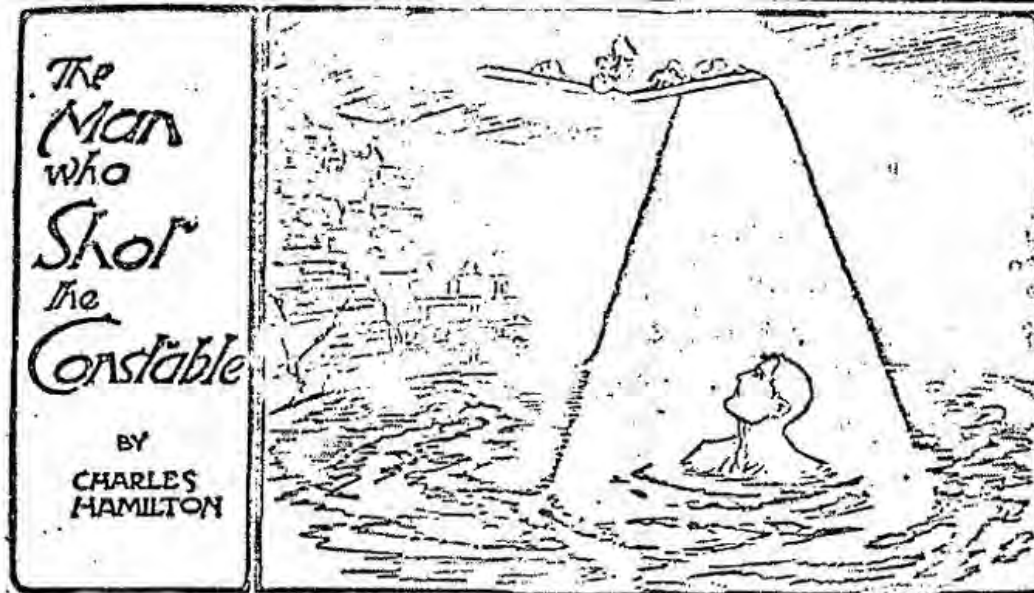


This is one of our Splendid Flashlight Yarns! Tales Snatched Red Hot from the Forno of Life.



The aperture opened again. A light flashed in his eye. He swam towards it, and saw the sunning, leering face of the Dandy.

A Divided Duty.

The room was very silent

The man stood by the window, his brows contracted, looking gloomily out. The girl sat with her face partly turned from him, very quiet and still. The tears were wet on her lashes.

The silence had lasted minutes. Paul Talbot turned abruptly, at last, from the window, and fixed his dark, handsome eyes upon his sister.

“You are really in earnest, Mella? You love this man – this stranger whom I have never seen?”

There was a ring of reproach in his voice. The girl turned towards him quickly.

“Whose fault is that, Paul?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Mine, I suppose, as the aversion to a meeting was on my side, and not on this Mr. Redfern’s”

“You have refused to meet him. You have cherished an unreasonable dislike for a man you do not know.”

“You know the reason, Mella.”

“It is not a reason. Why should you dislike Arthur Redfern simply because he is a detective? There are as many noble men in that profession as in any other. And Arthur is brave and noble.”

The colour came into the girl’s cheeks as she spoke. Mella Talbot was very beautiful. Her brother looked at her with a slightly amused smile.

“I am afraid, Mella, that I could not idealise this – this gentleman as you do. You are a dreamer, and I am a man of the world. I wish from the bottom of my heart that you had never met the fellow.”

“If I had never met him I should not be here now. Do you forget that he saved me from death in the sea, at the risk of his own life?”

“Yes, I had forgotten for a moment that exploit, which no doubt he has magnified a great deal –”

“He has done nothing of the kind!” cried the girl indignantly. “You are cruel and un-just.”

“I don’t intend to be, Mella,” said Paul Talbot, his voice softening, “and I am sorry to give you pain. But I cannot approve of your choice.”

The girl was silent. The tears were gliding down her cheeks now.

Talbot's face contracted, as if with pain, as he saw them. Mella was ten years younger than himself, and he had been more like a father than a brother to her. She had been his care longer than she could remember, for father and mother had died when she was but a babe. In those days they had been poor – terribly poor, yet Talbot had always somehow contrived that the child should want for nothing. Wealth had come to them of late years. Never till now had Mella received anything but kind indulgence from her brother. But now he was adamant.

Why?

The girl could not understand. Always, more or less, her brother had been a mystery to her; her love for him was mingled with fear. He was reserved, silent; in many matters grimly uncommunicative. That he cared for her tenderly she knew. Yet in this, the crisis of her life, she found him hard and cold.

"Mella" – Talbot's voice was low and husky – "Mella, is this man so much, then, to you? Cannot you let him go – cannot you forget him, and let us be once more as we used, before he came to bring a shadow on our lives?"

The girl did not speak.

"We were happy enough till he came to trouble us," said Talbot, with a sudden gleam in his eyes – a gleam of hatred for the absent man. "Do you care so much for him, then?"

"I have told you so."

"More than for all else?"

"Yes."

"Then you will not give him up?"

"I cannot."

"Be it so," said Talbot coldly. "Choose him, then, and say farewell to me!"

She looked up suddenly, startled.

"Paul!" What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. If you marry this stranger, we part, to meet no more. I do not wish to coerce you in any way. You are free to make your choice."

"I am not free," said Mella, in a choking voice, "for you know that I could not be so ungrateful as to leave you against your will."

He made an impatient gesture.

"Put gratitude out of the question. That has nothing to do with it. I want you to choose for your own happiness. If you love this man so much, you will not miss me."

"I do love him," said Mella bravely. "But I shall never become his wife unless you freely consent, and so I have told him."

Talbot's face lightened.

"That is as it should be. Mella, my dear sister, it goes to my heart to give you pain. But I cannot act otherwise than as I do."

"You dislike Arthur, but the reason you give is not a good one," said Mella, looking at him. "Have you heard anything against him? If it is that, he would gladly meet any charge; his honour is unstained as your own."

Talbot bit his lip.

"It is useless to discuss the matter, Mella. I have nothing to say against Arthur Redfern except that I dislike him. I will never touch his hand."

"Paul," the girl broke out, "What is this mystery? There is something behind this that you do not explain. There is some secret –"

"There is no secret, and no mystery," said Talbot quietly. "I dislike the man. That is all. Call it unreasonable if you will; but there it is. As I have said, you will make your own choice."

"I have given you my answer to that."

"Then there let the matter rest."

He tuned moodily to the window again. His brow was very dark. He gave a sudden start as he looked out, and a bitter smile curled his lip.

"Ah, I see your friend is coming, Mella. I shall be in the way, I am afraid."

Mella rose to her feet.

A handsome young fellow was coming up the garden path towards the house: a man with a fine, athletic form, clear-cut features, and a pleasant expression.

The colour deepened in Mella's cheeks.

"It is Arthur."

"Yes, and as I said, I should be in the way if I remained. Good-bye, Mella – and good-night!"

"Then you will not see him, Paul?" the girl said, her dark eyes pleading.

He shook his head impatiently.

"No. Good-night!"

"You will be away to-night?"

"Yes; on important business. I may not even return to-morrow, but in that case I shall write. Good-bye, my dear girl!"

Mella's eyes were heavy with tears.

She brushed them hastily aside as she heard the footsteps of Arthur Redfern. But the latter, when he entered, did not fail to observe the traces of them.

"Mella!"

He held her hand long in his, his eyes dwelling full of love and tenderness upon her face. She drew her hand away.

"Is your brother here?"

"No."

"Then he refuses to see me?"

"Yes."

"And gives no reason?"

"None, excepting that I have told you."

A bitter look came upon Redfern's face.

"Yes, that absurd and unreasonable dislike of my profession!" he exclaimed. "I cannot accept that as a reason. But why does he not go further, Mella, and forbid you to see me?"

The girl's face was sad and pale.

"He would never do that, Arthur. I – I cannot understand it at all. There must be some reason that he has never stated to me. Is it possible that someone has maligned you to him?"

"I have many enemies," said the detective, "But they are among the lawless classes; none whom your brother would be likely to meet. Mella, you have said that you love me." He drew her into his arms. "Dearest, this is the merest tyranny; are two lives to be spoiled by it? Let him go his way. If you will be my wife –"

"It cannot be, Arthur." The girl's face was sad, but very firm. "I could not be so ungrateful. I owe everything to Paul. He has cared for me since I was a little child. How could I flout his wishes now?"

"Yet –"

"Besides, he deems it for my happiness; I am sure of that. I know he is unreasonable; but I owe him so much, and he loves me dearly."

"You think much of him, Mella! You think little of me; but I love you!"

"It is not kind of you to utter reproaches, Arthur. And – as I have told you – I do not wish to bind you, when it is all so hopeless –"

"I am bound already," said Redfern quietly. "Bound by love, Mella. You need not offer me my freedom again. I do not want it. At least, it is something that I am permitted to see you, dearest. So long as that is not forbidden I will try to be content, and to hope for better times. But it is hard."

Mella's face brightened.

"A better time may come. He may not remain so hard. But to speak of yourself, Arthur. What of your work – the task that has been given you?"

Redfern drew her to a seat beside him. His face was grave, but there was a gleam like the light of battle in his eyes.

"I have something to tell you about that, Mella. At last, I believe I am on the track of the man I have so long sought; the man the police of a dozen cities have hunted for in vain; the man no one seems to have seen, and whose photograph is not to be found at Scotland Yard,

but is more dangerous than the best known criminal there. I believe I am on the track of the Dandy.”

Mella listened with keen interest. Redfern always found the girl an interested listener when he spoke of his work. She was always glad to hear of the cases that were placed in the hands of the most brilliant young investigator at the Yard. And an interest deeper than usual attached to his present work – the pursuit of the most mysterious criminal in London.

Mysterious indeed, was the criminal known to his associates as the “Dandy,” a man whose face was known by few, whose real name was known by none. Gladly had Redfern accepted the task at which others more experienced than he had failed. If he succeeded it meant the success of his career. And he was determined to succeed. To become famous in his profession, to earn promotion, and to rid society of a scourge – it was a high ambition, and Mella fully sympathised with it.

“The man has always worked by secret ways,” continued the detective. “His assistants have sometimes suffered; he himself has never been captured, has never even been seen by the police. His history is utterly unknown, but it is certain that he is a man of education, and great ability, for he has proved more than a match for the police for many a year. But now, at last, there is a weak spot in his defence. We have received information which I believe to be reliable. If it proves to be so, I think the Dandy has reached the end of his tether at last”

His eyes sparkled.

“According to our information, Mella, there is to be an attempt to steal Lady Lynwood’s jewels to-night, and the Dandy is to be there. The house will be watched, every way of escape will be guarded. If the Dandy comes, he will not go again. It was I who gained the information that I speak of, and if the capture is effected, to me the credit will be due. It will mean much to me.”

The girl’s face blanched somewhat.

“You are going into danger?”

The detective laughed.

“Danger and I are old friends,” he said. “But the danger will be little to-night. I shall have six men with me, and if the rascals come, they will have no chance. You need not be troubled by that thought, dearest. I only hope the Dandy will fall into the trap. For years he has preyed upon society. I think he is nearing his fall.”

“I hope you will succeed,” said the girl wistfully. “Yet – yet one cannot help feeling some pity for that wretched man. What will it mean to him?”

“Ten years’ penal servitude at the least,” said the detective quietly. “But your pity is wasted, Mella. He does not deserve it. He is not one of the miserable wretches common enough in this London of ours who are driven to crime by poverty. He is a man of intelligence and education, and fitted to make his way in the world by other means if he chose. Your compassion is wasted on him.”

The girl nodded.

“I shall be anxious about you, Arthur, until I see you again,” she said with a sigh.

He kissed her tenderly.

“I shall let you know that I am safe, as soon as it is over,” he said. “But there is really no occasion for uneasiness. It is the Dandy who has cause to fear to-night.”

And when Arthur Redfern left Mella, and walked away in the dusky evening, his thoughts were busy with the coming night’s adventure.

It would mean so much to him if the Dandy were captured; It would mean so much to the city upon which the mysterious criminal had preyed so long. And the capture seemed certain if he played his cards well. And the matter was quite in the young detective’s hands.

Lord Lynwood had given him a free hand to make his arrangements at Lynwood House. The Lynwood jewels were heirlooms of immense value, and his lordship was grateful for the warning he had received, and anxious to do anything in his power to help the police in effecting the capture of the intended raider.

The night was a busy one to Arthur Redfern. His arrangements were made with skill and foresight, yet he was uneasy that some point might have been overlooked. Had he been dealing with an ordinary criminal he would have been more assured, without taking so much

trouble. But with the Dandy it was different. The man who had defied the police for years would not be captured easily. The smallest loophole would be sufficient for him.

But Redfern, at last, was satisfied that he had left no loophole for the escape of the raider – if he should come! That was his chief uneasiness now – that the criminal, whose career showed that he had an almost uncanny instinct, warning him when danger was nigh, should have learned what was intended, and should have abandoned the “job.”

Men were posted in the grounds and in the house itself, and Redfern was keenly on the watch in the room where the jewels reposed in the safe. The house was dark and silent; the household, with the exception of Lord Lynwood, knew nothing of ‘what was on the tapis.’ The whole affair had been kept a profound secret.

Midnight chimed out. Still and silent was the great house. The untiring detective waited in the gloom, patient as an Indian hunter. He stood in the shadow of a piece of furniture, completely concealed should the thief enter the room. Would the Dandy come?

His men had orders not to show themselves until they heard his signal whistle. Not till the Dandy was fairly in the trap was the mine to be sprung.

But would he come? Another hour dragged wearily by. The detective’s uneasiness was growing. Would he come?

Clink!

He started and strained his eyes through the gloom. It was a faint sound from the window. The blind was up; a dim form flitted outside the glass. Redfern drew a deep, quivering breath. Was it the Dandy? He made no movement. There was a sound again as the sash was thrown up, and a figure leaped through into the room. The time had come!

Arthur Redfern’s hand went up to his lips, and the shrill, piercing note of the whistle rang through the stillness of the night. The intruder seemed petrified for a moment at the sudden, startling sound. Then, with a muttered oath, he turned to the window. But he had no time to leap out. With the spring of a tiger Arthur Redfern was upon him. They went together to the floor with a crash.

There was a sound of alarm through the great house, opening doors, calling voices. A shout in the grounds, a sound of running feet, told that the detective’s whistle had been heard; the rest remained at their posts, guarding the possible avenues of escape.

“Surrender!” panted Redfern. “You are my prisoner!”

A bitter curse was the only reply. The man was struggling desperately. He had been taken by surprise by the detective’s attack, and had gone down undermost, and the detective had the advantage. But the burglar was a man of powerful build, and his peril seemed to have imparted to him the strength of a madman. He made a tremendous effort, and hurled the detective aside. He sprang to his feet. But in a second Redfern had fastened upon him again.

A light flashed in the gloom. Help was at hand. The burglar’s hand went up with something flashing in it. Arthur Redfern reeled away, half-stunned by a crashing blow from the butt of a revolver. The Dandy turned and leaped through the window like lightning.

There was a shout below; he had leaped fairly into the arms of two constables. They seized him fast. He fought like a tiger. The revolver crashed upon a head, and a man sank senseless at his feet. The other clung to him fiercely. Arthur Redfern staggered dazedly to the window.

“Hold him, my man!”

He leaped through to the ground. At the same moment the Dandy tore himself away from the constable who was holding him, and went racing down a shadowy path.

“After him!” yelled Redfern.

His head was reeling from the blow he had received, but he dashed in pursuit, the gasping constable close at his side.

“It’s all right, sir!” he panted. “Constable Price is watching that path, and the fellow can’t get past. He’s got no chance.”

The words seemed to be true, for there was the sound of a struggle ahead in the darkness. The Dandy’s retreat was cut off; he had no chance.

“Come on,” panted Redfern.

They tore on. Suddenly through the darkness came a ringing report, and a cry of terrible agony followed. Redfern gave a cry.

“He has shot him!”

He raced on madly. A sound of footsteps died away in the distance as Arthur Redfern stumbled over a prostrate form in the path. He stooped over it for a moment. His companion turned the light of a lantern upon the fallen man’s face.

It was the constable, who had watched the path; who had striven to stop the flight of the Dandy. His face was ghastly white, and there was blood on his uniform; blood in a pool beside him. His eyes were fixed and glazed.

“Dead!”

Redfern dashed on. The murderer should not escape him. But his quest was in vain. The grounds were scoured; search made in every direction. All in vain. The man who had shot the constable was gone – the Dandy had escaped.

And Redfern, in black and bitter disappointment, returned to the spot where the dead man lay. And as he looked at the ghastly face, grim with the seal of death, he swore silently that he would avenge that crime – that the murderer, at the last, should not escape him.

The Track of the Criminal. The Terrible Truth.

“Thank Heaven you are safe!”

Mella’s voice was tremulous; her beautiful face was very pale. Arthur Redfern pressed her hand.

“You had my wire?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“I thought you might be anxious,” he said, “When you heard – of course, you have heard what happened last night?”

“Yes.” She shuddered. It is in the morning papers. I have seen it all. The man has escaped, and now he is a murderer.”

“Yes. But he shall yet come to his deserts.” Redfern’s face was hard and stern. “He has escaped me for once. The next time he shall not escape.”

“It might have been you, Arthur!” Mella sobbed, as she clung to him. “It might have been you!”

“Calm yourself, dearest!” he said tenderly. “Calm yourself, or I shall wish I had told you nothing.”

“Your name is in the papers,” said Mella with a faint smile. “I should have known. But I have been terribly anxious. Is there no clue to the whereabouts of the assassin?”

“I am not sure yet, but I think we shall have him. I have what may turn out to be a clue – and I think he is at the end of his tether. I must hurry off, Mella. I came but for a minute to assure you of my safety.”

“You will come again as soon as you can; you know how anxious I shall be.”

“Trust me!” He kissed her. “And I hope I shall be able to tell you that the Dandy is under lock and key.”

And Redfern left her. Mella watched him from the window as he strode away, and then sank into a chair, in a deep and gloomy reverie. Although Arthur Redfern made light of it, she knew that grim peril lay before him. Would she see him again in life? A deep sigh escaped her lips, and a tear trembled on her dark lashes.

“Crying, Mella?” She started up at her brother’s voice. “My dear girl, why?”

Mella looked up quickly.

Paul Talbot stood before her. He was grave, handsome, well-groomed as usual; somewhat graver than usual, perhaps, the girl thought. He was gazing at her steadily.

“What has happened, my dear Mella?” he asked quietly.

“You have not seen the news, Paul?”

“What news, Mella?” Anything in the papers?”

“Yes.”

“I have only looked over the City columns,” he said, smiling. “You must tell me what has happened.”

She gave him a morning paper, folded down at the description of the attempted burglary and the murder at Lord Lynwood’s house the previous night.

Paul Talbot glanced over it carelessly.

“Ah, yes; I heard some people speaking of a murder, now I recall it,” he remarked; “but what concern is this to you, Mella?” Oh, I see here the name of your friend Redfern! He is the detective engaged on the case. Is that so?”

“Yes, Paul.”

“By Jove! I see he had a desperate struggle with the burglar – a gentleman who seems to rejoice in the soubriquet of the ‘Dandy.’ He shot a constable and got away. This will be a hanging matter for him if he is caught. Poor brute!”

“I was thinking of Arthur’s danger.”

“Redfern? He does not seem to have been hurt.”

“He is tracking the criminal now.”

Talbot laughed.

“He has a clue, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

“My dear girl, his clue will not lead him into any danger. I know something of the detectives and their clues. They always have a clue to begin with. It is simply to satisfy the public. When interest in the case has subsided, they come sneaking back to say they have lost the clue.”

But Mella did not smile.

“Arthur is not like that,” she said quietly. He will not leave the trail till he has found the murderer, and I fear for his safety.”

Talbot shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, if this peculiarly – named criminal is so dangerous a character, and Redfern really has a clue, it is quite possible that he will go into danger,” he said. “I shall be sorry for your sake, Mella, if anything happens to him. You think, then, that he was not merely boasting, that he really possesses a clue?”

“I am certain of it.”

“Then I wish him success. And now to talk of pleasanter matters. I have been hard at work in the City lately, and feel the need of a holiday. How would you like a run abroad for a few weeks, Mella?”

The girl hesitated. Her brother smiled bitterly.

“Ah, I see; you do not wish to leave London till this detective has finished his case!” he exclaimed.

“Can you wonder at that, Paul?”

“No, I suppose not. So I shall have to go alone. Be it so.”

He went out of the room, his brow darkened. The girl sighed. But her thoughts soon returned to Arthur Redfern.

Where was he now?

Good cause, indeed, would the girl have had for anxiety could she have followed the footsteps of her lover that day.

Arthur Redfern had not said idly that he had a clue to the criminal. The clue was in his hands, and he was following it up eagerly. In the struggle with Redfern on the previous night the Dandy had been hard put to it to escape. He had barely torn himself from the detective’s clutches. It had occurred to Arthur afterwards that he might, in that desperate tussle, have left some clue to his identity behind, and the detective had carefully searched the room. And his search had been rewarded.

He had found a broken electric lamp, a drill, and a fragment of paper, which had fallen from the burglar, or had been dragged from him, in that wild and whirling fight.

It was the last item that gave Redfern a clue. The paper was a fragment of a letter, and bore but a few words. It contained a reference to some plunder disposed of by the thief, and had evidently been written by a "fence," or receiver of stolen goods. The few words gave no clue in themselves. But the hand might be known to the police, and it was upon this point that Redfern based his hopes. And he was not disappointed.

For, compared with the specimens of criminals' handwriting in the possession of the police, the fragment was identified. It had been written by Moses Rosenthal, a "fence" with an unenviable reputation. And Redfern, inspired by the discovery, set off to interview Rosenthal. He knew the man, and knew that he was exactly the kind of man to give away anybody to save himself.

Moses Rosenthal dwelt in a little dark den off Shoreditch High Street. He was a little, swarthy, wrinkled man, with a soft, oily manner. He greeted the detective with a mingling of uneasiness and oily courtesy in his manner.

"I want a little talk with you, Moses," said Redfern genially. "Can you spare me ten minutes? It's important."

Rosenthal gave a sickly smile.

"Yesh, my tear Mr. Redfern," he said. "I am always at your service. Come into my parlour."

The detective entered the little back parlour, where Rosenthal lived like a spider in his web. It was a stuffy little room, with a single grimy window looking out into a dingy yard. It was half filled with ancient articles of wearing apparel, for Rosenthal's ostensible business was that of a second-hand clothes' dealer. The smell of the room was a suffocating mixture of old clothes, fried fish, and tobacco fumes.

"Please be seated, Mr. Redfern," said Moses fawningly. "And vat can I do for you?"

"How much did you give the Dandy for the Hopwood diamonds?"

The question was so sudden that the Jew could not be prepared for it. He gave a gasping cry. His yellow face turned livid. It was full a minute before he could recover his self-possession.

"You, you vas joking," he said, in a trembling voice. "Who is der Dandy?"

"The man you wrote this note to," said the detective, showing part of the scrap of paper, so that it appeared that he held the whole letter in his hand.

Rosenthal gritted his yellow stumps of teeth.

"The fool!" he hissed. "The madman! Where did you get that?"

Redfern smiled grimly.

"So you admit ---"

"I admit nothing," said Rosenthal, recovering himself. "A man came to me to sell some diamonds. I think that they were stolen, and threaten to inform the police. He escape wiz them. How vas I to blame in that?"

"This letter does not quite bear out that statement."

"I did not write it."

"It's in your hand, Moses."

"Let me see it."

Redfern laughed.

"You would like to get hold of it, Moses, my boy, but I am not likely to give you the chance. Now, there's no need to beat about the bush. You know what happened last night. I imagine you were the fence the Dandy was going to bring Lady Lynwood's jewels to if he had succeeded in carrying them off. You know the Dandy shot a policeman in making his escape from Lord Lynwood's house?"

"Yes," said the Jew sullenly.

"I don't want you, Moses," went on the detective disdainfully. "I am flying at higher game. It is the Dandy I want."

"I know nothing ---"

"Let me finish. I have long suspected you of being the fence through whom the Dandy disposed of his stolen property; now I have proof of it. You know where the Dandy is to be



The question was so sudden that the Jew could not be prepared for it. He gave a gasping cry. His yellow face turned livid. It was full a minute before he could recover his self-possession.

found; you can take your choice, Mr. Rosenthal. Tell me where to put my finger on the Dandy, or come with me to the lock-up.”

Rosenthal looked in the detective’s face, and read there his determination.

“And if I tell you all I know — “he began.

“Then you will not be troubled.”

“You promise that?”

“Yes. It is the murderer I want!”

The old Jew seemed to be torn by an inward struggle. Redfern watched him calmly and patiently.

“Well, Moses?” he said at last.

“I know fery little about the man,” said Rosenthal. “He is too cunning to put himself in my power or anyone else’s. I do not know his name.”

“I will find out his name soon enough when I have found him. That’s what I want you to help me to do. Where did you see him for your interviews?”

“I saw him very seldom. He never came here. Sometimes he would send a note, saying what he expected he would have to dispose of. I would write an offer in return. He was fery cautious.”

“But when you did see him?”

“Then I would go to a place he had in Knox Street. I had a key to a room opening on to a stable-yard. He used to come into the room by a different way. Whether he lived in the house I don’t know, but I know he kept some things there.”

Redfern’s eyes sparkled.

“Good, Moses! If you’re telling the truth, I think I have him now.”

“I am telling der truth, so help me!” declared the Jew. “But you vill keep mum, Mr. Redfern? It would be the death for me if it came out.”

“You can trust me, if you are dealing squarely. And I think you know better than to play with me.”

“I deal square as a die, so help me!” protested Moses. “But — but if you go into danger, you must not blame me. I varn you that it is dangerous to track down the Dandy.”

Redfern laughed.

“Thanks for the warning, though I’ve no use for it.”

“But you must take good care,” urged the old Jew. “I haf heard that the house in Knox Street is full of pitfalls. Dere are traps a man may fall into, and —”

“I shall take care. Is there anything more you can tell me?”

“Nothing, tear Mr. Redfern.”

“Then give me full directions — and the key.”

Not without reluctance the old man obeyed. Redfern, in high good humour, left the house of the fence. His first step was to telephone to Scotland Yard. Having informed the superintendent where he was going, and asked to be looked for if he did not ring him up again in an hour’s time, Redfern set out for Knox Street.

It was a little dingy street in the depths of Shoreditch. He easily found the yard the old Jew had described to him, and the door opening upon it. It was the dusk of the evening now. The detective, after a wary look round, put the key in the lock and turned it. Within all was dark, and seemed deserted.

Redfern had provided himself with an electric pocket-lamp. He turned the light into the gloom before him. The door opened directly into a room on the ground floor, and the apartment was destitute of furniture. On the opposite side was a door, apparently giving further admittance to the building.

Redfern stepped into the room, and closed the door behind him. He cast his light round the room and discovered nothing but that it was empty. Nothing was there to afford a clue. The walls were bare and mildewed, the floor of dirty boards, the ceiling black and rotting. No sound came from the building he was in. The windows, looked at from outside, had been dark, most of them broken and stuffed with rags. The house had appeared to be uninhabited, but Redfern knew that appearances might be deceptive.

If the Dandy were in the habit of frequenting this building, and meeting there associates with whom it was necessary for him to have personal interviews, there would probably be some clue left. The Jew had said that he came only by appointment, which looked as if the Dandy did not live there. But Rosenthal might have been deceived.

Redfern crossed the room towards the inner door. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the floor gave way beneath his feet, and he shot downwards without having a chance to save himself. Almost before he knew that he was falling, he had shot down into the blackness far below the level of the floor.

Fortunately, he fell upon his feet, and rolled over on the ground very shaken and jarred, but otherwise little the worse for his fall. His lamp had gone out, however, and he was in darkness.

For a moment or two he lay dazed. Then he rose, with a muttered anathema on his own folly. Every bone in his body was jarred. He looked upward, in time to see the trap he had fallen through slowly resuming its horizontal position. It was evidently governed by some automatic contrivance. The closing of the trap made the blackness pitchy.

Redfern set his teeth hard. The old Jew had warned him to beware of a trap, and yet he had walked into this one like the veriest child. Doubtless, when the room was used the trap was bolted. At other times it was left as a pitfall for the unwary. The detective thought he heard the distant buzz of a bell, and guessed that it had been sounded by the movement of the trap.

He struck a match and looked about him. He was at the bottom of a circular, well-like pit, at least twelve feet in depth. The sides were of brick, but the ground under his feet was thick with mud, and apparently had at some date — not very distant — been covered with water. The detective wondered at this somewhat, for there appeared to be no opening by which water could reach the pit. The mud was thick and foul smelling, but it had saved him from hurting himself much.

The match went out. Redfern gritted his teeth. But he remembered, with a thrill of relief, that he had rung up Scotland Yard before coming here, and that in an hour, or little more, men in blue would be there to look for him. There was certainly no escape unaided from the pit. A cat could not have climbed the circular walls.

He settled down to wait with all the patience he could muster. If the house was unoccupied, he was safe till his comrades came. But the trapped detective remembered the buzz of the bell. He was not surprised to hear a footstep on the trap a few minutes later. A small square opening appeared in the trap above him, and a light gleamed through.

“So you are there?”

“Yes,” said Redfern, assuming a cheerfulness he was far from feeling, “I am here.”

“Trapped!”

“Yes, so it appears.”

There was a grim laugh above.

“Fool!” I watched you coming to the house. I was at a window, and you did not see me. Are you prepared to die?”

“I don’t see the necessity of preparing for that yet, my friend,” said Redfern coolly. “You are in more danger than I am, if you are, as I believe, the Dandy, the villain who shot Constable Price last night!”

“The fool should have let me go! After last night, the penalty of capture is too great for me to spare you. You have come here to your doom.”

“We shall see.”

“Fool again! I have but to turn a tap to fill the pit with water, through a pipe that is out of your reach. You will be drowned like a rat in a trap.”

Redfern shuddered.

“Very well, I shall die doing my duty,” he said firmly. “You will pay for this along with the rest. Do your worst. I do not ask mercy at your hands.”

The unseen man laughed harshly.

“Yet I am disposed to grant it unasked. I do not desire to take your life unless you force me to it. I will spare you on conditions.”

“Name them.”

“That you relinquish my trail, keep a dead secret any discovery you have made, and —“

“Never!”

“You will swear this on your honour and conscience, and you shall live.”

“I would not live on such conditions.”

“Bah! What are your scruples? You see, I am willing to trust you; I know more of you than you know of me, and I know I could take your word.”

“You could take it if I gave it, but I will never give it. You are a murderer, and it is my duty to bring you to justice,” said Redfern, in a calm, clear voice. “I will give no quarter, and I ask none.”

“Then your fate be upon your own head.”

The aperture closed; blackness again shut in the detective. He listened painfully. Was this pit indeed such a cunning death-trap? He hardly doubted it, and the sound of gurgling water soon convinced him.

Gurgle! Gurgle!

Water was coming from a pipe let in the brick wall; exactly where he could not determine. It was coming in slowly, very slowly. Some time passed before the detective felt it creeping over his boots.

A shiver ran through his body. The unknown had carried out his threat; he was doomed to drown here like a helpless rat in a cage.

One chance, a glimmer of a chance, remained. He was a fine swimmer. Until the water reached the trap at the top he might keep afloat. By that time help might come. It was a slender chance; but it was all that was left to him.

Gurgle! Gurgle!

The water was over his ankles. It was very cold, and he tramped and splashed in the mud to keep himself warm. The chill went through him like a knife. He remembered, with a shudder, that the floor had been wet when he fell into the pit. Had any other hapless being been done to death there? Had other trackers of the Dandy met their doom beneath that trap, in darkness and despair?

The water swished round his knees. How long had he been there? He could not tell. Would his friends ever arrive? Would they arrive to find his dead body floating there under the trap? He thought of Mella, and groaned. Poor Mella! What would she think when he did not come? What would she think when she knew that he had been killed?

Higher and higher rose the water. It swished and gurgled round his waist, and now it seemed to be rising more quickly. Soon it washed round his chest and under his arms. He kept himself in rapid motion to fight off the chill of it.

Higher and higher!

He was swimming now; swimming for his life. The solid ground was gone from under his feet. There was a sound above. Was the Dandy still there? Heaven grant that the police found him when they came; he could not guess that they were coming, or he would not have lingered. Higher and higher, till his hand, upstretched, struck against the wooden trap. He felt over it desperately with his hand – it was immovable. Higher and higher, till his head touched the wood above. Then the water ceased to rise.

Redfern realised this with a thrill of hope. Had something gone wrong – or had the assassin relented? The aperture opened again; a light flashed in his eyes. He swam towards it, and saw the cunning, leering face of the Dandy.

“Will you swear now?”

“No!”

“Dolt! I have a motive for wishing to spare your life – what it is matters not – and I would gladly let you live. But I cannot let you live unless you swear that I have nothing to fear from you.”

“I have my duty to do.”

“Take the oath, and live.”

“Never!”

“Then die like an obstinate fool, as you are!”

The slit closed; a hidden bolt was shot. Redfern felt above with his hands, but all was hard and fast. There was no escape.

The water was rising again. Arthur Redfern gave himself up for lost.

But what was that? A sudden trampling above; a cry, a ringing shot, the sounds of a desperate struggle! Arthur’s heart beat wildly.

He knew that it was the police at last. He hammered on the trap with his fists, and shouted for help. He was swimming on his back now, and his nose was touching the trap. A minute more and the water would be over his face, and he would be a dead man.

“Help, help!”

There was a rush of water over his mouth. He gasped, and his cries died away. It was too late! Under he went, to darkness and death. But no! Light was flashing in his eyes. He felt the clutch of hands; and as his senses left him he knew that the trap had been broken open, and that friendly hands were pulling him from the jaws of death. Then came a blank.

Redfern came to himself with a start and a shiver. He was lying beside the trap, and the swish of the water was still in his ears. His head was on a policeman’s knee, and there was a taste of brandy in his mouth.

“All right now, sir?”

“Yes.” Redfern staggered to his feet.

“Have you captured him?”

“Him? Who?”

“The Dandy!”

The policeman gave a whistle.

“Was it the Dandy? No, sir; he got away.”

Redfern gritted his teeth. He had half-expected it. Again the villain had slipped through his fingers. Redfern was little the worse for his experiences, and, having wrung the water from his clothes as well as he could, he commenced to search the house.

Some of the rooms were empty. Others showed signs of occupation. Many a trace Redfern found to show that the Dandy’s visit to the house had been a final one, to clear away

any clue the police might find if they came. On one hearth was a heap of burnt paper. There seemed to be nothing left to give a hint to the man's identity.

"I fancy he was in a rare funk, sir," remarked one of the constables. "He came here to clear up before disappearing for good, I imagine, I shouldn't wonder if his idea is to leave the country."

Redfern nodded. It was his own thought. The Dandy, evidently in fear that the police might obtain a clue to the house in Knox Street, had paid it a flying visit to destroy anything there that might prove dangerous to himself if it fell in hostile hands. While so engaged he had been interrupted by the coming of Redfern. The arrival of the police had nearly led to his capture, and he had broken away and escaped by the skin of his teeth. His task had been interrupted. Surely there was a good chance that something remained to furnish a clue to him!

And Redfern searched patiently and carefully. The heap of papers was still warm where it had been burnt. That had been one of the Dandy's latest tasks. Redfern searched through the heap with a keen eye. Here and there a fragment came to his hands, and on one was a trace of Moses Rosenthal's writing.

Suddenly the detective gave a start. His hand closed on a fragment of a letter; his eyes fastened upon it in a wild, amazed stare; the colour deserted his cheeks.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "Good heavens!"

He knelt there, white as death, staring at the half-burnt fragment of paper.

"Found anything, sir?"

Redfern's hand closed over the fragment. He rose to his feet.

"Nothing," he said, in a husky, unnatural voice. "I'll leave you in charge here now. I must go and get a change of clothes, or I shall get my death of cold."

He hurried from the house. The paper was still tightly clenched in his hand.

"Good heavens," he muttered again.

A cab whirled him away towards his diggings. Not till he was in his own room did he look at the paper again, behind a locked door. He held it in the electric light, and gazed long and almost wildly at the few words written there, in a delicate, graceful woman's hand.

A groan burst from his lips.

"Mella's hand! There is no mistake."

He paced the room, deadly pale, with feverish eyes. He knew that hand too well to hope that he could be mistaken. The paper the Dandy had burnt in the old house in Shoreditch, which, owing to the interruption of the police, he had left only partially consumed, was a letter written by Mella Talbot – the girl Redfern loved!

But that was not all. For these were the words the detective read:

"My dear Paul – "

It was the commencement of a letter written to – whom?

Redfern groaned aloud:

"Her brother!"

By His Own Hand.

"You will not come then, Mella?"

A look of pain came over the girl's face. There was a dark frown on Paul Talbot's brow as he fixed his eyes on his sister.

"You will not come, Mella?"

"Paul, I will come if you wish. But – but you know how anxious I am about Arthur. You know that – "

Her brother interrupted her with a hard laugh.

"Yes, I know that this man is all the world to you; that since you have met him your brother counts as nothing."

The tears came into Mella's eyes.

"That is not true, Paul. I will do as you wish. But - but -"

"But you will come abroad with me like a slave dragged by a chain," he said. "Your thoughts are all with this Redfern. Well, be it so. You have made your choice, and I do not complain. I go, and I wish you every happiness, Mella."

She looked at him in alarm.

"You speak as if you intended never to return, Paul."

"I do intend never to return."

"You - you are jesting. Why - why -"

"I need not explain, Mella. I am leaving England at once; I have my reasons. I should have been glad to take you with me, for you are all I have in the world. But I do not wish to stand in the way of your happiness. If you love Redfern, marry him, if you will."

"You consent?"

"I consent freely; for after to-night you will never see me again."

Mella burst into tears.

"Paul, how can you be so hard, so cruel? I -"

"Hush" - his voice was very tender now - "hush! Mella, I must go. I cannot explain, but I must go; I have no choice. But I will not drag you reluctantly with me. Perhaps we may meet again; I do not know. I leave you well provided for. If this Redfern be really the man you believe, he will care for you as well as I have ever done; I know at least that he is brave and steadfast. Mella, Mella, I cannot bear to see your tears! Believe me, I should not go if it could be helped."

"But what is this mystery? What is the reason -"

"I cannot explain. Can you not trust me?"

"Yes, yes; but - but I will not desert you, Paul." She rose to her feet, her eyes shining. "I believe you; I will ask no questions. I love Arthur; but you are my own dear brother. I will come with you; you shall not hear me complain once."

Paul Talbot's eyes were very soft.

"My dear Mella! But you will regret this - you will repent -"

"I shall not. Where you go I shall go."

"Think before -"

He stopped. There was a buzz of an electric bell. Mella started, and coloured.

"It must be Arthur."

Talbot's teeth came together hard.

"Do not be angry, Paul. I shall tell him what I have resolved; I shall bid him farewell for ever."

"Have you the courage, Mella?"

"You shall see that I have."

A strange look came over Paul Talbot's face.

"Mella" - he looked quickly round - "be it so, my dear sister; I accept your sacrifice. Now I will leave you."

He left the room by an inner door. He closed the door behind him, but he did not let it quite shut. Mella did not observe it; she believed that he was gone, and she stepped forward to meet Arthur Redfern, who entered the room the next moment.

She gave a cry at the sight of him.

He was deadly pale, and a feverish light was burning in his eyes. It was evident that he was labouring under some strong and terrible emotion.

"Arthur! What is the matter? What has happened?"

He glanced about the room as he took her hands in his.

"Nothing, Mella. Where is your brother?"

"He has but just left me."

She gave a nod of explanation towards the door by which Paul Talbot had quitted the room. Redfern glanced at it, and the trained eye of the detective noted what had naturally escaped the girl. He observed that the door was ajar, and that a shadow lurked there; his quick

ear caught a faint sound – faint, but enough to enlighten him. At the door of the inner room stood Mella's brother, and Redfern knew it as well as if he could see him standing there.

He gave no sign of his discovery. He had come there to see Paul Talbot; as matters stood his task was easier.

"But what has happened?" persisted the girl. "Arthur, tell me."

"I will tell you, Mella." Redfern's voice was dry and hard. "You remember that I told you I had a clue to the Dandy – the man who shot the constable?"

"Yes."

"I have followed it up. I have found out his secret."

The door of the inner room moved slightly.

Mella's back was to it; but Redfern, looking past her, saw it, and a grim expression came into his eyes.

"And is he captured, Arthur?"

"No. He is not captured. I followed up the clue I possessed. It led me to a house in the East of London, which seems to have been used by the Dandy for the purpose of meeting his associates and for assuming various disguises. There, Mella, I nearly lost my life, but I was saved in time from a terrible fate. It is not on this account that I am tracking down this criminal. What happened to me counts for nothing. It is for other reasons that I cannot spare him."

"You would spare him, then?" said the girl wonderingly.

"I would if I could, but I cannot! The arrival of the police put the Dandy to sudden flight. He had gone to the old house, evidently, for the purpose of destroying any clue that might be among his possessions there. On a hearth was a heap of burnt papers, but he had not been able to ascertain that all were burnt. Doubtless, given time, he would have left no clue. But as it happened, he left one – a fragment of a letter."

Again the door slightly moved.

"That letter – that fragment – told me all I wanted to know. For I knew the writing, and it opened my eyes to all. It was not a letter from one of his criminal associates. He had doubtless gone to that house hurriedly, in his everyday clothes. And in his everyday life, Mella, the Dandy, as I have learned, passed as a respectable member of society, a reputable and respected gentleman."

"It is strange."

"But since the murder of Constable Price, he must have gone in fear of arrest every moment. Therefore he burnt this letter with the rest, in order to have no clue to his identity about him if he were suddenly seized. For he would still wish to keep his secret – in prison, even on the gallows – for the sake of the one he loved. There was tenderness in the heart even of this criminal who has preyed upon London for long years."

"I pity him," said the girl softly.

"That fragment of a letter opened my eyes. Much that has puzzled me in many ways became clear to me at last. I followed up the clue it furnished, and learned that the theory I had formed was correct. Once my eyes were opened to the truth, the rest was easy. The net is tight round the criminal; it waits but my signal to close upon him."

"Then he is still free?"

"Free for the moment; but the building in which he is is closely watched; every way of escape is guarded, and there is no hope for him."

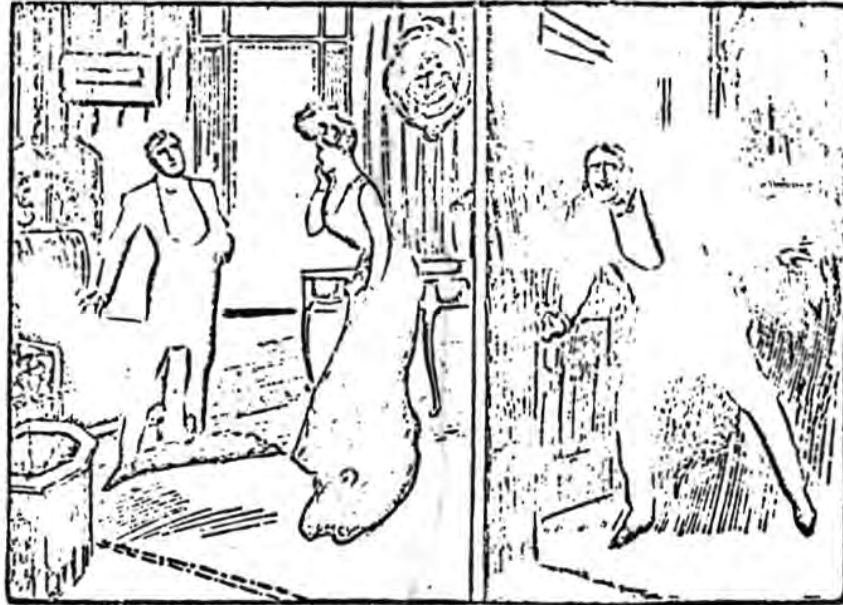
"Heaven have mercy upon him!"

"Amen," said the detective quietly. "And even were he, by some desperate chance, to escape his enemies now, his name is known, and would be published far and wide; his secret would flare forth in every newspaper, and he would be hunted down. And the one I have spoken of – the one he loves, Mella, she would know it all."

The detective paused.

From the adjoining room his strained ear caught faintly the sound of a low, hurried breathing.

Mella observed nothing.



"I will tell you, Mella." Redfern's voice was dry and hard. "You remember that I told you I had a clue to the Dandy—the man who shot the constable? Yes. I have followed it up. I have found out his secret."

"For her sake," resumed the detective — "for her sake, Mella, I would gladly spare the pain, if I could, but I cannot. There is blood upon his hands, and justice demands a life for a life. Besides, if I spared him, others would not. One thing I could do. If he gave justice her due, I could hush up his secret; the power to do that much would be mine. The one who loves and trusts him would know nothing then."

Mella shuddered.

"And now I must go," said the detective, raising his voice slightly. "I must go; my men are awaiting my signal."

"And you will give him that terrible choice?"

"It is all I can do for him."

"Heaven help him!"

"Yes, Heaven help him indeed!" said the detective.

Crack!

Mella started, and uttered a cry. It was the ring of a pistol-shot from the adjoining room.

The detective's face went a shade paler; but he did not start. Had he been expecting it?

He stepped quickly to the door. Mella, with a scared, white face, passed him swiftly. She reeled back with a low cry of pain and terror at the sight of the form stretched upon the carpet.

The detective's strong arms caught her and held her fast.

"Paul," cried Mella wildly — "Paul!"

Yes, it was Paul.

He lay very still, with a streak across his marble-like face, and a revolver, still smoking, gripped in his right hand. And slowly by his side a dark, crimson pool was forming.

"Paul!"

The girl, with a cry of anguish, flung herself down by his side. She caught his still hands; she called wildly upon his name. But no answer came to her calling, and the hands in hers were lifeless and cold.

Paul Talbot had gone to his account.

Justice, swift at the heels of crime, had overtaken the man who shot the constable.

Long-lived was Mella's passionate grief — long and bitter. One comfort only she had — the love of Arthur Redfern. From him she never learned the truth; from him she will never learn it.

THE END