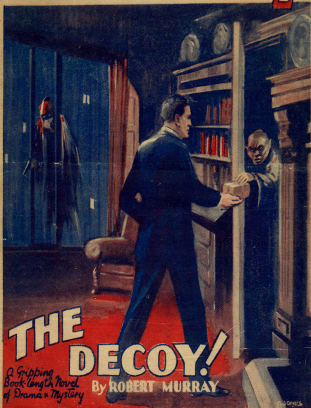


THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

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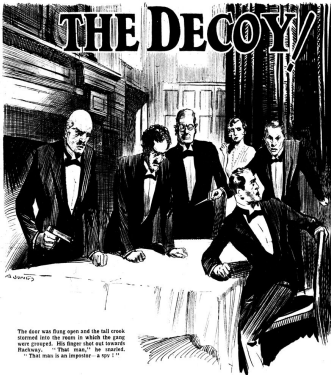


THE DECOY!

*A Gripping
Book-length Novel
of Drama & Mystery*

By **ROBERT MURRAY**

THE DECOY!



The door was flung open and the tall crook stormed into the room in which the gang were grouped. His finger shot out towards Rackway. "That man," he snarled. "That man is an impostor—a spy!"

Chapter I. THE SUSPECT.

WITHOUT raising the question as to whether he was aware of the fact or not, it can be definitely stated that Indus Rackway was a marked man from the moment he disembarked from the s.s. Cadonia at Southampton, and took his seat in the backstage that was waiting to convey him and his fellow-passengers to London.

The train was not the only thing that had been waiting for the Cadonia to berth, after her long voyage from Australia. Certain officials at Scotland Yard were not altogether disinterested in the movements of Mr. Indus Rackway, and Inspector Wood, of the Special Branch of the C.I.D., was one of them.

Several hours after the Cadonia had left Melbourne, and set her course for the British Isles, Inspector Wood was handed a

double telegram that had been dispatched by the head of the Melbourne police.

"Edward Lee, alias 'French' Edwards, alias Indus Rackway, international crook, wanted for Southampton aboard the Cadonia. Please note movements and report."

The inspector called his men, and passed a bell-pull. Shortly he handed the message to the young, capable-looking officer who entered the room.

"What do we know about Mr. Indus Rackway, alias second-one, and second-two?" he asked, after a brief pause.

"We know of him," replied the official from the Records Department. "We possess his dossier, as supplied by the French police on one occasion. But we have nothing against him. He is a British subject, with no convictions, so far as we are concerned."

The dossier, when produced at Mr. Wood's

request, gave the following description of Mr. Indus Rackway:

"Age, thirty-two; height, six feet; grey eyes, brown hair, fresh complexion, slender build, well-proportioned (several languages), and generally smartly dressed."

"There were some details relative to the man's past career, and the people of doubtful character with whom he had associated, but for the moment Mr. Wood was not unduly intrigued."

"Hing up the Yellow Star Line, and find out what date the Cadonia is expected to reach Southampton," instructed the inspector. "Make a note of it, and remind me to arrange for a man to keep an eye on Mr. Rackway when he arrives in England. As a preliminary you might also cable Melbourne and inquire if there is any likelihood of their applying for a warrant for Rackway's arrest."

By Robert Murray



A GRIPPING BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL OF THRILLS AND MYSTERY IN THE SECRET SERVICE.

Such a cabin was sent, and the reply was instantly in the negative. Backway was not "wanted" by the Australian police, but they would be interested to learn of his future movements.

Thus it came about that Inder Backway was a marked man when he transferred from the gangway from the *s.s. Catalina*, and set foot on English soil for the first time for two years. He was keenly scrutinized by a pleasant-looking young fellow, who wore a light-colored overcoat and a grey *Homburg* hat.

Backway was easily identified by the description in the possession of Scotland Yard. He was tall, wiry, and distinguished-looking. His close-set features were deeply tanned by the sun; his grey eyes were healthily clear, and his well-fitting clothes were unmistakably Colonial.

Deputing a porter to look after his cabin-trunk, he retained only a leather suitcase, and reposed himself comfortably in a first-class compartment of the boat-train. It was a corridor carriage, and the young man in the tweed coat placed himself inconspicuously in an adjoining compartment.

A moment before the train was due to start, the door of Backway's compartment was unceremoniously opened, and a belated passenger scrambled inside. The man from Australia stared curiously at the newcomer. His gaze was strictly Western, but his yellow skin, and oblique eyes betrayed him for a native of the East.

He was a Chinese. In build he was almost as broad as he was tall, and he was less than five feet in height. He dropped into a corner seat, directly opposite to the only other occupant of the compartment, donned a pair of knee-length spectacles, and became absorbed in a copy of the "Daily Mail."

The train started, and the young man in the tweed overcoat who occupied the adjoining compartment strolled innocently along the corridor. He cast a seemingly careless glance at Inder Backway, and returned satisfied to his seat, knowing that there would be no other stop until they reached Charing Cross.

For an hour the train roared steadily on its way. The swaying of the well-sprung coach, and the regular throb of the wheels was conducive to sleep. Inder Backway yawned several times, and settled himself more comfortably in his seat. His eyes fluttered several times, and finally they remained closed.

The Chinese suddenly lowered his paper. His black, heavy eyes gleamed like pools of ink as he stared alertly across at his fellow-passenger. From one pocket he produced an ivory snuff-box. Opening the lid, he revealed a wad of cotton-wool, in which was wrapped a tiny glass capsule, almost as faint as a soap-bubble.

Holding it gingerly between the finger and thumb of his right hand, he extracted a handkerchief from another pocket, and

pressed it tight over his mouth and nostrils. Then, quick as a flash, he leaped forward, held the capsule within an inch of Inder Backway's nose, and crushed it between his thin, yellow fingers.

For an instant the sleeping man seemed to cease breathing. Then his body gave a convulsive jerk, and his head fell limply against the padded back of the seat!

The Chinaman uttered a slight hissing breath of satisfaction. He glided to the end of the compartment, and glanced up and down the deserted corridor. Then with calm deliberation he bent over the senseless figure of Inder Backway, and swiftly examined the contents of his pockets.

He appeared to find nothing of interest, for he transferred his attention to the leather suitcase, unhooking it with a skeleton-key, and keenly scrutinizing everything in hold. Disappointment flamed in his eyes as he finally relocked the bag, and returned it to its place on the luggage-rack.

Half an hour later, when the boat-train rolled into Charing Cross Station, and came to a standstill, the compartment was empty, save for the figure of Inder Backway, who was hunched in a corner seat, with his head falling forward on his chest.

The Chinaman had disappeared.

As the long boat-train glided alongside the arrival platform of Charing Cross, and shuddered to a standstill, Detective-sergeant

Pyre was one of the first to alight. Standing to one side, his gaze concentrated on the compartment in which Mr. Inker Backway had descended from Southampton.

The door remained closed. The man from Australia failed to make an appearance, and a look of uneasiness flashed across the detective's face. In two strides he had crossed the platform and ratched the door open. A strange gasp of amazement and dismay escaped his lips.

Backway lay motionless and half-off the seat, his legs and arms sprawling limply. His eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily. It was evidently something deeper than an ordinary sleep that had claimed him.

"By Heaven, doped!" exclaimed Pyre in a strangled voice. "What the diuce has become of the other fellow who was in this compartment? I never saw him leave the train!"

Doped! Here was a mystery that Pyre couldn't pretend to understand—something that he had never anticipated when he had travelled to Southampton to cover the movements of Inker Backway, the crook from Australia!

He craned his head through the doorway, and looked to a passing porter.

"I'm a police officer. There's a man in here been taken ill?" he snapped. "Fetch a doctor at once!"

The porter needed no second bidding. He vanished at the double. Pyre drew the blinds at the windows to preserve privacy, and raised his chin wearily. He knew that there had been two passengers in this compartment when the train had left Southampton, and he cursed himself for not having paid closer attention to the second man who had been seated opposite to Inker Backway.

The porter returned, accompanied by the station-master, a railway policeman, and an elderly individual with a brusque, professional air. The latter felt Backway's pulse, and sniffed at his lips.

"There's nothing seriously wrong with him. He appears to have been drugged—or gassed," he announced, opening his emergency-case.

Backway suddenly commenced to stir and cough as the doctor fanned open his mouth and trickled a few drops of some liquid down his throat. He sat up, blinking his eyes, and with an expression of utter amazement stole across his face as he stared at the people gathered around him.

"For the love of Mike, what's happened?" he exclaimed, peering about the compartment, and out of the window at the busy station platform. "Is this Charing Cross? There hasn't been an accident, has there?"

"Who doped you? Or did you do it yourself?" demanded Pyre swiftly, hoping to extract an instinctive answer by the suddenness of his question. He had not forgotten the record of the man with whom he was dealing, as the mystery that appeared to surround his arrival in England.

"Doped me! Are you crazy? What's the game, anyhow?" Backway's voice was violently indignant, but a look of caution gradually dawned in his eyes.

"You were found motionless in this carriage when the train arrived at Charing Cross?" challenged Pyre. "What do you know about it?"

"Know about it? I never heard you get in all my life!" declared Inker Backway emphatically. "I've come straight from Southampton. Arrived from Australia this morning. I remember falling asleep in the train, and that's all there is to it."

"There is a possibility of foul play," hinted Pyre cautiously. "Were you alone

in this compartment when the train left Southampton?"

Backway pondered for a moment. He certainly was feeling queer and light-headed.

"No," he admitted suddenly. "There was another man got in here with me just as the train started."

Pyre nodded. He was already aware of that fact.

"Did you know the man? Can you describe him?"

"Never saw him before in my life," declared Backway bluntly. "He was a Chinese—a queer-looking little fellow, with a yellow face, and eyes like hot-buttons."

"Look here, we don't want any more hearing about the bank," Pyre suddenly snapped gruffly. "Do you know who that Chinese was? How you say idea why he should have doped you in your sleep?"

Inker Backway's bewilderment was palpably genuine. His tanned face was flushed with anger.

"This has got me growing all sorts up," he explained. "If I could lay hands on that Chink I'd soon show you whether I know him or not. Why the diuce should he have doped me? What was his motive?"

"Robbery, perhaps," hinted Pyre. "Better look and see if you're lost anything."

Backway's lips tightened, and there was an uneasy look in his eyes as he ran through his pockets. Nothing was missing, and a quick glance inside his suitcase satisfied him that its contents were intact.

"Everything O.K.," he announced, with a sigh of relief. "Not a brass farthing missing. That Chink must have been of his racket. I can't understand now how he could have doped me."

"Do you wish to make a report of this extraordinary affair?" asked the station-master reluctantly.

"Not on your life," assured Inker Backway promptly. "I'm none the wiser for what's happened. If it's all the same to you, I'll be getting on my way."

Pyre snatched while the other men were out of earshot, and then turned quietly towards the crook from Australia.

"What has brought you back to England, Backway?"

"I came on the s.s. *Colombo*—"

"Don't try and be smart. Why have you come back to England?"

"Patience," replied Backway gravely; "that yearning for the old homeland that burns steadily in the heart of every true-born Britisher. But why all these questions, and this intense interest in my movements? And how you know my name. The moment I landed at Southampton, and caught sight of you mingling innocently with the crowd, I guessed that you were a 'boss,' and that you had been sent down by the Yard to escort me safely to London."

Pyre flushed, and bit his lip.

"If you guessed that you must have a pretty rotten conscience," he said warty.

"Why did you expect to be met by an officer from Scotland Yard?"

"I have no conscience at all, and I did not expect to be met by an officer from Scotland Yard," admitted Backway pleasantly. "I am highly flattered by the interest that is being displayed in my movements. In fact, I should be interested to know why you were sent to Southampton to meet my boat?"

Pyre made no reply. He didn't know himself. He had received certain instructions from a superior officer, and he had faithfully and diligently carried them out. Beyond that he had no idea why headquarters was interested in Mr. Inker Backway.

But he knew the man's record. He knew that he had a "past," and that he had been an associate of some of the shabbiest crooks men in Europe. But he had never been convicted of any criminal offence; though he had been involved in affairs that had brought other people to the dock, and subsequently landed them in prison.

Backway beckoned to a porter, and instructed him to arrange a taxi, and to attend to his trunk in the baggage-van.

"I don't think we need detain one another any longer," he suggested with a friendly smile. "By the way, I suppose you see an officer from Scotland Yard? One has to be so careful of strangers in these days."

Sergeant Pyre cringed, and made queer noises in his throat as he produced his warrant-card and displayed it.

Nevertheless he stubbornly kept pace with the young man as he walked towards the waiting taxi.

It was unfortunate that circumstances had forced him to betray his connection with the police. It rendered more difficult his task of observing the man's immediate movements. To his amazement, Backway gave him ready assistance in this matter.

"If you see going straight back to the Yard, I can give you a lift part of the way," he suggested amiably. "I am going to the Universal Hotel in Northumberland Avenue. Incidentally, I shall be staying there for the next three or four days, if that information is of any use to you."

Sergeant Pyre was too taken aback to reply. Mechanically he stepped into the cab, wondering truthfully just what kind of a fool this immaculate, agreeable young man took him for.

He was still wondering as the taxi bowed out of the station approach, flushed through Trafalgar Square, and drew up outside the Universal Hotel in Northumberland Avenue.

A hotel porter appeared, and disappeared with Backway's baggage. Backway grasped Pyre's inert hand, and shook it warmly.

"Glad to have met you," he said graciously. "I hope to see you any time you're passing. I always like to keep in with the police. So long!"

The C.I.D. man crossed the road, and took up a point of vantage. He was no fool, and he was prepared to see Inker Backway reappear, complete with baggage, jump into another taxi, and speed away to some unknown destination.

But no such thing happened. Determined to make certain on at least one point, Pyre marched across the street, entered the hotel, and walked straight to the banister.

"Have you a Mr. Backway staying here?" he asked bluntly.

The reception clerk had no need to refer to the visitors' book.

"A Mr. Backway has just arrived," he informed obligingly. "Room Number Twenty-four. Shall I page him? What name, sir?"

"I'll call later. Won't disturb him just now," jerked Pyre hastily. He strode back across the foyer, almost to collide with the dapper, distinctive figure of a man, who came strutting through the door, closely followed by a porter carrying a couple of suitcases.

Pyre's involuntary words of apology died on his lips, and his eyes widened with sudden surprise as he stopped quickly to one side.

The man was a Chinese; swarthy-skinned, heavy-eyed, and quietly dressed! In every respect he answered to Inker Backway's description of the Oriental who had travelled up with him in the last train from Southampton.

Swiftly Pyre shifted his glance to the suitcase the porter was carrying towards

the lift. Each bore the same railway luggage-label: "Southampton to London."

Undoubtedly it was Indre Backway's mysterious fellow-passenger who had arrived to look a noon at the Universal Hotel, where his recent victim had preceded him by less than twenty minutes!

GREEN MARK.

There was a quiet smile of amusement on Indre Backway's face as he walked briskly into the Hotel Universal. Stripping off his gloves, he approached the bureau and nodded pleasantly to the reception clerk.

"Name of Indre Backway," he announced crisply, seizing a pen and making a flourishing entry in the visitors' book. "I booked a room by wireless from the U.S. Cabin early this morning."

"That is quite right, sir," agreed the clerk, detaching a key from the rack behind him. "Your room is number twenty-four in the second floor. There is no letter for you, sir."

A momentary gleam of surprise showed in Backway's eyes as he took the letter and slipped it into his pocket.

Number twenty-four was a front room, overlooking Northumberland Avenue. Just outside the window was a balcony that ran the entire width of the hotel.

"Thank you," said Backway, as the porter placed his trunk on the stand at the end of the bed, and unobtrusively effaced himself. His next movements betrayed extreme caution. Carefully he shut the bolt on the door, and then crossed to latch the window and draw the blind.

Setting himself in the armchair beside the bed, he lit a cigarette, and ripped open the letter the hotel clerk had handed to him. The envelope contained a single sheet of thick, expensive notepaper. It bore no address, and the few lines of writing it contained were written in a fast, somewhat foreign-looking hand. The message was couched in curt, commanding words:

"You will dine at eight o'clock in the hotel restaurant, and await further instructions. Our messenger will make himself known to you in the usual way. He is on your guard."

The note was unsigned. Backway studied it in silence for several minutes, and a puzzled look crept into his grey eyes.

"Our messenger will make himself known to you in the usual way," he quoted under his breath. "Humph! That's got me guessing. I shall have to watch my step pretty carefully. Things are beginning to move sooner than I anticipated. I can guess where this note comes from, and I can understand Scotland Yard having a man on the job, but I'm hanged if I can fathom that queer business with the Chick on the way up from Southampton. Where the devil does he come into the game? I'm up against a bigger proposition than I realized."

Indre Backway glanced at the watch on his wrist, then crossed to the automatic telephone that stood on a table beside the bed. He dialed a number that was to be found in no telephone directory that had ever been printed, and almost at once there came the click of a lifted receiver from the other end of the line.

"Is that Zero?" queried Backway cautiously. "This is Number A-12 speaking from the Universal Hotel."

"Good!" came the curt, unemotional reply. "Don't telephone to me again. Don't attempt to communicate with me under any circumstances—no matter what happens to you. You are playing a lone hand, Number A-12. It is up to you to

make good, or go under without involving anyone else in the affair. Good-bye!"

A grim smile stole across Backway's face as he replaced the receiver.

It was half-past seven. Indre Backway unbuttoned his dinner-jacket coat, and after evening lit, and disappeared into the adjoining bath-rooms. He whistled gaily as he lathered and shaved, and dressed himself in preparation for the next move in the dangerous game he was playing.

At five minutes to eight he descended down the stairs, and drank a cocktail at the hotel bar. Fortunately at eight o'clock he seated himself at a table in one corner of the smart, palatial restaurant and selected his meal with the elegant discrimination of an expert.

grace, and the limon curve and sweep of her silk-shrouded limbs.

She could not have been more than nineteen or twenty years of age. Her curly, bobbed hair was a glorious shade of Triton red, and her eyes as blue and as clear as Italian skies.

She sat with her white arms resting on the edge of the table, smoking a cigarette in a jade holder, and sipping with a glass that contained nothing more innocuous than lemon-squash. Once she glanced in Backway's direction, but her gaze went through him, and beyond him, as though he had no visible existence.

"By thunder, what a stunner!"

Backway's admiration was crudely expressed, but it would have taken an im-



Suddenly the Chinaman leaned forward and held the capsule of drug beneath the sleeper's nose. Then he crushed it between his lean, yellow fingers.

Backway ate slowly, and with genuine enjoyment. Outwardly cool and collected, inwardly he was thrilled with a sense of vague anticipation. Superficially his steady gaze roved to every part of the spacious restaurant.

There were men and women in evening-dress; people of all types and most nationalities. Which of them, he wondered, was the messenger who had been deputed to meet him there that night? He only half-guessed that he was on the verge of the greatest adventure of his life.

And then every other thought was swept from his mind as he suddenly became conscious of the fact that he was staring to dumb fascination at the most beautiful girl he had ever set eyes on.

She was seated alone at a single table, several yards distant from him, partly screened by a spreading palm that vied with the emerald-green frock she was wearing—a frock that revealed her deeper charm and

poise to have described the charms of the girl in the green dress; and Backway was no poet.

The girl appeared to be utterly unconscious and regardless of the fact that she was alone. One tiny foot, biding in a green silk slipper, tapped in time to the music of the orchestra, and her eyes were half-closed as she surveyed the spinals of the blue smokes that curled from the end of her cigarette.

Backway drew a deep breath, and managed to tear his gaze away. Mechanically he selected a black coffee and a liqueur.

Then with a startling, brutal suddenness, he was wrenched out of his dreams and confronted with the stark reality of the strange business he had in hand.

A man stood leaning over his table—a man in immaculate evening-dress, with a red carnation in his buttonhole, and an unlighted cigarette held between his long,

pink fingers. He was elderly, with bushy, white hair, small sunken-eyes, and a wedge-shaped face.

"Could you bring me with a match?" he asked, a queer, meaning smile playing around the corners of his cruelly thin lips.

Luder Rackway came back to earth with a jolt. He stared hard at the stranger, suddenly realizing that this trivial request held a subtle meaning that was intended for his understanding alone.

There was a silver match-vest placed in plain view in the center of the table. Instinctively Rackway struck a light, and held the flame to the man's cigarette. With a swift, barely perceptible movement, the latter spread his left hand, and dropped a tiny crumpled pellet of paper into the saucer of Rackway's coffee-cup. There and waiting, he bowed his thanks, and moved away across the room, disappearing up the red-carpeted stairs.

Quite by chance Rackway happened to turn his head. The girl in green was staring straight at him, her red lips parted, and a startled, wondering look in her eyes. With a quick flash she shifted her gaze, and beckoned to a passing waiter.

A moment later she left her seat, and hurried away in the direction the white-haired stranger had gone.

Rackway watched her out of sight, passed and curious. Then he finished the tiny pellet of paper from its resting-place, and deftly unrolled it and spread it out in the palm of his hand.

He could just read the few lines of writing that were penciled across it. Unbelievably it was the message he had been warned to expect in the letter he had received that evening.

"It is too dangerous for me to risk reading to you now. Go straight to your room, and wait."

Danger! Rackway flushed a quick, unobtrusive glance around the room. He could see nobody who had appeared to be unduly interested in his presence. The place was now practically empty. Most of the people had already finished their meal, and departed in the throats and cabarets.

The girl in green! Surely it couldn't have been her! Rackway winced as this thought flashed through his mind. It might have been only coincidence that she had paid her bill and swept from the restaurant as close on the heels of the sinister stranger who had performed the sinister innocent action of asking him for a match.

Rackway placed the scrap of paper in the ash-tray, and pressed it with the glowing end of his cigarette until it was entirely consumed. Then he rose and walked casually from the room, passing only to purchase some cigarettes in the foyer, and to cast a quick glance around the entrance-lounges.

Both the girl and the man had entirely disappeared. Whistling softly, Rackway ascended to the second floor and entered his room. Flinging himself into a chair, he smoked thoughtfully for several minutes. He had been instructed to wait—but what for? And for how long? How would the white-haired man seek to communicate with him, a second time?

The man left suddenly impatient and uneasy. The delay was irksome to him. He was beginning to wish that he had risen and followed the girl in green when she had left the restaurant.

"I must be easy! I don't suppose the girl has the slightest connection with this green business!" Rackway fumed, as he strode to the window, tugged up the blind, and, opening the glass doors, he stood there,

peering gloomily in the direction of Trafalgar Square.

A continuous stream of traffic was surging up and down Northumberland Avenue, with a humming of motors, a hiss of rubber tires on the wet, wood-blocks, and a clamorous hooting of horns. It was a pleasing noise; it brought with it a sense of security and protection.

Rackway suddenly swung round on his heel, muscles tensed, and every nerve on the alert. There was someone outside his door—someone who was rapping gently, but insistently.

Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat!

He crossed the room in three long strides, unlocked the bolt, and opened the door. To his surprise the passage beyond was in darkness, and he could see nothing save a hand holding a brown-paper parcel that was thrust out towards him.

EDMUND SNELL

is the author of another brilliant book-length novel—
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appearing

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The THRILLER

"Take it, quick!" snapped a low voice. "Get hold of it! Don't stand there like a fool! Hide it! Look after it well until I need for it!"

The parcel was thrust roughly into Rackway's arms. The next instant the hand was withdrawn, and a stealthy patter of footsteps died away along the passage. A moment later the lights were switched on again, but there was no one in sight. The white of a descending lift came faintly to his eye.

Blind with bewilderment, Rackway stopped back into the room and closed the door. There was an almost comical expression of concentration on his face as he stood staring foolishly at the object that had been thrust into his hands in such an unceremonious manner.

It was a neatly-tied brown-paper parcel, less than six inches square. It bore no label, and the knotted string was sealed with bits of red wax.

Rackway sat down on the edge of the bed and whistled thoughtfully through his teeth as he turned the parcel over and over in his hands.

"It strikes me," he mused, "that I'm getting myself mixed up in a pretty queer game, and the unfortunate thing is that I haven't the remotest idea what it's all about! And yet I'm supposed to know the whole bag of tricks. Chinks, Yees from Scotland Yard, mysterious messages, and now—this! I wonder what the blues is going to happen next!"

Something happened the very next

moment! A sudden sound behind him made him swing round once more in the direction of the window.

He could dimly discern a shadowy figure standing just outside the open French window. His teeth came together with a snap, and it was with a frown, determined air that he strode across the room.

"Who are you? What do you want? Isn't it possible to—"

The remainder of Luder Rackway's words died away in a strangled gasp of astonishment. It was the slender figure of a girl that stood confronting him on the balcony. She looked as though she was already attired to attend a dance, or a carnival ball. She was wrapped from head to foot in a long black cloak, with a big cream collar, that stood out around her throat like a white veil.

A face veiled was wound around her head, and her features were entirely concealed by a green domino, that exposed nothing save the tip of her chin and two big, blue eyes that were bright with excitement as they stared straight at Luder Rackway.

"The girl was the first to speak.

"Give me that parcel—quick!" she said in a low, tense voice. "Don't delay! There is not a minute to be lost!"

Rackway started, and then frowned. So it was the parcel the girl was after! His suspicions were quickened at once. He glanced down at the girl's feet. She wore green silk slippers! He wondered if her hair beneath the lace shawl was a mass of Titian red curls!

If so, here was his lady of the green dress, who had sat a few tables from him in the hotel restaurant!

"I beg of you—please give me that parcel! It mustn't be found in your room!"

"It won't," said Rackway firmly, "unless the person to whom it belongs calls for it. My dear young lady, perhaps you will explain—"

"I can't explain anything," protested the girl quickly. "You don't realize the danger you will be facing if you keep that parcel in your possession. It will spoil all your plans—it will ruin you! Give it to me!"

Rackway's eyes narrowed, and his lips tightened. This was more serious than he had supposed!

"What do you know of my plans?" he demanded curtly. "And why should I hand you this parcel? Does it belong to you?"

"Mr. Rackway!" The girl made a step forward, and laid an appealing hand on his arm. "Listen to me, I can't answer any of your questions. I can explain nothing; but I can assure you that I am acting in your best interests when I beg of you to give me that parcel, and let me take it away before it is too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes, too late. In another few minutes the police will be here to search this room, and if they discover that parcel here you will find yourself involved in a serious criminal case."

Rackway stared incredulously. He had reason to be suspicious. He followed a profession that often taught him the truth of the axiom that the female of the species was more deadly than the male.

He was in a queer and not altogether uninteresting position. He knew nothing of the mysterious parcel he held in his hand. He knew nothing of the person who had pressed it upon him, and he knew little more than nothing of this pretty girl in the green dress, who stood biting her lip impatiently, and staring at him with something very much like appeal in her eyes.

Rackway temporized. He was inclined to peep this unexpected and not unpleasant interview.

"Don't you think," he suggested lightly, "that I am entitled to something a little more tangible in the nature of an explanation? Do you know where this parcel comes from? Do you know what it contains? And why do you suggest that there is a possibility of my receiving a visit from the police?"

"The girl made a sudden, fierce, warning gesture, and laid a finger on her lips. There was a sound of footsteps advancing steadily along the passage. They seemed to halt right outside the room, and the next instant there came a sharp, peremptory knock at the door."

"The police! Quick—it is your last chance! Give me that parcel!"

Rackway had no opportunity to comply with this request. As he stood staring over his shoulder in the direction of the door, the girl made a quick step through the window, and snatched the parcel from his grasp.

A twist of silver garments; a faint, lingering aroma of some delicate perfume; and she was gone, as suddenly as she had appeared!

Rackway darted to the window. The balcony was deserted; there was no sign of his recent visitor. She might have vanished into any one of the numerous second-floor apartments that faced on to Northumberland Avenue.

"Needed," he decided ruefully. "She was after that parcel, and she got it. Confound it, she was too quick for me!"

But-what! Again that insistent, impatient knock at the door. Rackway closed the window, deliberately passed to light a cigarette, and walked unobtrusively across the room. He shot back the bolt and peered open the door, expecting to see no one more important than one of the hotel servants.

There were three people outside. One was the manager of the Hotel Universal, immaculate, and smiling away. Beside him stood the Scotland Yard detective who had accompanied Indre Rackway on his journey from Southampton to London.

The third individual was a thick-set, broad-shouldered man, with mild, benign eyes, and a fair complexion. He stood with a grey felt hat tilted on the back of his head, and his plump hands resting on the heavy crook of a waddy-cotched umbrella. The latter was the first to speak.

"Mr. Rackway, I believe?" he said gently. "Mr. Indre Rackway, late of Melbourne, Australia?"

"Exactly," agreed Rackway. His mind was busy, but his face betrayed no uneasiness. "I am afraid you have the advantage of me."

"That is easily remedied," came the ready reply. "My name is Wood—Detective-inspector Wood. I am a police-officer from Scotland Yard. I am sorry to disturb you in this unceremonious manner, Mr. Rackway, but the matter is somewhat urgent."

Rackway traced himself for what was to come. He was not wholly surprised. The girl in green had warned him of a visit from the police, and it had come to pass.

"I don't quite understand," he said steadily. "What is your business with me? Is it anything important?"

"I am afraid it is," Mr. Wood rumbled apologetically. "As a matter of fact, it is a case of—murder!"

"Murder!" Rackway's start was one of genuine amazement and horror. "Great heavens, what do you mean? Who has been murdered, and what has it got to do with me?"

"The victim is a gentleman visitor in Room Number Sixty-five," informed Inspector Wood succinctly. "I have reason to

believe he is known to you, and I must ask you to assist me in identifying the body. Will you step this way, please. I trust that I don't have to detain you very long, Mr. Rackway. By the way, have you seen anything of a small brown-paper parcel, tied together with blue cord?"

Rackway drew a long, somewhat shaky breath. The C.I.B. man had accurately described the parcel that had been handed into his room ten minutes earlier. But it was not there now. It had disappeared with the girl in green!

THE Mysterious PARCEL.

DIRECTOR-INSPECTOR PRYCE did not waste any time in the execution.

He knew that Indre Rackway had taken up his abode at the Hotel Universal. He was also pretty certain in his own mind that the Chinese whom he had just seen enter the hotel was the same slinky, suspicious individual who had travelled up from Southampton in the same compartment with the man he had been shadowing. Just how those two were connected with one another he did not know.

Pryce walked briskly to the Embankment end of Northumberland Avenue, and hopped on a passing tram. He alighted opposite Scotland Yard, and passed through the gateway to the main entrance.

Inspector Wood was in his room. "Mr. Indre Rackway," Sergeant Pryce began importantly, and plunged into a detailed report of all that had come his way since the *sa. Cochon* had docked at Southampton that day. Mr. Wood listened absently. If he was in any way interested in the movements of Indre Rackway, he did not display the fact. Yet he did not miss a word of his subordinate's long-winded narrative.

"I don't know anything about Rackway, or why the Australian police should wish to have him shadowed," he said frankly. "You are prepared to swear that he was dragged by a Chinese on his way up from Southampton, and that that same Chinese has now followed him to the Hotel Universal in Northumberland Avenue?"

"Rackway was dragged right enough, but he won't give anything away," replied

Pryce. "And he denies any knowledge as to why the Chinaman should have seized him. I don't believe him. I think there's something fishy about the whole business."

"Well, keep an eye on Rackway for the next few days," advised Mr. Wood, with a careless wave of one hand. "Then you can have the pleasure of condensing your report, and having it cabled out to Melbourne. We've nothing against the man. So long as he doesn't object to being followed about by a Chinese we have no reason to interfere."

The telephone-bell suddenly rang, and the inspector's expression gradually changed as he sat with the receiver clamped against his ear.

"Yes, I'll take it on. I'll go along right away," he snapped. "Sounds like a queer business to me. Why? Because I happen to know of a certain suspicious customer who is staying at the same hotel?"

Pryce started, and stared puzzledly. "What's up now? Who was that, sir?" he asked eagerly. "Where are you going?" Mr. Wood slipped his hat on the back of his head, and looked his umbrella on one arm.

"We're going along to the Hotel Universal," he replied promptly. "The message has just got through an urgent call. So far as I can gather a visitor has been found murdered in his bed-room. We may find it necessary to interview Indre Rackway after all, Pryce."

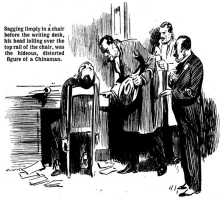
"And why Rackway? How do you know he's got anything to do with it?"

"I don't know," replied Wood bluntly. "But it seems strange to me—after what you have just told me—that the murdered man is a Chinese, and that he arrived at the Universal just over an hour ago!"

It took Sergeant Pryce a good few minutes to digest this startling piece of information. By that time he and Mr. Wood had secured a taxi, and found themselves deposited outside the main entrance to the Hotel Universal.

Scotland Yard is always confident. There was nothing extraordinary or likely to attract undesirable attention about the manner in which the two detectives announced their presence, and were conducted straight to the manager's private office.

Sagging limply in a chair before the writing desk, his head falling over the top rail of the chair, was the hideous, distorted figure of a Chinaman.



M. Fierlo—the manager—was an unattractive, solitary little Frenchman with a courteous moustache, and eyebrows that appeared to be arched at rest. They wiggled and quivered from the bridge of his nose almost to the extreme summit of his lofty, bald head.

"This is a terrible affair!" he almost wailed, prancing distractedly up and down the room. "Never—never has such a thing happened in this hotel before. There must be no publicity. If it becomes known that a murder has been committed here, every visitor will leave the place at once."

"They certainly won't," said Mr. Wood, with calm finality. "No one at present staying in this hotel will be permitted to take his or her departure until every inquiry and investigation has been made. I suggest we make a start now."

The scene of the crime was a room on the third floor of the building. The manager gave his assurance that nothing had been touched or disturbed. The moment the tragedy had been discovered he had locked the door, and immediately telephoned to Scotland Yard.

The dead man sat in a chair, his head lolling over the top rail, facing a small writing-table, with his back towards the door. He had been strangled. A length of strong silk cord was looped around his throat, and knotted so tight that it was unkeno strained out of sight in the flesh. He could have uttered no sound, but it must have taken a powerful man to hold him down in his seat whilst he writhed and fought in the throes of asphyxiation. His fingers-nails had scored deep scratches in the leather surface of the table.

The inkstand was overturned, and on the floor lay a penholder and a sheet of newspaper bearing the hotel address. On it was written just three words:

"Infer Backway is—"

"That hints me out," said Sergeant Fryce grimly. "This is the same Chinese who dragged Backway on the way up from Southampton, and whom I saw enter this hotel just before I returned to the Yard."

"You may be right," conceded Mr. Wood. He laid the sheet of newspaper carefully on the bed, and placed his umbrella on top of it. "What do you know of this man, M. Fierlo?"

"I know nothing of him!" declared the manager. "I never saw him before to-night. He came here and booked a room. He entered himself in the visitors' book as Mr. Ho San Yuen, and gave his last address as the Imperial Hotel, Southampton. And the next thing I know, he is found here—dead!"

Even as Backway flung himself to the floor there came a sudden flash in the darkness, and a bullet crashed into the wall above him.

"Murdered," asserted the inspector. "Who discovered the body?"

"One of the page boys. I will send for him."

The page was a boy of little more than fifteen. Yet he had the self-assurance of a man twice that age.

"I knew something was wrong as soon as I opened the door, sir," he volunteered readily. "He didn't answer when I knocked, and then when I saw him sort of sprawling across the table—"

"But—but, not so fast," interrupted Mr. Wood reprovingly. He paused to give certain instructions to Sergeant Fryce, who made a hurried exit. "And now," continued the inspector, "why did you have come to enter this room? Did Mr. Ho San Yuen ring for you?"

"No, sir. It was when I brought him up the parcel. He asked me to fetch him a telephone-directory, and—"

"Parcel? What parcel?" queried Wood patiently.

"It was left at the office. The clerk gave it to me, and told me to take it straight up to the Chinese gentleman in Number Sixty-five," explained the page. It was then he asked me to bring him a telephone directory. When I came back I couldn't get no answer, so I opened the door, and there he was just as you see him now, with—"

"Stop! Stop!" Mr. Wood pointed his pump-handle like the conductor of an orchestra in the middle of an impressive movement.

His mild blue eyes betrayed a gleam of excitement as he turned slowly on his heels and peered keenly into every corner of the room.

"And where is the parcel?" Mr. Wood asked gravely. "If nothing in this room has been disturbed or touched, where is the parcel that you delivered to Mr. Ho San Yuen just before his death?"

The page's jaw dropped, and he shook his head bewilderedly.

"I saw him place it on the table," he averred. "But it ain't there now!"

"It certainly ain't—ain't!" agreed Wood.

"Yet the room was locked, and no one has been in here save ourselves, and the doctor who remained just long enough to certify that Mr. Ho San Yuen was dead: It is only to be presumed that the murderer took

the parcel with him. Perhaps that is what he came here for."

A thorough search of the room revealed no sign of the missing parcel.

"It was just an ordinary newspaper parcel, about six or seven inches square," described the page-boy. "And I remember that it was tied together with blue cord."

At Mr. Wood's request the clerk on duty in the reception-office was sent for. He verified the page-boy's story. The parcel had indeed been handed to him by a gentleman, whose appearance he could not clearly remember. He had merely requested that it be sent straight up to Mr. Ho San Yuen.

Mr. Wood shrugged his shoulders, and took the sheet of newspaper from where he had placed it on the bed. It was the only Chinese character he had found. It at least hinted at some connection between Infer Backway and the murdered Chinese. It bore Backway's name, evidently written by Ho San Yuen himself, just before death had claimed him:

"Mr. Backway? I know nothing of him, either," declared the hotel manager. "He looked a mean by window from a boat called the Cadonia early this morning, and he arrived here to claim it late this evening."

And he was followed here by Mr. Ho San Yuen, who also journeyed up from Southampton," asserted Wood. "Well, Fryce, what's your view?"

Sergeant Fryce entered the room with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Backway is still here," he announced. "He went up to his room about half an hour ago. Prior to that he dined alone in the hotel restaurant, and he was there for well over an hour."

A shadow of disappointment passed across Wood's facial countenance.

"If that's the case, Backway has a notion still," he said slowly. "He couldn't have been anywhere near this room at the time our Chinese friend was murdered. All the same, an interview with the gentleman is clearly indicated. Lead on, M. Fierlo!"

A newspaper parcel tied together with a blue cord!

Infer Backway had a premeditated command over himself. Not by so much as the flicker of an eyelid did he betray the surprise and uneasiness that stirred within him as he met the level gaze of Mr. Wood's mild, blue eyes.

He shook his head. It was a method of response that did not implicate him in a direct lie.

"You've got me guessing, inspector," he said, more or less truthfully. "I don't know whether to feel flattered or not by the kindly attention that Scotland Yard has bestowed on me since I landed at Southampton this morning."

Scathily Backway dropped his bustling air. He suddenly realized that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"By James, you're not joking me!" he exclaimed sharply. "What's this talk of murder? What are you trying to put over on me? I'm not acquainted with a living soul who's staying in this hotel!"

"Probably not," said Mr. Wood equably. "The



individual I am referring to is dead, and I have reason to believe that he was no stranger to you. I am making no accusation against you, Backway, but I wish you to give me your assistance towards identifying a certain man who has been brutally murdered in this hotel within the past half-hour."

Inspector Backway's statement was so palpably genuine as to convince both the C.I.B. men that he could know nothing regarding the mysterious death of the equally mysterious Ho San Yuen.

Backway squared his jaw, and flung the remains of his cigarette into the fireplace.

"I'm your man," he said curtly. "If anyone I know has been murdered in this hotel I can promise you that I'll willingly give the police every assistance in my power."

Mr. Wood winked meaningly as he and Backway walked away along the corridor, and Sergeant Pryce deliberately lagged behind. Now was his chance to search Backway's room and luggage; but it was to prove a waste of time.

From Stratford was at the rear of the hotel, on the same floor as that where the man from Australia was quartered. Mr. Wood had an eye to effect. He unlocked the door, and made a dramatic gesture towards the fireless form, sprawled across the table by the window.

His narrowed eyes never left Backway's face as the latter walked across the room, and stared silently at the dead man. He started visibly, and made an attempt to suppress the sharp gasp of amazement that escaped his lips.

"Ah! So you do know him?" challenged the C.I.B. man. "Then you probably know who murdered him—and why?"

Backway slowly turned and saw his fingers bewilderedly through his hair.

"I do not know this man?" he said emphatically. "The first time in my life that I have ever set eyes on him was this afternoon, when we travelled up from Southampton together. He was in the same compartment with me—"

"And he doped you during the journey? And I suppose you don't know why he did that? Come, let's have the truth, Backway!"

Backway stared at the C.I.B. man with a look in his eyes that brought a flash of confusion to Wood's cheeks.

"You're getting the truth," he said coldly. "Who this Chinese is I have not the vaguest idea. I am not even certain that he did dope me on the way up in the train, though Sergeant Pryce seems to have taken it for granted that that is what did occur. You can take it from me, Mr. Wood, that this affair is just so big a mystery to me as it appears to be to you."

"The man's name is Ho San Yuen. Does that suggest anything to you?" asked Wood with the greatest deliberation. "If he is not known to you, you must be well known to him. He was waiting for you at Southampton when you stopped at the Gardens. He travelled up by the same train, and over in London he booked a room at the same hotel, and on the same floor as yourself. And these were the last words he wrote immediately prior to his death:

"Inspector Backway is— If Ho San Yuen had completed that sentence we might know a lot more than we do at present. Perhaps you can hazard a guess as to what he intended to write?"

Backway's eyes narrowed to mere pin-points as he stared at the sheet of paper. His perplexity was transparently genuine, and he shook his head slowly as he turned to meet Mr. Wood's searching gaze.

"This case appears to be so serious that it would be idle to hazard foolish guesses. I can only repeat what I have told you

before. I don't know the dead man. I don't know anything about him, though it would appear that my name is not unfamiliar to him. Personally I should be very interested to know what he had intended to write."

Wood sighed as he filled the sheet of paper, and carefully placed it between the leaves of his notebook.

"I believe you're speaking the truth," he said candidly.

"Thank you," Backway bowed gracefully.

Backway's curiosity urged him to enable



The Chinaman seated himself in front of his beard and helpless victim, a sinister grin on his face. "For the last time, are you going to speak?"

himself. There was one point upon which he had not as yet been enlightened, and that was the one point that really intrigued him.

"I believe," he said slowly, "you mentioned something about a parcel when you first knocked at my door. What has a parcel got to do with the murder of this mysterious Chinese gentleman?"

"It may have quite a lot to do with it," replied the inspector promptly. "A small brown paper parcel, tied with blue cord, was deposited at the hotel here this evening, and immediately delivered to Mr. Ho San Yuen in this room. Ten minutes later he was found murdered, and the parcel had disappeared. What has become of it? Our own only presumption that the murderer took it away with him—or her."

Backway started, and his eyes widened. "Ho! Are you suggesting that it was a woman who committed this heinous crime?"

"No. But at the same time we are not certain that it was a man."

Backway lit a cigarette as a deliberate act of nerves. He was relieved to see that his hands were perfectly steady; inwardly he was quaking with uneasiness and horror. There was no doubt that the parcel that had been handed to him through the door of his room was the property of the dead man.

The Chinese had been murdered, the parcel taken from his room and deliberately handed into Backway's possession. And the girl in green must have known all about it. She was aware that the police would ultimately visit his room, and she had taken it upon herself to remove the one piece of evidence that would implicate Backway in the tragic death of Mr. Ho San Yuen!

There was a welcome distraction in the sudden appearance of Sergeant Pryce. There was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he brought his hands from behind his back and produced the missing parcel.

"Ho, and where did you find that?" snapped Mr. Wood. "In Backway's room?"



The Chinaman seated himself in front of his beard and helpless victim, a sinister grin on his face. "For the last time, are you going to speak?"

MR. WOOD IS ANNOYED.

Backway being anxiously on the attendant's reply. His quiet was unbroken as Pryce steadily shook his head.

"One of the chambermaids discovered it," he informed. "She found it lying on the dressing-table in an unoccupied room, which she had entered to prepare for an expected visitor."

Mr. Wood looked baffled, and slightly disappointed.

"The room in which the parcel was found," continued Pryce impressively, "is on the second floor. It is the room directly adjoining that occupied by Mr. Backway."

The blow was a heavy one, but Backway did not turn a hair. His mind worked swiftly. It was evident to him that the girl in green had left the parcel where it had been found. She had straggled back along the balcony, and entered the room by way of the window, in the same way as she had left it, and visited his apartment.

"So near and yet so low!" mused Mr. Wood, and his eyes were keen with renewed suspicion. "Not your room, Backway, but the one next to it. What a peculiar thing!"

"And why? I have never set foot in the next room," said Backway truthfully.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders as he took the parcel from his assistant and balanced it on his hand.

"There does not appear to be very much in it," he remarked. "It looks to me as though it had been opened, and haphazardly tied together again."

Merely Backway agreed with him. Mr. Wood placed the parcel on the table and carefully unfastened the blue cord. He stripped the wrapper away and revealed a plain cardboard box. The box seemed to be empty, but as it was turned upside down a slip of paper fell from the floor.

Mr. Wood snatched it up and quickly scanned the message written upon it.

"Return without delay," he read aloud. "Something wrong. You are after the wrong man. He is not I. E."

There was a few moments' silence. Inder Backway's brows were crinkled in a pained frown as he stared at the scrap of paper in the inspector's hand.

"You see after the wrong man. He is not I. H.," repeated Wood in measured tones. "Obviously this message was intended for Mr. He San Yuen. But to whom does it refer? Who is 'I. H.'? What do you make of it, Backway?"

The question was a direct challenge—almost an accusation. Backway took a long pull at his cigarette, and found the inspiration he sought. It was little less than a dash of genius.

"Why, the whole affair—so far as I am concerned—appears perfectly plain now," he replied, with an emphatic nod of his head. "Mr. He San Yuen had been following the wrong man, so that message came. He mistook me for someone else."

"For the love of Mike, what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Wood explosively.

Sergeant Pryce is evidently correct in his assumption that His Yuen followed me as from Southampton," explained Backway apologetically. "Perhaps he did drag me and afterwards looked a room at the same hotel as myself. But he was on the wrong trail. I wasn't the man he anticipated meeting at Southampton."

"Then why did he follow you?" snapped the C.I.D. man. "This message refers directly to 'I. H.' and the initials 'I. H.' stand for Inder Backway."

"Not necessarily," corrected Backway gently. "They might stand for Mrs. Hamble, or Miss Redwood, or lots of other names. That is how the mistake occurred. My initials are stamped on my suitcase. Mr. He San Yuen saw them, and jumped to the conclusion that I was another individual whose name comprised the same initials. That's perfectly plain, isn't it?"

Mr. Wood drew a deep breath. There was a gleam of ungrudging admiration in his eyes as he stared at Backway.

"Well, it's perfectly plausible," he said lightly, "but it's mighty thin-fetched. You spin a good story, young fellow, but how do you account for that note the Chink was writing just before he was murdered? He knew you as Inder Backway. He wrote the name down."

"Of course he did," agreed the other. "He had just realized his mistake. What he intended to write was that Inder Backway—myself—was not the particular individual he had thought him to be."

"Oh, yes, that's a very clever theory," said Wood ironically. "Can't you get a little further and tell us who actually did murder He San Yuen?"

"I can't. That is where you come in," smiled Backway. "It seems to me that it is up to Scotland Yard to solve this mystery, and bring the murderer to justice."

"And so we will. So we will!" purred Mr. Wood in his most dangerous voice. "First let us see if we can find out how this parcel came to be left in the next room to yours. I must insist that we retain the pleasure of your company, Mr. Backway."

They descended the stairs in silence. Sergeant Pryce had taken possession of the key to the room adjoining Inder Backway's. He unlocked the door and switched on the light.

Mr. Wood glanced keenly around and walked straight across to the window.

"There is a balcony outside," he said meaningly. "It runs just the window of your room as well, Backway."

"It runs past the windows of a dozen front rooms on this floor," pointed out the young man.

"The window to this room was latched and locked on the inside," informed Ser-

geant Pryce dutifully. "No one could have entered it by way of the balcony."

"What about the door?"

"It was locked as well. The chambermaid who found the parcel had to fetch the key from the office before she could get in."

Mr. Wood unlocked the window and shrugged his shoulders disingenuously as he peered out. It was still raining heavily, and it was hopeless to search for any foot-prints on the balcony, where the water lay in pools.

Suddenly Backway's heart gave a big jump as he caught sight of the still-damp imprint of a small, dainty feminine foot on the thick carpet, just inside the window.

Mr. Wood saw it at the same time. He flicked his tongue excitedly as he went down on his knees and examined the tiny foot-mark. He measured it, and covered the dimensions in his notebook. But he made no comment.

"And now," he said quietly, as he rose to his feet, and brushed the knees of his trousers, "I think we will move along to Scotland Yard. You will need your hat and a raincoat, Backway."

Inder Backway lit his lip, and his face clouded with dismay.

"Am I to understand that I am under arrest?" he asked incontinently.

"Not at all," replied Mr. Wood gravely. "I merely wish to take a statement of you. It is merely a matter of routine, Backway. There are several questions I wish to ask you—what you have been doing in Australia all these years; why you went there in the first place; why you have returned to London; and what you intend doing now you are here."

"That won't take very long!" smiled Backway hopefully.

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Wood vaguely. "But there are other questions I wish to ask you as well."

Backway secured his hat and trench-coat from his room, and the three men descended in the lift. Mr. Wood linked his arm through Backway's as they stepped briskly across the foyer. It was an unobtrusively friendly gesture that concealed a deeper motive, and the young man lit his lip mentally as he glanced around the crowded entrance-hall.

His gaze fell squarely on a girl who was seated alone at a table, with a cup of coffee in front of her, and a cigarette between her red lips.

A glimpse of a green frock showed beneath the cloak she was wearing, and her pretty, somewhat pale face was circumscribed by a crowd of adoring curls.

Her blue eyes stared straight at Inder Backway, and a look of utter dismay crossed her face as she saw him walk towards the door, arm-in-arm with Mr. Wood, and with Sergeant Pryce bringing up the rear.

Swiftly, deliberately, Backway turned his gaze away, fearful of betraying any sign of recognition that would arouse his companion's suspicions.

It was the mysterious girl in green! Her cigarette dropped unheeded to the table, and every spot of colour seemed to leave her cheeks as she watched the two Scotland Yard men and their companion vanish through the swing-door.

An instant later she was rushing towards the telephone-booth at the further end of the hall, hurriedly and agitatedly dialing a number that found no place in the telephone directory.

It was the same number that Inder Backway had called from the Hotel Universal earlier that evening!

A taxi carried the three men straight to Scotland Yard. Backway lit a cigarette and

BIG THINGS COMING!



Now that Christmas is in full swing, I am sure you are all making the best of this happy festival, and I trust that **THE THRILLER** will take its part in the general excitement in giving you that thrill which will help you to appreciate the lighter side so much more.

Last week I gave you some idea of the splendid programme which I had in store for you in the New Year, and for the benefit of those who happened to miss the announcement, I am going to repeat briefly just what readers of **THE THRILLER** can expect during the coming months. Stories by Edgar Wallace, the first of which will be published in January, a splendid new competition, with attractive prizes, open to all, and a special free gift in the form of a supplement containing an extra complete back-length story—so that that week you will be getting double value for money. This is just a commencement to a year that I hope is going to carry **THE THRILLER**

beyond all its previous records, to keep your eyes at this amazing paper which can give you more value for your 3d. than has ever been thought possible.

Edmond Scott, the popular author of next week's story, has written something really novel in "The Curse of Phari!" Mystery, weird and romantic, gripping and sinister, is linked with the ancient tombs of Egypt. The domination of a Pharaoh's living place in real life has been blamed for many mysterious deaths (has not, and in the same way, the looting of the treasures of a mummified ruler of a long dead Egypt, brought strange and dramatic adventures to a certain young man and others in modern London. This is a distinctly unusual pair which cannot fail to hold you.

There was also collecting their **THRILLERS** with the intention of finding them. **LEADS** should note that this issue commences the first volume, and that next week will commence vol. II. I know that many readers have been keeping their copies during the past year, and they will, I am sure, be delighted at the splendid look, or look-like if it really helps to have them done in two parts—but these make sense bound.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to "The Thriller" Office, The Fantasy House, Finsbury Street, London, E.C.A.

uffed furiously during the brief journey. He had not as yet got over the shock of surprise of seeing the girl of green seated in the foyer as they had left the hotel.

She had forgotten the lack of dismay—shout of horror—that had sprung to her blue eyes as she had seen him leave in company with Inspector Wood and Sergeant Pryce. Had it been fair that he might betray her or anxiety for his own welfare? It was vitally essential that he get back to the Hotel Universal as soon as possible.

It was the first time that he had paid a visit to the inner workings of Scotland Yard, but he was not impressed by the interior of the big, gloomy building as they passed through the main entrance, and threaded a maze of passages until they came to Inspector Wood's room.

The furniture was typically "Government" in its bareness and sparsity; a plain wooden desk, hard wooden chairs, a mosquito-net of carpet, a mirror, and a black leatherette flanking the glowing remains of a fire.

Mr. Wood took off his hat and coat, hung his previous umbrella carefully on a hook, and made a futile attempt to wrangle some kind of a blaze in the cheerless grate.

"Sit down, Backway, make yourself comfortable," he said gruffly. "Smoke if you want to. I don't have to detain you very long. I think it would be as well for you to make some kind of a statement regarding what has happened this evening."

Backway focused, lit a fresh cigarette, and stared thoughtfully at the toes of his shoes. He recalled that he was in a tight corner. For reasons which he could not explain to this blind but determined detective, it was essential that he should get back to the Universal Hotel as quickly as possible.

"Supposing I refuse to make a statement, and that I refuse to answer any of your questions?"

"That would be very undesirable," said Mr. Wood. It was all he did say, but the few words conveyed quite a lot.

And then the telephone suddenly rang. Mr. Wood stared responsibility at the instrument, and his expression was one of extreme surprise as he reached for the receiver and glanced at it sadly against an "out."

"Hallo! Yes, Detective-Inspector Wood speaking. Who is that? Who?"

His voice died on a top note, indicative of apoplectic surprise, and he layed into sudden silence. It was evident that the individual at the other end of the line was doing all the talking. Backway could hear a deep base voice rambling and lurching in the receiver. He soon realized that he caught the mention of his own name.

"Hey, yes, Sir Henry. That is quite as I have him here now. I was about to—What?"

Backway stared across at Mr. Wood, and sat bolt upright with a jerk that shot the ash from his cigarette half-way across the room. He was alarmed by the possibility that the inspector was on the verge of an apoplectic fit. His face was crimson, his mouth was half-open, and there was a glassy look of consternation in his eyes. He swallowed hard several times, as though his vocal chords had ceased to function, and finally reconnected his voice from the pit of his stomach.

"Very good, Sir Henry. Your instructions shall be carried out at once. Good-bye. Good by!"

Mr. Wood appended the last ejaculation a fraction of a second after he had replaced the receiver on his hook. He fell back in his chair, ran his fingers through his hair,

and blew his nose with tremendous emphasis.

"You can go now, Backway," he said at length. "I don't detain you any longer."

Under Backway stared incredulously at the C.I.D. man.

"You don't wish me to make a statement?"

"I should be interested to ask you a lot of questions," replied Wood. "But I will content myself with a few

simple, personal queries, which you are under no obligation to answer. Are you in any way related to Sir Henry Fairfax, the Home Secretary? Does he owe you any money? Have you ever served him from dressing, attended him from being run over by an omnibus, or made any heroic sacrifices on his behalf?"

Backway picked up his hat and glanced sternly towards the door.

"I don't know anything about the Home Secretary," he said firmly.

Mr. Wood picked up a pen, and with a show of irritation that was unconsciously foreign in his nature, stabbed it clear through the little heap of ash footstep that lay on his Hotting-pad. "Our minute, Backway! You honestly assure me that you can offer no reason why Sir Henry Fairfax should telephone to me, and give me explicit instructions to the effect that a gentleman by the name of Mr. Under Backway is not to be detained under any circumstances, but to be permitted to immediately take his departure from Scotland Yard?"

"If you can't give me any enlightenment on that subject perhaps you can tell me how the names Sir Henry Fairfax knew that you had been brought in Scotland Yard? He telephoned to me from his house in Surrey, thirty miles outside of London?"

THE MYSTERY DEVELOPS.

Mr. Wood could read a man's mind with the same ease as any other person reads a newspaper. He needed no telling that his extraordinary announcement had come as a staggering surprise to Under Backway.

The latter planted a foot on the cigarette that had dropped from his hand, and stared long and levelly at the C.I.D. man.

"Are you giving me a straight line of talk, Mr. Wood?" he asked at length. "Do you mean to tell me that it was the Home Secretary who rang up a moment ago, and instructed you that I was to be allowed to leave Scotland Yard as soon as I pleased?"

"He certainly did. He was most emphatic on the point."

"And he gave no reason for his request? He didn't explain how he came to know that I had been arrested in Scotland Yard? Perhaps you didn't ask him?"

"I am not in the habit of questioning the



Making his way to an isolated room at the top of the house, the German crook staggered up the stairs, the Home Secretary's personal instructions, and Mr. Wood calmly, "But I shall go further into the matter when I see the chief commissioner in the morning. In the meantime, pray don't let me detain you, Mr. Backway. I take it you won't be leaving the Hotel Universal for the next few days?"

"I will let you know if I do."

"That won't be necessary," said the inspector pointedly. "What I meant to convey was that it would not be advisable for you to change your quarters until we have made further investigation into the murder of Mr. Ho San Yuen."

Under Backway smiled faintly as he picked up his hat, and moved towards the door.

"I promise you," he said gravely, "that I won't change my present address without the Home Secretary's permission. Good-night, Mr. Wood."

"Get out!" snapped Wood peevishly. "And let me hear you go—so that—I know you've gone. Go, man, go!"

It was eleven o'clock, the hour at which Scotland Yard usually closed down until eight o'clock the following morning.

Emerging on the Embankment, he stood for several minutes, tapping a cigarette on his case, whilst the brazen voice of Big Ben boomed sonorously in his ears.

"Mittens seem to be coming slightly improved," mused Backway, as he put a match in his cigarette and glanced about in search of a stray trail. "I have almost lost sight of my original mission. I have been attracted so less than three times during the past few hours. First, by the mistresses, altogether delightful, and somewhat automatic young lady in green. Secondly, by the murder of that confounded Chin-see; and, thirdly, by the particularly soap-saucers and officiousness of friend 'Wood.'"

There was no cab in sight, so he turned and walked briskly in the direction of Northumberland Avenue. He had covered less than a hundred yards when a handsome, cream-colored limousine came gliding noiselessly from the direction of Westminster Bridge. It passed him, hugging the kerb, and came to a standstill a short distance away.

As he drew level with the car a voice called him softly by name:

"Mr. Backway?"

Inspector Backway stopped at once, rigid with sudden suspicion and surprise. He knew that the voice had come from the darkened interior of the limousine. He could see no one save the chauffeur, who sat erect at the wheel, staring straight in front of him, with the respectful aloofness of a well-trained servant.

"Mr. Backway?"

A white hand fluttered at the open window, beckoning impatiently, and a wave of some subtle, delicate perfume reached his nostrils. He knew it was a woman that had addressed him, and it was with quizzical gaze that Backway swept off his hat and stepped up to the waiting car.

The lights of a passing train shone directly through the opposite window, and the moving beam lingered for a second on the face of the girl in green ere it passed on, plunging the interior of the car into darkness again.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, if you will forgive such a trite expression," said Backway. "I was only just wondering whether I should ever be granted the opportunity of thanking you for the kindly interest you have taken in my welfare to-night. You saved me from getting involved in a very awkward and unpleasant affair."

"I wonder how you know that Mr. He Sam Yuen had been murdered, and the box with the blue cord deposited in my room? And why did you run such an extreme risk in order to avert suspicion from falling on me?"

"The girl, who was crouching back in the depths of the car, suddenly leaped forward and dropped a slender hand on the arm that Backway laid carelessly along the edge of the window.

"Mr. Backway, you mustn't ask me any questions—there isn't any time," she said quickly, in a low voice. "And even if there were I shouldn't be able to answer you. Don't think because I am sitting in the dark that I did not wish you to recognize me. It is because I do not wish to be seen by someone else that I have switched off the light."

"You mean because you do not wish someone else to see you in my company?" suggested Backway gravely. "You were not referring to Inspector Wood?"

"I didn't mention He Sam Yuen, if that is what you are hinting at," remarked the girl in green calmly. "And I do not intend to give you any explanation of what I did to-night. Listen to me, Mr. Backway. You do not know who I am, but I know quite a lot about you."

The friendly darkness concealed the faint smile of amusement and doubt that flickered across the man's face.

"I want to give you a word of warning—to put you on your guard," proceeded the girl quickly. "And it is as much for your sake as well as my own. You don't realize it now, but it is extremely likely that you and I will meet again within the next few hours."

"That is the best news I have heard to-night," said Backway gallantly.

"I want you to give me your promise," continued the girl, her fingers tightening on his arm, "that you will not betray the

fact that you have ever before set eyes on me. You understand? No matter how unexpected the meeting, or under what circumstances, you must not display any surprise or recognition."

Backway frowned gravely.

"It will be extremely difficult; but you take my promise," he said grudgingly. "When we meet again it will be as complete strangers. And afterwards I trust I shall be entitled to hear more about you than I do now?"

The drifting light from another passing train revealed a swift, enigmatic smile that passed across the girl's pretty face.

"You will be permitted to know just as much as you can learn. And then, perhaps, you will not feel disposed to become any closer acquainted. An revoir, Mr. Backway, until we meet again."

She pressed an ivory button embedded in the upholstery of the seat. Backway had just time to step back on to the pavement as the limousine shot away from the kerb, and disappeared swiftly down the Embankment in the direction of Hungerford Bridge. But he so swiftly that he was unable to catch the number on the rear plate.

"42-80048," he quoted aloud. "I must remember that."

Inspector Backway realized that Inspector Wood was likely to prove a difficult nut to crack, and he had every reason for wishing to avoid the C.I.B. man's future attentions. It was unlikely that Wood would have him followed when he had left Scotland Yard,

but he was taking no chances, and, according to the Embankment, he took a short cut back to Northumberland Avenue that revealed an intimate knowledge of the immediate vicinity.

There was no sign of any plain clothes man lurking about outside the Hotel Universal, and his entry passed almost unnoticed as he walked through the deserted foyer and obtained the key to his room from the night porter, who had just come on duty.

He ascended by the stairs, little thinking of the surprise that awaited him when he entered his bedroom and switched on the light.

Even then it was several minutes before Backway realized that anything was wrong, and he was suddenly struck by the strange barrenness of the room. The hairbrushes, and other toilet articles he had laid out on the dressing-room table, were missing.

He stared dumbly at the wooden luggage-stand at the foot of the bed. It was empty. Both his cabin-trunk and his leather suitcase had disappeared.

Backway made a quick search of the room. With rising anger and indignation he peered under the bed, opened the wardrobe, and flung wide the cupboard doors. It took him less than a

minute to make the astounding discovery that every piece of luggage he possessed had vanished into thin air.

Backway's face was white with annoyance as he grabbed the telephone and pumped the receiver up and down until the hotel operator must have thought the whole building was on fire.

"I want the manager. Send M. Pirella up to my room at once!" he demanded. "Tell him to jump to it!"

M. Pirella evidently did "jump to it," but his expression was one of consternation and surprise as he came strutting into the room, and stared hard at the young man who was pacing impatiently up and down the floor.

"Share bien, est ce vous, Monsieur Backway?" he spluttered, clapping dead in the doorway.

"Well, who in the name of thunderbolt did you expect to find here in my room?" snarled Backway furiously. "What sort of a game is this? What the blazes has become of my luggage?"

"Your luggage?" The hotel manager's heavy eyes bulged. "Your luggage! Why, est ce que?"

"Que?" Backway glared incredulously. "What the dickens do you mean, man? Where has it gone?"

"Why, est ce not he?" M. Pirella shook his hands excitedly above his head. "I was told that you were not coming back. Well, as here you a man drive up in a taxi. He tell me that he is a detective



from Scotland Yard, and that he has instructions to take away the luggage of Monsieur Inster Backway. You see being detained by the police, and they have decided to take possession of your belongings. Naturally, I have them packed, and hand them to the detective. He takes them away. That is all I know."

Backway flung down on the edge of the bed, and ran his fingers bewilderedly through his hair. He found it difficult to believe that Mr. Tind could have played such a trick on him. Even if he had sent for the luggage prior to the message he had received from the Home Secretary he would have mentioned the fact before he allowed Backway to leave Scotland Yard.

"Perhaps the staid old warden's dose this deliberately, in order to search through my stuff?" he pondered disquietly. "He won't find anything if he does, but all the same I'll give him merry hades for this!"

But Backway knew that he would have to wait until the morning before he could take any steps to recover his luggage. Scotland Yard had closed down for the night,

and Inspector Wood had gone home to bed. He took it quite for granted that it was the police who had removed his stuff; he had no reason to think otherwise under the circumstances.

"Get out of here!" he said wrathfully to the puzzled hotel manager. "I don't suppose you're to blame, but all the same I shall never stop in a dump like this again. What with Chinks being murdered, and a fellow getting his luggage lifted—Come in! Well, what do you want, sonny?"

It was a diminutive page-boy who had appeared in the doorway balancing a silver tray on the fingers of one hand.

"Message for Mr. Backway," he announced.

Backway was on his feet at once, and everything else, save one thing, was forgotten as he grabbed hold of the sealed envelope and tore it open. Here was the message he had been warned to expect! It was printed in the same writing as the brief note that had been handed to him by the strange man in the hotel grill-room many hours previously.

He dismissed the messenger and the page-boy with a curt gesture, and carefully looked the dose before he examined the flimsy sheet of paper that had been contained in the envelope. It bore no address at the top, nor any signature at the foot, but just a few lines of small, neat writing:

"You will leave your hotel punctually at twelve o'clock, and take a taxi straight to the Fifty-fifty Club in Robinson Street. You will wait in the lobby until you are approached by a certain individual wearing a black and red rosette on the lapel of his coat. Follow him without fear, and deliver this note as soon as you have read it."

Backway's eyes were shining with excitement as he read these brief instructions. At last he was to get to grips with the strange business that had taken him all the way to Australia and back again.

He knew that he would be taking his life in his hands once he had left the hotel, and caught out the messenger who was to meet him at the Fifty-fifty Club, but his hands were perfectly steady as he put a lighted match to the flimsy scrap of paper, and watched it until it was consumed to ashes.

He glanced at his wrist-watch. It was then ten minutes to twelve. With calm deliberation Backway left the room and descended the stairs. The foyer was peculiarly deserted, and no one saw him leave the hotel and walk towards Trafalgar Square.

"The Fifty-fifty Club," he jerked, stepping into the first empty taxi he came to. He pulled impatiently at his cigarette as the cab drifted into the glittering sweep of traffic that was clustering toward the square, and finally shot away towards Charing Cross Road.

The public-houses had long since closed, in addition to all the theatres, music-halls, and cinemas, but there was still plenty of people hurrying towards the tube stations and bus stops. Such night life as was now obtainable was reserved for those individuals who could afford the doubtful pleasure of dances, cabaret shows, and night clubs.

The Fifty-fifty was one of the latest, most magnificently appointed, and expensive night clubs in London, where people danced for hours on red, drunk champagne out of two-cups and consumed raw kidneys at five shob in the morning. There was the occasional mild thrill of a police raid in odd variety to the programme.

A massive commissionaire, in a glaring lino and crimson, eyed Backway speculatively as he alighted from the cab and walked calmly up the steps into the luxuriously-furnished lobby. A continual stream of men and women in evening dress was passing through towards the inner precincts of the club.

Backway waltz himself in one of the plush, pink settees, and stared loquely around him. At the moment he could see no sign of any man wearing a black and red rosette in his buttonhole; but he was early. It was only just after midnight.

Suddenly the big, oving doors were pushed open, and two men in full evening-dress stepped into the vestibule.

The first one was tall and important-looking, but his robes seemed a trifle too tight for him, and he walked in a peculiar dithered style, as though he was endeavoring to restrict his pace to a steady four miles to the hour.

"Hallo, Fryer," said Backway cheerfully. "Not looking for me, are you?"

Detective-constable Fryer swung round as though a snake had bit him. His eyes bulged in genuine amazement, and his face turned the colour of chilled meat.



With his back to the wall, Backway fought desperately for his life. At the moment when he was practically 'all in' there came a crash of rending woodwork and a clatter of broken glass as a crowd of determined-looking police officers swarmed into the room.

"Thunderation! You here?" he yelled, flanking an avenue glower around him. "For heaven's sake, keep your combated mouth shut, or I'll run you in for obstruction. Can't you see I'm here on special duty?"

"I'm relieved to hear that. I thought you were here in pursuit of hostile plating," said Backway. "Garry on, old thing. I won't spare your pitch. My worry I don't let here when the fun starts."

The C.I.B. man lit a cigar and swaggered away down the stairs arm-in-arm with his companion. Portenight hours later the Fifty-Fifty Club had closed its doors for good and all.

Backway had just finished his second cigarette, and was tapping a third impatiently on the side of his case when the door opened again, and a tall, thin man, wearing a soft-lined overcoat and a silk hat, glided swiftly into the vestibule.

He stood in the centre of the floor, leisurely unbuttoning his gloves, meanwhile his pale, expressionless eyes darted lightning glances here and there. Unobtrusively displayed in the lapel of his coat was a black-and-red silk rosette, little bigger than a shilling.

Backway rose leisurely to his feet, and instantly the new came towards him with outstretched hand.

"How are you, Backway?" he greeted, with a million smiles that flickered across his pale face like a ray of light on a marble slab. "Garry to keep you waiting. But as you have kept me waiting for so many months I feel certain you will excuse my impatience. Shall we get right along?"

"By all means," agreed Backway nervously. "I am entirely at your disposal."

Together they passed the barrel-chested, vulpine-eyed commissioner and emerged in the street. A gloved hand laid firmly on his arm guided Backway across the street, and into a narrow side-lane. Here stood a handsome Rolls-Royce limousine, with dimmed headlights, and a uniformed chauffeur seated at the wheel. The door was swung open, and Backway stepped inside.

"Abandon hope all ye who enter here!" he quoted under his breath, as he leaned back in the luxuriously upholstered seat. "Now we really are beginning to get busy."

There was a comforting lunge beneath his left shoulder. Strapped next his skin was a spring-clip shoulder-holder that firmly held a small automatic. There were two cartridges in the magazine, and one in the breech. In the event of his early demise Backway did not intend to get unaccompanied into the next stage of spiritual evolution, however undesirable the company might be.

The car moved forward with the silence and smoothness of a gliding airplane. He caught a glimpse of the electric signposts in Piccadilly Circus before there was a faint click, and tight-fitting black blinds slid down over the windows, plunging the interior into pitch darkness. There was another click as an electric-lamp in the ceiling glowed into life.

"You are extremely cautious," said Backway, lighting a cigarette.

"You should know," replied his strange companion pointedly, "how necessary it is for me to be cautious. Do you imagine from what you have experienced during the past few hours that your presence in London has passed unnoticed?"

"I should require a pretty extensive imagination to assume that," agreed Backway, with a wry smile. "The kindly attention of Scotland Yard have proved somewhat perturbing."

"You need not be perturbed any further. It is extremely unlikely that Scotland Yard will worry you again. So far as they are concerned you are longer exist."

Backway experienced an unpleasant sensation, as though a coldspike with frozen feet was running leisurely up and down his spine. There was something sinister and ominous about those deliberately spoken words.

The car halted steadily on its way. There was no longer any sounds of traffic, and Backway had no more idea in which direction they were going than a blind man in a drifting balloon. He strained his ears in an endeavor to catch some distinctive sound that might enable him to determine his approximate whereabouts, but he could hear nothing save the purr of the six-cylinder engine, and the creak of the balloon-tyres on the level road.

He eyed the silver clock that formed one of the appointments of the limousine. He watched the minute-hand make a half-revolution of the dial, and it was the longest half-hour that he had ever known.

Then, just when he had settled down and resigned himself to an all-night journey, the car came to a sudden standstill, and leaped the low rumples and clasp of a heavy sliding-door being slammed shut.

"All change!" muttered Backway, but he had never felt in a less peculiar mood in his life. He knew that he was on the verge of a crisis that was to decide whether he had seen his last sunrise or not!

DANGER.

"That way, Backway,"
It was an order rather than a request. The tall man opened the door of the car, and stepped out. Under Backway clamped his left arm conductively over the

floor beneath his shoulder, and followed him.

For a moment his eyes were dazzled by a glare of light. Then he saw that he was standing in the interior of a spacious, well-equipped private garage. There were two other cars there besides the Rolls-Royce, but he had no time to note and memorize the number plates.

Guided by a hand laid firmly on his arm he walked unobtrusively to the far end of the garage. Here was a massive door set flush with the wall, which his companion unlocked, and smoothly locked again, after they had passed through. There was an atmosphere of pleasing warmth, and Backway's foot sank deep into a soft-carpeted stair.

He counted a dozen steps before a second door swung open and shut, and they emerged in a spacious lounge hall, handsomely furnished in black oak, with a marble floor, and a wide, elaborately-chimney-piece, in which crackled a big log fire.

Several doors opened on to the hall, but the main entrance door was a down yard-way, and Backway could see at a glance that it was heavily bolted, with a massive chain on it as well.

Remembering his distance he could hear a gramophone, or a record, playing a lively dance tune. It was a cheerful, reassuring sound, yet to Backway—sensitive to danger and the uncertainty of his position—sounded grotesquely out of place.

What he had at first taken to be a statue, suddenly became animated, and proved to be an elderly, wooden-faced manservant, attired in knee-breeches, silk stockings, and a black waist-coat with brass buttons and red silk lapels. With a quiet air of polite authority he collected hat and cane, and his companion of these hours and hours.

Under Backway knew that he was in the residence of someone of both wealth and taste. It might be situated in the heart of the West End, or on the exclusive outskirts of London. His sharp eyes glanced on the telephone that stood on the hall-table, but he could hear nothing there. The instrument held an ornate wood case that gave its number, and the name of the exchange.

The tall man glanced at his watch, and looking his arm through Backway's, drew him towards the foot of the stairs.

"We have half an hour to spare," he said curtly. "I will show you to your room. You may wish to have a wash and brush up before we settle down to business."

Again there was that vaguely sinister note in his voice, but Backway betrayed no signs of the uneasiness that was stirring in his veins as they ascended the stairs, and walked around one wing of the gallery.

The man opened a door, and entered on a number of electric lights.

"I think," he said, with a gleam of a smile, "that you will find everything you require. I will return for you later."

Backway heard the door snap shut behind him. He listened instinctively for the rasp of a key in the lock, but it did not come. He knew why an instant later as he turned to examine the door. There was no need for a lock and key to make him a prisoner. There was no handle on the inner side of the door.

It was fitted with a spring lock, and it was impossible to open it save from the outer side.

Backway dug his hands in his pockets, and shuffled his feet through his instep, as he made a steady, deliberate survey of his surroundings. He had no grounds for complaint so far as the room that had been placed at his disposal was concerned.

It was furnished with taste, and an eye to extreme comfort. It was decidedly better than the room that he had occupied at the Hotel Universal.

The polished floor was strewn with Turkish rugs. The big, low-pitched bed was a potential cure for insomnia in itself. There was an electric fan, a washstand with hot and cold water, and a comfortable armchair.

With a quick, steady stride he crossed to the window, and pulled aside the heavy curtains. He lit his lips suddenly as he stared at the massive steel shutters that were drawn

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across, and looked on the outside. It was evident that he was not to be permitted to catch a glimpse of what lay beyond. The secret of his present whereabouts was evidently guarded.

Turning away from the window, he noticed for the first time a trunk and an leather suitcase, which were stacked on a sack lugged with an eye on the wall.

The locked trunk's handle. Surely it was an extraordinary coincidence that both the trunk and the case were stamped with the same initials as his own: "I. H."

And the label: "St. Antonio—passenger from Melbourne to Southampton." It was something more than a coincidence. It was an omen, irrefutable fact. It was his own luggage that had been removed from the Hotel Universal during the brief interval when he had been making suits with Herbert Wood at Scotland Yard!

"Well, now, I be permanently petrified!" he exclaimed immediately, as he threw open the trunk and examined its familiar contents. "No wonder that long guy with a face like a marble bustard suggested that I should get everything I required here. This trunk I'm due to connect with don't leave much to chance. They bluffed the hotel folks, and waited away with my traps, and all along I've been thinking it was Willy Wood, the shock of Scotland Yard, who'd done the dirty on me."

Backway checked his head anxiously. It seemed possible that he was destined to disappear without leaving a single trace behind him—not even his luggage.

Then he smiled again as he patted the gun beneath his shoulder. If it came to a question of "get out, or go under," that little automatic contained just eleven steel arguments in its favour.

Backway made a quick but thorough tour of the room. He pulled open drawers and cabinets and searched everywhere for something that might give him a clue as to where he was, or who was the owner of this big, solitary furnished room.

He even examined the sheets and bedding. Here he found a handkerchief—just a small letter and a number, but they conveyed nothing. All the same he made a note of it on the inside of his cuff.

The delay and suspense were getting on his nerves. He killed time by washing and combing through his trunk for a clean collar. Then he lit another cigarette, and had just plunged himself down on the arm chair when some small object swished through the air and landed on the floor within a few inches of his feet.

Backway stared dumbly at it. It was a piece of paper, wrapped around a lead disc, similar to the weights used in the edges of women's coats.

He picked it up and balanced it in his hand, wondering where the demons it could have come from. He glanced up at the red top and scanned the walls. Finally his eyes fell on the narrow hallway over the door. It was half open! The queer missile must have been tossed into the room by someone standing outside in the passage.

Backway's hand trembled slightly as he unwrapped the tiny scrap of paper and smoothed it out on his knee. It was badly crumpled, but he was just able to distinguish a few words scrawled across it in pencil. There were just six words in all:

"You are blind in one eye!"

Backway's face was a picture of utter bewilderment as he stood staring at this extraordinary, senseless message that had been flung through the daylight into the room.

"You are blind in one eye?" he repeated slowly. "Now, what in the name of all that's crazy does that mean—if it means anything at all? Here I landed up in a private lunatic asylum, or in this queerest idea of a practical joke. Perhaps it isn't intended for me at all. But why should one person write to another, telling them they're blind in one eye?"

He turned the paper aside-down, read it backwards, and tried in rearranging the words, thinking that it might have been written in some kind of a code. Each attempt was

equally futile. The sentence remained the same: "You are blind in one eye!"

"I'll tell the cockeyed world I am!" he muttered disgustedly. "The general approach to being blind I can remember to the right of—"

Backway's quick ears caught the sound of a light knock outside the room. With one movement he crumpled the slip of paper in his hand, and jammed it into the crevice between the back of the chair and the wall.

He was not a moment to lose. The door was suddenly flung open, and the tall man who had met him in the vestibule of the Fifty-Fifty Club stropped noisily into the room.

"Come along, Backway," he said curtly. "Everything is prepared. They are waiting for you."

Backway's lips tightened grimly as he rose to his feet. It struck him that, in just such a manner might the public executioners present himself at the condemned cell to inform some

As the crook from Australia strode along the Embankment, a car suddenly swept into the kerb. The interior was in complete darkness, but a white hand appeared in the open window, beckoning him impatiently.



unfortunate wretch that his last hour had come!

But under Backway's brain was as cool as ice, and he had himself under perfect control as he tossed the remains of his cigarette in the fireplace, and walked imperiously out of the room.

He had travelled twenty thousand miles to perform a certain mission, and he certainly wasn't going to fall at the last hour.

He knew exactly what was expected of him. He knew exactly what to say, for all this had been planned long in advance; but the brain that had helped him, and the influence that had smoothed his path, were no longer at his disposal.

He had to play a lone hand! His life—and something far more important than his life—depended directly upon his nerve, his wit, and his ability to meet and conquer the unexpected.

He was face to face with the unexpected now, for he had no more idea than the man in the moon by whom he was destined to be confronted within the next sixty seconds.

They mounted the foot of the stairs, and walked towards a door at the far end of the hall. Backway could hear a hum of voices, and a pleasant rattle of glasses. A man laughed heartily—a big, deep-chested laugh that momentarily diverted all other sounds.

"I suppose the joke is on us," muttered Backway, under his breath. "Well, perhaps I'll

have the last laugh in the end. It sounds as though there's a full gathering of the class to-night."

His companion tapped sharply on the door, and flung it open.

"St. Luke's Backway?" he announced impatiently, but there was a faint note of mockery in his voice, and in the manner in which he stepped politely to one side.

For a few seconds Backway's eyes were dazzled by the sudden glare of light from a big cluster of electric bulbs. He realized that there were four or five people assembled in the brightly-lit room, whose cheerful fire was burning, and the air was fragrant with the aroma of fine cigars, and Egyptian cigarettes.

A man in immaculate evening-dress rose from the depths of an armchair, and came towards him. He was a short, thick-set individual, with a big head, and a lily face. He was bald, save for a fringe of grey hair, and his long upper lip was adorned with a close-cropped

grey moustache. He looked like a good natured, pink-faced walrus as he smiled extensively, and held out a white, fat hand, that felt like a lump of warm clay.

"Ah, so here you are at last, Backway!" he greeted joyfully. "Glad to meet you. You will forgive me dispensing with the formality of introducing names in introducing you to my friends?"

Backway bowed graciously.

"In that respect I am at a disadvantage!" he suggested. "My name is known to all of you."

"Surely. You are at a disadvantage," agreed the man rapidly, and this time his smile held a deeper meaning than it conveyed. "But, since all you hold the trump card, Backway?"

"Yes, I hold the trump card," he replied. His gaze made a swift survey of the other occupants of the room, who leaned back in their chairs and stared back at him with the detached interest of a tiger in a cage.

Three of them were men, and the fourth a woman. She was a magnificent-looking creature, with a mouth of jet-black hair, long, dark eyes, and a vivid, scarlet mouth. Backway noted at once that she was the most distinguished person in the room. Adorned in a blue-tinted, Mackintosh-pelisse evening gown, she remained him as talking as much as a coded profane as she reached on a green satin divan, smoking a cigarette in a long, mother-of-pearl holder.

Of the three men, one was undeniably a Russian Jew, long-haired, long-haired, and body-encased in a tarantula. The fat-headed, square-headed man, with the heavy chin, and thick-lined spectacles, that lent him the im-



As she sped along the darkened corridor, two hands like steel claws suddenly gripped her by the shoulders, hurling her down her feet.

pression of a collision in a tank, possibly chained together as the land of his birth.

The third man was an Oriental; a typical example of the civilized East, with his clipped, well-fitting dinner-jacket, and top patent-leather shoes, that would have proved too small for a class of troika.

His oblique eyes twinkled like chips of black jet, and there was a bluish, glistening smile on his smooth, yellow face, as he sat perched on one side of the chair faster in front of the fire. "Like part of a sawtooth chain, representing specimens of all nations," was the wisp of thought that flashed through Backway's mind. "There's not one of them would front the other faster than they could be seen. By Jove, there'll be a future in the diplomatic services if only I can reap this bunch in."

"Sit down, Backway," invited the big man, who so far had done all the talking. "Before we settle down to business I'll ring for the coffee to be brought in, so that we shall be disturbed afterwards. Help yourself to a liqueur and a cigar."

Backway lit a cigarette and poured himself a liqueur bravely in a fruit, slender glass. He felt that he might be in need of a stimulant very shortly. He seemed an unendowed of unimproved anticipation that longed to the atmosphere like an insubstantial poison gas.

There was a tap on the door, and a maid-ervant, in neat cap and apron, entered the room, pushing a silver-plated trolley, complete with silver tray, and coffee service. She moved deftly and swiftly from person to person, distributing the tiny cups of fragrant coffee, and finally passed in front of Backway.

"Cigar and liqueur, sir?"

"Thank you very much, please," replied Backway, and, struck by some familiar chord in the voice that addressed him, lifted his gaze and stared straight into the violet eyes of the mysterious girl in green, whom he had seen for the first time that evening in the grill room at the Hotel Universal.

It took much for Backway's mind self-asserted that he never turned a hair, though he felt as though someone had struck him a crashing blow on the back of the head with a

swallow. His head was as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar as he took the proffered coffee-cup and daintily unrolled slender, pink fingers along a strip of sugar into its straining black contents.

Quick as thought he remembered the warning words the girl had spoken to him from the interior of the big limousine car, that had drawn up alongside of him, just after he had terminated his interview with Detective-Inspector Wood, and emerged from Scotland Yard.

She had hinted that they might meet again that night, and had warned him not to betray the fact that he had ever before set eyes on her!

But he had never expected to meet her here, and under such strange circumstances. He had been prepared for most contingencies, but certainly not this! A hundred and unnumbered thoughts flashed through Backway's brain in a fraction of a second.

When he raised his eyes again, the girl, who had seemed so tall, thin, individual, who had exhaled his from the Fifty-Fifty Club, was in the act

of tearing the top of the hat off the back of the neck. He knew that five pairs of eyes were concentrated steadily on him as he calmly stepped his cup of coffee, and set it down on the small table by his elbow.

"And now, Backway, let us get to business!" It was the big man who had broken this silence. He had planted himself steadily in front of the fireplace, with his hands clasped behind his back, and his lower lip thrust out and curling upwards towards his nose, grey mustache. "You know exactly why you have travelled all these thousands of miles to be present here in this company to-night? And, you know—"

"One moment! If you please?"

Backway moved a swift procedure of impending danger as he stared at the interrupter. It was the long, spider-legged Russian, with his bony, black hair, who had sprung up from his chair, snapping his fingers excitedly in the air.

"Yes, moment, if you please?" he repeated, in a smooth, high-pitched voice.

"Before we go any farther, I wish to show this gentleman a little trick, which will be of interest to all of us. Have you forgotten? He has not remembered what I told you an hour ago?"

The woman, rolled on the green satin divan, withdrew the long cigarette-holder from her red mouth, and spoke for the first time.

"He is right," she said, in a rich, vibrant voice. "Let him do as he suggests. It was agreed, was it not?"

"Go ahead!" The grey-mustached man shrugged his wide shoulders a trifle listlessly. "I am sure Backway will not mind submitting to your test. He can't take a couple of seconds."

Backway drew a deep breath, and experienced an unpleasant sensation in the pit of his stomach. He could feel the reds glittering around him as he met the looking, suspicious gaze of the bony, hood-eyed Russian. What was this test to which he was to be submitted, and how could he hope to successfully through the ordeal unless he knew that it was all about?

"Where's where I beg?" he thought grimly, that his face displayed nothing of his inner feelings as the Russian turned toward him and held one hand above his head.

"Heaven Backway, give me your attention for one minute," he said glly. "It is just a little trick that I wish to show you. How many fingers is set of my left hand that you can see?"

"Three," replied Backway (truthfully). He was beginning to think that the man had suddenly gone crazy. But an instant later he came within an ace of falling into an cunning a plot as had ever been laid!

"And now, if you please, place your hand over your right eye, so! That is right. And now—how many fingers can you see?"

The correct reply was trembling on Backway's lips when, quick as light, he suddenly recollected the strange message, scribbled on a scrap of paper, that had been tossed through the twilight of his room on the upper floor!

"You are blind in one eye."

It was now perfectly clear to him now, and he almost bit off his tongue as he looked back the word that his lips had already half-formed. Instead, he smiled kindly before he finally gave his reply.

"As a matter of fact, I can't see anything at all," he informed quietly. "I regret to say that I am quite blind in my left eye."

The woman rolled at once, and a sigh of relief exhaled through the room, and the big man smiled tranquilly at the disoriented Russian as the latter shrugged his shoulders and resumed his seat, covering his eyes.

"It is only right that we should make perfectly certain that this man is indeed Backway," he jerked suddenly. "But I am quite satisfied. Yet! There are not many people who know that Backway is blind in his left eye!"

Backway knew now who didn't—and that was himself! It was the one hidden flaw in the construction of his carefully laid plans that might have ruined the whole scheme of things to collapse like a house of cards.

But for that chance message that had been tossed into the locked room where he had not waiting for this particular ordeal, he was bound to have fallen an innocent victim to the cunning trap to which the Russian had contrived him.

"That girl again!" was the conclusion that flashed through Backway's mind as he readily lit a cigarette and waited for the next move in the game. "It couldn't have been anybody else but her. Who the devil ran she by, and what is she doing here? And how in the name of all the gods, and everything else do she know my secret?"

"Surely we have wanted enough time!" It was the woman. She rose to her feet and glided towards the centre of the room, blinking luxuriously around out of her chamberlain eyes. "Have we not been waiting eight months for this moment? Let us get the business started—and finished!"

Backway sensed a sudden change in the atmosphere—a general lightning-up of the situation. He started himself to meet the test onslaught in this battle of wits. So far it had been more stalling, cross-talk, guessing, and dodging for an opening. Now for a frontal attack, with the odds six to one against him.

"One body friend is right." The man with the malice mustache drew himself up to his full height, and snarled backwords and forwards at his foes.

"Let me carry your mind back to a certain day of about eighteen months ago, Backway. You were living in Paris at the time, and you had reason to believe that the French authorities were beginning to develop an advanced interest in your movements."

"Before any definite steps could be taken you decided to return to London, and caught the last train to Paris. Your luggage consisted of a very ordinary leather over-coat. In the same compartment of the train there travelled with you another gentleman, who also carried a suitcase of almost identically the same pattern. I am not going to suggest that you deliberately changed bags—"

"I didn't," said Backway calmly. "Such a thing never entered my mind. It was quite by accident that I took the wrong bag when I alighted at Charing Cross."

"A most fortunate accident, if I may say so," remarked the big man, with an ironic smile. "For when you opened that bag you found that it contained a large sum of money

in French banknotes, and a number of documents in a sealed envelope.

"Quite right," agreed Barkway. "There were French banknotes to the value of close on ten thousand pounds. I looked upon these as a gift from the gang—a most appreciable windfall to a man of my profession. I remember perfectly well how I carried all the bundles of bank notes away, and changed those notes into British money. Three days later I was on my way to Australia."

"I took on a long while to travel you," mused the big man, stroking one lumpy eyebrow. "Of course, we discovered your name by the contents of the bag you left behind. Unusually, after many months, no lettered that you were in Melbourne, Australia. We called to see a friend of ours in Melbourne, instructing him to get in contact with you."

"He did," smiled Barkway. "I found him a most entertaining and affable gentleman. Shall I continue the story? Your agent—big your partner, your friend—most generously told me that I could retain the money. I had found in the suitcase, furthermore, he offered me another ten thousand pounds if I could hand over in his a certain document—written in Russian or some other outlandish language that had formed a part of the contents of said suitcase."

He paused to light a thick cigar. The silence was so tense that not a sound was to be heard save the dry rattle of the match.

"I accepted his offer," continued Barkway. "And I had to point out to him that I had left behind in London all the papers which were in the suitcase that came so strangely into my possession. He then offered me once again the following day, and increased his offer to four thousand pounds, providing I would arrange back to England, where the papers, and lined these over to certain people who would make themselves known to me in London."

"I carried out such instructions as he gave me. I sailed from Melbourne on the *s.s. Ukraina*. Yesterday I landed at Southampton, came straight to London, and, as instructed, went direct to the room I had booked at the Hotel Universal. There I received your letter—I presume it was your letter, and—well, you know the rest."

The big man drew a long, shaky breath. His eyes were gleaming, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, half hid. He suddenly drew a hand into his pocket and drew a thick bundle of banknotes, slipped together with a rubber band.

"A bargain is a bargain. You are certain of a sum of ten thousand pounds? Here is the four thousand pounds you were promised. And where is the document we want? Show—have you got it with you?"

All eyes were fixed on Barkway. He felt like a lion dived surrounded by a pack of ravenous wolves. But he also felt that the final victory would be with him.

"Now, I ask you?" he said respectfully. "What chance have I had of getting hold of that paper since I arrived in London? The only man I stirred out of the hotel was to spend an extraordinary evening in Scotland Yard, with Inspector Wood. The paper is quite safe. I can get it for you this evening in the morning."

A swelling note of disappointment and fury cracked down the lips of the fair-haired Russian. The German dragged his shoulders sullenly, while the red-haired woman made a graceful gesture of disgust as she lit a fresh cigarette on her long holder. Only the Chinese remained curiously unparticipating, though there was a smoky look in his black eyes.

"And where is the paper?" demanded the big man hoarsely. "How do you know it is still where you left it?"

Barkway smiled reassuringly. "Before I left England for Australia," he said calmly. "I hired a straggle at the Safe Deposit in Marble Lane, and paid two years' rent in advance. I knew I should be returning to London. The paper is in the strong box, along with several thousand pounds. I left behind in case my trip to Australia did not prove remunerative."

Barkway lied unblushingly. It was one of those occasions where he felt himself entitled to sham the truth, and exercise his imagina-

tions. He had never been inside a safe deposit in his life.

For a moment the other occupants of the room stared stupidly at one another. Then the big man turned sharply towards the tall, marble-topped individual who still stood vigilantly by the door.

"You will take Mr. Barkway back to his room," he said grimly. "At nine o'clock tomorrow morning you will accompany him to the Safe Deposit in Marble Lane, and bring him straight back here as soon as he has secured what we want. And it—"

A light rap sounded on the door. The tall man turned the key, and cautiously opened it. For a fraction of a second Barkway caught a glimpse of a slender figure in a white cap and apron. He knew that it was the maid who had brought in the coffee a short while previously. Then the door closed again, as the man stepped out into the hall.

"We did not anticipate so much trouble over this slight," remarked the big person, glancing pointedly towards the closed door. "As soon as this matter has been finally settled you will conveniently forget all that has occurred, and catch the next boat back to Australia, four thousand pounds richer than when you started. Your passage has been booked on the *s.s. Orford Castle*. The sail next Tuesday."

There is the matter of that Chinese gentleman who was murdered at the Hotel Universal," protested Barkway sullenly. "I should like to know—"

He lapsed into sudden silence, and his hand gripped convulsively at the arms of his chair as the door swung back on its hinges, and the tall man came into the room. His hair was wild with rage, and his fingers trembled so that he could scarcely turn the key in the lock.

"By gods, here's where the trouble starts!" was the damning thought that flashed through Barkway's mind. "Something's gone wrong with the works. I've got a hunch that someone's got into, and spilled the house! Steady, the Duffs!"

"By heavens, what's the matter, Karmody?" came curtly from the direction of the fireplace. "Speak, man! What the devil has happened?"

"We've been betrayed!" The tall man's eyes were wild with fury as he put out the words and leveled an accusing finger at the wretched figure of Under Barkway. "I've just learned the truth! That fellow is more Barkway than I am! He's a cursed spy! Barkway never left Australia! He's still in Melbourne!"

TORTURE:

A gasp of consternation echoed through the room. There was a sharp crack as the long cigarette-holder snapped in halves between the woman's white fingers, and then a gleam of steel as the Chinese leaped to his feet. As if by magic a narrow-bladed, razor-edged knife had appeared in one yellow hand!

Barkway's foot slipped on the carpet as he endeavored to land himself out of the big, depressed armchair. Long before he could recover his balance the big man was looming in front of him, his plump face distorted with bestial rage as he clutched him by the shoulder, and ground the blunt business of an automatic into his ribs.

"You are a cunning double-crossing dog! Put your hands up!" he rapped. "Who the blazes are you? What are you doing here in Barkway's place? Quick! that with the truth, sir, by thunder. I'll blow a hole through you!"

The other occupants of the room hung tense on the man's words, but Barkway stood, unword, though he slowly

and reluctantly raised his hands above his head. His lips were tightly compressed, and there was a dazed, vaguely puzzled look in his eyes. In that moment of deadly peril, when the entire edifice of his carefully laid plans threatened to topple in ruin like a house of cards, he was not so pert concerned about his own personal safety.

His chief feeling was one of disappointment and disillusionment. He had no doubt that it was the girl of the green dress who had betrayed him to those men, just when he had come to look upon her as one who was seeking to aid him. She was the only one who knew his secret. It was she who had commenced the tall man out of the room, and communicated some message to him.

"I might have guessed she was bound to go with this gang!" he thought sullenly. "She was waiting for me when I arrived at the Universal; she was waiting outside for me when I left Scotland Yard, and now, tonight, she has reappeared to bring me down at the last jump."

"Harry up, my friend! I am not in a mood to be trifled with," Barkway sneered at the post-bellied giant pointedly against his ribs. "Who sent you here? How do you come to know as much as you do? Are you a cursed spy, or just a meddling fool?"

"He is a spy?" It was the woman who spoke, her green eyes snapping dangerously. "Barkway must have betrayed us. Didn't I tell you there was something wrong when we heard this fellow had visited Scotland Yard tonight? It was all a bluff! He sent three to report. Make him speak! We must know the truth!"

"Yes, we must know the truth," cried the Russian, raising his fingers nervously through his heavy hair. "If we have been tricked, it may be that we have been trapped as well! Don't you realize what this may mean? Stop posing the police as our best friend! Supposing that paper has fallen into their hands—"

"If that paper had fallen into their hands, we should not be here now," interrupted the German, with a menacing glare of his plump shoulders. "Himmel, his thin dog to tongue! Perhaps Barkway sent him over here because he feared to come to England himself. Speak, villain!"

But Barkway did not speak. He was wondering just what chance he had of getting to the automatic that was stipped beneath his left shoulder. Before he could make up his mind the electric light suddenly snuffed out, and the room was plunged into pitch darkness.



Sluggishly crossing the room, she found the gang's prisoner lying upon the mattress. A gasp of horror escaped her lips—he was still unconscious.

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Rackway was totally unprepared for such a welcome aggression, but he wasn't slow to take advantage of the opportunity to improve his position. It was evident by the sounds of confusion and alarm that riveted his eyes that the sudden failure of the electric light had come as an unexpected surprise to the other occupants of the room.

He flung himself backwards, and to one side, twisting like a rat so that he landed crosswise on his hands and knees. A tangle of red flame spit above him, and he heard the crack of a bullet as it struck the wall above him. A foot-level groined painfully on his fingers, and the head of the lamp fell to the top of which the last lamped. Rackway gave a mighty heave that tipped the main chain off its balance, and sent him sprawling to the floor with a crash that shook the house.

Still maintaining his crouching position, he writhed awkwardly, but swiftly, in the direction where he judged the door to be. Somewhere in the heart of the gloom he could hear the Chinese whispering and whining like a leopard that had lost a hot scent; a faint cry directly beneath sounded almost nothing in comparison.

"Keep your heads, you lads! He can't get out of the room! The door's locked, and I've got the key in my pocket!"

It was the tall man who had spoken, and at the same instant Rackway ran head-first against some heavy article of furniture. The force of the impact almost stunned him, and before he could recover his scattered wits, a mesh rickled and slipped to the distance.

It was the German with the thick-lined spectacles who stood holding the trap, flicking flame above his head. He glomped Rackway, scooped himself beneath his feet, sliding his head almost from side to side, and with brutal deliberation laid drive a tremendous kick at his unprotected face.

Rackway had no time to duck. The heavy boot caught him squarely on the point of the chin, and the entire solar system seemed to revolve in front of his eyes.

There followed a period of prolonged and lacerating blackness, in which Rackway tried again and again experiences of his younger days, each one presumably connected with a dull, nagging pain in the region of his lower jaw.

Gradually the mist that obscured his brain seemed to clear away. He tried to move, but couldn't; then as he slumped down he saw the stout straps that clasped his wrists to the arms of a massive wooden chair.

"He's coming to at last! I was beginning to think that Von Tushen had put him to sleep for a week."

It was the big man with the walrus mustache who had spoken. His plump face was white and strained with anxiety as he gazed round and about the room. All three present looked haggard and down in the cold, grey light of early morning that filtered through the heavy blinds which were fixed tightly across the windows.

Rackway realized that several hours must have elapsed since that brutal kick on the jaw had battered the senses out of him. His head throbbed with pain, and his chin felt as though it had been wrenched off, and nibbled on again with a dog-banana. A quick glance showed him that he had exactly the same company to deal with. The woman glared at him through a tangle of hair that had fallen over her eyes. Cyclic flashes of orange flamed fitfully in her pale cheeks. She looked as artificial as a cheap lithograph in the land, revealing light of day.

Rackway wailed, despite his aches and pains, and the straps that clasped him helplessly to a chair. He wasn't broken yet! He still had those people guessing. Their nerves were worn to shreds by the prolonged suspense, and the dismal uncertainty of their position.

The big man suddenly swung his restless parking, and, seizing a chair, plumped himself down in front of Rackway.

"We are not going to waste any more time on you, my friend," he said curtly. "This is your last chance to explain who you are, and how it happens that you know so much about our affairs that you have been able to proceed so far with your daring and impudent imposture of Under Rackway."

"We know that you are not Under Rackway. We know that Rackway is still in Melbourne,

and that in some way you managed to detain him there, while you slipped into his shoes, and proceeded to carry out every detail of the programme that had been arranged for him. What we want to know is, who are you, and who are you working for?"

Rackway managed a somewhat puffed smile. "As you are so well informed, and seem to know such a lot, why bother me with your trivial questions?" he said coolly. "You are only wasting your time, I am not in a very conversational mood at the moment."

"You will find your tongue soon enough—we see it altogether!" snapped the big man, with an ugly hardening of his jaw.

"Ah, do not bandy words with the best of dogs!" growled the German impatiently. "He is no police spy. He was not here when Scotland Yard here had him under observation since the moment he set foot in England! Like us, they thought that he was Under Rackway. If he will refuse to speak, he Tushen deal with him. He is not so cowardly as you suppose."

The little Chinese ran and bowed politely, as though it was a pleasing compliment that had been paid him. Heek and sleet as a cat he puffed across the room, and seated himself in the chair that the big man somewhat reluctantly vacated.

Rackway left his nervous commotion to twinge as the Oriental bestowed his steel black eyes on him.

"It would be better if you told us now what we want to know!" he suggested gently. "It will save me the necessity of compelling you to speak under far less pleasant circumstances."

There was a mouthful of ugly roaring in the softly-spoken words, but they left Rackway unmoved. He merely shrugged his shoulders, and accepted a golden spear of sunlight that stabbed through a crevice in the drawn blinds. He was wondering what time it was, and exactly where he was. His position was as hopeless as if he was imprisoned in the depths of a diamond cut mine. He had played his hand, and lost, at the very moment when he had seemed as a fair way to achieving his object.

"Go ahead, Tushen, we must know how we stand!" The big man spoke loudly, and walked to the far end of the room, as though anxious to witness whatever was to follow.

The Chinese bowed forward, and examined the straps that bound Rackway's wrists to the arms of the chair.

"They will serve," he said blandly, "but in my country we have a wooden glove in which the hand is secured, with just the finger-tips protruding. However—"

He finished in his pocket, and produced first a neat petal cigarette-lighter, and then after appeared to be a common drawing-needle, fixed in a wooden handle, with the sharp end protected by a small cap.

As unobtrusively as though he was about to rock a pill of opium on the end of a pipe-stem, he ignored the petrol-lighter, and held the pointed silver of steel in the clear flame.

Rackway caught his breath sharply, and sank his teeth into his lower lip. He was so comatose, but his throat suddenly contracted as he realized something of the man's intention.

"There is still time to speak," reminded the Chinese, watching the needle as it gradually blackened, and then glowed red-hot. "I have never known this method of stimulating spontaneity contrived to fail. You see the idea, Mr. Dumb-bog? The needle, when skillfully heated, is inserted between the end of the finger, which becomes considerably pained and uncomfortable, as you can imagine."

Rackway's face was deathly white, and breath of perspiration stung out on his forehead. He strained at his bonds until the chair creaked and groaned beneath him.

"You yellow head!" he seared. "Go ahead. You won't get a square out of me! But, by heavens, if I could get my hands on you I'd finish you!"

The Chinese merely grinned as he twisted the steel needle in the clear flame of the petrol-lighter. Rackway set his teeth, and there was a gleam of humor in his eyes as he watched the pointed silver of metal gradually turn from red to white hot.

He was so comatose, but his nerves were raw

and quivering in anticipation of the agonizing ordeal that lay in front of him.

"For the last time, Mr. Spy! Are you going to speak?"

Rackway shook his head. His hair was damp with perspiration, and there was an engorgement, retching sensation at the pit of his stomach. He could feel the cruel heat of the glowing needle as the Chinese drew it from the flesh, and saw his feet begin to grasp the middle finger of his helpless victim's right hand.

Rackway closed his eyes, and it seemed as though a time before every fibre of his being revolted and fought against the shock of an agonizing state of pain that lifted up his sin like a scorching flame. He fancied that he could almost see the needle sinking into his finger, and catch the red of scorching flesh.

The pain was more than human nature could endure, for Rackway was still weak and shaken from the brutal kick on the chin that had laid him low in the first place. Never more in his life would he again experience the torturing state of the scorching needle; but he could feel his senses returning, and a crimson mist billowed before his eyes.

Then something seemed to snap in his brain. Rackway's head fell backward, and he sagged heavily in the chair.

The Chinese shrugged his shoulders, and clenched his teeth angrily.

"The obstinate fool has fainted," he said calmly. "I am afraid he is going to prove an unyielding customer to deal with. Any ordinary man would not have stood half as long with out speaking."

The big man stirred a cigar as he stood tapping nervously at his heavy mustache.

"By heavens, we've got to find some way to make him talk," he declared. "Until we know how we stand we don't move from this place."

"But who is the fellow?" jeered the Russian excitedly. "Where does he come from? How has he managed to take Rackway's place? Perhaps he was selling the tooth? Perhaps he has got that infernal paper rolled up in a safe deposit, and is holding out for a higher price?"

"That we will find out as soon as the dog is in a state to talk," jerked the big man determinedly. "It is the remarkable fact that I will make him talk. You, Von Thulsen, you know where to get him. The servants are forbidden to go to that part of the house. At once as he has recovered Youden can have another attempt to make him talk. He may have learned his lesson by then."

The generally-built German stepped forward, and undisturbed the steps that bound the senseless man to the chair. He swung him over one shoulder as though he weighed no more than a leather pillow, and carried him out of the room. The spacious hall was deserted, and the house was as silent as a tomb. It was evident that the hour was early. The first rays of the morning sun were striking through the lamplight over the front door.

The German did not encounter a living soul as he gadded silently up three flights of stairs in the very bow of the house. Here he unlocked a heavy door, and passed into a narrow passage with another door at the farther end. He opened this by turning the key that was in the lock.

The room beyond was not much bigger than a large cupboard. There was no window, but in one corner of the ceiling a kerchief shall was up to a skylight that was set in the roof, high overhead, and by beyond anyone's reach, without the aid of a ladder.

The room was unadorned, save for an iron bedstead, on which the German calmly flung the limp figure of Luke Rackway. A moment later he had gone, leaving the massive door on the outer side, and shooting a heavy bolt as well.

Von Thulsen passed for a moment at the head of the stairs, and blinked around the landing through his thick-lensed spectacles. He fancied that he had heard a faint rattling sound, and tried to see if a breeze of mill-paper that was flapping in a draught of air.

With a nod of satisfaction the big German

descended the stairs, and the soft shuffle of his footsteps died away in the distance. A door banged as he entered the room on the ground floor, and a moment later a slim figure stepped cautiously from a cupboard at the far end of the landing on the top floor of the house.

Under Rackway would have recognized the girl at once, though she now wore a fur-trimmed coat, and a close-fitting hat pulled down over her soft auburn curls. Her face was pale, and there was a fever, determined light in her blue eyes as she looked her head over the banisters, and peered down into the hall below.

Then, lightly, she darted across the landing and unlocked the door through which Von Thulsen had just passed. Her key had made no sound on the bare boards as she flitted along the passage beyond, and halted outside the room where Luke Rackway was imprisoned.

The key was still in the lock. Her fingers were trembling with excitement as she turned it, and thus she took the heavy bolt.

A gasp of astonishment escaped the girl's lips as she stared at the figure slumped there that lay huddled on the floor huddled. In an instant she was at Rackway's side, lifting his sagging

limb straight. The little yellow man was as strong and as firm as a tiger. His black eyes were blazing with fury and suspicion as he glared at his helpless victim.

"Ah, the pretty little auburn curls were as red as with our coffee last night!" he roared. "And what is she doing dressed up to go out at this hour of the morning? Just what were you doing coming out of that passage?"

The girl did not reply. She made a desperate attempt to scratch her face; but in a trice the Chinese had seized his grip in her right wrist, and applied a cunning pressure that rendered her powerless, and wrenched a groan of agony from between her clenched teeth.

"You are!" chuckled the little man, seizing the girl through the head of the chair. "It is no use resisting. We will see what my friends downstairs have to say about this! I am beginning to think we have more than one spy in the house."

The girl's face was white and set with dismay and despair. She threw a hopeless glance over her shoulder as the Chinese propelled her abruptly down the stairs, and through the hall to the room at the back of the house.



A scream came from the girl and, caution being to the winds, Rackway hurried himself through the door like a human opiate to her rescue.

head, shaking him by the shoulders, and clashing his ribs hard.

"The brute! The beast! What have they been doing to him?" she had asked. "Oh, Rackway, wake up! Please, wake up! Now is our only chance! We must act at once, or it may be too late!"

But Rackway was not to the wick. His pulse was beating strongly; but his limbs were groping miles away in space, and he was not conscious of anything that was happening.

The girl gazed wildly around the room. Water was what she wanted, but there was none handy, though she knew there was a tap at the head of the stairs.

A hot glance at the senseless man, and she rushed out of the room, closing the door behind her. Rockedly she ran along the passage, and reached the door at the end just as it was pushed open, and a stout, long-armed figure, with an oval, yellow face, loomed on the threshold.

The Chinaman? The girl was too late to pull up. Before she ran in search of water her breath in arrest, two red limbs like steel claws had closed round her shoulders, dragging her out on to the landing at the head of the stairs.

"Care you, keep still!" sneered the Chinaman, stooping so low they above drummed pointedly against his skinny chin. "What were you doing in there? Don't you know you're not allowed to go near that part of the house?"

Panting for breath, the girl ceased her one-

gasp of unuttered protest their sudden appearance. The big man leaped to his feet, and stared bewilderedly at the grinning Chinaman and his helpless victim.

"I do not think you have been careful enough in your choice of servants, comrade Tashell," chuckled the little yellow man. "You are rough for this young lady! I caught her peering about outside the room where Rackway is imprisoned, and she refused to give any account of herself!"

"She—she is one of the maid!" exclaimed Turbell hoarsely. "She was engaged through an agency, and has been here for over a month. By heavens, don't tell me you've got another victim up to the house! Let's have the truth from you, my girl. Who are you? Who sent you here? What are your game?"

Reluctantly the girl compressed her lips together, and shook her head.

"The tracheotomy!" blared the dark-haired woman, glaring malevolently at the plucky girl. "Of course she's a spy! Let me deal with her. Perhaps I can make her talk!"

She glided forward, drawing at her cigarette until it glowed red-hot between her jeweled fingers, and watched the flaming end in her cruel eyes.

THE FINAL GLASS.

It was the threshold pain of his scorching finger that quickened Luke Rackway's latent wits, and rolled away the mist that belogged his shocked faculties. He opened his

eyes, and sat up, to stare heedlessly around the black room, with its four bare walls, and the top skylight set high overhead.

A rush of memory brought him leaping to his feet, and he crouched furiously under his berth as he glanced at the pistol, red beam on the trigger.

Backway shook his head gloomily as he made another survey of the small, cell-like compartment. He could see that the door was a massive affair, and he took it for granted it was locked and bolted on the outer side.

There was no other opening from the room into the glare of light, and that was his last of his luck.

A gust of anger and desperation swept through Backway as he grabbed hold of the door-handle, and gave it a savage tug. A moment later he was the most amazed man in Europe, as the massive and seemingly unmovable door flew open, coming into painful collision with his nose, and hurling him half-way across the room.

"Great snakes, the confounded door wasn't even locked!"

Backway shook his head puzzledly, and there was a gleam of suspicion in his eyes as he crept nervy out into the passage, and through the second door on to the deserted landing. There was something queer about the fact that his enemies had neglected to lock and bolt the door.

Their indifference as to whether he regained his freedom or not led him to suspect that they had long since left the house, and were quite confident that he would be unable to trace them.

But he was not taking any chances. Despite the fact that the house was as silent as a tomb, he did not intend to describe his movements. Slipping off his shoes, he tucked them in his pockets, and crept stealthily down the winding stairs. He did not regret this precaution. As he reached the bottom of the last flight, and stood irresolute in the wide hall, his sharp ears caught a murmur of voices that came from beyond the door of the room where he had been trapped and overcome.

The lock had not held!

Backway's took came together with a click. He was not yet alone, and the circumstances revealed that he should seek assistance in a certain quarter. He would have to play the card that was only produced as a last resource.

Downstairs!

The reverberating clank of a mighty chain suddenly loomed out on the silence, and being springing on the air after such successive violence, Backway recognized the brass voice of steel. The angle of vibration had made it tender in every part of the world.

"Big Ben!" he breathed excitedly. "And not a stone's throw away by the sound of it! The fellow who brought me here last night must have been driving round in circles all the time! I passed to a point this house is within half a mile of Godolphin Yard!"

It was also a shock that had struck. The clank at the end of the hall still remained clear, dulling the morose-toned bass of voices within.

Backway glided across to the telephone, and lifted the receiver. In a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper, yet clearly audible, he asked for the same mysterious number that he had called from the Victoria Hotel, shortly after his arrival in London.

And it was the same quiet, cultured voice that again answered him.

"Hello, Chief! A-12 speaking!" called Backway robbishly. "I don't know where I'm speaking from, but the operator at the Exchange will be able to put you wise. Everything is up for a killing if you can strike at once. I think you'll make good to love, and it's too big a job for me to tackle on my own."

"Are you still on your own?" queried the calm voice. "There's another suggestive work-up on that job with you, A-12. I haven't told you before, but—"

"Humph!" That explains several things! Backway's voice was calmly tone. "There's not a minute to be lost, Chief. I suggest you ring the Yard, and—" suggested the voice. "I have already got the Yard on another line. If you're where I think you are, you can

EDGAR WALLACE!

*A wonderful new thriller
by this famous Master of
Mystery will appear shortly
in this paper.*

look out for some pretty lively action within the next ten minutes."

The line went dead. Backway leaped up the receiver, and stood for a moment staring wildly towards the room where his enemies were still engaged in animated conversation. Ten minutes to wait, and at any moment his previous night is discovered!

There was no way by which he could lock the door and make them temporary prisoners. He could only remain where he was, and trust to luck. The nervous of Big Ben and Freddie had given him every confidence that he would not wait long to get away.

The gun that he had carried strapped under his left shoulder was no longer there.

Then, struck with a sudden idea, he glided along to the massive front door and commenced to fiddle with the locks and bolts. If he could leave the door unlocked, it would mean the saving of many valuable moments when the police arrived on the scene.

Backway had scarcely drawn the last bolt when the silence of the big house was split by a shrill scream of terror that came ringing from the direction of the room at the farther end of the hall.

It was a woman's voice, and it held a pregnant note of appeal that went through Backway like a knife.

"The squalling one? If she can scream, she can be made to talk!" came the Russian's rasping voice. "Hold her tight, Vas! Vas! Vas! You're not seen looseen her tongue!"

Backway did not hesitate. He could guess what was happening. Someone else's woman was being subjected to the same ghastly treatment that had caused him to collapse with pain.

Caution was flung to the winds. Regardless of whether save the fact that a woman was in need of his help, Backway hauled himself from one end of the hall to the other, and banged the door like a ball at a gate.

It flew open with a crash. Shouts of amazement and dismay greeted his unexpected appearance as he burst into the room like a human volcano. The three, excepting glass shivered Backway all there was in air.

It was the mysterious girl of the Victoria Hotel who sat huddled in a chair, with Van Thalen's great hands clasped brutally on her bare shoulders, and the Little Chinese hovering menacingly over her drinking figure.

The tall man stood directly to one side. The door had caught him a stunning blow as it had burst open, and a trickle of blood was flowing from a nasty laceration on his forehead.

Backway checked his hats and charged. He realized one thing. What he had to do was to keep his end up and hold this crowd engaged until the police arrived on the scene.

He glimpsed the gleam of a knife-blade in the Chinaman's yellow hand, and without hesitation he sent his fist crashing into the man's face. There was a screech of broken bones, and the Chinak went down as though he had been jerked, and his jaw broken and his nose smashed.

"Take that, you yellow snake!" roared Backway, his eyes blazing with the joy of battle, and he whirled towards the other occupants of the room, just in time to meet the ferocious attack of the big, blonde-haired German.

The latter had snatched a heavy poker from the fireplace, and he aimed a murderous blow that would have cracked Backway's skull like an egg-shell, had it found its mark.

But Backway ducked, and even as the iron

bar skinned the top of his head, he brought his right fist up from the region of the knee, and it had all his weight and strength behind it.

It was a blow that would have staggered an elephant. His lumbering knuckles caught the German close on the point of the jaw, dropping him flat on his face as though he had been shot through the brain. He fell with a thud that shook the room.

"That's for the kick in the mouth you gave me!" quaked Backway. "Come on, I'm ready for the whole bunch of you! Every that comes out of this trap, or this going to get lost!"

Too late. Backway remembered the tall man who had been standing by the door. He snarled and reeled towards the duck as the man lurched himself through the air and landed heavily on his back, wrenching his arms around his neck and kicking viciously at his towering legs.

"Quick! Now's your chance, Terrell! Don't shoot! Smash the dog over the head!"

The big man with the walrus moustache came lumbering forward, gripping his pistol by the barrel, and shuffling for an opening to land a telling blow.

Half-stung by the muscular arms that encircled his throat, Backway reeled backwards, and flinging his arms over his head, got a grip on the hair of the man who was cooched on his back.

Then he leapt forward, leaving with all his might and main, and sending his adversary flying clean over his head. There was a wild yell and a thud of falling bodies. The one man had landed heavily on top of the other, and both went sprawling to the floor. The pistol dropped from the big man's hand, and went clattering across the carpet to the center of the room.

Like a flash Backway dived forward and snatched the pistol from the floor. The action undoubtedly saved his life. He heard something bump violently past his ear, and there was a jangle of broken glass as a long-handled, saw-edged knife shattered the mirror over the fireplace, and struck splintering in the wall.

It was the woman who had flung the knife. Her face was a mask of baffled rage as she saw that she had missed her mark.

"You poor fools!" she cried shrilly. "Can't the four of you settle one man? Back him, before it's too late!"

But the odds were now only two to one. The Chinese had had all the light knocked out of him. He crouched on the floor, groaning with the pain of his shattered nose and broken jaw, while the Russian sat propped against the mirror, tranquilly panting by a rapid punch on the back of the neck that had dazed him as nerve-centres. The German was still out to the wicks.

Backway knew that he held the upper hand. His face was grim and threatening, but there was a glaze of confusion in his eyes as he backed into a corner of the room by the fireplace and except the muzzle of the automatic pistol in a steady aim that covered every other part of the room.

"This is a strange gun to use, so don't blame me if it gives you sudden fits," he said quietly. "I should advise you all to stay just as you are, and not use any fancy ideas you might have in your minds. I've been drunk as far, but I'm willing to do all the talking from now on. Keep your hands in front of you where I can see 'em."

The big man made a gesture of despair. His slumped in a white and haggard as he turned towards his companion. The latter showed his teeth in an ugly snarl.

There was a sudden ruck of feet, and a deafening report as Backway fired one varying shot over the heads of the two men who had lurked themselves robbishly at him.

The result came as a stunning surprise to Backway himself. The echoes of the shot had scarcely died away when pandemonium seemed to break loose, as though it had been timed for that very moment.

There was a crash of rattling woodwork, and a cluster of broken glass as the curtains on the big window were torn apart, and a crowd of

burly, determined-looking men scurried into the room.

From the direction of the hall came still more men, in a grim, irresistible wave that literally supplanted the disarmed occupants of the room.

There was no attempt at resistance, even for the infuriated women, who fought and spat like a cornered wildcat. There followed a methodical stripping of the steel jaws of handcuffs, and then a sudden lull in the uproar and confusion.

Rackway heaved a sigh of relief as he tossed the automatic on to the man opposite. His gaze swept keenly around the room. What had become of the girl on whose behalf he had meant to make desperate measures? He had but seen her moving cautiously towards the door as he had hurled himself into the thick of the fight.

But there was no sign of her now. Instead Rackway found himself staring into the amazed, incredulous countenance of Detective-Inspector Wood.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" exploded the astonished officer. "Where the blazes did you spring from, Rackway? What are you doing here?"

"Nothing for the moment," answered Rackway, with a faint smile. "I was just finishing up my part of the job when you arrived on the scene. Didn't you expect to find me here, Wood?"

"Blazes, no?" snapped the inspector indignantly. "Blamed if I ever did think I'm sticking here. It was the Chief Commissioner himself who superintended this raid, and dragged me into it. Are you supposed to be under arrest, or—?"

Two men advanced across the room from the direction of the crowd of police and prisoners. One was Sir Henry Fairfax, the Chief Commissioner of Police. His companion was a short, dapper individual, with a smooth face, hard grey eyes, and a quiet air of authority. It was he who stared Rackway almost paternally on the shoulder.

"Well done, Holman!" he said approvingly. "Good work, my lad. You seem to have come out top-dog after all. But it was a close shave, wasn't it? Still, we've got the man we want."

Mr. Wood relaxed, and fanned himself vigorously with his hat. He was one of the few people who knew that the small, almost insignificant-looking man was Colonel Montague Cabell, the head of the English Secret Service. But who the blazes was the man he knew as Inker Rackway?

Sir Henry Fairfax caught the inspector's look of wonderment, and drew him to one side.

"Had to keep you in the dark up to now, Wood," he explained quietly. "The Secret Service has just launched off a big scoop. No, of course that's not Inker Rackway. That's young Captain Doyle Holman—Operative A-12—one of the smartest fellows in the S.S. He explains the whole affair to you in a few minutes."

"But, chief, I nearly fell on this job," Doyle Holman was saying earnestly. "They got wise to the fact that I wasn't Rackway, and hauled me down out!"

Colonel Cabell liked the inspector's keen, unblinking eyes, and drew him to one side.

"Well, you seem to have come out top-dog in the end. You didn't fall down on your share of the work, Holman," he said. "As soon as you 'blowed' me, and I started the raft, I got hold of the Chief Commissioner, and we went to the Yard together. Inspector Wood detained twenty men for special duty, packed them into two Flying Squad vans, and we came straight here and raided the house."

"And a very neat and effective raid, too, if I may say so," added the Chief of the Secret Service. "Do you know who our man is, Holman?"

"Not by name, sir," admitted Operative A-12, "but I should imagine him to be that lanky brawler, with the heavy jaw, and walrus mustache."

"Exactly!" agreed Cabell. "That is Sir

Marlin Turbell, who occupies a very important position in the Foreign Office. The lady with the black hair is Vilma Sutherland, one of the most dangerous spies in Europe. There we have Erich von Thaler, Nicholas Delgado, Yulius Tapp, and Armand Kennedy—all spies, renegades, and traitors to their own countries; all members of the Red Workers, the most dangerous and desperate revolutionary society in existence at present."

"By James, so this is a nest of spies we've broken up?" exclaimed Mr. Wood. "And Sir Marlin Turbell, is named up with a gang like that? A man in his position? He ought to be hanged!"

"He may be!" remarked Cabell grimly. "We have no had a master in the country working on behalf of the Red Workers; but it was extremely difficult to trace him, and it was not until recently— Holman, you explain matters to Mr. Wood. I want to have a few words with Sir Marlin before they take him away."

"I think that I am entitled to an explanation," said Mr. Wood, a trifle stiffly. "What was the idea of making a post of me, Rackway—or, Holman?"

"We have to do all sorts of funny things in the Secret Service," smiled Doyle Holman. "It is even necessary to keep Scotland Yard in the dark at times. I wanted you to believe that I was the real Inker Rackway; that is why the Melbourne police were instructed to watch the Yard to keep an eye on me when I landed in England."

"But what the blazes has the real Inker Rackway got to do with this business? Is he a spy?"

"Rackway is merely a harmless cook," ex-

plained Holman. "Before he sailed for Australia he accidentally became possessed of a certain document that contained details of a plan to throw every country in Europe into a state of revolution. This plan originated in Russia, and Sir Marlin Turbell was the man who was bribed to betray this country, and act as an agent for the Red Workers."

"The loss of that document saved Turbell and his three stone cold. They discovered that Inker Rackway had taken it to Australia with him, not realising its importance, because it was written in a language that he did not understand."

"Under-estimates were sent to an agent in Australia, instructing him to trace Rackway, and pay him any sum for the return of the incriminating document. Those cables were intercepted, and decoded by the Secret Service before they were allowed to be delivered."

"I happened to be in Melbourne at the time," propped Holman, lighting a cigarette. "The chief called me, and, acting on his instructions, I passed on Rackway, knowing very well that the real Rackway was in Fremantle Prison, serving twelve months for fraud."

"To cut a long story short, the Red Workers' agent approached me, and I willingly agreed to return to London and hand over the stolen document. I was kept completely in the dark. I was merely told to go straight to the Home National and await further instructions. I was the duped. So far as the document was concerned, they no longer existed. Rackway was reintroduced in prison, and confessed that he had destroyed it before he left England. He didn't think it was of any value."

"By James! So you have been playing a

(Continued on page 1192.)

TOMBS OF DEATH!

Many strange mysteries, unaccountable deaths have followed the looting and destruction of the tombs of the ancient Pharaohs. Often has it been wondered what uncanny power it is that watches over these ancient tombs and seems to place its curse on those who profane their sanctity. And that it was with the opening of the tomb of Phari, once a queen in ancient Egypt. Always some strange, sinister power seemed to hover a silent, deadly guard over the stolen treasure of Phari. To yesterday London its influence spread, and in London strange things indeed began to happen. Around Dick Ropland began to whirl a veritable maze of mystery, weird and sinister, and grim adventure.

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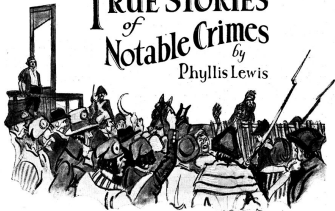
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"SLAYING FOR SNOBBERY."

The Case of Antoine Derues.

DERUES' FIRST CRIME.

LAST week the extraordinary character of Derues, the grocer, who became so infatuated with the idea of being an aristocrat that he undertook to buy a large estate for upwards of twenty thousand pounds when he had not a penny with which to pay outstanding debts, was described. It was told, also, that he had so charmed Monsieur and Madame Lamotte, the owners of the estate, that they had persuaded him to remain with them as their guest for six months. Finally, as they had not received any money from him, it was decided that Madame Lamotte and her young son should go to Paris to make further inquiries about him. Seeing danger, Derues insisted that they come and stay with him and his wife.

Derues, the bankrupt grocer, who delighted to pose as one of high breeding and of important connections, could not give up his inflated idea of his own importance. The gratification of his snobbishness—although he did not call it that—was more precious to him than anything else. He lived only for the reason of imagining himself a man of social importance, and, as well explained earlier in the story, he had turned money-maker, and lost large sums, regardless of the fact that those, in many instances, were irretrievable—provided always that the borrower was sufficiently aristocratic and that he would give him a little of his money.

His love of blue blood was so ordinary

snobbery. It was an ingrained idea, and if it were not laughable to use the term, one might almost say that it had become a matter of principle.

People mattered to him only as their names counted socially. He had gone to the trouble some years earlier of altering the spelling of his wife's name on their marriage contract, to make it appear that he was marrying into the nobility, and a more characteristic act was never performed.

And although he could not pay for the aristocracy of life, he had dared, nevertheless, when he had been married for some time and had heavy family responsibilities, to arrange to buy an estate which cost more than twenty thousand pounds, and for which he should have paid soon after the agreement to purchase was reached.

The estate, "Baizeau-Secot," was a magnificent and imposing one, owned by Monsieur and Madame Lamotte, with whom he had become great friends. Having gone there to see whether the place suited him or not, he stayed on with them for six months as their honored guest. His wonderful gift of entertainment had made him the ideal person to invite to a dull country house, and while he had remained with them, no doubt as to his bona fides as his ability to pay had crossed the minds of Monsieur and Madame Lamotte. It was only after his departure that they realized that he had not attempted to fulfil the contract into which he had entered.

They were too much fascinated by the

brilliant little man ever to rethought to become altogether distrustful. They were merely wary. Therefore it was decided that Madame Lamotte and her son should go to Paris. But when Derues, on hearing of the impending visit, wrote with characteristic warmth that he and his wife insisted that Madame Lamotte and her son should be his guests in Paris, a good deal of their seriousness vanished, and the invitation was accepted.

On December 16th, 1778, Madame Lamotte and her son arrived in Paris and were greeted warmly by the grocer and his wife, Marie Louise, who talked jocularly of the wonderful things they would see and do now they were happily together.

Madame Lamotte had an idea that her host was a grocer. She believed him a distinguished aristocrat, this "Monsieur Derues de Cyrano de Berry," and nothing occurred to disturb her. She did not discover even that his real name was Derues, plain and simple, and that the imposing titles of "de Cyrano de Berry" were added for the purpose of satisfying his own craving for high-sounding names, and also for the special purpose of impressing her.

As a girl, Madame Lamotte had known Paris and had made friends whom she still remembered. She was encouraged by Derues to visit all her old acquaintances, and not to wish in the matter of settling the business concerning the estate, Baizeau-Secot.

He knew her weakness for elaborate meals, and fed her so lavishly that she spent many

hours in the terrace common to the genuine children. And for the rest of the time he arranged delightful entertainments for her so that she was quite satisfied to postpone the business talk, which was the main reason for her visit to Paris.

He had a great friend named Bertin, an amusing fellow, and Bertin visited the house constantly, so that Madame Lamotte was kept in fits of laughter throughout the week, long meals that were served to her. She placed her son in school nearby, and shared herself in every way content to stay in debtless.

Meanwhile, Bernes, who had come to worship the estate and the prestige that he could enjoy as its owner above all things, could not get together the money to pay for it. At the same time, he would rather have died than give it up. He had already practiced the signature he would use in the hand of the man, taking his title, as was customary, from the estate. Thus it would no longer be the simple signature, "Antoine Bernes," but "Antoine François de Guyon Bernes de Bury, Seigneur de Buisson-Sauf et Valle Prebende."

He derived exquisite joy from this impressive nomenclature, as was shown by the hundreds of sheets of newspaper on which he had scrawled it.

At the same time, he realized that Monsieur and Madame Lamotte expected him to pay a sum slightly higher than twenty thousand francs, and that unless the money was forthcoming the estate would not be his. He might even get into serious trouble over bills he had given Madame Lamotte and which he could not meet, but that was insignificant to him compared with losing the chance to be a gentleman.

To get out of "trouble" and to become a grand seigneur was to him the only motive for living, the only thing that could make life worth while. Nothing else mattered.

Meanwhile a ghastly misfortune was hatching in the twisted, perverted mind of the seemingly kind and charming grocerman. He knew that an miracle would intervene to help him purchase Buisson-Sauf. Therefore, he himself must perform a miracle. He must manage to give the impression that he had bought and paid for it, while actually he had not parted with a penny!

Towards the end of January, Madame Lamotte, who was still enjoying herself enormously as the guest of Monsieur and Madame Bernes, became ill. She was not very ill, but she suffered some discomfort and pain. Bernes was all sympathy. He would not allow her to constrain herself by talking of business matters. On the contrary, he did everything he could to divert her; and, indeed, with his inimitable stories, his delightful mimics, his power of turning any and every situation into comedy, he succeeded so well that she scarcely touched on the matter of Buisson-Sauf and the money that was owed to her and her husband for the estate.

Strongly enough, Madame Lamotte's son was not very well, either. But the grocer assured them that there slight malady was probably a matter of the change of air and food, and they believed him.

By January 26th, Madame Lamotte was too ill to rise from her bed.

But Bernes picked himself upon being a splendid nurse, and assured her that there was no need to call in a doctor, since he himself would look after her.

The following day marked several unusual occurrences. For one thing, Bernes, who had sent his children to Mantes-sur-Seine, at some little distance from where he lived in Paris, told the maid that she, too, might go there to enjoy a little holiday. And he

sent his wife, Marie Louise, out shopping, telling her to be sure and remain away for an hour. Madame Bernes, who was expecting the birth of a baby, was glad of the opportunity to go out shopping, although that left the little grocer, in the gorgeously flowered dressing-gown and the elaborate hair-dress that he affected, alone in the house to care for Madame Lamotte.

Just what Bernes did in that lonely hour nobody will ever know. But in some way which he never revealed, he administered a poison that made it certain that Madame Lamotte would never leave her bed alive. How he gave it, whether any conversation passed between them, and whether Madame Lamotte realized that she was in the hands of a murderer can never be proved.

That evening Bernes' amusing friend, Bertin, came to dine, as he very often did.

He had known that Madame Lamotte was not especially well, but had had no idea that she was so ill as to have to keep to her bed.

"I should like to see her, and cheer her up," said the good-natured Bertin.

"That is impossible," said Bernes. "She is too ill. But I am giving her some wonderful medicine, and soon she will be in a very different state."

Bernes, with his usual witiness, gave an amusing description of his duties and capacities as a nurse, saying, in conclusion: "Was there ever such a nurse as I?"

Bertin, a great admirer of Bernes, as well as a friend, assured him that he was certain that Madame Lamotte could not be in better hands, although he could not help adding that he thought it strange that a lady should be nursed by a man.

Bernes pointed out that Marie Louise's health did not permit her, at this time, to nurse a sick woman, and said that surely it would be a heartless thing to let a lady who was a stranger in Paris be cared for by kitchen-people she did not know. Therefore the duty devolved upon him

to fulfill, also, that he was really fond of nursing.

Meanwhile, young Lamotte, who usually dined with the Bernes, had come in and asked to see his mother.

Bernes allowed him to go in. But first he went in himself, and coming back to conduct the lad to his mother's room, warned the lad to tread lightly and make no noise, as Madame Lamotte was asleep.

The room was almost dark. The boy could just see the altitude of his mother's face against the pillow, but, since she seemed to be in a deep sleep, he did not speak to her. So soon as Bernes had told him how much better she had been this day than the day before, he was quite content, and the dinner was very gay and jolly.

Every now and then Bernes left the table to go and administer the wonderful medicine that he had spoken about to his patient; but, each time he came back to give a cheering account of her, and so nobody, including her son, allowed her illness to exert a depressing influence.

An extraordinary chance, however, began to prevail the house—an odder one singular that the company was shattered. Bernes agreed with Bertin that it seemed to emanate from the room of the patient. But no explanation was found.

The next day, Madame Bernes was sent to sleep once more.

The daily "medicine" that Bernes had given had accomplished its work, and he wanted to use the time preparing the body of Madame Lamotte for burial.

Bernes, the delicate, foppish little man, in his elaborate, flowered dressing-gown and his embroidered and too shiny bonnet, was the first murderer on record to think of using a trunk for the purpose of hiding a dead body.

That he was in the midst of his gruesome work, a woman creditor called and insisted upon seeing him. The trunk, a large grey

(of the kind used by)



Even as Bernes was preparing to place the body of his victim in the old trunk, came a sudden interruption from the doorway. It was one of his creditors who stood without, demanding admittance.

"BLATING FOR SNOBERT!"

(Continued from previous page.)

one—was visible, and she concluded at once that the little grocer intended to help to avoid paying his debts.

It must have been a frontal moment for Derives. Only a few feet away lay the corpse that he was about to handle into the trunk. And this important woman would not go away.

But even in this crisis, Derives' wonderful charm of manner did not desert him, nor did he show the least signs of disturbance or fear. In his usual engaging manner he told the truth that the trunk was not his, and that it belonged to a lady who had been staying with him who was going away.

He pleaded with her in the end that she had wronged him by her suspicions, and she departed, all manners that she laid in her hands the clue to a mystery destined to baffle France.

Later in the day, Derives hired some porters and had the trunk carried to the studio of a sculptor friend of his. To him he explained that he was so pressed for room that he would take it as a favour if it might remain there for a few days until he and Madame Derives left for the country estate that they had bought. The sculptor obligingly permitted this.

That evening, Bertha dined with Derives once more, and so did young Lamotte.

Derives was all gaiety, full of cheer and amusing stories, so that even Lamotte, a lymphatic and slow-witted youth who had inherited his mother's tendency to obesity, was amused with merriment.

Derives had the most excellent tidings to

give the boy of Madame Lamotte. She had so far recovered, he told at the dinner-table, that she had insisted upon going to Versailles, where she intended to make haste and in thanking him a position in Court.

"We shall go and see her in the course of a day or two," he said to young Lamotte. "Of course, I will let you know as soon as I have."

Bertha congratulated Derives upon his successful winning of the pattern, and even the rather dull boy bestowed himself enthusiastically to thank the little man for his kindness to his mother.

The little grocer had disposed, so far with perfect success, it seemed, of one of the obstacles that had stood between himself and the realisation of his dream of some glory as the host of the manor and the owner of a magnificent estate.

It remained for him now to eliminate the other obstacle—Madame Lamotte's son.

But there was much to be done before he could accomplish this task that had become so necessary. He realised that he could not leave the trunk for long in the sculptor's studio, lest it should be quietly secret. And at the same time he must find some safe way of getting rid of the body.

Smartly dressed, and using the alias of Decourard, Derives two days later, rented a cellar in the rue de la Mortellerie. He explained to the landlord that he had bought some Spanish wine which he wished to store there.

And four days after this he appeared with the grey trunk.

But meanwhile an incident had occurred that later was to prove fatal to the safety of the little grocer.

One of his many conditions met him when he was taking the trunk to the rue de la Mortellerie.

He jumped at the same conclusion as had the woman creditor who had called at Derives' house. And he interrupted the journey of the grocer to emphasize that, if he were not paid soon, it would mean prison for Derives.

With a courage that, despite his wickedness, can be described only as superb, Derives made a sweeping gesture towards the trunk.

"What is in there will make my fortune," he exclaimed dramatically. "In a very short time I shall be rich and shall pay every penny that I owe."

The creditor began inquiring what was in the trunk. Derives told him that it was Spanish wine, much profitable to sell.

His listener had left inclined to believe him. Nevertheless, Derives had but just done so many times that he decided to have him followed, and, although it never came to light when he succeeded to do this work—for it must have been some passing accident or trick—he did discover that the trunk was deposited in the cellar of a house in the rue de la Mortellerie.

Had it not been for this chance meeting with one who was interested in him because he owed him money, it is questionable that his crime would ever have been brought home to the unshrewd little grocer.

Of how he considered the son of the woman who had died at his hands, and of the unreluctantly elaborate plans he carried out to throw dust in the eyes of the suspicious Lamotte and the police officials, the story shall be told next week.

"THE DECOY"

(Continued from page 1181.)

"My hell of a job!" exploded Wood. "It was the only way to get your man! But, you know, Holmes, how about this Chinaman, Ho San Yuen, who was murdered at the Hotel Universal?"

"I am not in a position to explain that," answered Colonel Gable. "He was murdered by Yoshio Togo, the delightful professor who was about to show Holmes some very nice work with a red-hot needle. Ho San Yuen was a double-crosser. He wanted to steal that document from Holmes, and show that Red Winters so get his treasury thousands pounds for it."

"You've got your girl happily disposed of, Ho San Yuen. He slipped that document into Holmes's room because he couldn't understand the message it contained, and he guessed that the supposed Redway would. Actually that message meant that one of Ho San Yuen's assistants had discovered that Holmes was not Redway. You remember the message? You see after the coming man?"

Inspector Wood nodded. He was beginning to realize that when it came to real red-hot needles there were no flies on the Secret Service.

He also understood why the Civil Government had telephoned to one Yerd the previous night, and instructed him to release Tucker Redway at once.

There was a stamp of feet as the six gentlemen were marched from the room to the waiting motor van. Sir Mark Trelant walked like a broken man.

"Trelant will stand his trial for treason," revealed Colonel Gable calmly. "The others will be deported to their own countries, where their presence is much in demand. See you later, Holmes."

"One moment, sir," said Darle Holmes persistently. "What about the other operative who was working on this job? You might tell me—"

Colonel Gable looked and jerked a thumb meaningly in the direction of the hall.

Darle Holmes shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and walked out into the hall.

On one side of the hall stood several brown-looking servants, who were waiting to be summoned by the bell.

In a chair on the other side of the hall sat the girl with the blue eyes, her hands folded neatly in her lap, and an expression of calm indifference on her pretty face.

By her side stood a lady, respectable, undressing to look stern and important.

Darle Holmes caught his eye, and lifted the flap of his waistcoat to expose the gold Secret Service badge he wore there.

"I should like to have a few words with this lady in private," he said meaningly.

The respectable looked surprised, and then grinned knowingly and pushed open a door behind him.

"No one in there, sir."

The two passed into the room beyond. He closed the door, and for a moment he and the girl eyed one another closely.

"Well, there's one thing about the Secret Service," he said at length, "it certainly can do mighty clever work at times. Here you've had me guessing and wondering and all that sort of thing, and I've been playing the same game. But I suppose I'd better make mine. What about it?"

Deliberately, and somewhat to Holmes's confusion, the girl asked her chief above her shoulders, remained here, revolving a coil of rope to which was attached a familiar gold badge.

"I keep mine here," she said calmly. "I'm Mary Lane—Secret Service Operative A12."

"It's right," agreed Darle lightly. "We made the chief mistake when I asked him who was on this job with me. I've got a lot to thank you for, Miss Mary. I suppose it was you that got me out of an awkward corner when Wood was going to detain me at the Yard? And I guess it was you who checked that door upstairs, when I was tipped out like a confounded kid?"

Mary Lane smiled her next line.

"I've been on the job for weeks past," she volunteered. "I suspected Mr. Mark Trelant all along, and even the chief didn't know that I managed to get a situation here as maid-servant. I suppose you have guessed that it was I who found the lights last night, implying that you would be able to escape in the darkness?"

"I stopped guessing," said Darle lightly. "It's better to hear you talk. What are one of Mr. Mark Trelant's main reasons being dining at the Hotel Universal last night?"

"It was my night out. I was keeping my eye on Operative A12."

"And," challenged Holmes, "what was a maid-servant doing driving about in a Rolls-Royce cabon—how many's value? I see it in the garage?"

Mary Lane's cheeks dimpled mischievously. "Why, that was mine," she said. "I only had to let with the chauffeur, and he'd be anything I asked him."

"So will I—if you promise not to let with me," grinned Darle Holmes. "I suggest you ask me to take you along to breakfast. I'm hungry."

"So am I," said Mary Lane. "Look sharp, Operative A12! We've done our bit. We can get up on with the chief's not looking."

The chief was looking, but he only smiled and sighed. Thirty years ago he would have done the same thing.

THE END.

(Don't miss reading Edward Saxon's gripping new novel of Eastern mystery—"The Crown of Pharaoh," in next week's issue of THE THRILLER.)

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