall be opened for you to go. I don't fight with cabmen. You may go back freely to him who sent you and give him my compliments."

Greg obstinately closed his mouth.

"It's a fair offer," said de Socotra mildly. "Better take it. There are men up-stairs who will not let you off so easily."

Again he waited to give Greg a chance to speak.

Finally he said: "I can't wait here all night, you know."

"You needn't wait," said Greg. "I'm not going to tell you."

De Socotra favored him with a sharp look. "I beg your pardon," he said ironically; "I see you're no cabman. Milio, bring him up-stairs."

He led the way into the house through the main door. The negro followed, half carrying Greg, half pushing him before him. At the steps he tossed him up as easily as a straw man. Greg ground his teeth at the humiliating posture, but still forbore to struggle. The first room of the house was a foyer hall, handsomely finished in paneled walnut, but without any furniture. A finely carved stairway came down at one side. De Socotra mounted with leisurely tread; the man was as straight as a tree, his small head poised with inimitable arrogant grace. The negro carried Greg after. Greg might have given him considerable trouble on the

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

stairs, but he still saved his strength until he should see some chance of getting away.

On the floor above they passed into the front room, their entrance creating a veritable sensation among the small crowd of men gathered there. No sound had warned of trouble below. This was likewise a handsome room but without any furnishings except some cheap pine tables and chairs. Heavy stuff curtains hung before the three windows, but these were evidently for the purpose of darkening them, rather than for decoration. It looked like the hastily improvised meeting-place of a political circle or a gang of plotters.

There were about a dozen men in the room, some Spanish-Americans, others undoubtedly of these United States. The two men who had come to de Socotra at the Meriden were both present. All stared at the negro and his burden with amazed eyes, and questions in both Spanish and English were fired at de Socotra.

The latter moved among these men with the air of an undisputed leader. Their agitation amused him, and he made them wait awhile before he answered. To the negro he said:

"Put the man down. He can't escape. Stand by the door."

When he finally deigned to answer their questions he spoke in English. Greg marked that he said nothing about having ridden in his cab earlier, but let them assume that he had never seen Greg before. Greg supposed this was because he did not care to confess that the explanation of Greg's reappearance was a complete mystery to him; for all his cool airs de Socotra was deeply puzzled by that. The two men who had

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

seen to the disposal of the body apparently did not recognize Greg. They could not have seen him but for a moment as he drove on the ferry in the dark.

All the men in the room were amazed and panic-stricken to learn that some outsider knew of the little black book, but no word was dropped that gave Greg any hint of the contents. A furious polyglot discussion arose. The more frightened demanded that Greg be put out of the way instanter—one spoke of burying his body under the cellar pavement. Others who kept their heads better insisted on the necessity of first finding out who had sent him, and how much he knew of their affairs.

De Socotra listened with a cynical, detached air. Finally he said: "Well, gentlemen, there's no advantage in letting him hear more than he knows already. I would suggest that you confine him in another room, until you settle what is to be done with him."

At this moment one of the Spaniards, a stocky, scowling youth with a purplish scar on his left cheek bone, peeped through the curtains hanging before one of the windows. He said in English: "His cab is still at the door. The engine is running."

"Who can run it?" asked de Socotra.

"I can," said the previous speaker.

"Then go down and run it away somewhere—anywhere, and leave it."

The man moved towards the door. Greg's heart sunk, thinking of the girl. The door was well guarded, but there was no one in front of him at the moment. He sprang across the room. Taken by surprise they were not quick enough to stop him. Snatching a cur-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

tain aside, with a blow of his two fists he smashed out the glass behind and cried:

"Beat it! Beat it!"

He was instantly snatched away from the window, but he had the satisfaction of hearing the old flivver get under way long before the man could get down stairs; he had the satisfaction, too, of seeing the cool and cynical de Socotra grind his teeth and mutter a curse as he realized that the explanation of what he so much wanted to know had been just outside the door all this time.

The uproar in the room was redoubled. They rushed at Greg now, pummeling him, and trying to kick him. He fought back blindly. He would have been worse hurt had they not got in each other's way. It was some moments before de Socotra could make his voice heard.

"Gentlemen! You forget yourselves! Hands off him! The window is out. Do you want to arouse the neighborhood?"

They drew back scowling. The room became quiet again. Greg, bruised, fiery-eyed and panting, had his back against the wall.

De Socotra went on in his icy voice: "If it is necessary to execute this man in the interest of the Cause all right. But I will not have you maul him like a pack of terriers. You, Sforza, conceal yourself behind the curtains and see if an alarm has been raised in the street."

One disappeared through the curtains. The negro was dispatched for rope. When he returned Greg's wrists were unceremoniously tied behind his back, and his ankles tied. The man at the window reappeared to say that while several windows near by had been

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

tnrown up, the aroused ones had apparently gone back to bed without taking action. The negro picked up the helpless Greg and carrying him into the back room on the same floor dropped him like a sack, and left him alone.

For awhile he took no notice of his surroundings. To be trussed up like a fowl ready for roasting seemed to be the lowest degree of ignominy possible to a man: a despairing rage filled him; his heart seemed like to burst his breast; he rolled helplessly on the floor.

Then dimly he began to realize that his impotent rage was only destroying him, and little by little with a great effort of the will he succeeded in disciplining it. He had to think, and in order to think a clear brain was necessary.

Must he end in that house like a trapped rat? Youth at the flood could not conceive of coming to an end. He put that thought from him. "I will get out! I *will!*" he told himself. "They dare not kill me if I am not afraid!"

Meanwhile the girl outside might contrive to aid him. But he determined not to count on her. She was so little and young and inexperienced she would not know what to do. What could she do? If she applied for help it would be only to betray her own secret. She ran her own terrible danger. He shuddered. Well, that thought must be put out of his mind too. Let him once get out and he would save her.

Greg took careful stock of his surroundings. The room he was in was a companion to the room in front. It occupied the whole width of the house, and it had but the one door opening into the central hall. Oppo-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

site were three tall windows looking to the rear. Enough light came through them to show Greg that this room like the others was bare of furniture. There was a handsome chimney piece against the right hand wall. The house was solidly built and no sounds reached him.

Suddenly the door was opened softly, and for an instant Greg's astonished eyes beheld a woman's figure outlined against the faint light in the hall. She came in and closed the door behind her, and he heard her hand feeling softly along the wall for the switch. It clicked and the room was flooded with light. Greg saw her, then the light went out again. Her startled eyes had taken in the fact at a glance that the windows were uncovered. Presumably they were commanded by the windows of houses in the rear.

In that briefest of glimpses she was unforgettably impressed on Greg's vision. It was a strange apparition in that empty and sinister house; a beautiful woman, a lady in evening dress! It was black velvet, snugly fitting, against which her arms and neck gleamed like marble. She was a dark beauty, another Spanish-American perhaps, but taller than the run of Latin women; she had hair like a raven's wing, eyes like twin black pools and voluptuous crimson lips. She was carrying something, but he had not time to see what it was.

She came towards him in the dark, bringing a subtle perfume. "You poor fellow!" she murmured. "Can I do anything for you?"

Greg's feelings were mixed; he took it for granted that she was one of the same lot; moreover he was

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

ashamed to be found by a woman in so lowly a posture.
"Who are you?" he asked sullenly.

"Your friend," she breathed.

One in Greg's position could hardly refuse an offer of friendship. His heart warmed to her. Yet he did not altogether abandon caution. Something about her still repelled him; her foreignness perhaps. She spoke excellent English, but not with the unconsciousness of the native born.

"How can I help you?" she murmured.

"Help me to get out of here," said Greg bluntly.

"I daren't!" she whispered. "They would kill me if they found out. Besides it is useless. The house is full of men. All the doors are guarded."

"Cut this rope and I'll take my chances of getting out."

"I daren't," she wailed. "But maybe I can loosen it a little."

Careless of her fine dress, she dropped to her knees on the dusty floor beside him. What she had in her hand she put down. It sounded like a plate. Greg rolled over, and with her soft warm hands she fumbled with the knots at his wrists, not with much success. Her hands trembled a little as if in confusion at being forced to touch a strange man. Greg was thinking principally of the plate.

"What was that you brought?" he asked.

"You are hungry?"

"Famished. I suppose it's ten hours since I ate."

"There was nothing cooked in this house, but I brought biscuits and chocolate. Are your hands more comfortable now?"

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Not much. How can I eat with my hands tied?"

"I will feed you," she said with a charming confusion in her voice.

She proceeded to do so, feeling for his lips with her fingers and pressing chocolate and sweet biscuits between them. In good sooth the situation was romantic enough, the warm breathing woman bending over him in the dark, fragrant as a flower; there was something infinitely caressing in the touch of her fingers, nevertheless Greg remained cold. He could think of nothing but how to get out.

"You are not like a common taxi-driver," she said presently.

Greg was reminded with a little pang of the other woman who had said that. "I'm a taxi-driver," he replied. "As to common that's not for me to say."

"You speak like an educated man."

He shrugged. "Who are you?" he asked for the second time.

"A prisoner like yourself."

It occurred to him as strange that a prisoner should have been so anxious to keep lights from showing in the windows. "What sort of joint is this anyhow?" he asked.

"Joint?"

"Who are these men? What are they?"

"I don't know. They tell me nothing."

"But if you live here you must hear and see what goes on. What do you make of it?"

"It's politics of some kind," she said vaguely. "I don't understand. How did you happen to come here?"

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"I was sent."

"By whom?"

"A fare who engaged me on the street."

"What sort of person?"

"Well, I'm not much of a hand at description. An ordinary looking fellow, middle-aged, plainly dressed, nothing special about him."

"You're just fooling me!" she said reproachfully. "You don't trust me."

"Why should I trust you?" said Greg bluntly. "You don't answer my questions but only ask me others."

"Ask me anything, anything!" she said passionately. "I look to you to save me!"

"Who are you, and what are you doing in this house?"

"It's a miserable story!" she said in a shamed voice. "My name is Clelie Mendizabal. I am a Peruvian. My father died a few years ago leaving us penniless. I had to go to work. Well, in Peru a girl who works for her living is looked down upon, so I determined to come to New York. They said that the streets of New York were fairly paved with gold. I had no difficulty in finding work here, but I soon found that a working girl has no easy time in America either. There was a man from my own country who made believe to be my friend—I trusted him—Ah! I was so friendless here! I thought no wrong. I went about with him—Oh, how can I go on! One night a month ago he brought me to this house saying that it was a restaurant. I—I have not been out of it since!"

Somehow this piteous tale failed of conviction. For one thing the teller, in the one brief glimpse he had

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

had of her, had seemed much too radiant and blooming to be the victim of so terrible a fate. Moreover, she had seemed to tell it with a certain gusto that suggested the pride of authorship. It might be true, but Greg resolved to keep an open mind.

"Why don't you throw up the window yonder and call for help?" he asked.

"They're locked."

"Windows are never locked on the outside," he said dryly. "You could hang from the sill and drop without danger. It can't be more than twelve feet or so to the ground. And climb over the fence into one of the other back yards. Or if you couldn't get over the fence you could scream for help until the neighbors rescued you."

"People don't want to rescue one like me," she said mournfully.

"Nonsense! Times have changed. They're crazy about it nowadays. Cut me loose, and I'll undertake to get you out."

"But I'm afraid of you. Who are you? Tell me truly."

"Elmer Fishback," said Greg, grinning in the dark.

"Who sent you here, really?"

"I told you. A fare who picked me up. I don't know his name."

She put her two hands on his shoulders and brought her face close to his; he sensed the great languorous eyes in the dark. "Trust me," she whispered. "You will never regret it!"

Greg was exquisitely uncomfortable. He desired to make use of this woman if he could, but he found him-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

self unable to produce the slightest semblance of warmth. He got out of it the best way he could.

"A man bound hand and foot like this can feel nothing for a woman," he said. "He is not a man but a mere log! Free my hands and I'll show you!"

Her instinct was not deceived. She drew away with a sharp little movement in which Greg apprehended danger. "How can I trust you if you will not trust me?" she said somberly.

"What difference does it make how I came here if the main thing for both of us is to get out?"

"I couldn't go with you unless I knew who you were. Won't you tell me how you came here?"

Greg was already at the end of his powers of dissimulation. "No," he said curtly.

She rose with a single movement, and gliding to the door threw it open. "Francisco!" she called.

De Socotra's leisurely figure appeared in the light of the doorway. "Well, my dear?" he drawled mockingly.

She was glad to throw off the mask, it seemed. "I can get nothing out of this fellow. Better hand him over to the men."

Greg had suspected her throughout, nevertheless this frank unmasking outraged his sense of decency. "You liar!" he cried involuntarily.

She was clearly revealed in the doorway. He saw her elevate her fine shoulders and smile at de Socotra. No man surely could have displayed such hardihood. "If there's nothing further for me to do I believe I'll go home," she said, affecting to stifle a yawn.

"Very well, my dear. Pleasant dreams."

Digitized by Google

Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

She passed from Greg's sight.

De Socotra made a signal to those outside, and two men followed him into the room. He had a small pocket flash which he threw on Greg. To the two men he said:

"I give him in your charge now to be treated as you see fit. Better have Milio carry him down cellar for you where his cries cannot be heard."

The brawny negro appeared and hoisted Greg on his back. Greg believed he had heard his doom pronounced, and his heart was low. All of a sudden life seemed ineffably sweet. He set his jaw hard, and glared at his enemies. They should not see him weaken.

Greg was carried back down the carved stairway. The two men whom he looked upon as his appointed executioners followed, and in the position in which he was being carried there was nothing for Greg to do but look in their faces. He saw no mercy there. The one had a stiff, rough crop of hair that started to grow far back on his head, and a long, scraggy neck. He swallowed continually. He looked like a carrion-eating bird. The other was still more horrible: short and dumpy with a moist, livid face like something half-cooked in too much grease. These two were followed by others of their ilk. The more human-looking individuals remained up-stairs. With every step of the descent something seemed to whisper to Greg: "Take your last look at light and life!"

The dark beauty, closely cloaked and veiled for the street, had preceded them down the stairs. When they got half way down Greg heard the door from

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

foyer to corridor close behind her. Her exquisite heartlessness surprised him. "It's nothing to her what they do to me," he thought, feeling a little pin-prick of wounded self-love even in the face of the horror that awaited him at the foot of the cellar stairs.

Greg's bearer turned under the stairs to a door that stood presumably at the head of another flight. But even as he laid his hand on the knob they all heard the sound of running feet in the corridor and the negro paused. Two soft little fists beat frantically on the house door. One ran to open it. There stood the dark girl beside herself with terror.

"The police!" she gasped. "Outside in the street!"

They didn't require her warning. The house was filled with the sound of a pounding on the big doors. A peremptory voice demanded admittance.

"They know we're inside," gasped the girl. "They saw me as I opened the door to go out."

Instantly the house was in confusion. The negro dropped Greg on the floor. All thought of their intentions towards him was forgotten. Those above came scampering down the stairs. De Socotra was the only one who retained his presence of mind.

"Keep cool!" he admonished them. "The door is strong. We have time to get out. Get your hats and coats. Abañez, you know the way; lead the others. I will come last."

Grabbing up their outer wear they fled as softly as mice through the door into the corridor. The negro Milio, leaving with the rest, was sharply recalled by de Socotra.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Take this man with you," he commanded. "Do you want to leave him behind to identify us all?"

Very unwillingly the negro picked up Greg again and followed the others out into the corridor. De Socotra put out all lights and brought up the rear. They turned to the right in the corridor, that is to say, towards the rear of the lot. Through a covered way at the back they gained another building, presumably the original stable of the establishment. As the stable door closed behind them, Greg heard the blows of a heavy piece of timber on the front doors. De Socotra locked the doors that they passed through.

In the back wall of the stable there was a door which admitted them to still another building, a rear tenement apparently on the lot abutting behind. It was empty. They then crossed a narrow paved court, and struck through a long close passage. The lights of a street gleamed at the far end; a trolley car rumbled in the distance—inexpressibly friendly sound to the prisoner.

At the mouth of the passage the fugitives all clung together, apparently afraid to venture out into the lighted street.

De Socotra coming up with them commanded: "Do not linger here. There is no one in sight. Scatter in different directions. Do not run. You are safe enough. There is nothing to connect you with the Ninth Street house. Go! You will hear from me in due course."

They melted away, leaving only de Socotra and the negro in the passage. The latter had dropped Greg to the pavement. It was of brick, and a tiny trickle of cold water ran down the middle of it. The negro made

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY