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Snarled Identities

BY

NICHOLAS CARTER



STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SNARLED
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Transcriber's Notes:

The original spelling, hyphenation, and punctuation have been retained, with the exception of apparent typographical errors which have been corrected.

For convenience, a table of contents, which is not present in the original, has been included.



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1096—A Broken Trail By Nicholas Carter
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-



SNARLED IDENTITIES

OR,

A DESPERATE TANGLE

BY

NICHOLAS CARTER

Author of the celebrated stories of Nick Carter's adventures, which are published exclusively in the New Magnet Library, conceded to be among the best detective tales ever written.



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SNARLED IDENTITIES.

CHAPTER I. STARTLING NEWS.

Nicholas Carter, and his first assistant, Chickering Carter, had risen early that morning, but not for the usual reason. It was a very unusual occasion in the great detective's household, for he and Chick were actually going away for two weeks' vacation in the Adirondacks.

The train that was to carry the two to the Great North Woods was scheduled to leave shortly after eight o'clock, and many preparations had been deferred until that morning. Now, however, everything was practically ready, their trunk was packed, locked, and strapped, their suit cases were nearly filled, and they had time for a bite of breakfast and a glance at the morning papers, which had thus far been neglected.

Nick seemed to be the only one who was interested in the news. In fact, his assistant made a wry face when he saw his chief reaching for one of the papers.

"Can't you forget that sort of thing?" he asked, in an injured tone. "I was hoping you would until we got well started, at least."

"What's the trouble?" Nick asked, in a bewildered tone. "Oh, I see what you are driving at! You are afraid I'll see something interesting in the line of crimes and mysteries, and decide at the last minute to stay at home? Is that the idea?"

His assistant nodded gloomily. "Correct," he answered. "I never know which way you are going to jump, or at what moment. When I'm trying to get you off for a holiday, especially, I feel the greatest responsibility. You have such a way of changing your mind, and, if you don't, somebody usually bobs up with a case that you find irresistible. You've been working your head off for months, and you are run down; you know you are." Chick grinned. "You are not exactly at the breaking point yet," he went on, "but you are just a little stale, and that won't do, you know. Any day something may break that will require your keenest brain work, and your last ounce of strength and agility. Of course, things will turn up; of course, you'll have all sorts of calls every day, and if you allow yourself to read the papers, you'll run across plenty of things that will prove fascinating to you. Can't you cut yourself loose, though—absolutely?"

“I’ve done harder things than that, grandmother,” Nick answered, “but I really don’t see the necessity for that sort of total abstinence. If you think I’m going to cut out all newspapers for two weeks, you’re very much mistaken. I’ve promised to go, though, and I’m going—unless, of course, something turns up that is altogether too big to neglect.”

He opened the paper, whereupon Chick gave an exaggerated sigh of resignation.

“What is to be is to be, I suppose,” the younger detective murmured; “or, in more up-to-date form, she goes as she lays.”

It may be inferred, therefore, that he was far from surprised, when his chief gave a startled exclamation a few moments later.

“Well,” Chick asked pessimistically, “what have you struck now? We are not going away, I suppose?”

“Of course we are, you idiot!” Nick answered excitedly. “You’ll agree with me, though, I’m sure, that it would have been a calamity if we had missed this. It looks as if we had had our last tussle with ‘Green-eye’ Gordon.”

Chick’s eyes widened. “What do you mean?” he asked. “Has Gordon died in prison?”

Nick nodded soberly. “He was burned to death last night in a fire that destroyed one wing of Clinton Prison,” he replied, his eye hastily running over the rest of the article.

Presently the paper was passed to Chick. This, in part, was what the latter read.

CHAPTER II.

“GREEN-EYE” GORDON.

“Shortly after ten o’clock last night fire was discovered in the laundry at Clinton Prison. The blaze spread with surprising rapidity, and as the laundry was in the basement of one of the main wings of three tiers of cells above it, the lives of many of the convicts were soon seen to be in danger.

“Under the circumstances, it is surprising that more lives were not lost, but the best information obtainable at the present time is that three of the inmates were fatally burned—including the clever and infamous Green-eye Gordon—that many were injured or temporarily overcome, and that one took advantage of the excitement to escape.

“As soon as it was seen that the fire was beyond control, so far as the prison’s fire-fighting facilities were concerned, and that there was danger of asphyxiation from the dense smoke, the cells of each tier in the threatened wing were unlocked simultaneously, and there was a general exodus of frightened prisoners. The scene defies description, for the delay in opening the cells had given the trapped men an opportunity to work themselves up into a frenzy, and, as a result, the guards were powerless to handle them.

“A general jail delivery might have followed if the convicts had realized their power, but fear had driven everything else out of their minds for the time being, and in consequence, only one man, Convict No. 9,371, made his escape. He is known to the world beyond the gray walls as “Shang” Libby, a yegg, who had made his headquarters at Buffalo. Libby must have followed one of the guards when the latter left the inclosure for help, and having waited until the door of freedom had been opened, he quietly struck the guard down and passed through. He was one of those who had hastily dressed himself in the prison uniform and unless he can manage to get other clothing there is no doubt that he will soon be rounded up.”

Then followed a long account of the fire, and references to those who had been killed or seriously injured. The article ended with the following:

“The death of Ernest Gordon, widely known as Green-eye Gordon, was the most ignominious one, and hardly in keeping with this notorious criminal’s career.

There was nothing spectacular about it. Gordon might have been expected to play a conspicuous part at such a time—to rally the prisoners for a concerted attempt at escape, for instance—but he does not seem to have distinguished himself in any such way. Indeed, it would appear that his daring and initiative left him at the last, for there seems no very good reason for his death, when most of his fellow prisoners escaped.

“Of course, some accident must have happened to him, for he was found trodden to death by the others in their bestial rush. His face disfigured beyond recognition.

“Gordon hailed from New York, and those who know have long classed him as one of the cleverest and most dangerous criminals this country has ever produced. He came of a good family, and was well educated, but early showed a tendency to criminal pursuits. Apparently he reformed, however, and for several years was employed by one of the great detective agencies.

“In this capacity he showed himself to be very able and daring, so much so that he advanced rapidly, and long enjoyed the utmost confidence of his employers. In the end, however, it was learned that he had been using his position for his own ends, and had really never given up his career of crime. He must have known that a storm was brewing, for, as usual, he managed to get away a few jumps ahead.

“After that, thanks to the invaluable experience he had gained as a detective, he turned his attention to much more ambitious and lucrative pursuits, soon becoming one of the most troublesome thorns in the side of the police of this city and elsewhere. Gordon always was versatile, and handled many kinds of crime with remarkable success. Toward the last, however, he developed something approaching a specialty in the shape of blackmail on a large scale. He seemed to have an uncanny facility for learning the secrets of the wealthy and prominent, and using them for purposes of blackmail.

“Crimes of this sort are not easy to establish in a legal way, or to punish, for the victims seldom raise an outcry. Nevertheless, that lifelong foe of crime and criminals, Nicholas Carter, took up the trail, and finally brought Gordon to bay. The capture and trial of two years ago are doubtless fresh in the minds of many newspaper readers.

“Gordon acquired his nickname of Green Eye from the fact that he had a pair of

peculiar, rather nondescript gray eyes, which were said to emit a green light when the man was angry or excited. In addition, his eyes showed an inclination to cross at such times, although perfectly normal at all others. In fact, it is claimed that these distinguishing characteristics more than once served to identify the clever rogue, whose remarkable histrionic ability and skill at make-up would otherwise have enabled him to defy detection.”

Of course, neither of the detectives read all of this. They did not need to, for they knew a great deal more about Ernest Gordon than any one else could have told them.

Chick followed his chief’s example in glancing through the article and getting the main points that were new to him. Then he looked up with an odd expression.

“Well, it certainly sounds final enough,” he remarked. “I find it hard to believe, though, that Green Eye is dead, and that he died in such a way.”

“It is somewhat difficult to credit it,” Nick agreed. “That’s the way things frequently happen, though. Fate isn’t always dramatic in its methods according to our theatrical standards. No, it seems safe enough to believe that Ernest Gordon won’t give us any more trouble, and I find a certain amount of relief in the thought. I’m willing to confess now that there were times when I doubted my ability to bring him to account. In other words, I felt myself nearer defeat at his hands than I had ever done in any other case.”

The detective pulled out his watch, glanced at it, and threw his napkin aside. “We must hustle if we are going to catch that train,” he announced.

Five minutes later he and Chick were whirled away to the station. Their well-earned vacation had begun, but they were far from carefree.

The thought of Ernest Gordon persisted in haunting their minds, and somehow it seemed to dull the edge of their anticipations.

CHAPTER III.

NOT SO DEAD, AFTER ALL.

Two days later a striking-looking, conspicuously well-groomed man presented himself at Nick Carter's door.

He did not give his name, which is not to be wondered at under the circumstances, for the caller was Green-eye Gordon—not his ghost, but the man himself, substantial flesh and blood, escaped convict, and first-class criminal.

For once Chick's intuitions had been keener than his chief's. The younger detective had been inclined to question the validity of Gordon's death in the absence of any more conclusive testimony than that given in the first accounts of the fire. Nick, however, had been in a mood to discourage such skepticism—perhaps because of that relief to which he had confessed.

The fact was that it was Green Eye who had escaped, and not the yegg from Buffalo. Gordon had stumbled over the latter's body during that mad rush for safety. The yegg was by no means dead at the time, but had been overcome by the smoke, and, without a moment's hesitation, Gordon had determined to profit by the encounter.

He had no definite plan, but it was characteristic of him that whereas the others were interested only in escaping the flames, he was looking for the opportunity to escape from the prison itself, and was prepared to profit by every promising circumstance.

It occurred to him at once that an exchange of coats would be to his advantage, and he proceeded at once to make the exchange, stripping off the unconscious man's coat, and putting his own halfway on in place of it.

The reason for this may be easily guessed. The gray coats—for stripes are no longer in vogue in New York State—bore each man's prison number, and, therefore, by such a simple exchange, identities could be shifted temporarily.

Gordon's number was 39,470, and, of course, it was known to all the keepers and prisoners as standing for the identity of the formidable Green Eye. The other man's number, on the other hand, had no particular significance, for the yegg

was an ordinary criminal, of comparatively little intelligence, who had not made himself conspicuous in any way, either in or out of the prison.

Consequently, if there should prove to be later on any reason to believe that Libby was missing, his absence would not be likely to cause any great commotion, for it would be taken for granted that his capture was only a question of time.

Gordon had reasoned shrewdly, as usual, and had thus, by his own promptness and resourcefulness, put himself in the way of the luck that subsequently favored him.

He had feigned an injury, and had thrown himself down in the prison courtyard, after taking care to stagger close to the main gates, and a shadow of the projecting section of the wall. There he was ignored, for the flames in the burning wing were mounting higher and higher, and all the men were not yet out of it.

It was some minutes before Green Eye's chance had come, but it did come, as he had felt sure it would. One of the guards rushed past him and approached a small door at one side of the big, double gates. Evidently the man had been sent on some important errand, which would take him outside the prison walls.

The keeper looked behind him with a wary eye to make sure that he was not followed. He had fears of a general break for liberty, but apparently no one was paying any attention to him.

Therefore he excitedly inserted a key in the lock, and, after some fumbling, opened the door. It was then that Gordon had pounced upon him.

One blow had been enough. It caught the unfortunate guard behind the ear and sent him hurtling through the opening. In a moment the convict had followed.

Gordon dashed across the road before the vanguard of the crowd from the town had reached the spot, and, dodging through the extensive lumber yard, made his way to the outskirts of Dannemora, his goal being a certain tumble-down, abandoned house.

There he found what he sought—a moisture-proof box of considerable size, containing a complete outfit of clothing, an automatic of the latest model, and no

less than five hundred dollars in gold.

We have hinted that Ernest Gordon was no ordinary criminal, and the truth of that has doubtless begun to shine through this narrative. Here, at any rate, is striking evidence of it.

Green Eye had always preferred to work alone, as many of the most successful criminals have done. He had friends, however, and one of these had carried out his directions. The gates of Clinton Prison had not even closed behind Gordon, when the latter had begun to plan for a possible escape, and the planting of this box played an important part in the arrangement.

During his many months in the prison, Green Eye had not succeeded in liberating himself, but now that the fire had enabled him to escape, the box was waiting for him, thanks to his unusual foresight.

Thus it was that he had completely eluded pursuit. The authorities were looking for a commonplace, unimaginative yegg, who went by the name of Shang Libby, and who might be expected to retain some, at least, of his prison garments. It is little wonder, therefore, that they failed to capture the polished and superdaring Gordon, who lost no time in starting for New York City in a sleeping car.

The fugitive's first thought when he reached the metropolis was one of revenge. He had no idea of killing Nick Carter for the part the latter had played in his downfall, for murder had never been in his line. There are many other kinds of revenge, however, and Gordon was determined to avail himself of one or more of them.

He wished to humiliate Nick to the utmost, if possible, and, incidentally, to do so in such a way that his success would line his pockets with gold.

He had a plan, when he presented himself at Nick's door, but it was lacking in many details, for these he had decided to leave to the inspiration of the moment. In any case, however, he meant to palm himself off as a would-be client, and, having thus gained the detective's confidence, to proceed with the rest of the scheme, or some modification of it.

"Is Mr. Carter in?" he asked anxiously, when the butler opened the door.

"No, sir," the servant replied, noting with approval the visitor's apparent

prosperity and air of importance. "Mr. Carter is out of town at present."

"Is it possible? For how long?"

"He went away day before yesterday, and expected to be absent for two weeks."

"How unfortunate! I have a case of the utmost importance—the sort of thing no one else can handle," the caller said, with the semblance of profound disappointment. "One of his assistants might help me to some extent, however, or bring the matter to Mr. Carter's attention by telegraph."

Again the butler shook his head regretfully. He was being very indiscreet, but he did not suspect it for a moment, owing to the impression the stranger made upon him.

"I'm afraid that's out of the question, too, sir," he answered. "There is no one at home who could attend to you. It's the first time it has happened in years."

The stranger seemed greatly distressed.

"This is terrible!" he cried. "I don't know what I shall do if I can't get hold of Mr. Carter. I would be very sorry to break up his vacation, but I'm sure if he knew the circumstances, he would not hesitate for a moment. Some very prominent people are involved, and, unless something is done speedily, there will be nothing short of a national scandal. Surely, you will give me Mr. Carter's address, will you not?"

The butler hesitated—and fell.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DETECTIVE'S "HALFWAY HOUSE."

Chick had been in favor of cutting off all communication with the detective's residence in New York. It was not because he himself felt any great need of a holiday, but rather because he had an exaggerated notion that his chief was badly in need of a change.

Nick, however, had vetoed this suggestion, and left things largely to his butler's discretion. The butler had been in his service for years, and had shown himself by no means a fool.

"If anything big develops," Nick had told him, "do not hesitate to telegraph for me, or have me called on the long distance—if there isn't time to write. I don't want to miss an important case."

The butler remembered these words now—and forgot that he did not even know the caller's name. Carried away by the man's air of authority, he blurted out the desired information.

"Mr. Carter is staying at the Buck's Head Inn, Little Saranac Lake, sir," he said.

"Many thanks! That's all I need. I'm sure Mr. Carter will respond at once when he hears what's in the wind," Gordon declared importantly, and having made a note of the address, thanked the butler again, and returned to the waiting taxi.

Green Eye had seen a great light as a result of the butler's incautious revelations, and all his previous plans had been discarded. In their place a new one was growing—a plan that promised to set a record for daring, and to bring the detective nearer to professional shipwreck than he had been in all of his career.

The new plan did not involve an interview with Nick. On the contrary, it was built upon the fact that the detective was hundreds of miles away, buried in the woods.

Therefore, as may be guessed, Green Eye did not make use of the address the butler had given him. He was quite satisfied to have created the impression that he intended to communicate with Nick at once, and that the latter might return in

the course of a day or two.

The following morning an individual climbed the stairs leading to one of Nick's "halfway houses," that particular one being on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

Nick Carter maintained a number of these places in different parts of the city, and in each of them he kept several complete changes of clothing and a supply of wigs, false mustaches, beards, make-up articles, and the like.

Their mission is perfectly obvious. Under ordinary circumstances, it was safe enough for the detective and his assistants to disguise themselves at home, and to return to their headquarters at their pleasure. When they were handling an unusually delicate case, however, or dealing with exceptionally clever lawbreakers, they found it necessary to take further precautions, and these so-called halfway houses then came in handy.

In other words, the secret bases of supplies—each of which had two exits—made it possible for them to leave and return to their headquarters openly, and without disguise, although the intervening hours might be devoted to the most relentless shadowing, carried on under all sorts of guises.

The man who climbed the stairs at the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street place, therefore, might easily have been Nick in the act of returning from some such expedition. He did not look in the least like the great detective, but that proved nothing, and his actions went far to indicate that he was Nick or one of the latter's assistants.

He boldly approached the door of the room, the location of which did not seem to give him the slightest trouble, despite the fact that there was nothing on the door to guide him. He seemed to have some little difficulty in getting the door open, to be sure; but, after working at the lock for two or three minutes, he gained entrance.

Many criminals would have given a great deal to know the location of one of those rooms, but Nick did not dream that one rascal had long since discovered the halfway house in Harlem.

The man who had gained entrance by picking the lock was Green-eye Gordon, of course.

He had learned of the place shortly before Nick had caught him, two years or more back, and had been more or less uncertain as to the present use of the room. The detective might have given it up in the interval, for all he knew, but he had resolved to put his knowledge to the test, and now he was rewarded, for a glance about the place showed him that it was still employed by the detective.

Rows of clothing hung in orderly array on hooks along the walls. At one side there was a long mirror, which enabled one to view oneself from head to feet, and between the windows, at the rear, was a dressing table, which looked as if it might belong to some musical-comedy star, so cluttered was it with make-up materials of all sorts.

It was nearly an hour later when Ernest Gordon let himself out, locked the door behind him—after some further effort—and sauntered downstairs.

Another complete transformation had taken place in his appearance. He was no longer the hunted criminal who had escaped from Clinton Prison, no longer the dressy individual who had presented himself at the detective's, the day before, and least of all did he look like the man who had ascended those stairs some fifty minutes previously.

Now, to all intents and purposes, he was Nick Carter himself.

Not only was he wearing one of the excellent suits the detective kept for his more respectable disguises, but in build, walk, features, and even expression, he was as much like Nick Carter as one pea is like another.

His astounding plan had ripened into action.

CHAPTER V. IN NICK'S SHOES.

The butler happened to be out ordering supplies when the detective's front bell rang, and, as Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, was near the door, she answered it.

On the tip of her tongue she had the answer which she had already given to several inquiries—that the detective was out of town. Therefore, her amazement may be imagined when she found—as she supposed—that it was Nick himself who was outside.

“For goodness' sake, sir!” she ejaculated, starting in surprise. “What in the world are you doing back so soon?”

The masquerader smiled one of Nick's characteristically genial smiles.

“I was called back, I'm sorry to say,” he answered, his voice taking on the detective's familiar tones. “Joseph furnished my address yesterday, I believe, and the man he gave it to wired me to come back. The case was so important that I felt I had to. I hope to return, though, in a few days, and, as I have everything here, of course, I didn't bring any baggage.”

“Well, I never!” exclaimed the housekeeper. “I feared it would be just like this, but I hoped you would stay this time. Didn't Mr. Chickering come back with you?”

“No, I left him at Little Saranac, but shall send for him if I need him.”

As they had been speaking, the housekeeper had instinctively stepped aside, and Gordon had passed her. Now he started up the stairs, in the direction of the study.

“You'll have some lunch ready at the usual time?” he asked, looking back over his shoulder.

“Of course, sir,” was the reply; and that was all that was said.

If the new arrival had been Nick himself, he would have smilingly apologized to Mrs. Peters for having broken in so unexpectedly upon her well-earned

Miss Peters for having broken in so unexpectedly upon her well-earned relaxation, but Green Eye was altogether too selfish to think of such things.

Thus far he had played his part very well, but there were many pitfalls in his path, and there was no knowing at what moment he might fall into one of them. His eyes were not Nick's eyes, and his disposition was not Nick's disposition—far from it, in fact.

At any moment his innate harshness and tyranny might assert themselves.

Moreover, his habits were unlike those of the detective. He smoked much more, for one thing, and he drank. Nick, to be sure, had consumed many a glass of beer and wine—for effect and under protest—but he had no real liking for anything of the sort, and no one had had a better opportunity than he to note the evil effects of drink.

Naturally, Gordon had resolved to deny himself whenever he was under the eye of those who were familiar with Nick's habits, but it remained to be seen whether he would succeed in keeping to that resolution.

Already he had forgotten one little thing which might have caused him embarrassment, and might still do so, for that matter. He had meant to offer some plausible explanation of his failure to let himself in with a latchkey, but he had forgotten all about it at the time, and now it might seem strange if he brought up the subject.

He had not come straight to the house from the changing room on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, but had shown himself in one or two places where Nick was well known, his idea being to see if his disguise would pass inspection elsewhere before submitting himself to the scrutiny of Nick's household. That had consumed some time; consequently, the luncheon hour was near when he arrived at the house.

He was on fire with eagerness to rummage in Nick's desk, hunt about in his file cases, and rifle his safe, but he knew that he could not accomplish much before lunch, and he did not wish to make himself conspicuous by passing over that meal. Perhaps he could accomplish something, however.

With that idea in view, he approached one of the detective's metal file cases. The drawers were locked, but he found a means of opening them, and the drawer he first pulled out was that devoted to the letter "G."

first pulled out was that devoted to the letter 'G'.

A few moments spent in thumbing over the big cards filed there brought the desired one to light. It was that devoted to himself, and bore, in addition to a lot of closely written information, a photograph and a set of facsimile finger prints.

Gordon seemed to take a grim delight in reading the accurate description of himself, and the careful details concerning his career, characteristic methods, and so on.

“Not bad!” he muttered presently. “In fact, it’s a little too true for comfort. I think I shall have to withdraw it.”

And going over to the wastebasket, he deliberately tore the card into small bits and dropped them into the receptacle.

After that he returned to the file case, fingered over some of the other cards, and then leaned thoughtfully on the opened drawer.

“There are hundreds and thousands of cases recorded here,” he mused, “but apparently they are not the most important ones, and it’s safe to say that Carter isn’t keeping records of his most confidential affairs in such an easily accessible place. I have no doubt I could milk lots of these fellows for tidy little sums, but I’m after big game just now—not rabbits.”

His gaze strayed in the direction of the detective’s safe, and a more calculating look came into his eyes.

“I shouldn’t be surprised if you hold the records I’m looking for—or some of them,” he muttered aloud, addressing the big safe. “If not, you may contain something else of interest. At any rate, I’m going to find out, the first chance I get.”

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTERRUPTION.

The audacity of Green-eye Gordon's venture has doubtless been apparent from the beginning, but now the real purpose of his impersonation has begun to be discernible.

He was not there in Nick Carter's shoes, in undisturbed possession of the detective's study, for the mere satisfaction involved in such a daring masquerade. Of course, the experience was a stimulating one, and the clever rascal chuckled to himself every time he pictured Nick's face when the detective learned the truth. It was something more practical, though, that had brought him there.

Naturally, if he succeeded in gaining access to the safe, he would not be above appropriating to his own uses whatever money and valuables he might find there, but his desires even went beyond that—far beyond it.

He knew that Nick had handled many of the most delicate cases that had ever developed in this country, and was the custodian of more secrets than had come into the possession of any other American.

Among those secrets he had no doubt were many of such a nature that those concerned would feel compelled to part with large sums of money, in order that their secrets might be kept. Some of them doubtless were men and women now wealthy or distinguished, who had some secret connected with their past lives which they would go to almost any lengths to keep the world from knowing. In other cases, the guilty might be dead, or unable to pay, but the records would probably give the names of relatives, friends, or former business associates who might be successfully blackmailed.

That was it—blackmail on a huge and hitherto unprecedented scale.

The accomplished scoundrel had made up his mind that Nick Carter's records would prove nothing less than a gold mine, and he meant to work that mine for all it was worth in the next week or ten days. Nick might have destroyed the most confidential and dangerous of these records, but Gordon did not believe that to be the case.

“They are too valuable to him in his work,” he told himself. “And, even if they were not, the keeping of records gets to be a habit. Of course, he may realize that some of them would be more dangerous than a few tons of dynamite, if they should fall into the wrong hands, and he may have placed the ones of that description in some safe-deposit vault. If he has, that will mean much more trouble, but if I can locate the vault, I ought to be able to trick those in charge of it into giving me access to the box, even if I can’t produce the key. Am I not Carter himself, and are not keys lost or mislaid in the best-regulated families?”

“Let’s hope that won’t be necessary, though. I trust I shall find what I want right in this room.”

He was summoned to luncheon then, but he came through the ordeal that followed with flying colors. Joseph, the detective’s butler, served him in person, and evidently found nothing more suspicious than Mrs. Peters had done. Gordon still had himself well in hand, and, after the brief greetings were over, little was said.

“I’ll eat what’s set before me,” Green Eye had decided. “The servants are well trained, and ought to know Carter’s likes and dislikes by this time; therefore I can’t go far wrong in eating what they serve, whether I like it or not. It won’t be easy to deny myself, and to keep on the alert, but I shall have to pay some penalties, I suppose, for aspiring to be the great and exalted Nick Carter.” And he grinned at the thought.

After luncheon the impostor hurried back upstairs, and hunted up a box of Nick’s favorite Havana cigars. A handful of them underwent a careful selection, and a more or less appreciative sniffing before being transferred to his pocket.

“Not so bad,” he commented mentally. “A little too dry, though, and I’ve smoked better.”

Nevertheless, he did not seem averse to smoking these, one after another.

“I shall have to go out before long, I suppose,” he decided. “It’s understood that I’ve been called back on important business, and, as it isn’t convenient for my new client to call on me here, I’ll be expected to meet him elsewhere, and to make a noise like action.”

That did not deter him, however, from making an immediate descent upon the safe, but he soon found that he would be obliged to defer serious activities in that connection. He had hoped to be able to open the safe by merely putting one ear to the door and listening to the fall of the tumblers in the lock, but five or ten minutes' effort convinced him that that was out of the question.

"It can't be done with a lock like this," he concluded, with a muttered imprecation. "It looks to me as if I would have to force my way in if I'm going to get in at all. That will be decidedly risky, at best, but I think I can do it quietly enough, and, after it's over, I ought to be able to find some means of concealing my handiwork. Not just now, though, thanks. I'll take something a little easier, first."

And with that he turned his attention to the desk.

The top had been cleared of its accumulation of papers before the detective's departure, and the drawers were all locked, but Green Eye was provided with certain handy little tools. To be sure, it took two or three minutes to open each drawer, but soon the contents of three or four of them lay at his disposal in plain sight, and he determined to examine these papers and books before opening the other drawers.

He was engaged in this absorbing occupation, when the lower bell rang and roused him with a start.

"Wonder who that is?" he asked himself apprehensively, then shrugged his shoulders. "This won't do!" he muttered. "If I'm going to be as nervous as a cat at every sound, I had better give up. What difference does it make who it is; I'm master of the situation."

He listened attentively, and heard Joseph go to the door, after which there was a murmur of voices, followed by steps on the stairs. Presently, the butler knocked and entered.

"I thought I told you at luncheon that I was still out of town," Gordon said angrily. "I came back for this one case, nothing else, and I don't want to be bothered by every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

"I didn't forget, sir, I assure you," Joseph said apologetically. "It's Mr. Cray, though, and I felt you would want to make an exception in his case. There's a gentleman with him."

gentleman with him.

Gordon knew what that meant, for he had studied Nick Carter almost as thoroughly as the detective had studied him. Moreover, had he not himself figured not inconspicuously in detective circles not many years before? Consequently, he knew that the Cray referred to was Jack Cray, a former police detective, who for years had been in business for himself, and who, curiously enough, was a close friend of Nick's.

The two were about as unlike as possible, but Cray, big, methodical, tireless, and brave to the point of recklessness, was a fine example of his type, and had won Nick's friendship and assistance, giving, in return, a rare gratitude and loyalty.

Nick had thrown many cases in Cray's way, and, on the other hand, had found his big, lumbering friend of considerable assistance now and then. In fact, they worked together unusually well, for Cray had all the plodding methods of the police department at his command, to supplement Carter's swift intuitions, and the ex-police detective—unlike many of his kind—was always ready to follow Nick's leadership, and defer to the latter's better judgment.

Should the bogus Nick Carter see Cray, though? He did not in the least fear discovery at Cray's hands, but the interview might lead to something embarrassing. On the other hand, it might be most fortunate.

Obviously, Cray had brought one of his clients to Nick, and that meant that the big fellow felt himself more or less out of his depth, and wished to consult with his brilliant friend.

If the case were important enough, it would be worth while for Green Eye to look into it. He felt himself quite capable of solving almost any puzzle if he chose to solve it, but, aside from that, there was a possibility of pickings—of blackmail again. But much depended upon the client.

“Who is the other man?” the criminal asked eagerly. “Did Cray say?”

“Yes, sir. It's Mr. Griswold—Mr. Lane A. Griswold.”

The man behind the desk whistled softly, and a gleam came into his eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RASCAL'S FIRST CLIENT.

Green Eye's decision had been an immediate one when he heard the second man's name, for Lane A. Griswold was several times a millionaire, and the owner of the *New York Chronicle and Observer*, one of the biggest and most influential of the country morning papers—the first and most conspicuous link in the chain of daily publications which now stretched all the way across the continent.

Millionaires were worth cultivating, according to Gordon's philosophy, and he reasoned that if he could get any sort of a hold upon this one, it might mean the greatest stroke of luck in his life.

It was well to be on the safe side, however, and he knew that Cray sometimes exhibited an unexpected degree of intelligence. In the light of that thought, he took an automatic from one of the open drawers, examined it to make sure that it was loaded and in first-class condition, and then dropped it into the right-hand pocket of his coat.

After that he closed the drawers, darkened the room, took up his cigar, and leaned back in his chair.

"Nick Carter" was ready for another case—as ready as a spider is for a fly.

The face of the man was calm, his expression indifferent, but it is probable that his heart was beating at an unusually rapid rate, and that more or less fear was lurking behind that noncommittal exterior.

It would have been strange, indeed, had it not been the case, for, with all his daring, this was no commonplace, everyday affair for Ernest Gordon. He might remind himself as much as he pleased that he was "officially" dead, burned in the fire at Clinton Prison, and that no one would be looking for him for that reason, but the many months he had spent within those grim walls had told upon him physically and mentally.

In other words, he was not yet his old self. The unnatural conditions of prison life so lately left behind had incapacitated him to a certain extent for this abrupt

plunge into the life outside, especially a plunge of such an interesting character, yet he gave no sign of all this, and, unless something unforeseen developed, he would doubtless gain confidence and ability as time went on.

For that matter, he had already planned and begun to carry out a scheme which would have daunted any other criminal in the country.

The supposed detective regarded his visitors with lowered eyes as he rose languidly from his chair.

Jack Cray's red face was redder than usual with excitement, and there was something about his manner that suggested he had brought the famous newspaper owner there for no trivial reason.

The latter was a man rather over medium height, dressed in the very latest fashion, but with a trace of untidiness that suggested a careless valet. His face was inclined to be sallow, and the light eyes, prominent and rather jerky in their movements, had heavy bags under them, despite the fact that their owner must still have been under fifty.

For the rest, his chin was firm, perhaps a little pugnacious, and his bearing was that of a man who fully realizes his importance.

"This is Mr. Lane A. Griswold, the owner of the *Chronicle and Observer*, you know, Carter," explained the flustered Cray. "Mr. Griswold, my friend, Nicholas Carter."

Gordon kept his eyelids partially drawn down as he greeted the millionaire. It was a trick of Carter's when thinking. In fact, the detective often closed his eyes altogether at such times. Gordon had noted this, and was making use of it in order to conceal the color of his eyes, the one weak point about his impersonation, physically considered.

Cray was inclined to clip his words short, and leave out as many of them as he could, thereby giving an impression of unusual directness, and a haste that cannot stop for trifles.

"Very important case, this one, Mr. Griswold has brought me," he said. "Delicate matter, too—decidedly. Did little job for him once, so he brought me this. Thought I'd better let you in on it, though."

Gordon nodded slightly, as if all this was quite a matter of course.

“I shall be glad to hear what it is about, Mr. Griswold,” he said. “Of course, I’m very busy, as always, but——”

“I understand that,” the newspaper proprietor broke in. “I’ll make this well worth while for both of you, though, if you can handle it without publicity.”

Green Eye smiled. “That sounds rather strange from the lips of our greatest apostle of publicity,” he commented.

Griswold gave a gesture of impatience. “Perhaps so,” he admitted. “I can’t help that, though. Facts are facts, and this would be most embarrassing to me if any of my competitors should get hold of it, or even if it were spread by word of mouth.”

He fixed Gordon with his eyes, looking him up and down, as if scrutinizing an applicant for the position of office boy—supposing a millionaire would descend to such trivialities.

But the bogus detective stood the scrutiny very well. To tell the truth, Ernest Gordon was really beginning to enjoy himself. Griswold’s first words could hardly have sounded more promising. They suggested all sorts of delightful and golden possibilities.

It seemed perfectly plain that this was just the sort of thing he was looking for—the case of a wealthy, prominent man, who had something to hide, and was willing to pay liberally to those who would keep his secret.

“I can trust you implicitly, whether you succeed or fail, to reveal no word of what I’m about to tell you?” Griswold asked sharply.

The man behind the desk shrugged his shoulders in a way that was characteristic of Nick Carter on occasion.

“I’ve been in the confidence of presidents and senators, ambassadors and noblemen—and millionaires,” he returned, tacking on the word “millionaires” as if it were an afterthought. “In fact, I may claim some knowledge of the secrets of royalty.”

It was all perfectly true from Nick Carter’s standpoint, but the detective himself

It was all perfectly true from Nick Carter's standpoint, but the detective himself would not have put it in that way, or boasted of it at all.

"Of course, you may confide in me or not, as you please," Green Eye continued, warming up as he gained self-confidence.

"Tut-tut!" ejaculated Griswold, with a somewhat pained expression. He had come, with reason, to believe that wealth would buy anything, and he was not quite prepared for this show of indifference. "I meant no offense, Mr. Carter, you may be sure. As I said, though, this is a very ticklish business——"

"We'll take that for granted," Gordon quietly interrupted. "Were you going to give me the details, Mr. Griswold?"

His cool, almost insolent tone gave no hint of the turmoil of impatience raging within.

What was he about to hear, and what use would he make of it—in other words, how much could he make it yield him in cold, hard cash, or crackling bank notes?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ABSCONDING TREASURER.

For a time it looked as if the millionaire newspaper proprietor meant to resent the supposed detective's effrontery in some way, but he managed to swallow his wrath, and, after reseating himself and angrily fingering his watch chain, got down to business.

Probably he had decided that it would be very poor policy to have words with a man of Nick's reputation, especially when he was badly in need of the detective's services.

After clearing his throat, he began:

"I have explained it all to Mr. Cray, here, but perhaps I had better go over it again, in my own way. The case is in connection with the relief fund which my papers, headed by the *Chronicle and Observer*, have raised for the Hattontown sufferers."

Gordon nodded almost imperceptibly. The terrible fire at Hattontown, which had destroyed a large part of one of New England's busiest little manufacturing cities, had occurred while he was still in prison. He had read of it, however, in the papers to which he had access in the prison library, and for that reason he was familiar with the main facts.

Hundreds of residences and business blocks had been destroyed, with an appalling property loss and a considerable loss of life, as well. Thousands of persons, men, women, and children, had been rendered homeless and penniless.

That was where Griswold's chain of newspapers had taken a hand. Always quick to respond to such emergencies—largely, it is to be feared, for the advertising it gave them—they had started to raise a fund for the destitute victims, and, thanks to their tremendous combined circulations, the amount had soon attained imposing proportions.

Part of it had been paid out for the immediate needs of the victims, but most of it, according to the latest reports Gordon had seen, was being retained for more permanent aid, to provide work, homes, et cetera.

What could there be about this fund, Green Eye wondered, that required investigation, particularly an investigation prompted by the proprietor of the newspapers responsible for it.

“As usual,” Griswold went on. “I started the fund by subscribing five thousand dollars, and many men of substance have contributed large sums, although none so large as that. You may or may not know that the receipts to date total a little over a hundred thousand dollars.”

“A very neat sum, indeed,” Gordon commented, “and one that is very creditable to those who have contributed, especially those who have done so anonymously.”

He could not resist that slight dig, for he knew perfectly well that Lane A. Griswold had never been guilty of making an anonymous contribution in his life. He was never satisfied unless his name could head the list.

Perhaps this baiting was unwise, but Green Eye did not think so. A little of it, he felt sure, would be good for the millionaire, and give him a wholesome fear of the supposed detective. He decided, though, to let it go at that, for the present, at least.

As for Griswold, after swallowing hard two or three times, he evidently determined to ignore the thrust.

“But how could a criminal case, delicate or otherwise, have arisen out of such a philanthropic enterprise?” Green Eye queried innocently.

If pressed, he could have given a pretty shrewd guess, but it suited his purpose just then to take another course.

“It’s simple enough—too infernally simple!” Griswold retorted feelingly. “The money has been stolen, that’s all!”

Gordon had suspected something of the sort, but it was pleasing to hear it put into words. A hundred-thousand-dollar relief fund reposing safely in some bank vault was of only theoretical interest to him, along with the hundreds of millions stored in similar vaults within a radius of a few miles of Nick Carter’s study. A hundred thousand dollars—or anywhere near that amount—in the hands of a fugitive from justice was a very different matter, however. There were

possibilities in that situation.

“Ah, I’m not surprised!” Gordon remarked calmly. “How and when was the money taken? I assume you don’t know by whom?”

“But I do—I know only too well,” Griswold told him promptly.

“You do?”

“There’s no room for doubt about it. The money was taken by a man named John Simpson, an old and trusted employee of the *Chronicle and Observer*.”

“How did he happen to have access to it, may I ask?”

“I made him the treasurer of the fund. I never dreamed of anything of this sort. He had served in a similar capacity more than once in the past, and always with the most scrupulous fidelity.”

“But how did he have possession of the whole fund, if it was collected by different newspapers?”

“Daily drafts were sent to the *Chronicle and Observer*, as the parent newspaper of the chain. Our New York office is the general headquarters, you know.”

“I see. Simpson is missing, is he, along with the money?”

CHAPTER IX.

CHANCE PLAYS INTO GORDON'S HANDS.

The newspaper proprietor nodded gloomily in response to Gordon's question.

"Yes," he answered, "Simpson disappeared four days ago."

"Has he a family?"

"A wife."

"And she knows nothing about him, or professes to know nothing?"

"I feel sure she's as much in the dark as we are."

"Perhaps—perhaps not," murmured the bogus detective, joining the tips of his fingers as he had seen Nick do. "Please tell me now how the fellow managed to get hold of the money, to get it out of the bank or banks in which it had been deposited to the credit of the fund. Surely, his wasn't the only signature required, was it? The checks drawn against the fund must have been countersigned by some one else?"

"They were—by Mr. Driggs, the vice president of our organization."

"Then how——"

"In a very ingenious way. I wouldn't have thought John Simpson capable of so much adroitness. I was away at the time, but he prevailed upon Mr. Driggs to withdraw the fund from the two New York banks in which it had been deposited—the Broadway Exchange Bank, and the Hudson National—and to transfer everything to the Cotton and Wool National at Hattontown."

"Thus making it possible to deal with only one bank, and that a smaller one whose officials presumably were not so wary," Green Eye commented judicially. "What excuse did he give?"

"A most plausible one. He pointed out that the Hattontown sufferers and the citizens generally would feel more comfortable, more sure of the reality of the fund if they knew that it had been transferred to one of their local banks. 'We

and if they knew that it had been transferred to one of their local banks. 'We aren't ready to pay the money all over to them,' he told Driggs. 'Most of them would like to have it all at once, of course, and they're somewhat dissatisfied, even though the more sensible among them realize that mere temporary relief isn't a solution to their problems. If we transfer the fund to Hattontown, however, that will encourage them. They will feel it is almost in their hands.'

"Well, it looked like sound sense, and Driggs agreed, with the result that every cent was withdrawn from the two New York banks. As you say, that made it much easier for the thief. Still, the task that remained would have seemed big enough to most men. In fact, they would have passed it up as impossible. Not so our old, reliable John Simpson, though—confound him! After plodding along as methodically as any spiritless work horse for fifteen or eighteen years, he had suddenly developed a streak of lawlessness, and, along with it, in some unaccountable fashion, had come something approaching brilliancy of mind. The Hattontown bank was now the custodian of the entire fund, less what had been paid out to the victims for their immediate necessities. As the disbursements amounted to a little less than twenty thousand, there was a balance of about eighty thousand when the transfer took place. Naturally, Simpson then turned his attention to Hattontown.

"The Cotton and Wool Bank there, so far as I've been able to ascertain, is a fair sample of hundreds of good, average, conservatively conducted institutions of the kind of our smaller cities. Apparently there was no rottenness of which Simpson could take advantage, and evidently he didn't waste time over that possibility. He seems to have felt himself quite capable of getting that money out by his own unaided efforts, and subsequent events prove that his confidence was far from misplaced."

"What did he do?" Gordon urged eagerly.

He was greatly interested; not from the standpoint of law and order, but from that of one criminal studying the work of another. He had been inclined at first to think that the fugitive would be easy to catch, and easy to swindle out of the proceeds of the theft, but he was not so sure of that now.

"You would never guess in a hundred years, gentlemen," Griswold assured his two hearers. "This is new to Cray, too," he added in explanation, addressing Gordon. "I didn't cover this point when I explained matters to him.

“This is the way he worked it: After getting the money where he wanted it, he went to Driggs with another adroit idea—a suggestion for the publicity stunt this time. One of the smaller papers under my ownership, as you probably know, is published in Hattontown—the Hattontown *Observer*. Well, Simpson went to Driggs and proposed that that eighty thousand dollars be temporarily withdrawn from the bank in gold, and exhibited under strong guard in the windows of the *Observer* office. See the point? He argued very convincingly that the sight of so much money would create the greatest possible local sensation, and give the people in Hattontown an exalted idea of the importance and power of the *Observer*. Driggs offered certain objections, but Simpson argued them away without much trouble. As a matter of fact, I have no doubt but that I would have fallen for it as readily as Driggs did.”

The millionaire paused and smiled in a rather grim fashion.

“To tell the truth, I’ve actually adopted the suggestion,” he informed them. “Eighty thousand dollars in gold is actually on exhibition at the present time in the windows of the Hattontown *Observer*—under the eyes of armed guards day and night.”

“But——” Gordon had started to speak, but a gesture of Griswold’s stopped him.

“Let me explain,” the great newspaper owner hastened to say. “The original fund has been stolen, but, of course, that fact is known only to very few, including the officials of the Cotton and Wool Bank in Hattontown. We cannot afford to let the truth get out, if we can possibly help it, for it would be a serious blow to the prestige of our organization; therefore I have duplicated the fund, drawing on my private account for the purpose, and, as Simpson suggested, the money has been placed on exhibition. It’s attracting an immense amount of favorable attention, and will doubtless mean a great increase in circulation for the Hattontown *Observer*. We have that much to thank Simpson for, at any rate.”

“Very extraordinary!” murmured the supposed detective aloud. “Better and better!” he commented inwardly. “I haven’t any scruples to speak of, but it goes without saying that I’d rather relieve this hog of a millionaire of eighty thousand than take it from a few hundreds of poor devils who have been cleaned out of everything. That money seems to be fatherless, and waiting to be adopted. It was contributed to the fund, but the fund is now complete without it. It doesn’t belong to Simpson. and Griswold doesn’t need it. Obviously. it’s mine. and I’m

going to have it.”

“But you haven’t told us yet,” he added, addressing his visitors, “how the missing treasurer actually got his hands on the money. The bank in Hattontown naturally wouldn’t have turned any such amount over to a stranger.”

CHAPTER X. THE IMPOSTOR'S CLEVERNESS.

"You may take that for granted, of course," Griswold agreed, in reference to the bogus detective's last suggestion.

"But Simpson was treasurer of the fund," Cray interposed. "He worked it so the bank accepted his authority, and——"

Gordon was studying the millionaire's face, and was clever enough to read what he saw there.

"By no means, my dear Cray," he said. "Simpson didn't approach the Hattontown bank in his capacity as treasurer of the fund. He knew better than to do that—knew that he would have no standing there, unless identified and backed up by the organization itself. He knew, too, as I reason it out, that the bank would look for any action to come from the local newspaper, and would be off its guard if it did, the *Observer's* man being naturally known to the bank officials."

He was watching Griswold narrowly all the time, and saw that he was on the right track.

"Mean he had an accomplice on the Hattontown paper?" demanded Cray, looking startled.

"By no means," Gordon returned calmly, still using Griswold's expression as a guide. "There's such a thing, though, as impersonation, my friend."

It was a venturesome leap, but it proved surprisingly successful.

"By Jove!" ejaculated the millionaire, looking at the supposed Nick Carter in amazement and with a new respect. "You have hit the nail on the head, Mr. Carter! How in the world——"

Gordon shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, it was very simple," he confessed. "I read it all in your face."

He rightly guessed that that would not make it seem any the less remarkable in Griswold's eyes.

"I don't see how," declared the millionaire.

"Some stunt!" Cray commented admiringly.

"I did just that, though," Green Eye assured the millionaire. "Of course, I saw in advance that Simpson would have been powerless unless introduced by the manager of your local paper, and supplied with credentials from the New York office. The credentials might have been forged, to be sure, but a local introduction would have been out of the question without the assistance of a confederate to impersonate the manager, or some one else in authority on the paper. And if there was any impersonating to be done, it was clear that Simpson could do it himself. For the rest, I depended upon your expression, Mr. Griswold, to tell me when I got off the track."

"It is useless to try to belittle your achievements, sir," the millionaire told him. "I consider it an evidence of most unusual ability. You have hit upon the truth in a manner that has taken my breath away. You are quite right, Mr. Carter. The trick was turned by means of impersonation, and the man impersonated was the business manager of the Hattontown *Observer*. Charles Danby is his name, and, as it happens, he and Simpson resemble each other more or less. Simpson pleaded overwork as a result of his extra duties in connection with the fund, and got permission to be away for a couple of days. Evidently he lost no time in going to Hattontown, and there he presented himself at the bank in the guise of Danby."

"The fellow must have had nerve!" contributed Jack Cray. "Hard to believe he isn't a dyed-in-the-wool crook."

"It's almost incredible," Griswold agreed, "but apparently there's no room for doubt that Simpson did the whole business. He was known at the bank, but no one suspected the deception, and the only thing the bank people can remember that was queer about him was his husky voice, which he attributed to a cold.

"In the character of Danby, he informed the bank people, and showed a letter addressed to Danby and signed by Driggs, our vice president. The letter was perfectly genuine, and had been dictated here, in our New York office, following Driggs' acceptance of Simpson's scheme for exhibiting the gold. Simpson had

managed to get possession of it, however, before it was sent out, and the real Danby never got a sight of it. Naturally, the bank officials did not approve. The plan seemed too spectacular, and altogether too risky. It was none of their business, though, and they finally agreed to an immediate removal of the gold.”

“Simpson had a car handy, then?” queried Green Eye.

“Oh, yes, he had an electric outside—said he had just bought it at secondhand. Hattontown is a place of twenty or thirty thousand, you know—too large for every one to know the business of everybody else; consequently, the bank people had no reason to doubt his word.”

“How about guards, though,” Cray broke in.

“There were none,” Griswold answered. “The bank people claim to have expostulated on that score, but Simpson scoffed at their fears. It was broad daylight, in a peaceable community, and he had only a few blocks to go. He assured them, however, that the gold would be carefully guarded when it was put on exhibition, and reminded them that their responsibility ended when he had withdrawn the deposit. I forgot to say, also, that he presented an order on the bank for the withdrawal, signed by John Simpson, as treasurer.”

“So they packed all this money up, loaded it on the electric, and let him make off with it alone, did they?” queried Gordon. “It certainly sounds like small-time stuff. I suppose we can’t blame them, though. They had plenty of reason to think that everything was straight. Anything more, Mr. Griswold?”

“That’s practically all, I think,” the millionaire returned. “We haven’t notified the police, or employed any other detectives; therefore we have been unable to trace the rascal’s further movements. The only reason we know all this is that it has come out naturally. One of the bank officials met the real Danby the next day, and expressed surprise that he had heard nothing of the gold being put on exhibition. You can imagine Danby’s consternation, and the confidential reports that have been flying back and forth since then.”

“Trail begins in Hattontown, then,” Cray mused aloud.

“We may cross it at some other point, though,” hinted Gordon. “Describe Simpson, please, Mr. Griswold.”

The newspaper proprietor rumbled in his pocket and produced a photograph, which Gordon took eagerly.

“Seen it already,” Cray informed him. “Face commonplace, easily disguised.”

The photograph was indeed that of a very ordinary-looking man. He was a little over forty, one would have said, but looked older. He was somewhat bald, wore glasses, which would make it difficult to determine the color and expression of his eyes, and had a rather weak, amiable face.

In short, he belonged to the traditional clerk or bookkeeper type, and seemed to be one of those men whose chief object in life is to hold down some poorly paid position, and to cheerfully make hypocrites of themselves in order to do so.

With that pictured face before him, Ernest Gordon found it very difficult indeed to credit Simpson with the cleverness and resourcefulness which had been so conspicuous in Griswold’s account of the theft. Still, he knew that such men sometimes had flashes of brilliancy.

“Let’s hope it’s nothing more than a flash, though,” he told himself. “If he were to keep up that pace, it might not be such a cinch to corner him—but he won’t. He’ll have a relapse, and when it comes, he’ll be an easy mark.”

He continued to examine the face in detail.

“You feel sure his wife does not know of his crime?” was his next question.

“Certainly not,” was the prompt answer. “That would have been unwise, under the circumstances, for, in her distress, she would probably blurt it out to her relatives and friends, and, before we knew it, the whole thing might get into print. I have inquired about him, of course, and she may suspect, but that’s all.”

“Her address, please.”

“No. 31 Floral Avenue, New Pelham.”

Gordon jotted it down on one of Nick Carter’s pads.

“Now, will you kindly answer a question that has been puzzling me for some time?” he went on. “If we catch this man for you—or, rather, when we catch him—what are you going to do with him? You can’t prosecute, you know, without

letting the cat out of the bag.”

CHAPTER XI.

CRAY GETS HIS ORDERS.

“Unfortunately, that’s only too true,” admitted the millionaire newspaper proprietor. “Secrecy is the prime requisite in this case, and that precludes the possibility of arrest. I want you to catch John Simpson, though, scare him as much as you can, and force him to disgorge. He’ll be dropped from my staff, of course, but, beyond that, we can do nothing.”

“Compounding a felony—accessory after the fact!” Cray pronounced disapprovingly. “Bad business—very bad!”

“I can’t help that,” Griswold persisted, “and I’m willing to take full responsibility. If any trouble threatens, I think I have enough influence to fix things up.”

Green Eye’s face was grave and thoughtful, but inwardly he was fairly chuckling with glee.

He could have asked nothing better than this extraordinary case, and his only regret was that the amount involved was not much larger. Everything seemed to play into his hands in the most unbelievable way.

Here was a man, who, despite the surprising adroitness he had shown, was plainly a novice in crime—a novice with something like eighty thousand dollars in gold in his possession. And here, on the other hand, was a man to whom eighty thousand dollars was only a drop in the bucket, a trifle hardly worth mentioning.

The latter’s interest demanded secrecy, required that the whole thing should be conducted under cover, and unofficially. What an opportunity it was! If Simpson could be caught—and Green Eye had no doubt he could do it alone, or with Jack Cray’s unsuspecting assistance—it ought to be a very simple matter to relieve the thief of the coin in some way, and neglect to turn it over to Griswold. As for the latter, he could not take the matter into the courts without ventilating the whole affair from beginning to end.

Surely, the situation seemed to have been made expressly for Green-eye

Gordon's benefit.

If necessary, two or three thousand—or possibly five—could be left in Simpson's possession, in order to buy his silence, or to induce him to give some misleading explanation of the disappearance of the loot. And here was Griswold, actually ready to pay handsomely for having the robber robbed.

No wonder that Green Eye exclaimed inwardly, "Oh, joy! This is almost too good to be true!"

As if influenced by his thought, the newspaper proprietor broke the brief silence by announcing:

"There's the whole story, so far as I know, gentlemen. I need only add, I think, that I'm prepared to pay you ten thousand dollars for your services. What do you say, Mr. Carter? Will you help us? Mr. Cray has already agreed to my proposition."

Gordon did not answer at once, as Nick would have done, if too many cases were not already awaiting solution. He wished to impress the others with his importance and indifference to monetary considerations.

"The affair has its points of interest," he conceded at length. "I went up to the Adirondacks two or three days ago, intending to remain there for a couple of weeks, but I was called back on urgent business. That case, though important, is a comparatively simple one, and I can attend to it at intervals."

"Then you'll undertake this?" Griswold asked eagerly.

The impostor slowly nodded. "I'm glad of an opportunity to oblige you, Mr. Griswold," he said. "And, of course, I'm always desirous of helping my friend Cray, here, if possible."

"Good!" ejaculated the millionaire. "I'm glad, indeed, to have you on the case, Mr. Carter. It's no flattery to say that you've greatly impressed me this morning. That being settled so satisfactorily, however, I'll leave you and Mr. Cray to decide upon your course of action."

"Yes, we need not detain you any longer, I think," Green Eye assured him.

Three minutes later Griswold was gone after asking them to call him up either at

Three minutes later Griswold was gone, after asking them to call him up either at the office or the house whenever they desired any further word from him, or had anything to report.

As a mark of special respect, Gordon had accompanied his distinguished client to the door. Now, with a smile on his face, he returned to Nick Carter's study, where the ex-police detective was awaiting him impatiently.

"Queer case, very!" Cray barked at him, as soon as he entered the doorway. "What's your idea? How are we going to handle it?"

Doubtless, he had his own ideas as to the proper methods of procedure, but he was revealing, as usual, deference where Nick was concerned. His manner of exaggerated respect made it difficult for the masquerader to keep his face straight.

"I'm having the time of my life, without a doubt," thought Gordon. "I wouldn't have missed this for anything. Here I am in Nick Carter's house, monarch of all I survey, with Cray fawning on me like a faithful dog, and a multimillionaire for a client already. Soft, soft!"

The accomplished rascal had really given a very creditable performance while Lane A. Griswold was on the scene, but now, in spite of his contempt of Cray, he decided to give the latter his head for the time. It would be safer so, and, besides, Gordon was not one to exert himself unnecessarily.

He helped himself to another of Nick's cigars, and threw himself into a chair.

"You have had more time to think about it than I have, Jack. Let's hear how you would go about it."

Cray found this very flattering.

"Well," he said, with assumed modesty, "I had thought of one or two little things. Of course, there are two ends to be picked up, two places to cover. One's Hattontown—tracing the electric machine, and all that."

Green Eye made a gesture of indifference, as if he did not think much of that suggestion.

"The other's this end," Cray went on, somewhat less confidently, meaning the

fellow's home.

Gordon gave a slight nod. "That's more likely to yield something, I should say," he declared. "Of course, an electric car is comparatively uncommon, and might be traced without a great deal of trouble. Several days have passed, however, and that will make considerable difference. Suppose we consider the situation at New Pelham. Much depends on that. Of course, if Simpson is tired of his wife, and has decided to abandon her, we may not be able to get a single clew there."

He gave another glance at the photograph which Griswold had left on the desk.

"The fellow's face is against that supposition, however," he went on; "I don't believe he has spunk enough to cut himself off absolutely from his wife."

"Had spunk enough to swipe a fortune," Cray pointed out skeptically.

"I know, but there's a difference. I don't know where he got the nerve to do what he did, but I'd like to wager a tidy little sum that a man with that weak chin and mouth would be too much a slave to habit to cut his domestic bonds with one slash. He's probably foolishly fond of that wife of his, no matter how much of a fright she may be, and, if I'm right——"

"He'll write her sooner or later, or try to sneak an interview," Cray burst out excitedly, with the air of one who had just arrived unaided at the most astounding conclusion.

"Precisely," agreed the masquerader. "That being so, I think you had better cover the New Pelham end of it. Go and see the man's wife, tell her you are from the office, and find out all she knows. She may give you a clew right away, without knowing it—something that may mean nothing to her, but much to you."

"Get you," Cray said eagerly.

His distinguished friend, as he believed, had just said that the New Pelham end of it was the most important, so that here was another feather in his—Cray's—cap.

"I'll work it for all I'm worth," he added. "What line are you going to take, though?"

CHAPTER XII.

GREEN EYE DOES SOME THINKING.

That question of Cray's ought to have proved very embarrassing to the impostor under the circumstances.

As a matter of fact, Green-eye Gordon did not intend to do anything, if he could help it. It appealed to his lazy temperament, and his sense of humor, as well, to let Cray do as much of the actual work as possible, and then to step in at the end and claim the reward in his own peculiar way.

Of course, it remained to be seen whether or not he could carry out that program without arousing the ex-police detective's suspicion, and its success was also conditioned on Cray's ability to handle the practical end of it in a way that promised to bring the desired results. Naturally, if Cray fell down, he would be obliged to take a hand in the game, and the eighty thousand dollars would amply reward him for his exertions.

"Time enough to cross that bridge when I come to it, however," he assured himself. "Meanwhile, I'll do a little stalling, and see what comes of it. It's safe to say that it won't prove so difficult as it looks. Cray is more or less of a fool, and he thinks the sun rises and sets in his good and great friend, Carter; hence, Carter can do no wrong in his eyes—and I'm Carter."

He assumed an engaging expression.

"I'm afraid you'll have to go it alone, Jack," he confessed frankly, accompanying the words with a disarming smile. "For a day or two, that is. Of course, we'll go over the thing together step by step, and I'll give you my advice whenever you wish it. There's this other case, however, which will keep me in New York for the present, although it won't take up all of my time. You see how it is—it simply means that I won't be able to do much running around in the Simpson case just now. As soon as I get this other thing out of the way, though _____"

"But hadn't I better go to Hattontown, if that's the state of affairs?" suggested Cray. "You can't leave New York just now, you say, but you might be able to run out to New Pelham before long. For that matter, it's quite likely that you

could handle Mrs. Simpson better than I could. You have a great way of getting around the women.”

Gordon looked around with mock alarm.

“I’m glad there’s no one to overhear that, Jack,” he said, with a grin. “I might get the reputation as a lady-killer.”

“Nonsense, Carter!” scoffed Cray. “Everybody knows you never even look at a woman that way. Seriously, though, hadn’t I better beat it for Hattontown?”

That would have appealed to Green Eye if he had had any desire to get rid of his unsuspecting ally. That was not his purpose, however. He had a strong feeling that New Pelham was more promising ground than Hattontown, and, since he was determined that Cray should bear the brunt of the investigation, it was to New Pelham that he meant to send him.

“No, I think my way is better,” he insisted quietly. “You will see that later on, Jack, I’m sure. As for Hattontown, a few hours more or less will make no difference. You can start for New England to-night, if necessary.”

Jack Cray scratched his closely cropped head in a manner that was characteristic of him when in thought.

“All right,” he agreed presently. “Guess I can handle it all. You are usually right in the thick of it, though.”

“I’ll be in the thick of it before we are through, Jack,” Gordon assured him, with a hidden gleam in his eyes.

And, with that, Cray heavily descended the stairs, and left the house.

Now that he was alone, Green Eye leaned back in the chair, allowed his face to relax into its own lines, and indulged in a prolonged fit of silent laughter.

“Ernest, my boy, this is the greatest piece of luck you ever had, or ever dreamed of,” he murmured aloud. “What a yarn this will make when you retire and write your reminiscences!”

Soon he sobered down, however, and began to consider the case point by point.

“I’m willing to stake almost anything on that hunch of mine,” he decided. “I feel sure the clew we are after will turn up at the fellow’s place out in the suburbs sooner or later, and, naturally, I’m not interested in the amount of work Cray is obliged to put into the business, or the wasted efforts it involves.”

At the same time, though, he meant to reason the thing out, so far as he could.

“This fellow Simpson,” he mused, “has been treasurer of other funds, and has been connected with the auditors’ department for years. That’s probably what influenced him to obtain the money in the bulky or more awkward form of gold. He knew that paper currency of high denomination could be traced by the numbers, if obtained from a bank or any institution which keeps track of such things. On the other hand, he seems to have overlooked the fact that there isn’t a great deal of gold in common use, and that a man who keeps on tendering gold in payment—after the theft of a large quantity of the stuff—is very likely to fall under suspicion. That may give us a clew.

“Obviously, the electric machine may furnish another, if it can be traced. It isn’t probable that it belongs to Simpson, or, if it does, that it has been in his possession very long. His salary hardly puts him in the automobile class, and there’s nothing to show that he has been dishonest in the business. Besides, an electric costs considerably more than many makes of excellent cars.”

The more he thought about Simpson’s use of such a machine, the more it struck him as significant.

“Why an electric, anyway?” he asked himself. “All that I know anything about are ladylike little coupés—about the last thing any man in his senses would be expected to choose for a quick get-away, especially when weighted down with eighty thousand dollars in gold. Why did he choose such a vehicle? What possible advantage could he see in it?”

Green Eye turned this over for some time in his mind, stopping now and then to grin, as he realized how seriously he was entering into the problem.

“I flatter myself I’m giving a pretty good imitation of Nick Carter,” he thought, with a complacent grin. “Griswold threw bouquets at me, and now I’m keeping up the pace when I don’t have to.

“What’s the answer, though?” he went on mentally. “Hanged if I can see more

than one possibility. It strikes me that the great advantage of an electric in the hands of a crook would be its silence. That must be it—silence. But why should silence be of any particular importance to Simpson? He didn't have to use any gumshoe methods at the bank; therefore, it looks as if he must have anticipated the need of stealth at the other end when delivering the loot at its destination.

“That's the problem—that destination.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POLICE DOG ACTS STRANGELY.

“The fellow has lived in and around New York for fifteen years, at least, for he has been in the employ of the paper that long,” Gordon thought, continuing his analysis. “Probably he hasn’t had more than two weeks’ vacation a year. If so, he hasn’t had much chance to make friends elsewhere, or familiarize himself with the criminal possibilities of any particular locality. Hold up, though, my boy! The fellow may have been born in the East, and may have spent every vacation there. Better settle that before you go much farther.”

Impelled by this, he promptly called up Griswold’s office, and, after a little delay, Nick Carter’s magic name brought him directly into touch with the newspaper proprietor.

“It occurred to me to ask you another question or two about our friend S., Mr. Griswold,” Green Eye said apologetically. “What is he, a New Englander? Do you happen to know?”

“No, no! He comes from the Middle West—somewhere in Ohio.”

“But perhaps he has been in the habit of spending his vacations in Massachusetts?”

“I’ve already looked that up, Mr. Carter. The question occurred to me when I first learned of his disappearance. Those who know him best, though, in the office, tell me that he has either spent his little vacations at home, in New Pelham, or back in Ohio.”

“Then, so far as you know, New England is strange country to him?”

“It would seem so.”

“Now, about that electric—you haven’t known of his owning one in the past, have you?”

“Certainly not—he was paid only eighteen hundred a year.”

“I see. That’s all at present, thanks. Sorry to have troubled you.”

I see. That's all at present, thanks. Sorry to have troubled you.

The clever scoundrel felt he was making headway.

“Now we can go ahead with a little more assurance,” he soliloquized, after he had hung up the receiver. “If New England is unknown to the fellow, or known only in a superficial way, it doesn't seem reasonable to suppose that he would think of hiding the yellow boys there. Besides, he must have them where he can obtain access to them at frequent intervals—for he would be almost certain to be arrested if he presented a quantity of gold at any bank, either for deposit or to be exchanged for paper. That's his hoard, therefore, from which he must draw.”

He grinned to himself.

“Tastes differ, of course,” he went on mentally, “but New England isn't the place I'd choose if I had eighty thousand to spend. I would want a little more action than I could get there.

“Then what? Well, something tells me that the chap has headed back in this direction. New York would attract that money as surely as a magnet attracts iron filings. What's more, Simpson is on his own ground here. And the electric car? It's a tempting theory, confoundedly tempting! Why would a stay-at-home shrimp like Simpson think of hiding his treasure if not somewhere on his own bit of land? That's it, I'll wager! Not a bad idea, either, for, ordinarily, no one would think of looking there for him or his loot. The police, for instance, would spend a few years going over the rest of the world with a fine-tooth comb before it would ever occur to them to look for the fugitive at home.

“But apparently the wife is straight, and doesn't know of her husband's fall from grace. He can't show himself to her, but he might safely pay visits to the place at night, thanks to the silence of his little electric. By George! What if I'm right? What a cinch for your Uncle Ernest! I'm almost tempted to go there at once, and see if I can locate the good old stuff. But, no, that won't do. I'll keep on playing a thinking game as long as I can, and leave the legwork to the worthy Jack Cray.”

He threw a glance in the direction of Nick Carter's safe.

“Besides,” he continued inwardly, “eighty thousand isn't so much, after all. If I find what I hope to in that safe, and play my cards right, I ought to make several times eighty thousand—and I mustn't let the grass grow under my feet for Carter

times eighty thousand, and I must let the grass grow under my feet, for Carter may come home in a very few days.”

He got up, and was about to approach the safe, when there came a knock at the door, and, in response to his somewhat surly invitation, Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, appeared on the threshold. She was dressed for the street, and had a strap wrapped about the knuckles of one hand.

“I’m going to take my usual constitutional, sir,” she announced, “and I thought, if you had no objection, that I would take Prince with me. He’s been shut up in the kennel most of the time since you went away, and what he really needs is a good run.”

Just then the detective’s famous police dog pushed past the housekeeper’s skirts, and pattered into the study at the end of the leash which Mrs. Peters held.

The animal started eagerly for his master, as if surprised to find him there. Suddenly, however, he halted, the hair along his back raised in a bristling line, and an unmistakable snarl escaped him.

“Good boy! Good old Prince!” Gordon said, in a wheedling tone, but he had turned pale, and his eyes were very ugly. “Take him by all means, Mrs. Peters. His confinement doesn’t seem to have improved his temper—and I’m busy.”

But the housekeeper was staring from Prince to the man she believed to be her employer.

“Well, I never expected to see anything like that!” she ejaculated wonderingly. “Don’t you know your own master, Prince? What’s the matter with you, anyway? You are not going mad, are you?”

Green Eye’s hand had mechanically sought the pocket in which the automatic lay.

“Oh, it’s nothing like that,” he said, with assumed lightness. “The heat has put him a bit out of temper, that’s all. Take him away, and let him work off his grouch.”

Still looking very much bewildered, Mrs. Peters turned to go, but she had to drag the dog from the room by main force, and the more she pulled at the leash, the more he snarled.

When the door finally closed upon them, Gordon passed a trembling hand across his forehead, and his fingers came away damp with sweat.

“Curse the brute!” he muttered savagely. “If he does that again, I’ll have to put him out of the way.”

He had intended to tackle the safe, but now he changed his mind once more. He was too much shaken by this last experience to attempt anything of that sort at present, and, therefore, he determined to take a walk and steady his nerves. In less than an hour he was back in Nick’s study, though, and the door was locked.

He was about to try his luck with the detective’s safe.

CHAPTER XIV.

CRAY CALLS ON MRS. SIMPSON.

It was quite early in the afternoon when Jack Cray reached New Pelham, and during his journey to that outlying suburb he had plenty of time in which to think out a plan of action, using as a basis Gordon's suggestion that he should present himself as a fellow employee of the missing Simpson.

Cray walked briskly through the little town, having inquired the direction in which Floral Avenue lay, and soon came to a steep hill.

On the top of the hill the detective stopped to mop his brow, and as he did so, his keen eyes took in every detail of the scene that lay before him. There was not much of it—just a dozen or so houses strewn about at haphazard in the midst of a maze of newly built roads.

The latter ran here and there, not at right angles, but obliquely, in sweeping curves, circles, and what not. The houses were all different and distinctive in type, with not a single old-fashioned veranda to be seen. In short, the settlement on the hill aimed to be a modern and "artistic" suburban development, which, like most of its kind, was still in the early stages of growth.

Floral Avenue proved to be at the very end of the development, and everything about it seemed newest and most unfinished. At the corner of it stood a small house of two stories and a half, with dull-red shingled roof and trimmings.

Beside the door, in big, brass figures, was the number 31.

That it was the only house on the street seemed to have made no difference to the builder, who doubtless saw all the rest of the houses from one to thirty and on indefinitely in his mind's eye.

No. 31 was very new, indeed. The lawn still plainly showed the seams where the strips of turf met, and the gravel walks evidently had not been rolled sufficiently, for they were scarred with footprints.

Plainly, Jack Cray had not looked for just this sort of thing. He paused at the gate and gave his red forehead a thoughtful mopping.

“Looks as if Griswold didn’t know the whole story, or forgot this part of it,” he speculated. “I got the impression that friend Simpson had been living in New Pelham for a long time, but he certainly hasn’t been living long in No. 31 Floral Avenue. Besides, this looks like a buying proposition, not a renting one.”

He ran his tongue along his lips, and a knowing look came into his eyes.

“I’ll bet he squeezed that fund for a few thousands before he raked in the whole bunch!” he muttered. “A little slick bookkeeping would have done the trick while they were disbursing funds for the immediate needs of the Hattontown sufferers. Some of it went into this house, if I’m not mighty badly mistaken, and I have a hunch that some more of it went to buy that electric machine he sported in Hattontown.”

Without further hesitation, Cray opened the gate and started up the front walk to an oddly shaped little stoop, which gave access to the front door. A neatly dressed servant answered his summons.

“Mrs. Simpson in?” Cray inquired.

“Yes, sir,” the girl answered, looking doubtfully at him, “but I don’t believe she will feel like seeing any one. She hasn’t been very well.”

“I hope she will see me,” Cray declared. “Please say that I’m Mr. Jones, from the *Chronicle and Observer* office, and would like very much to see her for a few minutes.”

The girl was obviously impressed by this information, and, without further argument, conducted him into one of the rooms off the reception hall, and then hurried away to communicate with her mistress.

With the natural instinct of the detective, Cray looked keenly about him, and there was something that impressed him at once.

The house he was in was by no means a large one, but the furniture seemed to have come from a much smaller house. The diminutive hatrack was positively lost in the square hall, the rugs were little more than patches on the inlaid floor, and the stair carpet—which he could see through the door—was shabby, and too narrow for the stairs.

In short, though John Simpson had recently taken a larger house, he had either been unable to furnish it adequately, or else had been too hurried or careless to do so.

“Mrs. Simpson will see you, sir,” the maid announced, when she returned. “She will be down in a few minutes.”

Presently, the fugitive’s wife descended the stairs. She was a small, slight woman, plainly dressed, and apparently about forty years of age, though her lined face and gray hair caused her to look much older than many women do nowadays at that age.

“You have news of my husband, Mr. Jones?” she asked eagerly, holding her hands out in unconscious pleading, so that Cray could see that they had been roughened by hard work.

It seemed curious that the mistress of such a house should find it necessary to do menial labor.

“Not yet, Mrs. Simpson, I’m sorry to say,” Cray answered reluctantly.

The woman sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. There was no longer the slightest room for doubt as to her innocence. Plainly, she knew nothing whatever about the theft, although it might be that some of her worry was due to fear that something of the sort might account for her husband’s unprecedented absence.

“It’s hard lines, Mrs. Simpson,” the detective said sympathetically. “Your husband will turn up pretty soon, though, I’m sure.”

The wife raised her head and hastily wiped her eyes.

“You—you don’t think that he’s dead, then?”

“Oh, no, nothing like that!” Cray hastened to assure her.

“Oh, I do hope you are right, sir!” Mrs. Simpson said fervently. “If he isn’t dead, though, or terribly injured and unable to communicate with me, what can it possibly mean? Have they reported it to the police yet?”

“You mean the office?”

“Yes.”

Cray shook his head.

“That hasn’t seemed necessary—at least, that’s what the office seems to think,” he answered. “Mr. Simpson isn’t in a hospital, though, you may be sure.”

“Then where is he? If they don’t do something at the office, I shall be obliged to go to the police myself. I can’t understand why it wasn’t done long ago. John has been gone days and days now, and he’s never before stayed away from home unexpectedly for more than a few hours without letting me know just where he was. I don’t understand it; I don’t, I don’t!”

“I know it’s tough, Mrs. Simpson,” Cray admitted awkwardly. “I wish I had some good news for you, but I came, instead, to see if you could not tell me something that might throw some light on it. We are naturally very much interested at the office, and they thought I might be able to find out what had happened. Will you help me?”

“Of course, I’ll do anything I possibly can,” the distracted woman assured him. “It’s very kind in them, and of you, to take all this trouble. What is it you want to know, though?”

CHAPTER XV.

SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION.

Mrs. Simpson asked the question bravely enough, but there was a certain haunted expression in her eyes which suggested that some inkling of the situation might have come to her. If so, however, her love and loyalty had caused her to brush it aside.

Jack Cray did not feel quite comfortable. It seemed like tempting the woman to betray her own husband—was nothing less, in fact. That was unavoidable, however.

“Well, I hardly know what to ask,” he confessed, desiring to keep her, if possible, from attaching any great importance to his line of inquiry. “Something unusual is keeping Mr. Simpson away, that’s sure, and I’ve got to try to find out what it is. I’m afraid I’m not much of a detective”—he was mentally comparing himself with Nick Carter—“and, therefore, the only thing I can think of doing just now is to ask a lot of questions, and hope to hit upon something of interest before I get through.”

Mrs. Simpson did not look as if this appealed to her in all respects, despite her great desire to have the mystery cleared up.

“Of course, I’m not going to peddle what you tell me all over the office,” Cray hastened to say, noting her look of doubt. “Besides, you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to. I’ll try not to seem impertinent, though, or to tire you out, and remember it’s only because we want to find your husband.”

The woman nodded. “I understand,” she said. “Ask me anything you please, and I’ll try to answer it.”

“That’s the way to talk,” Cray commented, and then went on, after a slight pause: “They generally began a long ways back when they’re trying to dope out a thing like this. Suppose we try that method?”

He was playing the part of the novice very well, and it was clear that Mrs. Simpson had no suspicion of his real status. On the contrary, she soon showed signs of impatience, as if she looked upon his questions as boring and pointless.

She continued to answer them politely and truthfully, however, and that was all Cray asked.

“You have lived here, in New Pelham, for some years, haven’t you, Mrs. Simpson?” the detective inquired.

“Yes, sir; ten years.”

“But not in this same house?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Jones. This has only been built a few months, and we were hardly settled, when my husband disappeared. We lived right in the village until recently.”

“Mr. Simpson is buying this on installment, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir. We have always rented until now, but he has long wanted to have a place of his own, and just lately he decided that he could afford it. It didn’t seem possible to me at first, but my husband’s salary had just been raised, and they had given him quite a lump sum, I believe, for the extra work entailed in handling this relief fund.”

The woman’s eyes were on Cray now, and there was a troubled, searching expression in them.

He nodded—there did not seem to be anything else to do. “Naturally, that would have made a difference,” he agreed, and was glad to see that Mrs. Simpson looked relieved. Apparently she had feared that he might deny the raise and the bonus.

“What a pity this should have happened just after you had moved into your new house!” he went on. “I hope Mr. Simpson hasn’t shouldered more than he can carry. That might explain it, you know. Possibly he has gone away in a fit of discouragement, after finding that the place would cost him more than he could afford. Real-estate people sometimes hold back essential facts, you know, in order to get a man’s signature to a contract.”

But he saw that that was a hardly less disturbing possibility in the woman’s eyes, and hastened to turn her thoughts into another channel.

“Or it may be loss of memory or something of that sort,” he added. “Your

Or it may be loss of memory, or something of that sort," he added. "Your husband may be wandering about without knowing his own name."

Naturally, that suggestion met with no better reception, and Cray was obliged to give it up.

"There isn't much use in speculating about it, though, until we get hold of more facts," he declared. "I suppose you picked out this house?"

"No, I didn't," Mrs. Simpson said with some feeling. "I had nothing to say about it."

"Is that so? I wouldn't have thought Mr. Simpson would have gone ahead in any such way as that."

"He never did before, Mr. Jones, but his heart seemed to be set on this place, and I let him have his way. The openness seemed to appeal to him very strongly. I've been living in a row for years, you know."

"Ah, the openness!" murmured Cray. "I can see how that might have attracted him. Have you noticed anything unusual about your husband lately, Mrs. Simpson? Has he seemed his normal self all the time?"

His hostess seemed at a loss to know how to answer the question, to judge by her hesitation and knitted brows.

"If you think there may be anything the matter with his mind, Mr. Jones, I'm sure you're wrong," she said, at length. "I haven't noticed anything of that sort at all, and I would have been sure to do so. I can't say that he has been himself, though. Buying this house on his own responsibility, and in such a hurry would be enough to show that he wasn't. Besides that, though, he has been nervous and irritable, but I laid that to the extra work he was doing. I'm afraid I shall have to call him freakish, but nothing more. He seems to have suddenly developed whims, and acquired rather expensive tastes. I'm afraid his advancement at the office has turned his head somewhat."

"You are still referring to the house?"

The woman hesitated again, but seemed to decide that frankness would be best.

"No," she answered, "that isn't all. He has got the automobile fever, as well."

CHAPTER XVI. THE TIRE PRINTS.

Jack Cray barely avoided a sudden start at that last remark of Mrs. Simpson's. He had been hoping for some light on the electric car, but had thought it improbable that he would find any clew at the fugitive's home.

"So he's a fool at times, is he?" he thought. "Good enough! That ought to make things easier."

"So the bug caught him, too, did it?" he asked aloud, with a careless smile. "Did he buy a machine?"

"Oh, no, sir! He rented one in the village, but his idea was to buy one as soon as he could afford it. In fact, he has had a gate made in the back fence, and one of those little, portable garages put up."

"He meant to enjoy himself, didn't he?" Cray asked lightly, though the role he was obliged to play was becoming more and more irksome. "There's a driveway at the side of the house, though, isn't there? I thought I noticed one as I came in."

"Yes, there is," Mrs. Simpson agreed. "That was another queer thing. I didn't see how in the world John was going to afford a car—even a secondhand one, as he talked of buying—but if he was going to have one, I didn't see why it should not be driven in from the front, since that was what the drive was made for. He wouldn't hear of it, though."

"Why not?"

"He said he was going to drive his own car, and he didn't want everybody to be watching him and criticizing the way he was doing it. He thought he would prefer to come in the back way, where there wouldn't be so many spectators. That was ridiculous, though, because you can see for yourself that there are not many people living here on the hill. Besides, he would soon have learned to drive well enough not to mind if he were watched."

Cray nodded, but his heart was pounding. This was certainly a queer whim on

Simpson's part, and the detective was sure there must be some reason for it. In fact, he was inclined to believe that there was a reason for the choice of the house itself, and that both had to do with the fugitive's crime. The thought was an exciting one, but Cray was at a loss to explain Simpson's actions.

It might be well to see how the land lay, and the best way to do that, he believed, was with Mrs. Simpson's knowledge, rather than furtively.

"I don't want to alarm you too much," he said, "but these things look rather queer, you know. You seem sure that there wasn't anything the matter with Mr. Simpson's mind, and yet you admit that he has done some peculiar things. You'd rather think that his mind was temporarily clouded, wouldn't you, than that he was dead, or had deliberately left you in the lurch?"

"Of course," Mrs. Simpson agreed. "It would be terrible, though—terrible!"

"So are the other possibilities," Cray pointed out. "Let's work along this line—for a while. Would you mind letting me see this gate and garage you speak of?"

"No, certainly not," the woman said, but it was plain that she thought the proceeding a senseless one. "I'll show you."

The lot was perhaps sixty feet wide, and one hundred and fifty feet deep, possibly more. The grass had not yet obtained a fair start, and the shrubs and trees were very small, although they had evidently been planted the season before.

The gravel drive ran along one side of the lot, from front to rear, and beside it, close to the rear fence, was the little, portable garage of which Mrs. Simpson had spoken. It was built of metal, as a precaution against fire, and when the detective tried the door, he found it locked.

"Your husband has the key, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

Cray had noted the graveled surface of the drive on his way from the house, and had seen that it had not been used. There were footprints on the soft surface, but no evidence of tires.

"The garage has never been used. I suppose?" Cray inquired.

“Oh, no, Mr. Jones.”

“And no car has been driven into the yard?”

“No, sir.”

There was no doubt that she was telling the truth, so far as she was aware, but Cray had evidence that she was mistaken. To be sure, no car had been driven in from the front, but it was plain that one had entered the yard through the new back gate.

Evidently the machine had not entered the garage, but had halted in front of it, and had then been backed out again. The marks were not very recent, however, and at least one rain had fallen since they were made.

Cray walked on to the rear gate and peered over. There was a newly graded road beyond, and in its surface were the marks of other tires—or, rather, the marks of the same tires repeated several times, a number of sets of them being more recent than those in the yard. And all were made by tires of the sort in common use on electric machines.

“Been here often,” Cray concluded. “Hasn’t been in the yard but once, but has come as far as the gate on a number of occasions. Seems to have been undecided about something, or had cold feet. What’s more, unless I’m ’way off the track, that machine has been here not later than night before last, and those freshest marks look suspiciously as if they were made last night.”

He actually forgot Mrs. Simpson for the time being, and, opening the gate, passed through. He had seen something which interested him, the print of a rather small shoe in the soft ground just beyond the gate, where one would naturally have stood to open the gate from the outside.

The detective took a steel tape line from his pocket, and carefully measured the footprint. Incidentally, he gave the tire marks a close examination.

Soon he straightened up and looked about him. In doing so, he was more struck than ever with the isolation of the Simpson house. The spot where they stood was not overlooked by any other residence. There was another house within two or three hundred yards, to be sure, but it presented a blank wall on that side,

evidently being designed to stand close to another one, which was yet to be built.

“Supposing the fellow had any motive to do it, he could come here in a noiseless electric at the dead of night, with lights turned off, and nobody would be the wiser,” Cray told himself. “And he could reach the hill here without passing through the center of the village itself.”

At that point, however, he glanced up at the rear of the Simpson house.

“How about his wife, though?” he went on to himself. “She evidently isn’t wise to any such thing, and yet there are plenty of windows here, at the rear—and not very far from the garage, either.”

That brought him back, and he rather awkwardly entered the yard, fearing that he might have betrayed curiosity of an altogether too professional character.

“A fellow can’t help trying to act like a detective, I guess, when he’s put on such a job like this,” he said, with a sheepish grin. “I see right now that I’m not in the same class with Nick Carter. Suppose I’ll have to try to keep up the bluff just the same, and ask some more fool questions—if you are not ready to throw me out.”

“Of course not, Mr. Jones,” the poor little woman assured him. “I only wish _____”

The detective nodded. “I wish, too, that I could find him for you, Mrs. Simpson,” he said sincerely, and added, under his breath, “and for you alone.”

“May be I will—who knows?” he went on, gazing thoughtfully about. “By the way, where do you sleep, if I may ask? At the back of the house?”

CHAPTER XVII.

CRAY WIRES FOR "CARTER."

It is not to be wondered at that Mrs. Simpson looked surprised at a question which appeared so irrelevant.

"Yes, I do," she answered, "but I don't see what in the world that has to do with Mr. Simpson's absence."

"Nothing, of course," was the prompt response. "I'm trying to get at something else, Mrs. Simpson—I'm afraid I can't tell you just what at present. Are you a light sleeper?"

"Yes, very."

"I suppose your room is on the second floor, there, where those double windows are?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the windows are open these nights?"

"Of course—all of them. It has been very warm, you know."

"Was that the room you originally planned to occupy?"

Mrs. Simpson looked amazed.

"Why, no, it wasn't," she confessed. "Naturally, the best bedroom is supposed to be at the front of the house. It has a big bay window, and gets the air from three sides. It's so big, though, and seemed so lonesome after Mr. Simpson was gone, that I changed to this back one after the first night. But I don't understand what's in your mind, Mr. Jones."

"Don't try to, Mrs. Simpson," he advised. "I have an idea, but I'm not free to share it yet, even with you. That's all I care to look at here, Mrs. Simpson; let's go back to the house."

They went around to the front door. and the woman invited him in again

... somewhat reluctantly. He would have liked to get hold of a pair of Simpson's shoes, but he did not dare ask that, feeling sure that she would smell a rat if he did.

"No, thanks," he said. "I have imposed on you too much already."

He paused for a moment, and went on, picking his words carefully.

"I suppose you haven't got a very good opinion of my abilities along this line, Mrs. Simpson?" he said deprecatingly. "Mr. Griswold himself has thought fit to send me here, and I have an idea or two that I would like to test. It's too soon to tell you what I believe, but I think I have a clew to your husband's behavior. Will you help me to find out whether it's good for anything, or not?"

"Of course, I will—I'll do anything I can."

"Then—it sounds like a mystery thriller, but the explanation is very simple—will you sleep in the front room for a night or two, and see that all the windows at the back are closed and dark?"

Mrs. Simpson looked at him as if she thought he had lost his senses, but she reluctantly agreed to do as he asked.

"Thanks ever so much," Cray said uncomfortably. "I know how it sounds, but I have a notion that it will help."

And, after a few more words, he left the house, being careful, however, to caution Mrs. Simpson to say nothing to any one concerning his peculiar request, or the trend of his inquiries.

Incidentally, he had secured from her the name of the garage at which Simpson had rented the car—an electric.

The ex-police detective's manner, as he strode down the hill, was a very thoughtful one, but there was something triumphant about the swing of his shoulders and the carriage of his massive head.

In his opinion, he had done a good day's work. Certainly, he had made some very curious discoveries, and if his theory were anywhere near correct, he had hopes of solving the mystery—and, incidentally, of capturing John Simpson, and

recovering a large share of the stolen gold—before many hours had passed.

And the best of it was that he had done everything single-handed. To be sure, his friend Carter had advised his going to New Pelham first of all, but, beyond that, the great detective had had nothing to do with the affair, thus far.

“Carter will be sorry he didn’t get into the game at the start,” Cray told himself, with a satisfied grin. “If this thing goes through, as I hope it will, I’ll cop about all the credit there is. Too bad I called Carter in at all. If I had known what a cinch it was going to be, you can bet I would have handled it alone.”

He and Nick were great friends, but Cray saw no reason to hide his own light under a bushel for that reason. On the other hand, he well knew that Nick would rejoice in his success, and decline to take any credit or pay that did not rightfully belong to him.

He would have been less certain of the outcome, however, had he suspected that he was not dealing with Nick Carter at all, but with one of the most unscrupulous criminals in the country.

Cray found the garage easily enough, and lost no time getting down to business.

“Friend of mine, Mr. Simpson, rented a car here,” he said. “An electric. It looks pretty good to me. Is it still for hire?”

“No, sir,” the owner of the garage answered. “Didn’t you know I sold it to Mr. Simpson nearly a week ago?”

“The deuce you did!” ejaculated Cray. “That’s a new one on me. Haven’t seen Simpson lately.”

“Well, he liked the machine so much that he took it, after having it out several times. I’ve got other cars here for sale, but that was the only electric. There isn’t very much demand for them, you know.”

“It was an electric I wanted,” Cray told him, with apparent regret. “Like them quiet.”

“That’s what Mr. Simpson said,” the garage owner vouchsafed. “They may be quiet enough, but I like something a little faster and bigger. I’ve got a dandy Wellington here, sir, as good as new, that I’ll sell you for——”

“Nothing doing,” Cray interrupted. “Wife has set her heart on an electric, and you know what that means. Thanks just the same, though.”

They exchanged meaning glances, and Cray left the garage. As he walked along the main street, he whistled softly, but very cheerfully. The garage man’s hint as to Simpson’s reason for purchasing an electric car had served to strengthen his suspicions. The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that he was right, and the more eager he was to lay his amazing theory before Nick Carter.

He desired the great detective’s approval, and his cooperation in the last dramatic scene, which he hoped would take place that night. But again there would have been a fly in his honey had he known that another had arrived at practically the same conclusion by pure reasoning, and that that other was not Nick Carter, but an impostor and ex-convict, who was posing in Nick’s place.

Perhaps it is just as well that Jack Cray did not know that fact when he proceeded to the combined railroad station and telegraph office, and wrote out the following message:

“Nicholas Carter—*Madison Avenue, New York*: Come to New Pelham by 7:30 train this evening. Important. Will meet you.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

GORDON TACKLES NICK'S SAFE.

Green-eye Gordon stood looking at the safe that was built into the wall of Nick's study, and, as he stared at it, his eyes were very greedy in expression.

For one thing, he felt certain that the famous detective kept money there—very likely a large sum—for, in Nick's profession, it is often essential to lay one's hands on plenty of cash at very short notice. Expensive journeys have to be undertaken on little warning, often at hours when the banks are closed, for instance, and there are many other ways in which ready money comes in handy. It remained to be seen, of course, whether the detective's absence had made any difference in this respect.

This, however, was but a very small item in Gordon's expectations.

As we have seen, he was after very much bigger game, in the shape of the secret records of Nick's most important cases, records which he hoped would be the means of netting him a very much larger sum than that represented by the missing relief fund.

The rascal's mouth fairly watered now as he thought of the possibilities. The possession of the papers he desired would mean a chance of blackmail, such as the world had never known. Until now, these papers had been perfectly safe in Nick Carter's possession, but should they fall into Gordon's hands, they would suddenly acquire a destructive power far more terrible than that of dynamite.

What a prospect! Aside from the enormous advantage which he expected to reap from it, Green Eye could conceive of no more effective retaliation for Nick's part in sending him to prison.

"A fool would only think of killing Carter, or at most, of giving him a taste of physical torture," thought the criminal. "But I can understand his point of view, and I know that the loss of such papers—and the use I shall make of them—will be infinitely worse than death itself in his eyes."

Gordon started as he heard the front door open, and moved across the room. He felt sure that it was Mrs. Peters returning from her afternoon constitutional, and

he wished to give her an order, but he paused, as he remembered the police dog. It would be better to have Prince out of the way before he sent for the housekeeper.

He waited ten minutes, therefore, before ringing the bell, and presently Mrs. Peters arrived, somewhat out of breath.

“If any one calls, say that I’m away,” the masquerader said sharply. “On no account am I to be disturbed by any one—by any one, mind you. If Joseph is about, tell him so, too.”

“Very well, sir,” Mrs. Peters answered. “Is that all?”

“Yes.”

Despite Green Eye’s eagerness to get at the safe, he remembered Prince’s alarming behavior, and narrowly watched the housekeeper’s face. He felt sure she could not deceive him. If she had the slightest suspicion that all was not as it should be, her face and manner would be sure to reveal the fact.

“No, she hasn’t tumbled to me,” he assured himself, as Mrs. Peters left the room. “It was not to be supposed that she would, but she must have thought the beast’s actions very peculiar. Thank Heaven, all of Carter’s assistants are away. I’ll have to keep the butler at a distance, too, as much as possible. I don’t believe he’s capable of seeing through the deception, but he’s a man, and he’s been with Carter for a good while. His eyes may be sharper than I think.”

He turned the key in the lock hurriedly, took off his coat, and began to roll up his sleeves.

“Now, where, does he keep the outfit?” he muttered, his pale, keen eyes darting about the room.

With quick steps he crossed to the cabinet and tried that, but, obviously, he did not find there what he sought, for he turned away from it with a snarl of impatience.

The desk was the next thing he examined, but it was not until he had picked the lock of one of the hitherto unopened drawers that he found what he sought—a small black bag.

When he had opened the latter, his lips curled into an ugly grin.

“What a burglar he would have made,” he muttered, as he emptied the contents of the bag carefully on the floor in front of the safe.

There were bits of various sizes, ordinary drills and wheel drills, jimmies, glass cutters, skeleton keys, acids—in fact, everything that goes to make up the outfit of the most up-to-date burglar.

Green-eye Gordon turned them over caressingly, but it was not for long that he was idle. He knelt before the safe, his eyes roving over it at close range. Soon he smiled with satisfaction.

It was scarcely as modern a safe as he would have expected Nick Carter to possess, but that was probably because the last thing in the world the famous detective expected was a burglary in his own house.

Among other accomplishments, most of which had brought him into conflict with the law, Ernest Gordon numbered safe-cracking, and, as he knelt before the massive steel door, with its shining nickel fittings, he had no doubt that he would be able to master this one in a comparatively short time.

After a brief examination of the lock, to make sure that he could not open the combination by ear, the masquerader picked up the powerful wheel drill, fitted a bit to it, and, pressing the other end against his stomach, set to work.

At first the bit seemed to make little impression upon the specially hardened metal, but presently a little hole appeared, and grew deeper and deeper as Gordon kept the wheel in motion.

For the time being, the criminal forgot the relief fund that he hoped to appropriate, forgot even the great, unique haul he counted on obtaining from that very safe, and was lost in the joy of being at his old trade again, and handling the old, familiar tools with undiminished skill.

Gh-r-rh!

Gordon paused to squirt oil into the deepening hole, as the note of the revolving bit changed and grew harsher. It was working smoothly again after a moment, and the particles of metal were rapidly accumulating.

Thus the work went on. One hole was sunk to the required depth, then another, and finally, after various deft operations, the inner secrets of the lock were disclosed, and the thick door swung back on noiseless hinges.

A little chuckle of satisfaction sounded as the door began to move, but, by the time it was wide open, a snarl of surprise and rage burst from the criminal's lips.

CHAPTER XIX. AN UNTIMELY KNOCK.

Despite the opening of the door, the interior of the safe did not meet Gordon's eye, as he naturally had anticipated. Instead, he found himself confronted by a second door.

Worse still, this second door appeared to be even more formidable than the first.

Doubtless, it was not nearly so thick, of course, but the trouble was that it presented an absolutely unbroken surface. In other words, there was no knob on it, no combination, no handle, nothing to indicate how it opened, or where the lock was.

It might open from left to right, or right to left—or from top to bottom, or bottom to top, for that matter. Moreover, it was only after a close and most careful scrutiny that it was possible for Green Eye to tell where the door ended, and the rest of the safe began, so tiny was the crack about it.

“Of all the infernal luck!” muttered the criminal. “A trick door, evidently. Of course, I could blow it open, if I wanted to do that, but it isn't safe to use explosives with a house full of servants. And how in thunder am I to know where the cursed lock is, if there are no outward signs of it? It may be on one side, or on the other, high or low. Have I got to keep on drilling holes at random until I stumble upon it?”

It was all he could do to keep from wrecking the study in his rage. He had a temper, and he knew it was at white heat, and threatening to boil over at any moment.

“This is the limit,” he thought. “For all I know, there may be no regular lock at all. Instead, there may be a mechanism somewhere else, operating a series of bolts which can be shot into the door from all sides. I might have known that any safe Carter would have would not be as easy to crack as this one seemed to be. Curse him! I wish I had him here right now! I'd make him open this safe for me, or tear him to pieces with my bare hands!”

Much must be allowed for exaggeration in the case of an angry man. If Nick

Carter could have appeared at that moment, it is probable that the outcome would have been by no means the one Green Eye imagined.

After storming up and down the room a few times, Gordon quieted down a little and returned to the safe. It had occurred to him that in the absence of anything like a knob or handle, there must be a secret spring or something of that sort, that was pressed in order to set the mechanism in motion, and open the inner door.

If he could find that, all would be well.

It seemed like a hopeless task, but Green Eye was master of himself again, and prepared to exercise the greatest care and perseverance.

First, he returned Nick's tools to the little black bag, and restored it to the drawer, after which he carefully removed all traces of his work, except those which permanently disfigured the outer door, and told of the violation of its lock.

Even these he cleverly hid by means of a sort of wax, which he found in Nick's laboratory, and which he coated over with ink after the holes had been plugged.

He did not expect to use the tools again, if he could help it, and he wished to clear the telltale litter away before doing anything else, so that if he were interrupted, in spite of his injunctions, he could open the door without too great delay.

Another trip to the detective's desk brought to light a powerful magnifying glass. Armed with this, the rascal returned to the safe and began a systematic inspection of its surfaces, inward and outward, so far as he could gain access to them.

He was looking for some place where the enamel had been worn off by the frequent pressure by fingers, or where finger marks had been left in such a way as to indicate repeated pressures.

He began just beyond the edge of the narrow door, and worked his way completely around it, but without success.

"I didn't think I'd find it there," he told himself, "but I had to make sure first."

He then extended his area of search, taking in the jambs of the outer door, and so working his way out to the exterior of the safe

working his way out to the exterior of the safe.

He did not waste time over the inside of the outer door, for his common sense told him that there could be no connection between that and the rest of the safe, except through the hinges, which were not likely to conceal any hidden wiring or mechanical connection.

It was a long and tedious search. Most men would have given up in the first few minutes, or at the end of an hour, but not so Green-eye Gordon. There was an ugly expression on his face, and his nerves were on edge, but he kept on with a dogged determination, scrutinizing the enameled surface of the safe inch by inch, and going over it not once, but many times.

The fact that the safe was set into the wall gave him a comparatively small surface to cover, and seemed to promise success without any great effort, but the promise was without foundation.

Nevertheless, the scoundrel's persistence was finally rewarded.

He located the secret spring, but did so purely by accident, not from any help which his keen eyes, or Nick's powerful magnifying glass gave him.

The reason was that the spring was located in a comparatively inaccessible place, behind one of the legs of the safe.

Gordon had lain down again and again, and, with the help of a pocket flash light and the magnifying glass, had done his best to peer under the low safe and behind the two squat little legs at the front. He had met with very little success, but finally, having failed to find what he sought elsewhere, he had begun feeling about at random.

In this way, just behind the right leg, and in the bottom of the safe, he had happened upon a small, yielding surface, and his heart had bounded as he pressed it upward.

To his delight, the inner door began to open noiselessly. Simultaneously, the impostor's heart stopped.

Some one had knocked at the door!

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACKMAILER'S SUPREME HAUL.

For a moment that seemed an eternity, Ernest Gordon crouched as if petrified, his eyes turned wildly to the door.

Had he locked it?

Of course he had, but he could not be sure of it at that moment, and, even if it were locked, what beastly mischance had brought an interruption just then?

Supposing it were Carter himself, or one of his assistants?

The rascal's clammy hands were cold, and his knees threatened to collapse under him.

Gritting his teeth, however, and with a look of contempt for his own weakness, he pushed the inner door back, swung the other one around until it was only slightly ajar, and, after a hasty glance about to make sure that all else was in order, strode to the door.

"What is it?" he called harshly.

Even at the moment of utterance he was conscious that the voice bore little resemblance to that of the man he was impersonating.

The reply, to his relief, was in the butler's deferential tones.

"Telegram, sir," Joseph announced. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I thought you probably would like to have it at once."

"That's all right," Gordon said, taking care this time to imitate Nick's voice accurately.

He unlocked the door and opened it a foot or so.

"Thanks, Joseph," he said, taking the telegram from the butler's silver salver, and closing the door again, but not locking it.

He knew that the hand he had extended was grimy, and that a locked door was probably a very unusual phenomenon, but he did not make the mistake of offering any explanation. That would have been more suspicious still.

“If he noticed my hand, he’ll think I’ve been working in the laboratory,” he assured himself. “As for the door, that’s none of his business. A man doesn’t have to do the same things in the same way year after year.”

He hastily tore open the yellow envelope, and found within Jack Cray’s message from New Pelham, asking him to come on the seven-thirty train.

Gordon positively chuckled as he finished reading the telegram.

“He’s hit upon something big already, or thinks he has, at any rate,” he decided. “Let’s hope his impression isn’t an erroneous one, and that my dear Carter’s friend Jack is going to lead me to a carload of gold pieces. I’ll be there, Cray, you may be sure.”

Now that Joseph had gone away, Green Eye quietly relocked the door, and, thrusting the telegram into his pocket, hurried back to the safe.

He swung the ponderous outer door to the right, and clamping his fingers over the right-hand edge of the knobless door within, he drew it to the left.

He had been careful not to push it completely shut before going to the door, for he feared that he might not be able to open it again.

Now open to his eyes lay the interior of the safe.

Eagerly he snatched open one of the drawers, and gave a little grunt of satisfaction when he found a couple of reasonably thick bundles of paper money. When the bundles were withdrawn, he caught a glimpse of several familiar-looking little packages, round, slender, and wrapped in manila paper.

“Gold, just as it came from the bank!” he muttered, snatching up one of the packages and tearing off the end of the wrapping.

A stack of ten-dollar gold pieces was revealed.

“This will do very nicely for current expenses,” Green Eye murmured, with a smile “Now for the rest though ”

CHAPTER. NOW FOR THE REST, MIGHTY.

He carried the money over to the table, and thrust notes and gold into the pockets of the coat he had taken off before he set to work, after which he returned to the safe and began his search for Nick's precious secrets.

Packet after packet he drew out, chuckling at the inscriptions on some of them, then grimy with his work, and, still in his shirt sleeves, he set out to examine the records, his chair drawn up to the table, his fingers shaking with the excitement that possessed him. Once he stopped, and mechanically lighted a cigar, but it was soon forgotten, and went out, after which the end of it was chewed to a pulp.

The papers he unearthed were all he hoped they would be.

There, before him, were the histories of scores of the most important cases that Nick Carter had handled. Many of them, to be sure, were of such a nature that they afforded no opportunities for blackmail, but there were quite a number which, even to a casual glance, revealed alluring possibilities in that direction.

Gordon's pale eyes glittered with greed as he read names and dates, and all the precise array of facts which had been accumulated by the painstaking labors of the great detective and his staff.

"It's a gold mine, nothing else!" the master rascal told himself, his hands trembling with eagerness. "If I have time to work it as it ought to be worked, I can pull down a quarter of a million—half a million!"

His enthusiasm carried him away into the region of fairy possibilities, where a rosy light played over everything. He did not realize how important was that little word "if" which he had passed over so lightly.

This was just the sort of thing that appealed to him most, this bleeding of those who could much better afford to pay large sums in hush money than to have gossip busy with their names.

He made a selection of the records that appealed to him most at first glance, then bundled the others up carefully and thrust them back into the safe.

"This will be all I will need," he told himself; "for the present, at least."

Therefore, he risked closing the inner door of the safe, but, lest there should be

any uncertainty about it, he made sure that he could open it later. After that he closed the outer door, but, of course, did not lock it, for he had put the locking mechanism out of commission.

Thanks to his care in covering up his traces, however, it was not likely that any ordinary eyes would detect the fact that the safe had been violated, and, to further minimize the possibility, he placed a chair with its back against the safe door.

Leaving the bundle of documents in plain sight of the desk, he rang for Joseph.

“I shall want dinner by six-thirty to-night, Joseph,” he said.

“Very good, sir,” the butler replied. “Any special orders?”

“No, no—the usual thing.”

After the butler had departed, Green Eye hastily bathed and changed his clothing, after which he seated himself at the desk, and began going through the papers in a more careful way, stopping to consider their possibilities now and then, or to jot down a note.

Dinner was announced long before he expected it, and, after keeping it waiting for ten minutes or more, he rose, stretched himself, and, with a little hesitation, thrust all of the papers into his pockets, to which he had already transferred the stolen money.

“For all I know, I may never return here,” he told himself. “It isn’t likely that Cray has located Simpson’s treasure chest, but if he has, the situation will call for immediate action on my part—and the worthy Cray and I will hardly be friends afterward, if he survives. He’ll know I’m not Carter if I stick him up for the eighty thou, and that means that I’ll have to make myself scarce, and be quick about it.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MASQUERADER JOINS CRAY.

Green-eye Gordon, Nick Carter's double for the time being, did full justice to the excellent dinner that he found ready for him when he reported to the detective's dining room.

To have asked for special dishes would have been a risky thing to do, and even if he had had an active dislike for anything that was served to him, he had sufficient self-control to conceal that fact.

To be sure, he would have preferred other things, and his craving for drink often nearly overmastered him, but he succeeded in fighting it down—at any rate, during the hours he spent under the eyes of Nick's servants.

It was a few minutes after seven when one of the detective's cars drew up at the curb, and Danny Maloney, Nick's chauffeur, honked an announcement of the fact.

The supposed Nick Carter left the table, explored his pockets for the last time, to make sure that his loot—including the automatic—was all in his possession, and then went out to the machine.

He was more afraid of Danny, than any of the rest, for the chauffeur's eyes were very keen, and he had had more than a taste of detective work on the various occasions when he had jumped in and helped out in a crisis. Nevertheless, the impostor felt that he could not afford to do too many unusual things, and he had sent for Danny instead of calling a taxi.

"I'll be behind the fellow as soon as I get into the machine," he mused. "He'll only see me for a few minutes. Therefore, as I've already stood Jack Cray's scrutiny, and am going to invite it again, I ought not to have any trouble with this fellow."

He did not, of course. Danny had no reason to doubt that his chief had returned unexpectedly, and therefore, it did not occur to him to give more than a passing glance.

Gordon was dropped at the station in plenty of time to catch the seven-thirty for New Pelham, a small suburban place a few miles to the north, in Westchester County. Both the motor car and the train afforded opportunity for very agreeable day-dreams connected with the papers in the scoundrel's pocket, and by the time he stepped from the train at the village he had persuaded himself that a big fortune was as good as within his grasp, and that there could be no possible hitch.

It is not to be wondered at that his hopes ran high, for certainly his daring had carried everything before it, thus far.

High tide is invariably followed by low, however, and although the ebb might not set in for some time in Green Eye's case, it was sure to come sooner or later. For wrongdoing is its own worst enemy, and devours its own children.

Jack Cray was waiting on the platform when Gordon alighted at New Pelham, and it was plain from the ex-police detective's bearing that he had had news of unusual importance to communicate.

"You have hit upon something, I see," Green Eye remarked in Nick's quiet tones.

"Cleared up the whole thing, I hope," Cray assured him excitedly. "Let's stroll in this direction—there are not many houses, and we need not be afraid of being overheard."

"Lead the way," the masquerader agreed, adding, when they had left the platform behind: "I'm curious to hear what you have dug up, Cray. Before you begin, though, I'd like to give you a few of the results I have arrived at in my study since you left me. It will be interesting to see how near they come to your findings."

He was proud of the way he had analyzed the matter, and could not resist the temptation to parade his results.

"Go ahead," invited Cray in an expectant tone.

He was thinking of Nick's achievements in that line, and looked for something out of the ordinary. To be sure, his famous friend might "take the wind out of his sails," as had often been the case in the past, but Jack's admiration was sincere enough to stand even that test.

enough to stand even that test.

The fact that he was not disappointed in this instance is perhaps the most remarkable tribute that could be paid to Gordon's intelligence.

"Just a word or two, then," Green Eye said in a self-satisfied tone that was far from characteristic of the man he was impersonating. "In the first place, I've made up my mind that there's no use in looking for Simpson in New England. The trail starts there, of course, but it ends here."

"Here!" echoed Cray in amazement. "How the dickens did you hit upon that?"

Gordon had not meant the word to be taken quite so literally. He felt sure that the fugitive had headed for New York, or some place in the immediate neighborhood, and he was inclined to believe that he was lurking in the vicinity of New Pelham, but he was prepared to shift his ground, if necessary.

Now he realized, as a result of Cray's amazing question, that he was on the right track. Furthermore, that realization gave him confidence, and helped him to fit in the rest.

"Oh, I've just arrived at it," he said carelessly, determined to use his companion's unconscious tip for all it was worth. "He has been back in New Pelham, and will be again, if he isn't at this moment. More than that, I have a suspicion that he has been lurking about his own house."

"For the love of Mike!" Cray breathed, looking his admiration as they strolled through the gathering dusk. "You sure are a wizard!"

"Not a bit of it. I simply use my reason, and when I find two and two, I don't hesitate to put them together, knowing that the result is bound to be four."

"But what in thunder led you to think that the fellow would come back here—especially that he would dare to return to his own place?" demanded Jack.

"I called up Griswold and learned that he had never lived in New England, and had spent most of his brief vacations here at home, or out in the Middle West. That helped to give me a start, and I sized Simpson up as a man with some clever ideas, but probably timid and unacquainted with the world in many respects. I reasoned that such a man might conceive the idea of outwitting his enemies by hiding his stealings in the last place which would be likely to be

searched—his own—and once thought of, I felt sure he would decide on it for other reasons. Because he was essentially a home body, for instance. Also, because he was not in touch with crooks, and wouldn't wish to trust any one with his secret.

“Of course,” he admitted, “it wasn't all reasoning—some of it was intuition, or plain hunch. His use of an electric machine, though, went far to convince me that I had the right idea. Its only advantage seemed to be its silence, and I couldn't imagine what good silence would do him, unless he expected to hide the gold somewhere, without those in the immediate neighborhood being aware of it. The bulk of the stuff, you see, made it necessary to use a vehicle of some sort to transport it. Well, it naturally occurred to me that the person he would least desire to know anything about it was his wife.”

All the time thinking, or seeming to do so, he was keeping one eye on Cray, and thus he was able to tell that he was not going astray.

“In short,” he concluded, “the more I thought about it, the more certain I became that the chap had hidden the stuff somewhere within earshot of his own house. Of course, though, I didn't attempt to carry the theory any further. That would have been a waste of time. Let's hear, though, what you have discovered.”

CHAPTER XXII.

PLANS FOR THE NIGHT.

The two men had some hours to kill, for they could not expect anything to happen before midnight, at least, although they realized that it would be well to be on the scene before that.

Mrs. Simpson would in all probability retire at ten or eleven o'clock, and as Simpson could—and probably did—approach the hill from the other direction without coming through the village, he might appear sooner than they expected.

Therefore, Jack Cray did not hurry himself when the time came for him to report his findings. They walked to the end of the street and turned, heading back toward the center of the village, while Cray expressed his amazement at his companion's reasoning.

That tribute having been paid, he got down to business.

"It's amazing," he said. "Doesn't leave me much to boast of. I've got some facts, though, and even you need facts to put under your theories."

He went on to describe his call at the Simpson residence, and the various things which had interested him—the new house, the misfit furniture, the facts that Simpson himself had chosen the place, the hasty move, the fugitive's sudden interest in motor cars, his refusal to use the drive from the front, and so on, until the subject of the tire tracks was reached.

"Very interesting," murmured Gordon. "The garage is metal, you say, and was locked? You think, then, that the stuff is hidden there—that Simpson bought the little, portable building for that purpose, not to use it in the ordinary way?"

"That's the way it strikes me," Cray answered. "A place like that doesn't seem very safe for such a purpose, but nobody would think it contained anything of any particular value. Besides, it's far enough from the house to make an occasional visit sufficiently safe, even in a car—providing the car is noiseless—and the neighbors wouldn't be any the wiser. Mrs. Simpson wouldn't have any interest in the garage, because she thinks it's empty."

“I see. Just how do you explain these different sets of tire marks, however? Your idea is, as I understand it, that the one set which you found in the yard itself in front of the garage doors was made several nights together, when Simpson brought the stuff there and unloaded it?”

“Sure.”

“Then how about the others which seemed to show that he has been there more than once since then, but hasn’t driven the car in?”

“Those other prints are the most interesting of the whole lot to me,” Cray returned eagerly. “It was because of them that I asked the woman where she slept, and all that. Don’t you see? This is the way I dope it out. He left the money the first time, and maybe, in his excitement, he didn’t keep any back, or else he’s been spending more freely than he expected. At any rate, it looks to me as if he wants more, or maybe the stuff is drawing him like a magnet, and he’s coming back to gloat over it.

“But right there, friend wife steps in and interferes without knowing it. He thought he had everything fixed with her sleeping at the front of the house and the garage far enough away so that she could sleep with one eye open, if she wanted to, without hearing him. Evidently, though, the very night after he banked the stuff in the garage, she upset all his calculations by deciding to sleep in that back room. Got the idea? It has three big windows right in a row, and as the nights have been warm, she has had them all open. He must have seen those open windows the next time he came, and evidently he guessed what they meant. Anyhow, he got cold feet, and didn’t dare sneak up to the garage, for fear she would hear him and get up. That’s why he has fiddled around and gone off again, and that’s why I asked her to oblige me by sleeping in the front room for a night or two.”

The big man chuckled.

“I suppose she thought I was crazy,” he went on, “but I can’t help that. I wasn’t exactly in a position to shine in her eyes, but if she does what I ask her to, and shuts those back windows, I shall be very much disappointed if we don’t catch our man red-handed to-night.”

“You think he’ll turn up again, do you, and that if he finds the coast clear, he’ll lose no time in getting next to the gold?”

“That’s the ticket.”

Gordon was silent for a minute or two.

“Well, I certainly hope you are right, Jack,” he said at length. “And you must be, I think, for it isn’t likely that we would both arrive at the same point by totally different routes unless there was something in it. We’ll put it to the test, at any rate, and if he doesn’t show up by two or three o’clock, we’ll burrow under one side of the garage and see what we can find. That will make it unnecessary to tamper with the lock, and we can fix things so he’ll never know that anybody has entered the place. Then, after removing the stuff, if we find it, we can watch the empty garage to-morrow night, and nab him if he puts in an appearance.”

Cray agreed to this plan, and informed Gordon that there was a pile of lumber within a few feet of the garage.

“We can hide behind that,” he said, “and wait for him. We’ll be in plain sight from the back windows of the house, to be sure, and Mrs. Simpson may spoil everything if she peeks. Let’s hope, though, that she obeys orders and goes to bed without question.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WATCHERS MAKE THEMSELVES SCARCE.

When Cray and Gordon first came within sight of No. 31 Floral Avenue there were lights in some of the upper windows, but before they had reached a point opposite the house, the lights went out.

“Mrs. Simpson is just going to bed,” announced Cray. “Good enough! Glad to see she isn’t a night owl. Thought of that, but was afraid to pile on any more injunctions.”

They passed the house and continued along the road toward the brow of the hill, then turned about and paced slowly back. There were lights in some of the other houses, and Green Eye could see that Cray had been right in saying that there were no other windows to overlook Simpson’s rear yard and garage.

“Like to see the wheel tracks?” asked Cray, just before they reached the house again. “Safe enough, I guess, if she isn’t snooping around.”

Gordon shook his head. “I’d like to have a look at them myself,” he answered, “but we’d better wait for a while and give the woman a chance to quiet down. She may be peering out of those back windows for all she’s worth at this very moment, you know. What you said was enough to arouse any woman’s curiosity, and she’s probably imagining all sorts of things. I don’t believe she’s in touch with her husband, and even if she were, it’s unlikely that she could get word to him. Still, you never know what a panicky woman is going to do. She has no man to fall back upon now, remember, and if she saw us lurking about, she might call up the police.”

“Well, what if she did?” demanded Cray. “We haven’t anything to be afraid of at their hands.”

Having once been a police detective himself, he often found it hard to sympathize with his companion’s attitude, which was that of most private detectives.

“That’s a foolish question, Jack,” Green Eye returned, copying one of Nick Carter’s gentle rebukes. “We’re not down in the city now, remember. We’ll be

up against some country officers, who might yank us off to the lockup before we had a chance to explain. While we were gone, what if Simpson should appear on the scene? Where would our plans be then?"

"That's right, too," Cray agreed ruefully. "Might get away and not turn up again. Take it all back, Mr. Carter. We can wait for a while—long enough for Mrs. Simpson to get tired if she's on the watch—and still have time to look about a bit, with the help of our flash lights, before midnight. Not much chance that Simpy will show up before then."

Accordingly, they concealed themselves near by and waited impatiently until nearly eleven-thirty, by which time all the houses in the neighborhood were dark.

"Now we'll do a little exploring," announced Green Eye. They cautiously skirted Simpson's property until they reached a point from which they could see that the rear windows were all closed, after which they continued to the rear of the lot.

They remained outside the low fence until they had satisfied themselves that Simpson was not in the vicinity. Having ascertained that, they crept about the corner of the fence, and, lurking in its shadow, approached the wide gate which the fugitive had had cut there.

Cray switched on his flash light, and turned it downward so that it shone upon the footprint he had noted earlier in the day.

"That's Simpson's, I'm pretty sure," he declared. "Got the data of it, anyway. The fellow stood here to open the gate."

"Show me the tire marks first," Gordon said.

He was trying to simulate Nick's thoroughness, but he had a more personal reason as well. He wished to see if the tracks would tell him the same story they had told his companion, because if they did not—well, the stolen gold might prove to be much more elusive than he had hoped, and the sooner he found it out the better.

The night was dark. Along the street an occasional arc lamp spluttered characteristically, but there at the rear of the house it was very lonely and gloomy; nevertheless, the two men threw frequent glances at the Simpson back

windows, and their ears were strained all the time to catch the first sounds of approach.

Gordon's examination did not take long. Every mark that he saw served to confirm what Cray had told him, and as the light was switched off the darkness permitted a significant grin of satisfaction.

"I see nothing to upset your reasoning, Jack," he said judicially. "We had better go into the yard, though, and see if there are any new tracks in front of the garage, and then get under cover."

Cray had noted that morning that the hinges of the gate had been very thoroughly oiled, but it seemed best not to put them to the test, but to crawl over the fence at one side, where their own footprints would not be conspicuous.

Thereafter, keeping as much as possible in the lee of the little garage, they examined the corner in front of the door.

"Nothing new seems to have taken place here," Cray informed the supposed Nick Carter. "Here's the one set of tire marks, you see, and nothing more of consequence, not even an obliterated trail. If the stuff was inside the garage this morning, it seems safe enough to say that it's here still."

As he spoke, he tried the door once more, but found it locked, as it had been that morning. They passed on around the little structure of metal, keeping to the side, away from the house.

"There's the lumber pile I told you about," Cray announced. "About time to hunt our holes, isn't it?"

His companion agreed, and they made themselves as comfortable as they could beside the pile of boards. Now, however, as Cray had foretold, they were exposed to view from the back of the house, but the only alternative was to take a position which might reveal them to Simpson if he should come, as they counted on his doing.

"Let's hope he shows up, and is considerate enough not to keep us waiting too long," murmured Gordon. "I've seen cozier places than this."

CHAPTER XXIV. REWARDED AT LAST.

More than once during the wait that followed, Jack Cray felt compelled to enjoin silence.

Under ordinary circumstances, he would not have thought of doing so where Nick Carter—as he believed—was concerned. That night, however, the great detective appeared to be unusually reckless, and Cray, on the other hand, felt an unwonted sense of responsibility and leadership.

To be sure, his ally had taken the joy out of life to some extent by arriving at practically the same point through a process of reasoning, but Cray had done all the work, and was quite proud of his achievements; therefore, for once in his life, he felt somewhere near on an equality with Nick, and allowed himself to call Gordon down for incautious remarks now and then.

“Not a word now!” he at last whispered authoritatively. “No telling how soon he may come!”

As a matter of fact, he had reason to be more cautious, and to take Simpson’s anticipated advent more seriously than did Gordon. Cray was doing everything in good faith, and kept continually in mind Griswold’s injunctions in regard to secrecy. He believed that it would be easy enough for two of them to capture Simpson, should that individual appear, but he went further than that, and determined to accomplish the capture as nearly in silence as possible, for he feared that the neighborhood might be aroused by Mrs. Simpson, if she heard anything in the nature of a scuffle.

On the contrary, Green Eye cared nothing about the millionaire newspaper proprietor’s desires or interests, and it made little difference to him whether the man were arrested or not, if only he could get the best of Cray and Simpson and make his get-away.

Nevertheless, he did not resent Cray’s assumption of command, for his brain was very busy, and quickly turned from the contemplation of one pleasing possibility to another.

He did not believe that a man of John Simpson's type had succeeded in spending very much of that eighty thousand dollars. Therefore, the absconding treasurer's loot promised to be well worth having as a nest egg.

Gordon meant it to be more than a nest egg, though. Other and larger sums were soon to join it and keep it company, according to those rosy dreams of his.

Now to the front crowded memories of those coveted papers he had examined in Nick Carter's study that afternoon—the papers which were now safe in his pockets, and represented his real fortune.

In particular, he recalled one set of records relating to the doings of a young man of sporting inclinations. The young man in question was the only son of one of America's richest men, and the sporting tendencies referred to had once got him into a very awkward position.

Nick Carter had extricated the foolish youngster without injustice to any one, and without the slightest hint of publicity. If Green-eye Gordon had his way, however, the young man and the young man's father would soon learn how it feels to have youthful indiscretions return to roost.

"That alone ought to be worth a tidy fortune," the schemer told himself.

In addition there were the Walsh papers, the Gravesend case, all the tempting possibilities of the Lindley matter, and, coming nearer home, there were a number of documents dealing with men within easy reach—with Chester J. Gillespie, for instance; ex-Senator Phelps, Bertie Craybill, Harold Lumsden, the actor, and others.

Yes, there were endless possibilities—money to be wrung from men who would be forced to keep their mouths shut, and their banking accounts at his command.

In the darkness, the criminal gave vent to a chuckle, which choked as he felt Cray turn and glance at him inquiringly.

"I was just thinking of the surprise in store for our friend," he whispered. "Why doesn't he come?"

But John Simpson seemed in no hurry to arrive, if he intended to do so at all. One o'clock came and passed, and the waiting men were still in their cramped positions beside the pile of lumber

positions beside the pile of lumber.

It began to look as if Cray had been wrong in his theory, or else that, discouraged by Mrs. Simpson's new hobby of sleeping at the rear of the house, the missing man had decided not to visit the place that night—for surely Simpson must have known that everybody had been in bed for hours.

Even the ex-police detective, usually so stolid, began to fidget. Suddenly, however, his body grew rigid, and his left hand closed upon the arm of the man beside him.

From the roadway at the rear, still some little distance off, had come faint but unmistakable sounds.

A motor vehicle of some sort, well-nigh silent in operation, was approaching, and pebbles were being displaced by its rubber-tired wheels.

“Our man!” Cray whispered.

CHAPTER XXV.

THOSE EXTRA-HEAVY SUIT CASES.

Green Eye did not reply to the burly detective's warning, but his hand took a firm grip on the revolver in his pocket.

He was holding it by the barrel, however.

The brief interval that followed seemed long and tedious, but in reality it could not have been of more than three or four minutes' duration.

Although tense and physically on the alert, Gordon found his mind wandering. He wondered idly where Simpson had been staying, and how he dared to travel about even at night in the same machine in which he had removed the gold from the Hattontown bank.

"He probably counts on Griswold doing nothing," he decided, then grimly called himself to account. "What difference does it make to me where he has been hiding?" he asked himself impatiently. "The important thing is that he seems to be here, that the gold also seems to be here, and that he's going to be kind enough to show me where it is."

The unseen car approached very quietly, and came to a halt outside the gate. They heard the faint scrape of the man's heel as Simpson dismounted, then footsteps approached the gate, the latch was cautiously lifted, and the gate swung inward.

Obviously Simpson intended to drive into the yard, and that could mean only one thing—that he intended to remove a substantial part of the gold, if not all of it, and wished to bring the machine as close to his hiding place as possible, so that he need only carry the stuff a minimum distance.

The fugitive was within a few feet of the two men when he pushed the gate back against the fence, but they made no attempt to tackle him. They felt pretty sure that the loot was hidden in the garage, but until there was no longer the slightest room for doubt, they meant to give Simpson all the rope he needed.

Presently the faint, buzzing sound of the motor began again, and then the vehicle

loomed over the top of the fence. Simpson was backing it very slowly and cautiously into the graveled driveway in front of the garage.

Now the car—an electric coupé somewhat larger than usual—was in the yard, and part of it was hidden to view beyond the garage. It was backed a few feet farther, and then the subdued humming of the motor abruptly ceased.

Again the two watchers heard the driver step out. Now there was a new sound, that of a key being inserted in a lock. The lock clicked audibly in the stillness, after which the door of the garage began to slide aside.

Not one of the sounds that had been made thus far could have been heard at a little distance, but not one of them had escaped the keen ears of Cray and Green-eye Gordon.

As they anticipated, the man did not push the garage door fully aside, that being unnecessary, owing to the fact that he did not intend to drive the machine in, but only to gain access himself, and to have room enough to carry out what he meant to make away with.

The time for action had come at last.

After exchanging signals, the two men behind the lumber pile silently straightened up, exercised their cramped limbs in the air, one after the other, and then stole toward the nearest corner of the little structure. Guided by the sounds within, they peered around the corner, and saw that the open door of the coupé was just opposite the door of the garage, and that no more than two or three feet separated them.

They had expected Simpson to begin carrying out the stuff at once, and meant to attack him as soon as he had completed his task and save them the trouble of handling the gold. Now, however, it was evident that he was digging.

They caught the scrape of his foot on the spade, and a series of faint “swishes,” as spadeful after spadeful of soft soil was thrown aside.

It was impossible for the two men to exchange words, but they turned and looked at each other, their faces close together. Plainly, it was necessary for them to wait still longer, if they intended to carry out their original program and let Simpson do the work.

The garage in itself had not appealed to him as an altogether safe hiding place, and he had gone to the trouble of burying the loot under the structure.

Some minutes passed before Simpson's spade struck something hard. After more scraping and rasping, the fugitive brought out a box or some similar receptacle, to judge by the sounds. Incidentally its weight was made manifest by the subdued grunts and pants which they heard.

A few moments' rest followed, and then the man awkwardly conveyed the box—or whatever it was—to the door.

The watchers saw now that it was a suit case of the stoutest leather, bought, doubtless, for the purpose, but looking considerably the worse for wear, as a result of its burial.

After a great deal of effort, the far-from-athletic Simpson succeeded in hoisting it into the coupé. Would he fill up the hole now and close the garage, or was there more to follow?

Obviously there was more, for after some further digging and a lot of sighs and mutterings, a second suit case, somewhat smaller, was dragged out and deposited in the car.

“That must be all of it,” thought Green Eye. “Eighty thousand dollars in gold doesn't weigh a ton or fill a coffin.”

He was right. At any rate, Simpson's actions quickly convinced them that he did not intend to remove anything more that night. He looked apprehensively in the direction of the house, and reentered the garage, where, for some minutes, he again busied himself with the spade.

He was filling in the hole. The clash was about due now.

Gordon had an inspiration. He had been wondering how Simpson had previously concealed the freshly turned earth, or how he meant to do so now.

“I'll bet he has it fixed so that the excavation appears to have been made for the purpose of sinking one of those underground gasoline tanks!” he told himself. “Very likely he's got the whole paraphernalia there, and the tank is actually in the ground. That's what I would have done under the circumstances, at any rate.”

As a matter of fact, his guess proved to be a singularly accurate one, for that was just the blind to which Simpson had resorted.

The spade had been laid aside now, and the critical moment had arrived. Cray turned to his companion and made a series of quick, expressive gestures.

“I’ll tackle him. You be ready to gag him while I hold him,” they said as plainly as words.

An instant later, Simpson reappeared in the narrow space between the garage and the car, and, turning his back, started to shut the big, sliding door.

That was Jack Cray’s opportunity, and, taking immediate advantage of it, he launched himself full tilt at the thief’s back.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOT ON THE PROGRAM.

Simpson gave a startled gasp and tried to turn, but Cray's weight bore him down, and in a trice they were on the ground.

Gordon showed himself, and approached as they flopped about for a few moments in that confined space. Suddenly he turned without warning and ran around the corner behind which he had just been hiding. He quickly circled about the tiny garage and approached the struggling men from the other direction.

The space had been so narrow that it would have been awkward for him to get at Simpson's head. Now, however, he could do so without difficulty, and, as he stooped, he had a handkerchief all ready to gag the prisoner.

Cray, he found, had Simpson by the throat, and was effectually preventing any outcry, while his great bulk kept the prisoner from squirming out from under him.

"Now, give it to him!" Jack muttered, breathing heavily. "He can't let out a peep."

Green Eye forced the wretch's jaws apart, and, inserting the handkerchief, tied it tightly in place; whereupon, Cray rolled Simpson over and handcuffed his wrists together behind his back.

The capture had been completed in record time, with no battle to speak of, and without a sound that could have been heard in the front of the house. Neither of the victors was inclined to congratulate himself very much on that achievement, for whatever might be said of John Simpson's cleverness in gaining possession of that snug little fortune in gold, the treasurer was far from a desperate character to deal with.

"Now, keep still!" commanded Cray. "If you don't, you'll wish you had, I can promise you!"

The warning seemed entirely superfluous, but Jack Cray knew that gagged men

have sometimes managed to make sounds in their throats which have been loud enough to bring assistance.

With Gordon's help, the captive was jerked through the doorway and into the garage. One man had already been disposed of, and Gordon was now secretly turning his attention to Cray, but the latter did not dream of that.

Jack's interest at the moment was confined to the helpless man whose face he desired to see to better advantage. Accordingly he drew out his flash light and turned it upon Simpson's features.

The treasurer's face was very pale—ghastly, in fact—and his lips were working convulsively on the gag, while his eyes were those of a cornered animal.

To an inexperienced person, he bore little resemblance to the descriptions of the missing treasurer, and certainly he did not look like the manager of the Hattontown *Observer*, whose character he had assumed at the bank. As a matter of fact, his disguise was a rather effective one, in view of his inexperience, for he had been wise enough not to attempt too much.

A rather straggling little mustache, grayish, and too long, with a tendency to "weep," had been transplanted to his upper lip, and proved to be unusually in keeping with his somewhat weak features. He wore a wig of an expensive sort, very difficult to detect, and the rest of his disguise consisted of a few inconspicuous lines, by which he had managed to change his expression to a surprising extent.

Cray made short work of the mustache and wig.

"Well, my friend," he announced, "here we are! You didn't look for us, did you? Here are Nick Carter and old Jack Cray, at your service."

He shook his head as he contemplated the shrinking man.

"You've certainly a lot of misdirected ability in a number of ways, Simpson," he remarked. "If you had exhibited half as much when you were holding down your job on the *Chronicle and Observer*, you might have made something of yourself. There's a big streak of incompetency in you, though. Queer mixture you are—very."

He paused for a moment while Simpson quailed under his glance and looked the

He paused for a moment, while Simpson quailed under his glance and looked an picture of misery.

“Got any more of the stuff buried, or did you dig it all up?” Cray demanded, jerking one stumpy thumb toward the place where his prisoner had been digging.

Simpson nodded despairingly.

“All in the car, eh?”

There was another nod.

“Well, I’m inclined to believe you,” Jack announced, “but we don’t intend to let it go at that, you know. Have to do a little digging on our own account to make sure.”

He stepped aside and reached for the spade.

“What are you doing, Mr. Carter?” he called out softly.

But in a moment the other’s occupation was evident enough, for Gordon was leaning through the open door of the coupé and working, with trembling fingers, at the straps of one of the suit cases. The weight of the case left little or no doubt concerning the nature of its contents, but his greed had compelled him to take a look at the gold at the first opportunity, especially when he had found that both cases were only strapped, not locked.

“I wanted to be sure this was the stuff,” he replied to Cray’s question, and continued feverishly until the cover was raised.

It was gold beyond question—a great quantity of it.

Much of it was still done up in packages, just as it had come from the bank in Hattontown, but many of the packages had been broken open, either by accident, or because Simpson had wanted to feast his eyes on the thousands of bright, newly minted coins.

Cray looked over Green Eye’s shoulder for a moment.

“Looks like the real stuff,” he commented indifferently. “Got to dig and see if there’s any more, though.”

“Go ahead, then,” his companion said impatiently.

Gordon also wished to be sure that all of the stolen gold that remained was in the car, but he could not tear himself away from the sight and touch of those gleaming coins just then. Besides, he was quite willing that Cray should do whatever dirty work might be involved.

While the perspiring Cray was again removing the dirt which Simpson had shoveled back into the hole, the master criminal fondled the gold in the two suit cases, then grudgingly closed and strapped them. He had hardly done so before Cray announced:

“He told the truth. At any rate, there’s no more of it here.”

Green-eye Gordon took his revolver from his pocket and clubbed it.

“Just leave everything as it is, and let’s get out of this,” the supposed Nick Carter said impatiently, stepping aside, so that he was not directly in front of the garage door. “Come out here a moment, though, before we put this fellow into the car. I don’t want him to overhear.”

At that, the unsuspecting Cray threw the spade aside and came out, mopping his forehead.

“Where are you?” he asked, looking about uncertainly from beneath the folds of his handkerchief.

For the time being, his big hand was protecting his forehead, but the moment he withdrew it, in order to see better, the blow fell.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GORDON MAKES HIS GET-AWAY.

As it happened, Jack Cray's skull was a pretty tough one, and, therefore, the criminal's first blow, vicious as it was, did not end matters.

It badly dazed the ex-police detective, making him totter and throw out his hands instinctively, but the attack was so extraordinary, coming, as he believed, from Nick Carter, that he fought with all his might to retain his senses long enough to see what it meant.

"Mr. Carter!" he muttered; then, lurching forward, peered at his assailant.

The act took Gordon by surprise. He had been prepared to strike again, but his blow missed its mark and struck Cray on the shoulder.

"Curse you!" Green Eye snarled, raising the weapon a third time. "Take that, then!"

But Cray seized him in a clumsy, though powerful grasp, and, with blinking eyes, peered into his face at close range. A moment later, Gordon wrenched himself loose, but the emergency seemed to have made Cray's brain act with more than its customary speed.

Despite the poor light, Jack had got a near and clear view of that distorted face and those rage-filled, greenish eyes. Had he been his normal self, he probably would have disbelieved the evidence of his own senses, for he would have recalled the seemingly conclusive reports of Gordon's death. As it was, however, he recalled nothing of this at the time, and only remembered the peculiarity which had given Ernest Gordon his nickname.

"Good heavens! Green-eye Gordon!" he whispered.

A second later, the criminal's third blow fell squarely on his forehead, and he went down, without a groan.

Immediately Green Eye bent over him and switched on his flash light.

"Curse you, curse you!" he reiterated wildly, striking Cray's unprotected head

Curse you, curse you! he reiterated wildly, striking Cray's unprotected head again and again, apparently with all his might.

He had no definite intention of killing the detective, but he was seeing red just then, and did not care in the least how hard he struck. As a matter of fact, he was inclined to believe that he had murdered his victim, and he actually hoped that he had, for Cray's recognition of him had enraged him beyond measure.

On the other hand, that sort of thing had never been in his line. He had prided himself on his ability to succeed without resorting to such extremes, and for that reason he shrank from any attempt to ascertain definitely whether Jack Cray were living or dead.

Besides, he was naturally impatient to be off with the gold, and away from this place where he had momentarily forgotten himself.

Accordingly, he rose from his knees, without another glance at the unconscious man, and, pocketing his weapon, returned to the door of the garage. The prisoner could not have seen what took place; but, as the attack had occurred just at the corner of the little building, and within a few feet of the door, it was quite possible that he had heard enough to reconstruct the whole scene, despite the remarkable quietness which had prevailed.

That, however, could not be helped, and as Gordon planned to lock the absconding treasurer in the garage, he did not anticipate any immediate trouble from that direction.

Moreover, Cray had, so to speak, introduced himself and his companion to Simpson, speaking of Gordon as Nick Carter, of course. That promised to furnish the basis of a nice mystery.

Green Eye found the prisoner almost fainting with terror, and finished the work already begun, by fastening him in such a way that he could not budge from his place, or make any noise to amount to anything.

"This will have to be your cell for the present, Simpson," he informed the trembling thief. "Don't worry, though, you'll find yourself in a real one, before long."

And he turned his back on the wretched man and stalked out, pushing the door to and locking it behind him.

Cray remained to be disposed of, but Gordon had not forgotten that fact. He had had no intention of placing the two men in the garage, for he considered that unwise, on general principles. If Cray were dead, as he believed, the presence of the body might drive Simpson to extraordinary exertions, and thus bring about a premature discovery. On the other hand, if Jack were still alive, the two men might find means of communicating with or helping each other.

What then?

Naturally it occurred to the criminal that it might be well to bundle Cray into the car and carry him for some distance from the scene of the affair before attempting to dispose of the body. A moment's thought caused him to veto that plan, however.

The car was not overlarge, and if Cray's bulk were added to that of the two gold-laden suit cases, the interior of the electric machine would be overcrowded.

Furthermore, the upholstery was rather light in hue, and Gordon was afraid of bloodstains.

On the whole, therefore, he decided to leave his victim in the yard, but to conceal him as well as he could.

To that end, he dragged Jack's inert form around the corner of the garage to a point close beside the lumber pile. Then very quietly he began removing boards from the top of the pile and placing them in another and narrower pile just on the other side of the body.

When he had raised this smaller pile to the required height, he began placing more boards in such a way that each one projected an inch or so beyond the one below it, thus forming a sort of arch over Cray's outstretched form—a one-sided arch that soon touched the original pile of lumber and leaned against it more or less securely.

"There!" Green Eye muttered. "Now he can't be seen from the house or the road here at the back. The ends are open, to be sure, but I can't help that. I haven't anything here to cover the openings. All I ask, though, is a start of a few hours, and that I shall certainly have."

As best he could, he obliterated the track he had left in dragging Cray to the lumber pile, after which he climbed into the machine, disposed of the precious suit cases to the best advantage, and touched the starting lever.

He had not yet turned on the lights of the car, but the hours he had spent in the gloom had thoroughly accustomed his eyes to the darkness, and, therefore, he had no trouble in guiding the easily controlled car out through the gate and into the road beyond.

There he brought it to a stop, and, returning hastily, obliterated the tire marks in front of the garage and such of his own footprints as he could find. He did not wish to use his flash light too much, however; therefore, it is quite possible that the job was not a very thorough one.

Finally he passed through the gate, closed it, and reëntered the car, which quietly purred away into the night.

Green-eye Gordon's extraordinary daring had put him into possession of a fortune of close to seventy-five thousand dollars, at least, as well as a bundle of papers which might yield him several times that amount.

He had robbed a thief and left the latter an unofficial prisoner, doomed to starvation, in all probability, if he were not soon found.

And he had murderously assaulted Jack Cray and left him, a battered and bleeding hulk, supposedly dead.

It was quite a day's work, and Green-eye Gordon may be excused for feeling considerably elated. His work was full of holes, however, and far from detection-proof, as Nick Carter could have proved to him in short order.

The question was, would Nick have the chance in time to avoid a chase around the world?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT THE DOG BARKED AT.

About half past six the following morning, Mrs. Simpson's maid, who had slept out, let herself into the house with her latchkey and quietly made her way to the kitchen.

As usual, her first act was to open the door and windows, for the weather was warm. In doing so, she was attracted by a disturbance in the back yard, and realized that she had heard a dog barking furiously as she came along the street and through the house.

She had paid no particular attention to the persistent barking, but now that she found the animal was in the rear of the Simpson lot, and acting very strangely, her curiosity was fully aroused.

She did not know the dog. It was brownish in hue, collarless, and neglected in appearance. Obviously it was a stray animal which had found its way there on a foraging expedition.

Now, however, its original errand had been completely forgotten, and the greatest excitement had taken its place.

The creature was running from one end of the lumber pile to the other—always being careful to remain at a respectful distance—and was giving vent to an unending series of frenzied barks.

The open country lay just beyond the Simpson house, and the girl's first thought was that some small-game animal had taken refuge in some cranny of the lumber. Urged on by her curiosity, she stepped out of the house and started toward the rear of the yard.

"It's a rabbit, mebbe, or a squirrel," she told herself. "Why don't the fool dig at it, though, instead of yelping its head off?"

But by that time she had reached a point from which she could get a view of the rear end of the lumber pile. Suddenly she halted in her tracks.

"It's a rabbit, mebbe, or a squirrel," she told herself. "Why don't the fool dig at it, though, instead of yelping its head off?"

“For the love of Heaven!” she muttered. “That’s funny! Who’s been monkeying with that lumber? It’s been piled over in the night, or some of it has been swiped, and they’ve left a hole underneath. That’s where the mutt’s rabbit, or whatever it is, is making itself scarce.”

Vaguely disturbed by her surprising discovery, she approached the spot more slowly.

“There seems to be as much lumber as ever,” she decided, “but what does it mean? Who would have taken the trouble to do that—in the dead of night, too—if he wasn’t up to some mischief?”

Now the dog caught sight of her and came running forward. She shooed him away, and he began barking at her, but the barks now had a pleading note in them, and again and again he ran back to the pile of lumber.

“He wants me to help him, the poor boob!” the girl thought, with a pitying smile. “Ain’t that just like a fool dog?”

But she advanced a little farther, somewhat warily, and sniffing the air as she did so. Certainly it was not a skunk that had been cornered, and it was not likely that the creature was ferocious.

Having finally arrived within six or eight feet of the end of the pile, the maid stooped cautiously and peered into the little tunnel. A moment later, she gave a piercing scream, picked up her skirts, and fled to the house.

Again and again she raised her voice as she ran, but fortunately her vocal efforts did not again touch the high-water mark of that first cry, which, as it proved, had awakened Mrs. Simpson.

The girl scuttled through the lower part of the house, and was flying up the stairs, when her mistress appeared at the top of the first flight.

“What in the world is the matter, Mary?” Mrs. Simpson demanded.

As she put the question, she clutched at her heart, for her thoughts had instinctively gone to her missing husband, and she imagined that the maid must have had some news of Simpson, or, perhaps, had even found his body on the front doorstep.

Naturally, therefore, the girl's information was not reassuring.

"Oh, Mrs. Simpson!" she cried. "There's been a murder as sure as you live! There's a dead man under that pile of lumber in the back yard! I saw his feet!"

Mrs. Simpson's face was as white as her nightdress.

"Merciful Heaven!" she breathed, horror in her eyes. "I knew it—it's Mr. Simpson! Oh, how can I bear it, how can I bear it!"

And she clutched the banister for support.

Fortunately, however, the girl knew better than that, even in her fright, and said so at once.

"No, no, it ain't Mr. Simpson!" she said pityingly, patting her mistress' heaving shoulder. "This man's got big feet, Mrs. Simpson. His shoes ain' a bit like your husband's."

"Are you sure?"

"Certain sure, ma'am."

"Thank Heaven!" the frightened woman cried fervently. "It's terrible enough, though, if what you say is true. Call the neighbors, get some man here as quick as you can. I'll dress while you're gone."

The maid ran downstairs on the new errand, and Mrs. Simpson returned to her bedroom. Five minutes later, she left the house by the rear door, wrapped in a long kimono.

The servant's errand had already borne fruit, for, although the girl herself was not in sight, a man in his shirt sleeves and with dangling suspenders was just climbing over the side fence.

"What's this I hear about a dead man, Mrs. Simpson?" he called out, as he caught sight of her. "Your girl wasn't very coherent, but I caught something about the lumber pile in the back yard."

Mrs. Simpson hurried to him and pointed to the pile of boards.

“There it is,” she explained nervously. “Mary says a man is underneath, and I can see that something has been done to the pile since yesterday. That hole wasn’t there then.”

The dog was still keeping up his incessant noise as they approached, and the neighbor found it impossible to drive him away. Mrs. Simpson stopped at some distance, and the man went on.

He, too, stopped and peered into the opening under the pile, but laid his hand on it in order to do so. After a prolonged scrutiny, he straightened up.

“There’s a man under there,” he said soberly. “You had better go to the house, Mrs. Simpson. This is no place for you.”

Confronted by this emergency, however, the fugitive’s wife showed unexpected courage.

“I shall do nothing of the sort,” she said. “The poor fellow may not be dead yet, for all we know, and unless the sight is too terrible, I shall remain to help you. Besides, he’ll have to be brought into the house, anyway, so why shouldn’t I see him now?”

“Of course, if you feel that way about it, Mrs. Simpson, stay, by all means,” the neighbor replied, turning and beginning to throw the boards back.

In half a minute he was joined by a couple of other men, while the maid and several other women appeared. These latter kept at a distance, however, and, in response to their urgings, Mrs. Simpson joined them.

The combined efforts of the men resulted in uncovering Cray’s body in almost no time. The sight that met the rescuers’ gaze was a distressing one, for the detective’s face was battered and bloody, and there did not appear at first to be any life in his big body. One of the men examined him, however, and presently announced that he was still alive.

“I wouldn’t give much for his chances,” he said, shaking his head, “but he isn’t dead, that’s certain. I’ll go for Doctor Lord.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

“THE GREENISH EYES!”

Doctor Lord was a young man, with next to no practice, who had recently moved into one of the new houses on the hill. It was easier, therefore, to go for him in person than to stop to telephone.

In the meantime, the women were reassured and thrilled by the announcement that Cray still lived, and Mrs. Simpson at once took steps to care for him.

She had sent the maid to the house for a basin of warm water and some towels. With these at hand, Mrs. Simpson herself knelt beside the unfortunate man and tenderly wiped the blood from his forehead and face.

Not until then had she recognized him, but when she did so, she gave a great start, and an audible gasp escaped her.

The other women were crowding around then, and her behavior was not lost on them.

“What’s the matter?” they demanded. “Do you actually know him?”

Mrs. Simpson bitterly regretted her display of emotion. Fear seemed to be squeezing her heart with icy fingers. In the background of her mind a foreboding had been lurking for days. Her instincts had told her that there was something strange and sinister about her husband’s disappearance—something which the office had not seen fit to reveal to her.

Now she recalled all of Cray’s strange questions and stranger actions.

“He’s a detective!” she told herself. “I was right. John is in trouble, and this man must have set a trap for him last night. If he dies, John will be his murderer. Oh, how could he do it! And Heaven pity me, how can I stand it!”

She was the soul of honor herself, however, and simply did not know how to lie.

“Yes, I recognize him now,” she admitted reluctantly. “I never saw him until yesterday, though, and I don’t know what he was doing here last night—if he was here. He’s a Mr. Jones from my husband’s office, and he said they had sent

was here. He's a Mr. Jones from my husband's office, and he said they had sent him to see if he could help find Mr. Simpson."

The young doctor arrived at that juncture, and, at his request, Mrs. Simpson repeated the information for his benefit as he worked over Cray.

"You don't know where he lives, then, or anything about his people?"

"No, but they would naturally know about that at the newspaper office, wouldn't they?"

"That's true. You had better telephone there, then—or somebody had. This poor fellow has had a terrible battering. Fortunately his skull is very tough, but though I can't be sure at present, I fear it has been fractured, in spite of that. If so, the outcome is problematical, and he may not recover in any case."

He rose to his feet.

"But the first thing to do is to get him into the house," he declared. "Have you a bed or a couch on the first floor, Mrs. Simpson?"

"Yes, there's a couch, doctor."

"Good! Make that ready for him, then, and we'll bring him right in."

Mrs. Simpson and the maid rushed away to do the young physician's bidding, and several women accompanied them. The men waited for perhaps five minutes, in order to allow time to get the couch in readiness. Then they lifted Cray's inert bulk as carefully as they could and bore it slowly toward the house.

It was no easy task, for the detective weighed close to two hundred pounds, but their united efforts were equal to it, and the unconscious man was soon lying, partially undressed, on the comfortable couch in one of the lower rooms.

A little later, every one had left the house, with the exception of the doctor, who continued to work over Cray for some time.

"I've done all I can at present, Mrs. Simpson," he announced finally. "If you don't mind, though, I'll stay with him for the present, so that I shall be on hand if any change comes."

He paused and smiled frankly.

“You see, I’m not overburdened with practice,” he explained, “and under the circumstances, I’m inclined to make as much out of this case as I can—in the way of experience, I mean.”

That promised to relieve the woman of a great deal of responsibility, and she accepted the suggestion readily enough, although she would have preferred, if possible, that no outsider should have access to the patient.

“I’m afraid you had better telephone to the office, though, before breakfast,” the doctor went on. “As yet, there’s no knowing how this case is going to turn out, and this poor fellow’s friends may live out of New York, in some other direction. In that case, there’s a possibility that it will take hours for them to reach here.”

“I’ll telephone at once,” Mrs. Simpson assured him, “and, meanwhile, Mary will be getting breakfast. You must join me in the dining room, doctor, or let her bring you something here.”

She intended to play the part that had been thrust upon her as well as she could, even though her mind was filled with all sorts of tragic possibilities.

Fortunately there was a telephone in the house, and, after considerable delay, Mrs. Simpson got in touch with the office of the *New York Chronicle and Observer*. To her regret, however, she could find no one who knew anything about an employee by the name of Jones who answered her description.

It was explained, however, that the hour was a very early one, and that the business offices would not be open until eight-thirty.

“This is the editorial department,” the man at the other end assured her, “and we don’t know much about the other branches. I’ll make a note of it, though, and of your telephone number, and have the matter brought to the attention of the general manager when he arrives.”

“I—I think it might be well to inform Mr. Griswold himself,” the woman ventured to suggest. “Mr. Jones told me yesterday that Mr. Griswold had sent him. I don’t know whether he meant it literally or not, but——”

“Well. I’ll do everything I can. Mrs. Simpson.” the editor promised. and with

...
that she had to be content.

Doctor Lord was plainly disappointed at the news, but seemed to have nothing better to suggest.

“It’s pretty early,” he admitted.

Mrs. Simpson finished dressing, and she and the young physician breakfasted together, after which he returned to Cray’s side, while his hostess busied herself with some of her morning duties.

Lord was a practical, unimaginative young man, and therefore, although he was greatly interested in the case from a professional standpoint, he did not waste much time in speculation regarding it. That was for the local authorities to do. He would not have been human, however, had he not pricked up his ears when his patient, after showing various signs of returning life, began to move uneasily, and to mutter.

The doctor was able to make out two names, which were repeated over and over again.

The names were “Gordon” and “Nick Carter.”

“Nick Carter!” muttered the listener. “That’s queer! That must be the well-known New York detective. What the dickens has this fellow got to do with him, though, unless he has done something wrong, and Carter is after him?”

Then he remembered the rumors that were flying all about in the neighborhood—rumors which hinted that there was something queer about John Simpson’s unexplained absence.

“This is getting interesting!” Doctor Lord told himself meditatively.

“Nick Carter!” Cray muttered again, and this time he added: “The eyes—the greenish eyes!”

CHAPTER XXX.

MRS. SIMPSON LEARNS THE TRUTH.

Lane A. Griswold's big car hummed softly to itself as it climbed the hill from the village of New Pelham, and stopped in front of No. 31 Floral Avenue.

The millionaire newspaper proprietor was on a strange errand, and his expression showed that he realized it.

Although he was frequently absent from his luxurious suite of private offices in the *Chronicle and Observer* building for weeks at a time, he had walked in that morning promptly at nine o'clock, instead of ten or eleven, as was his usual habit when in town.

Five minutes later, he was in possession of such facts as his general manager and the editor could give him concerning Mrs. Simpson's phone message. The manager, of course, informed him that no such person was employed in the building, but the description had set Griswold to thinking.

"I'll call her up myself," was the unexpected announcement which had sent his subordinates about their business. The connection was quickly made, but the conversation which had ensued was very brief.

Mrs. Simpson described Jones' visit of the day before in a very few words, and then told of the finding of the injured man. Griswold wanted to ask her to describe the latter once more for his benefit, but refrained, thinking the request might seem rather strange.

"I see," he answered, instead. "I think I had better come up to the house myself, Mrs. Simpson. I shall start at once, and ought to be there in an hour, I should say."

Less than that time had been required for the trip, and now the millionaire stepped out of the car and approached the house, looking about him rather critically as he did so.

He had not always been wealthy, and he knew that No. 31 Floral Avenue, though insignificant enough from his present standpoint, was not the sort of

place that a man dependent on the salary of the size of John Simpson's was able to afford. Accordingly, therefore, he came to the same conclusion that Jack Cray had reached the previous day.

"By Heaven!" he muttered, the skin under his jaws tightening. "The fellow must have been helping himself from the fund before he decamped. What a fool he is! What fools they always are to make a big showing on nothing. Don't they know what a telltale performance it is?" Then he smiled a little grimly and shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose, though, it's natural that they should want to find some outlet for the money they've sold their souls for," he added mentally, as he pressed the button of the electric bell.

The maid presently opened the door, and Griswold gave his name. He was ushered into the same room in which Cray had been conducted less than twenty-four hours before, and in hardly more than a minute Mrs. Simpson joined him.

Griswold looked at her with a touch of curiosity, for to him the members of his staff had always been little more than the cogs in the great machine that he drove, and it was rather hard for him to think of them in any intimately human relationship.

As soon as their first formal greetings were over, he came to the point at once.

"I'm very much interested—after a fashion—in this man Jones, Mrs. Simpson. Are you sure you made no mistake in the name?"

"Quite, Mr. Griswold," the missing treasurer's wife replied positively. "That's certainly the name he gave me yesterday. He said you had sent him, too. He asked me all sorts of questions about Mr. Simpson and the house and myself—very strange questions, some of them. He even requested me to show him about the place. I do hope——"

Lane Griswold held up one carefully manicured hand.

"It's all right, I think, Mrs. Simpson," he hastened to assure her. "If he's the man I think he is, he was quite justified in saying I sent him. Apparently, however, he didn't choose to give his own name, which seems to have been a rather useless and unlooked-for performance. Describe him, please."

The woman did so, and Griswold nodded once or twice during the description.

“That’s the man,” he admitted. “The name has caused some confusion, however, and the rest was due to the fact that he isn’t regularly employed at the office, but works for me personally.”

He was studying Mrs. Simpson’s face intently, and trying to decide whether it were worth while to continue the deception or not. Surely, if she had any intelligence, she must have suspected long before that there was something very queer about her husband’s disappearance. Still, so long as she did not insist upon the truth, he thought it best not to be too definite.

“I hope Mr.—er—Jones isn’t badly injured?” he said.

“He’s still unconscious, sir, and the doctor seems to be afraid that his skull may be fractured. If he has any relatives, Doctor Lord thinks that they should be notified at once.”

“I know nothing about his family affairs,” Griswold said, a trifle impatiently. “My impression is that he’s alone in the world, but I may be mistaken. May I see him?”

“Of course. He’s here on the first floor. They did not wait to take him upstairs. This way, please, Mr. Griswold.”

And she led the way to the room in which the battered detective lay, drawing back, however, at the threshold. The young doctor was still there, largely, perhaps, for want of something better to do.

Mrs. Simpson had said that the patient was unconscious, thereby giving Griswold a somewhat mistaken idea. Certainly Cray had not returned to normal consciousness, but he was by no means in the motionless stupor the newspaper proprietor had looked for. If his informant had told him that Jack was delirious, he would have been better prepared.

Nick’s burly friend was tossing restlessly to and fro—at least, his head and arms were—and just as Griswold came to a halt and looked down at him, he uttered two words which had come frequently to his lips that morning.

“Nick Carter,” he muttered, in a somewhat muffled, but perfectly distinct voice.

“He has been repeating that name at intervals for hours,” the young doctor remarked. “It must be the detective, don’t you suppose?”

remarked. "It must be the detective, don't you suppose?"

Griswold was under the impression that Mrs. Simpson had withdrawn, but even that did not entirely explain the slip that followed. He who had desired secrecy above all things must have forgotten himself for the time being.

"Yes, it's the detective," he answered in a matter-of-fact tone. "This man is himself a detective, and they were working together on——"

He stopped abruptly as a cry from the doorway reached him. Mrs. Simpson had heard what he said.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MILLIONAIRE PLAYS SLEUTH.

As we have seen, the missing man's wife had always had an uncomfortable feeling that all was not as it should be. Her husband had not been himself for some time before his disappearance, and the sudden fit of extravagance which had led him to take the new house on such short notice, and to talk about buying a car, had aroused suspicions, which she had loyally tried to tread under foot.

Naturally, therefore, his actual flight, and the strange attitude of those connected with the newspaper—their unwillingness to have her go to the police, for instance—had worried her greatly, although she had succeeded again and again in arguing herself into a belief that there was some other explanation.

Now, after hearing Lane Griswold's unguarded statement, there was no longer any room for doubt in her mind. She staggered forward half blindly, and, forgetting the doctor, or ignoring him, she laid both trembling hands on Griswold's sleeve.

"My—my husband!" she stammered. "Then he—took——"

The newspaper proprietor lowered his head.

"Yes," he answered soberly. "I've tried to keep the truth from you as long as I could, Mrs. Simpson. I thought you were out of earshot. You must try to bear up under it. If I had had any intention of prosecuting Simpson for making away with the relief fund he was handling, this whole affair would not have been conducted with any such secrecy. I have hired private detectives to investigate, because I wished to keep things quiet, in order that the reputation of the *Chronicle and Observer* might not be tarnished."

"Then, if they catch John, he'll not be arrested? Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly," he answered. "I must confess, Mrs. Simpson, that I shall not approve in every way of such an outcome. I believe in just punishment. As it happens, however, we're not in a position to punish your husband without starting a lot of injurious gossip about the way we handle public contributions. Therefore, when Simpson is found, he'll merely be forced to disgorge. His discharge is already

awaiting him on his desk, of course. Beyond that, I shall do nothing.”

As may be imagined, Mrs. Simpson’s emotions were chaotic. Her horror at the certainty of her husband’s crime had been succeeded by loving anguish, as she pictured his arrest and punishment. Now she was greatly relieved to hear that there was no danger of this; but, on the other hand, her heart bled as she realized what it would necessarily mean to them both, at best. He was no longer a young man, and had been able to save very little. His disgrace and the loss of his position would almost certainly age him greatly, perhaps cause a complete breakdown. Nothing but misery seemed in prospect.

“I—I thank you, but I’m in—in no condition to remain!” the poor woman sobbed, and, turning on her heel, precipitately left the room and fled upstairs.

Griswold and the doctor exchanged glances. The former was as sorry for Mrs. Simpson as he could be in his own way.

“You’ll treat this as strictly confidential, I’m sure,” the millionaire said. “You must see the importance of secrecy to us, and so long as there can be no prosecution, there’s no use in making that poor woman’s life more of a burden to her than is unavoidable. There’ll be a lot of gossip here, anyway, I suppose, but we must do all we can to minimize it.”

“I agree with you perfectly, sir, and you may count on me,” Doctor Lord declared sincerely.

“Thank you. Now, tell me, please, what you make of this man’s injuries, and what you know of the circumstances?”

The doctor’s reply was a rather lengthy one.

“There must have been several blows, and they were very severe,” he concluded. “I should say that they were delivered by a man of unusual strength.”

“That’s interesting,” Griswold said, with a change of expression. “You don’t believe, then, that a man of slight build, who had spent practically all of his life in an office, could have perpetrated the assault?”

Doctor Lord shook his head emphatically. “That’s extremely unlikely,” he replied. “In fact, I venture to say that it’s quite impossible.”

“Then, it’s hard to explain,” Griswold muttered. “Apparently Cray found some reason to hang about here last night, presumably to catch Simpson, or to recover the missing gold. If he was knocked out by an unusually powerful man, the only reasonable conclusion, it seems to me, is that the fellow in question must have been an accomplice of Simpson’s.”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“That’s the way it looks to me offhand,” he answered. “I don’t pretend to be a detective, though.”

“Neither do I. Such problems interest me, though. Can you tell me where the phone is?”

The doctor informed him, and Griswold left the room in search of it. After a little more delay than usual, owing to its being a suburban call, the millionaire was connected with Nick Carter’s house in New York. He was informed, however, that the detective had left there shortly after seven o’clock the evening before, and had not yet returned. Furthermore, nothing had been heard from him.

This information was a great disappointment to Griswold, for he had hoped to get in touch with Nick at once.

“Very likely he has gone to Hattontown,” he decided. “If both of them had been watching this place, Cray would hardly have got the worst of it to such an extent, and would certainly not have been left to be found by accident—unless there’s a whole gang involved. In that case, Carter himself must have met with foul play. But it doesn’t seem likely that Simpson could have enlisted any strong-arm assistance.”

He reëntered the room where Doctor Lord was.

“I think I’ll have a look around myself,” he announced. “Will you tell me just where this man was found?”

Three minutes later, he approached the pile of lumber, having quietly left the house by the front door and walked around by way of the graveled drive.

He was looking for signs of a struggle, but had found none. The arrangement of the lumber had been changed when the boards had been hastily thrown from on top of Cray’s farm, and the ground had been badly trodden by the rescuers.

top of Gray's tomb, and the soil had been badly trodden by the rescuers.

Having decided that he was not capable of reading the signs there, if there were any to be read, the newspaper proprietor stepped rather aimlessly toward the little garage. Passing around it, he tried the door, and found it locked. While he was tugging at it, however, a sound came to his ears from within, and he paused abruptly, holding his breath.

“What was that?” he thought.

CHAPTER XXXII. SIMPSON IS FOUND.

The sound was a curious, muffled groan, and in a moment it was repeated.

“Good heavens!” the thought flashed through Griswold’s mind. “What if Carter has been injured, too, and locked in here?”

For perhaps half a minute the newspaper proprietor hesitated, as any man might have done under the circumstances, then he called out in a guarded tone:

“Is that you, Carter?”

There was no answer in words, but he heard another groan—or, rather, a prolonged and incoherent sound, which suggested a tongueless man’s efforts at speech.

“He’s probably injured or gagged,” Griswold concluded. “I mustn’t waste any time.”

He pressed against the sliding door some distance below the lock, and found that it gave quite a little. That discovery encouraged him, and, running around the garage, he approached the pile of lumber, and snatched up one of the boards.

It was twenty feet or more in length, and about six or eight inches in width.

Returning as rapidly as he could, he pressed the door with his hand, and inserted one end of the board in the opening thus made, after which he began to pry at the door. The length of the board made it unwieldy and inclined to bend, but Griswold soon remedied that by pushing in several feet of the board, and then deliberately breaking it off.

He thereupon threw the larger piece aside, and, using the smaller, which was now wedged in the door, he drew it out for some distance, and then repeated his prying operations.

This new weapon was much more convenient and less inclined to bend. In fact, it proved to be unexpectedly sturdy, and, after repeated attempts, into which he threw all his strength, the millionaire presently succeeded in breaking the lock

unwieldy as his strength, the millionaire presently succeeded in breaking the lock.

The door was then quickly pushed back, and Griswold peered into the interior of the garage. The place was comparatively dark at first, in comparison with the bright sunlight outside, but a further shove at the door let in more light, and revealed a figure propped up against the lower wall. There was a gag in its mouth, its hands were evidently tied behind its back, its ankles were bound, and a closer scrutiny revealed that, in addition, it was tied to the wall in some way so that it could not budge from its place.

Almost immediately Griswold saw that it was not Nick Carter—or, rather, the man whom he supposed to be Nick Carter. As he strode forward, however, with an exclamation of pity, he did not recognize the unfortunate, the lower part of whose face was obscured by the handkerchief which was used as a gag.

It was not until this was removed that recognition came, and when it did, Griswold started back in amazement.

“Simpson!” he cried. “What on earth are you doing here?”

The man tried to speak, but seemed unable to articulate. Probably his throat and tongue were too dry from disuse, and very likely the tongue and lips were swollen as well.

Griswold saw the difficulty, and did not repeat his question just then. Instead, he proceeded rapidly to cut the cords which bound Simpson to the wall, and also to sever the bonds about the ankles.

The body sagged to one side from weakness, and when the millionaire turned it over to get at the wrists, he found them encircled by handcuffs, instead of ropes.

“Great Scott!” he muttered. “This is certainly a strange state of affairs.”

It looked as if Simpson had been caught by Cray—or perhaps by Cray and Nick Carter together—and that subsequently the detective had been set upon by others. That would account for Cray’s condition, and it might be that Nick had been carried off. Had the prisoner been locked in the garage, however, before that attack had taken place? If not, it seemed hard to explain, unless the mysterious assailants had not been accomplices of his at all, but had worked independently.

The newspaper proprietor propped Simpson up again, none too gently.

“I can’t get these handcuffs off,” he said. “Speak, man, as soon as you can, and tell me what happened? Where’s the money?”

John Simpson looked about him as if he did not quite understand. As a matter of fact, his experiences had left his faculties more or less benumbed for the time being.

Griswold had to repeat his question in a more peremptory tone.

“The money is gone,” Simpson managed to say at last, after several futile efforts and much moistening of the lips. “I—I had it here.”

“Go on, go on!” Griswold urged, bending eagerly, with clenched hands.

“I had come in the car to carry it away to—to a new hiding place I had found,” the absconding treasurer explained with difficulty. “It was all in the car—two suit cases full of it—when a couple of fellows pounced on me.”

“Two, eh?”

“Yes, one was rather tall and very broad and powerful——”

“Cray!” put in Griswold.

“Yes, he told me that after I was handcuffed,” Simpson agreed, “and he said the other man was Nick Carter.”

“So Carter was here? I wonder what’s happened to him? When did the others butt in, Simpson, and who were they?”

The handcuffed man looked up at him in bewilderment.

“I don’t know anything about any others,” he declared, with evident sincerity.

“But there must have been others. Cray was found outside here this morning, with his head nearly mashed in. Didn’t you hear anything after they shut you up. You didn’t go to sleep right away, did you, after that sort of thing? Did you have any accomplice?”

The treasurer shook his head in a dazed sort of way. “Nobody else had any hand in what I did, Mr. Griswold,” he said. “As for falling asleep, I guess you wouldn’t have done that very quickly if you had been in my place. I did doze off after daylight, but that was all.”

There could be no doubt that he was telling the truth. “Probably you were in a deep, exhausted sleep when they found Cray,” he said. “The yard seems to have been full of people then.”

“I did hear a dog barking,” Simpson admitted finally. “It partially aroused me, but I dropped off again. Maybe that was the time.”

“Then you haven’t the slightest idea of what happened after you were locked up here?” persisted Griswold.

“Why, I guess I could explain that,” the thief replied slowly, as if he were just beginning to realize what it all meant. “It must have been Nick Carter who——”

“Who did what?”

“Who put the other fellow out of business.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SUSPICION FALLS ON NICK.

“For the love of Heaven!” exclaimed Lane Griswold, in a shocked voice. “You are crazy, Simpson, or lying! Do you actually mean to charge Carter, who is one of the greatest detectives we have in this country, and a man who is absolutely above suspicion in every way, with having turned on his friend and associate, Cray, and then made off with the money?”

Simpson’s air was one of injury. “I’m not crazy, and I’m not lying,” he answered. “I’m telling you, or am ready to tell you, just what I know, and all I know. You’ve got me where you want me. Is it likely that I’d do anything to get in deeper than I am?”

“Then, tell me about it—everything.”

“Well, it isn’t much, and I didn’t actually see anything. I heard things, though—more than I was intended to, I guess. They tied me up here, and then, while Carter was looking at the money in the suit cases which I had already got in the car, Cray dug over there to make sure that there wasn’t any of it still buried. When he got through, Carter called him to come out, saying that he had something to tell him that he didn’t want me to hear.”

“Where was Carter then?”

“He wasn’t in sight. He had stepped to the corner out there, just back of where the car was. You can see that he could not have been many feet from here, so it was easy enough for me to hear things.”

“Well?”

“Well, Cray went out, leaving the door open behind him. The next thing I knew, I heard a queer sort of dull thud, and pricked up my ears. It sounded as if somebody had been hit, perhaps with a fist, or, more likely, with something else.

“Of course, I didn’t know then which man had done it, but I suspected that Carter had, because he had called Cray out. The blow must have given Cray something to think about, for there was a pause before I heard him say ‘Mr.

Carter!’—just like that. He said it as if his best friend had turned on him, and he didn’t know what to make of it. I guess Carter must have tried to hit him again right away, for they had a little tussle. It did not amount to much, because, as I figured it out, Cray must have got a pretty nasty blow that first time, and there wasn’t very much fight in him. He must have done something, however, for the other fellow snarled, ‘Curse you; take that, then!’ and rapped him again, as I could tell by the sound. Still Cray was not down and out. They clinched, apparently, and then Cray muttered something, or whispered it in a hoarse sort of whisper. I couldn’t hear all of it, but it was something about ‘green-eyed.’ That seemed to make Carter more furious than ever, so far as I could tell. He cursed Cray some more, and seemed to strike him again and again. That was the end of it. Carter locked me in then, and I think he dragged Cray around the garage before he drove off.”

Lane Griswold had been listening with all his ears throughout this recital, his face the picture of amazement and incredulity. Incidentally, his keen eyes seemed to search Simpson’s very soul.

The man was a thief, and might easily be a liar as well. What possible motive could he have for lying, however? The millionaire could think of only one, and that seemed far-fetched. It was conceivable, of course, that, despite all the probabilities, John Simpson might have had one or more confederates who had struck down Cray, and carried the loot off to some new place of concealment. In that case, the treasurer’s story might be made up out of whole cloth.

But after a brief mental consideration of this, the millionaire rejected the theory. If Simpson had had any one to help him, surely he would not have remained tied up there in a locked garage to starve, or be caught by those who were searching for him.

Even if he had actually been surprised and handcuffed by Cray before the arrival of his friends, the latter would not have left him there to such an uncertain fate. After giving the detective his quietus, they would have carried Simpson off with them, handcuffs and all, and found a means of releasing him later on.

No, the man must be telling the truth. He had suffered great hardships, and he was face to face with the employer he had defrauded. Surely, he was not the sort of man to lie under such circumstances, especially after having confessed to hiding the money under the earthen floor of the garage.

But if he had told the truth, and had not misinterpreted what he heard—which seemed unlikely—what could it possibly mean, except that the sight of so much gold had proved too much for the great detective, and that he had turned criminal.

Griswold faced the possibility very reluctantly, but he felt obliged to face it. In fact, the more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that it was the one and only solution.

As a newspaper proprietor, he knew a great deal about the seamy side of life, and was the custodian of many discreditable secrets which for one reason or another had never been allowed to see the light of print. He did not need any one to tell him that all is not gold that glitters, or that a man is necessarily straight in every respect because he has never been found out in any wrongdoing, and has always enjoyed the best of reputations.

As far as that went, this might not be Carter's first fall from grace. The detective was undoubtedly an extraordinarily clever man, and was said to be wealthy. Might it not be that he had contrived for years to deceive his clients, and fatten his bank account at their expense?

The thought made Griswold gasp, but at the same time it caused his heart to race with excitement.

What a beat it would be if his papers could announce exclusively that Nick Carter, one of America's greatest detectives, and the so-called "archenemy of criminals," was in reality a master criminal himself! It would cause a sensation, the like of which had never been known.

Of course, Griswold confided none of this to the man before him. Instead, with the instinct of the reporter, which had never deserted him since his early days of struggle, he surprised Simpson with a question.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked.

The thieving treasurer's mind had reverted to his own troubles, and it was with some difficulty that he pulled himself together sufficiently to answer.

"Why, I—I hardly know what to think, Mr. Griswold," he replied. "It's pretty hard to reconcile that sort of thing with what I've always heard and read about

Nick Carter, but I have to believe my own ears, don't I? The money seems to have looked good to Carter, just as it did to me, but that wasn't all of it, I'm sure."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm thinking about that whisper of the other fellow's," Simpson explained. "I told you, remember, that he said something about 'green-eyed.' We use that expression in only one connection, don't we, in speaking of 'green-eyed jealousy?' Don't that look as if Cray was accusing Carter of turning on him because he was jealous of him for some reason?"

Griswold was impressed. "That sounds plausible enough," he admitted.

He was unconsciously allowing himself to be led still further astray, and it began to look as if the outcome might be decidedly unpleasant for the great detective, for the owner of a chain of great newspapers is not an accuser who can be ignored or despised.

CHAPTER XXXIV. GRISWOLD IN COMMAND.

The millionaire remained lost in thought for a few moments longer, then grasped Simpson firmly by the arm.

“Come into the house,” he ordered.

“But—but these, sir!” his former subordinate stammered, nodding over his shoulder, and moving his hands so that the chain of the handcuffs rattled.

For the moment Griswold had forgotten his desire for secrecy. To be sure, if he could expose Nick, he would be willing to have all the facts come out, but he knew that he would have to be very sure of himself and his facts before publishing any such charge against a man of the detective’s reputation; consequently, he would have to delay, in the hope that Cray would be able to tell his side of the story, and until then it was desirable that no rumors should be set in motion.

Therefore, he slipped off his motor coat and threw it like a cloak over Simpson’s bowed shoulders.

“Come!” he commanded again.

And with shuffling steps, his head down, John Simpson accompanied him to the house, but went through the kitchen, instead of going around to the front door.

“Thank Heaven!” the maid cried, as she caught sight of her employer. “Mr. Simpson! Is it really you? I must run and tell Mrs. Simpson right this minute!”

“No, no, Mary!” the wretched man protested weakly. “Not—not yet! I wish to surprise her.”

Griswold had not told Simpson that the injured detective was in the house, but now he led the thieving treasurer to the room in which Cray lay. He said nothing about his object, because he wished to see if Simpson would recognize the patient at once.

If he did so without hesitation, and spoke of him as Cray, that would go far to

if he did so without hesitation, and spoke of him as Cray, that would go far to indicate the truth of his story, for if Cray had been struck down under other circumstances, this unexpected sight of him might well cause a momentary confusion.

The spectacle was, indeed, unlooked for, but though surprised, Simpson did not appear to be in the least embarrassed.

“Yes, that’s the fellow who called himself Cray,” he said, with a nod. “He was the one that jumped on me first, and the other, Carter, gagged me. He certainly seems to be in pretty bad shape.”

The doctor looked at him in the greatest surprise. He had never met Simpson, for the latter had moved to the hill very recently. He knew him by sight, however.

“You may or may not know that this is John Simpson himself, Doctor Lord,” the newspaper proprietor said brusquely. “I found him locked up in the garage just now. I’ll make it worth your while, however, to keep a discreet tongue in your head.”

The young physician’s shoulders went back proudly.

“I accept remuneration for professional services only, Mr. Griswold,” he said crisply. “I hope I can be trusted not to blab anything I may learn while attending a case.”

“I meant no offense, I assure you, doctor,” Griswold hastened to say. “I merely _____”

“Wished to remind me of something you should have taken for granted,” the doctor cut in. “Please say no more about it, though.”

Then Lane Griswold did another unexpected thing. He held out his hand with an apologetic smile, and, after a moment’s hesitation, Doctor Lord gripped it firmly.

A moment later Griswold led Simpson into another room and closed the door.

“Look here, Simpson,” he said, without preliminaries, “I’ve been grievously disappointed in you, but we’ll let that pass. I’m done with you, and your dismissal is waiting for you at the office. I want to hear no excuses. As for

prosecution, however, you have doubtless counted on immunity from that, and I regret to say that you haven't counted in vain—unless this new complication makes it worth while to air the whole thing for the sake of a supreme newspaper sensation. For your wife's sake, I'll let you know about that as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I shall see that you are under observation all the time. You can't get away, for I may want you locked up. If I don't, you'll soon be free to do what you please and go where you please."

"I—yes, sir," was all Simpson was able to say, and he had to swallow more than once before he could utter those words.

"Now you had better go to your wife."

"But these handcuffs, sir!" Simpson again protested.

"You should have thought of the possibility of such adornments before you made away with that fund," Griswold told him sternly. "Don't imagine that your wife doesn't know what you have been up to, for she does. Still, it isn't her fault, and I would not like to see her needlessly distressed. Perhaps there's a key to the handcuffs in Cray's pockets."

There was, and Simpson was freed from the humiliating shackles before he went upstairs to face his wife.

Griswold watched his halting progress, then sought the young doctor once more.

"It's important that this man should be able to talk as soon as possible—if he's ever going to," he said. "If you desire to consult with any one, no matter what his price, do so, and I'll be responsible. You may also look to me for your fee, and I wish you would get the best of trained nurses you can procure—one whose discretion you can rely upon. While you are with the patient, listen carefully for anything he may say, and make a note of it, whether it seems delirious or not. Request the nurse to do the same, and see that I'm notified by phone as soon as Cray is able to be questioned for five minutes."

"Very well, Mr. Griswold."

"One thing more. If the patient should become lucid at any time, and you or the nurse should have reason to believe that he may lapse into this same condition in a few minutes, ask him just one question and jot down his answer."

“And that question?”

“Ask him who is responsible for his injuries—who struck him down.”

Doctor Lord agreed to do so if the opportunity offered, and, after coming to that understanding, the millionaire reentered his waiting car.

“New York,” he ordered, giving Nick Carter’s address.

CHAPTER XXXV. A TRAP IS SET FOR NICK.

Lane Griswold had telephoned to the detective's house only once, and then had been told that the detective had not returned since the previous evening. It might be, however, that Nick was there by this time.

Nothing in Simpson's story indicated that Nick had met with any mishap, and it was improbable that a man of his daring and resourcefulness would take to his heels at once simply because he had become a thief. It was much more probable that he would return home and bluff it out to the end.

In that case, Griswold hoped to corner him, and, under threat of country-wide exposure, force him to confess—after which an exposure would be likely to follow, anyway.

The millionaire's face was flushed and determined as he strode up the detective's steps and pressed the electric button in peremptory fashion.

Joseph, the butler, opened the door.

"Is Mr. Carter in?" Griswold demanded.

"No, sir," was the prompt reply. "I can't say when he'll be back, either."

"I telephoned from New Pelham a couple of hours ago," Griswold went on. "I was told then that he had left the house last evening, and had not returned. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you know where he is?"

"No, sir. He was going to New Pelham on the seven-thirty train, however."

"He was, eh? That's significant."

He had sized up the butler, and decided that he was telling the truth. If necessary, he would try diplomacy. If he could get hold of Nick's assistants, he told

himself, he might obtain some valuable pointers.

To be sure, if the detective had been playing the wolf-in-sheep's-clothing part for any length of time, it was quite conceivable that his assistants, or some of them, at least, were as bad as he. If this were the first offense, however, it might be possible to get one of his staff to turn against him, and assist in his capture, in the hope of stepping into his shoes.

"I'm Mr. Griswold, the owner of the *Chronicle and Observer*," he told the butler. "Perhaps you'll remember that I was here yesterday with Mr. Cray? I'm very anxious to see Mr. Carter himself, but one of his assistants might do."

"None of them is here now, sir," Joseph told him. "They're all away from the city for one reason or another. Mr. Carter's chief assistant, Mr. Chickering Carter, left for the Adirondacks with him just the other day, and stayed up there when he returned unexpectedly."

"Carter's leading assistant! He would be the best one!" thought Griswold.

Aloud he asked for Chick's address.

"Something has happened," he explained. "Cray has been rather badly injured, and I can't seem to locate Mr. Carter. Under the circumstances, I feel compelled to telegraph for this young man you speak of, or else to call in some outsider."

In view of this explanation, it is not surprising that the butler gave him the desired information, especially as he and Mrs. Peters had been worrying somewhat over Nick's unexplained absence.

Armed with the address, Griswold lost little time in reaching the nearest telegraph office, and in drafting a message to Chick Carter. It read:

"Unusually important case on. Am badly injured. Come at once."

And it was signed "Cray."

He had decided to send it in the injured detective's name, believing that it would have more force than if dispatched by a third party. The absence of any specific directions for finding Cray was intentional. Griswold had neglected to make any inquiries concerning the injured man's relatives, and did not even know where

he lived. He had been to his office, that was all, and he knew that to be a business building.

He did not care to give the New Pelham address, because he hoped to have a very confidential interview with Chick, and he did not care to have it take place under Simpson's roof; therefore, he had decided to say nothing about it, and to meet Chick's train—for he had estimated the time required for the telegram to reach its destination, and could easily look up the trains when he reached his office.

It was then nearly one o'clock in the afternoon, and Chick could not be expected before morning. Meanwhile, Griswold hoped for a summons from New Pelham, but none came.

Growing impatient, he telephoned late in the afternoon, and was informed by the new nurse that there had been no change in Cray's condition, except one for the worse. He had sunken into a deep stupor.

"Hang it all! I hope he isn't going to die," Griswold muttered. "If he does, without recovering consciousness, I may not be able to fasten this thing on Carter, after all, for I'm certain Simpson's testimony would not have any great weight, unless corroborated."

Later, the millionaire called up Cray's office. He did not believe the injured detective had any one to keep the place open during his absence, but he wished to make sure, if possible, whether a message had been received from Chick Carter or not. As he had expected, he found the place closed.

It then occurred to him to return to Nick's house. The detective might have put in an appearance; if not, it was possible that Chick had sent a reply there, trusting that it would reach Cray indirectly.

In this latter respect, his surmise was correct. Nick had not returned, and Joseph's worry had grown. On the other hand, a telegram had arrived for Jack Cray, and Joseph was holding it; not knowing what else to do with it.

Griswold promised to deliver it, and took it in charge. In this way he learned that his guess as to Chick's train was correct. The young detective wired that he would arrive in New York at eight-thirty the following morning.

Nothing developed in the interval and a few minutes before eight-thirty the next

nothing developed in the interval, and a few minutes before eight-thirty the next morning, Griswold took up his position at one of the gates leading to the tracks in the great Forty-second Street terminal.

The train from the Adirondacks arrived at schedule time, and began to disgorge, while the millionaire, who had obtained a description of Chick from the butler, narrowly scanned the faces of the passengers as they hurried through the gate.

The newspaper proprietor did not have to wait long. He soon caught a glimpse of an erect, keen-eyed, athletic young man, striding down the platform, and carrying a heavy suit case, as if it were a featherweight.

“That must be Chick Carter!” he told himself, with a nod of satisfaction.

But the next moment he gave a gasp, and a look of utmost bewilderment spread over his face.

He had caught sight of the man at Chick’s side, and feature for feature it was the man whom Cray had called into consultation—was, in other words, Nick Carter himself!

CHAPTER XXXVI. AT CROSS PURPOSES.

Staggered, his brain reeling under the shock, Lane Griswold was flung clean off his balance.

What was Nick Carter doing here? Had he hidden the money somewhere, and hurried northward to join his assistant, as if nothing had happened?

That must be it, and yet it hardly seemed possible that he could have made the journey in that time. He would have had to leave New York in the dead of night following the robbery, and if he had reached the mountain resort in the far northern part of the State before Chick's departure, there could have been no time to spare. In other words, he must have returned at once with his assistant.

But what nerve to have returned at all, in the face of such a message from the man who had been half killed by him!

The detective could not know that the telegram had not been written or dictated by his victim, and therefore, must expect to have to face Cray.

It was incomprehensible, and yet there was Nick, beyond a doubt, and more than that, he was looking as fresh and buoyant as possible.

A policeman brushed past Griswold, and, with a quick movement, the latter touched the officer on the arm. He would have Nick arrested, and then——

“Yes, sir?” the bluecoat asked civilly.

“That man!” the millionaire answered hoarsely, pointing toward the approaching detective. “I must ask you to——”

Then something stopped him. He remembered that he did not have enough evidence as yet, and that it would be very unwise to press matters, unless he were reasonably sure of proving his charges.

“I—I'm mistaken!” he added confusedly.

The policeman looked at him for a moment in disgust, then turned away with a

THE policeman looked at him for a moment in disgust, then turned away with a shrug of his shoulders, muttering something under his breath.

Undecided, his thoughts in a turmoil, the newspaper proprietor stood aside and allowed Chick and his companion to pass him. They had gone hardly more than ten paces, however, before he suddenly made up his mind to follow and have it out with the detective at once.

He feared that it was a very foolish thing to do, under the circumstances, especially as Chick might be in the secret as well; nevertheless, he counted on his wealth and prominence to stay their hands, no matter how hostile they might be.

Just how he meant to proceed, he did not have the slightest idea as yet, but impulse flung him after the pair, and he overtook them just as they were about to step into a taxi.

“Mr. Carter!” he said sharply.

Both men turned.

“That’s my name,” the older man replied, looking the millionaire over coolly, as if he had never seen him before in his life.

The scrutiny had not gone far, however, before a look of recognition sprang into Nick’s eyes.

“Ah!” he went on. “Mr. Griswold, is it not?”

“You ought to know,” was the significant reply. “I called on you yesterday, in company with Cray, and it was that which took you to New Pelham night before last.”

Nick looked from the newspaper proprietor to his assistant, and back to Griswold again.

“There seems to be a very strange misunderstanding here, Mr. Griswold,” he said. “I have just returned from the Adirondacks, where we were enjoying a little vacation. Chick, here, received a telegram from my old friend, Jack Cray, stating that the latter had been seriously injured in connection with an important case, and asking that Chick return to New York at once. I did not understand why the

wire hadn't been sent to me, but, of course, I decided to accompany my assistant. If you know anything about Cray's condition, I wish you would tell me."

The dignified, commanding Lane Griswold looked at the detective in a half-dazed manner, and his lower jaw showed a tendency to drop.

"You are the coolest proposition I ever expect to see, Carter!" he said, with grudging admiration.

It was clear that something extraordinary was in the air, and Nick acted accordingly.

"I don't know in the least what you are hinting at, Mr. Griswold," he said, "and this is hardly the place for explanations. Will you do us the honor of sharing our taxi with us? Perhaps we can come to some understanding on the way home."

Certainly, there did not seem to be anything menacing in his attitude, and in that of the younger detective at his side. Both appeared to be genuinely mystified. Griswold attributed it to good acting, nothing more, but after a few moments' hesitation, he decided to accept the offer.

They would hardly dare attack him in a cab in broad daylight, and he need not enter the detective's house, if he did not choose to do so, when they reached their destination. Accordingly, he bowed, and, in response to Nick's gesture, stepped into the taxi, after which the others followed.

"Now, you'll greatly oblige us, Mr. Griswold, by explaining what you are driving at," Nick said, with courteous firmness.

The millionaire was a little too impetuous now and then, and this was one of the occasions. His reason told him that he had been misled in some unaccountable way, and that this was the real Nick Carter, but reason spoke in a very small whisper, and he did not choose to listen—in fact, he hardly heard it.

He had kept his rage and sense of injury bottled up, thus far, but now it exploded.

"I'm driving at just this, Carter," he said hotly. "You are found out—the game is up! I don't know whether this is the first time temptation has been too much for you, or not, but I have you where I want you, you thief! Your spectacular career

is at an end. My papers have a circulation well into the millions, you know, and as soon as I say the word, the greatest broadside of publicity that was ever fired will be hurled at your crime of the night before last! Oh, you need not glower at me! I'm not in the least afraid of you, and what I say, I mean, as you will learn to your cost."

Any one who knew Nick Carter well would have seen that he was growing dangerously warm, but the increasing tension was much more noticeable in Chick.

That young man wore his "fighting face," and was bending forward longingly, with twitching hands on his knees.

Nick, seeing his assistant's attitude and look, laid a restraining hand on Chick's arm.

"Easy there, my boy!" he murmured, then turned again to Griswold.

"I fear you are a little hasty, and will soon regret it, Mr. Griswold," he said as quietly as he could. "If I were not sure of your identity, and inclined to believe that you are laboring under a very serious misapprehension, I should not be so patient. I have been in the Adirondacks for several days, and know nothing whatever of the circumstances to which you allude."

"You lie!" replied the millionaire, his face purple. "You went to the Adirondacks several days ago with your assistant, but you came back alone. I have your own butler's word for that. What's more, I saw you with my own eyes yesterday at your home, whither Cray took me."

Again Nick and his lieutenant exchanged glances. It was beginning to look more and more serious. Had Nick not recognized the newspaper proprietor at once, they might have supposed the man to be irresponsible, despite his references to Cray, but that explanation seemed out of the question in Griswold's case.

Yet, the alternative appeared to be just as far beyond belief.

Had some one passed himself off as the detective under any ordinary circumstances, it would have been easy enough to believe, for such things had happened often enough in the past. The millionaire's statements, however, seemed to imply that some person had been passing as the detective in his own

house, and had done so in such a skillful and thoroughgoing way that not only the servants, but even Jack Cray, had been completely deceived.

It was unbelievable, and yet what else were they to think?

Chick had often seen the skin over his chief's jaw and knuckles tighten ominously, but he never remembered such a set, tense look as this one.

Nick was beginning to realize that something unparalleled had happened—something which struck directly at his honor and prestige—and he was rising to the emergency.

CHAPTER XXXVII. GRISWOLD STILL DOUBTFUL.

The detective leaned forward in the taxi, and held Griswold's eyes commandingly.

"That's about enough of that, Griswold," he said, with ominous quiet. "I would advise you to restrain yourself. I'm not accustomed to being approached in this way, and I've endured it thus far only because I've made allowance for your obvious excitement. I supposed that a man in your position would be sufficiently informed concerning me and my work to have no such illusions, and sufficiently in command of himself to conquer such heated impulse. A moment's reflection ought to convince you that my presence up the State for the last few days can easily be verified.

"And now, if you'll come to your senses, I shall be more than eager to hear what you have to say about this extraordinary experience of yours. First, though, tell me how seriously my friend is injured."

During this speech, and for some moments afterward, the millionaire newspaper man continued to gaze at the detective as if he were trying to pierce his very soul, and when he withdrew his gaze at length, it was only to shift it to Chick.

"You almost persuade me," he told Nick at last. "Either I've been dreaming, though, or I'm dreaming now. This is the most amazing thing that has ever occurred in my experience. I want to believe in you, Carter, I assure you. I have all along, and it was only with the greatest reluctance that I accepted the conclusion which seemed forced upon me by circumstances which I could not question."

He paused for a moment, and then launched into an account of his reasons for visiting Cray, the latter's suggestion that they should call upon Nick Carter and seek his aid, the interview in the detective's study, and so on.

"I can't see any difference," he declared. "So far as I can tell, you are the same man I talked with there, and don't forget that Cray himself was evidently convinced that he was talking with you. Later, you—or the man I took to be you

—phoned me and asked further particulars concerning Simpson. I hoped for speedy results, of course, with the case in such hands, but I heard nothing more until the next morning, when I was informed that a man named Jones, who had represented himself as connected with the *Chronicle and Observer* office, had been seriously injured in New Pelham. The description suggested Cray, and I hastened up into Westchester County. I found that it was Cray, and learned that he had been muttering your name. He had been repeatedly struck on the head with some blunt instrument, and the doctor feared a fracture. He had not really been conscious, though, and hasn't been yet, to the best of my knowledge.

“I questioned Mrs. Simpson and the doctor, and learned that Cray had been found in the back yard near one of those little portable garages. Curiosity sent me out there, and, hearing a sort of groan, I broke into the garage, and, to my amazement, found Simpson himself bound and gagged.”

He then went on to repeat the treasurer's story of his capture, and the unseen conflict that had taken place between Cray and his companion—the man whom Jack had referred to as Nick Carter.

Incidentally, he referred to the term “green-eyed,” which Simpson had overheard.

“Now, that's pretty strong circumstantial evidence, isn't it?” he demanded at the conclusion. “If you are really Nick Carter, and can prove that you haven't been in New York for days, no one will rejoice more sincerely than I—although it would cheat me out of a tremendous news sensation. Frankly, though, I still find it almost impossible to believe you, despite your attitude and your appearance of sincerity. How could your own servants have been deceived? How could any one have lived in your house for days without betraying himself in some way? How could Cray, a detective himself, and an old friend, have been so blind?”

Nick and his assistant had listened to the story with growing interest and excitement. More than once they had exchanged meaning glances, but when Griswold mentioned the compound word which had been part of Cray's last startled whisper, the faces they turned to each other were a study.

It seemed impossible for them to keep silence any longer, but they managed to do so until the millionaire had finished.

“The ‘dead’ have come to life more than once, you know, in our experience,”

Nick said softly, looking at his assistant.

Chick nodded. "Yes, that must be it, I suppose," he agreed. "I was thinking all along that I knew of no one else who would possibly have turned such a trick, and when it came to that 'green-eyed' business——"

"There wasn't much room left for doubt," Nick supplied.

"What in thunder are you two talking about?" Griswold broke in.

"Have you ever heard of Ernest Gordon, familiarly known as Green-eye Gordon?" the detective asked him.

"Of course. I read my newspapers more carefully than any one else does. Good heavens! Is it possible that you think Gordon could have impersonated you?"

Nick nodded.

"That's precisely what I feel obliged to think," he answered.

"But—but Gordon is in prison, isn't he? No, by Heaven, he's dead! I had forgotten for the moment, but he died in that fire up at Dannemora a short time ago. Don't you remember?"

"That was the report," Nick admitted readily, "and naturally I accepted it at the time, as every one else did. This astounding information you have just given me, however, puts a very different face on the matter. I believe Gordon would have been capable of that sort of thing—in fact, I have evidence of similar stunts pulled off by him in the past. Furthermore, I know of no one else with a criminal record who would have been capable of such a performance—and no one without a long criminal experience would have dared do such a thing. Finally, we have Simpson's testimony, which seems plain enough to me. When Cray was first attacked, he naturally assumed that his assailant was I, and he spoke my name in dazed incredulity. The next moment, however, overwhelming doubt would naturally have assailed him, and, under the influence of that, he must have obtained a closer glimpse in some way. Or it may be that the scoundrel betrayed himself unconsciously. Jack was about all in by that time, but he had strength enough to whisper his enemy's name. He wasn't talking about green-eyed jealousy, you may be sure, but about Green-eye Gordon!"

"Very ingenious," Griswold admitted doubtfully.

very ingenious, GHSWOLD admitted doubtfully.

“How could such a mistake have been made at the prison, however? The report of Gordon’s death has never been corrected.”

“Probably because its inaccuracy has never been discovered,” Nick told him. “A convict was burned unrecognizably, and the remains were identified only by the number on the coat. Another convict escaped and hasn’t been recaptured. Isn’t it easy enough to believe that a man of Gordon’s stamp might have seen a fellow prisoner succumb to the choking fumes, and, under cover of the excitement, might have managed to exchange coats without being discovered?”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NICK DISCOVERS HIS LOSS.

“By George!” ejaculated Lane Griswold.

He was beginning to see light.

“Is this Gordon of the same height and build as yourself?” he asked eagerly a moment later.

“Quite near enough for the purpose, as I recall,” Nick replied. “More than that, he’s a master of make-up, and would have had very little trouble in copying my features. His eyes are light, nondescript, to be sure, but——”

“Then I don’t see how it would have been possible for him to have fooled everybody in that fashion,” the millionaire objected.

“The human eye is far from perfect, Mr. Griswold,” Nick reminded him. “Besides, we have to allow always for the action of the mind behind it—that mind which interprets everything it sees. In short, we generally see what we expect to see. Such a successful masquerade appears little short of miraculous to one who isn’t a special student of such things, but it’s far from an impossibility. My butler and housekeeper, and Cray himself, had no reason to suppose that it was not I they were seeing; therefore, as I had been a familiar sight to them for years, they would never have thought of examining the masquerader. They merely gave him fleeting glances, and as those glances did not detect any glaring defect, that was all there was to it.”

Nick paused and smiled.

“Well, are you as sure as ever that I’m a rascal?” he asked.

The newspaper proprietor held out his hand with an embarrassed air.

“I’m afraid you’ll never forgive me, Mr. Carter, for making such an accusation,” he said apologetically. “You may be sure I shall never forgive myself. I ought to have known better, of course, and I’m very much ashamed that I didn’t.”

“Say no more, please!” the detective cried heartily, grasping the millionaire’s

Say no more, please: the detective cried heartily, grasping the millionaire's hand and giving it a good shake. "I don't blame you—I can't. There didn't seem to be any other way out. Here we are, though, at the house. Will you come in, Mr. Griswold? Then, a little later, we can go up to New Pelham together, if you wish, and see if poor Cray is any better? Naturally, I'm anxious to get his side of the story, in order to make sure that he really did identify Green Eye."

"That program suits me," Griswold responded. "Naturally, if a man of Gordon's stamp has got hold of the fund, the chances of recovering the money are slimmer than ever, and if you are willing to undertake the case, there's no time to be lost."

"Of course, I shall undertake it," Nick assured him. "You could not drive me off with an ax. My honor and reputation are involved, and, under the circumstances, I shall refuse to accept a fee."

"No, that's final," he insisted, in response to Griswold's objections. "I trust, however, that you will fully recompense Cray, no matter whether he does anything more or not. He has earned it."

They had reached the detective's study by that time, and Nick and his lieutenant were gazing about curiously. In a moment the former stepped forward and snatched up a pair of gloves that lay on the desk.

"Look here, Chick!" he cried. "These are from my room up in Harlem. I see I shall have to move it. I didn't dream that any one had discovered it, but Gordon must have done so, it appears, before he was sent up."

Chick, meanwhile, had approached the safe, and was just about to examine it, when his chief called his attention to the gloves. Now he returned and pushed away the chair that Green Eye had placed in front of it.

"Good heavens, chief!" he ejaculated a moment later. "He's broken into your safe!"

Nick reached the spot in one bound, and, after glancing at the makeshift which Green Eye had employed to hide his handiwork, he pulled the great door open, and, bending, pressed the spring that operated the inner one.

The latter in turn clicked open, was seized, and drawn back.

A momentary glance revealed several empty pigeonholes, and a confused mass of papers in others.

“Merciful Heaven!” exclaimed Nick, clenching his fists and raising them aloft, while his face became as white as a sheet. “The fiend has taken what he wanted here! I wouldn’t have had this happen for anything in the world. It means—Heaven knows what it doesn’t mean!”

His assistant realized only too well what the catastrophe foreshadowed, but, for the time being, he was stricken dumb. He could only look from Nick’s shocked face to the gaping safe.

But, of course, Griswold did not fully comprehend, and managed to put his foot in it again.

“It’s too bad that you have lost any valuable papers,” he said. “I have lost eighty thousand dollars, though, and the sooner you get on the trail of the fellow, the better.”

Nick turned on him with a look of scorn. “What do I care about your infernal eighty thousand dollars!” he demanded fiercely, his patience exhausted at last. “It doesn’t amount to a row of pins—or oughtn’t to, at any rate. The papers in this safe, though—the most valuable of which have doubtless been stolen—involve the honor and peace of mind of scores of men and women who are prominent in all walks of life. Don’t you understand, man? They are my private and most confidential records, covering the most important cases of years—records which would mean hundreds of thousands of dollars to the blackmailer. And that isn’t all, for if used in that way, as this fellow doubtless intends to use them, and will, if he isn’t prevented at once, they will bring anguish to a great many people. Finally, the fact that they have fallen into unscrupulous hands will work me more harm than anything else could possibly do.”

His anger against Griswold had cooled while he was speaking, however.

“But, fortunately,” he went on in a calmer tone. “We have every reason to believe that your gold is in the same hands as my papers; therefore, the trail isn’t likely to fork.”

“That’s it,” Griswold agreed eagerly. “I beg your pardon again, Carter. I didn’t realize what this loss meant to you and others. It gives you a supreme incentive,

however, to go after the fellow.”

Before he could add more, the desk phone rang, and Chick answered it.

“Yes, this is Mr. Carter’s house,” the young detective said. “You are speaking from Mr. Griswold’s office? Yes, Mr. Griswold is here. Do you wish to speak to him?... All right, I understand. I’ll tell him at once. Good-by.”

The receiver clicked back into its place, and Chick turned to the expectant listeners.

“They say that the doctor has phoned from Simpson’s house, at New Pelham, Mr. Griswold,” he said. “Cray is conscious at last.”

“Good!” ejaculated Nick. “You and I will go there at once, Chick. How about you, Mr. Griswold? Will you come along?”

“Certainly,” was the prompt answer.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CRAY'S LIPS ARE UNSEALED.

Despite his eagerness to see his friend Cray, and to get on the fugitive's trail, Nick remained at the house long enough to draft a telegram to the warden of Clinton Prison, asking for further details concerning the supposed death of Green-eye Gordon, and the escape of one of the prisoners on the night of the fire.

The message was given to the butler, who was asked to phone it at once to the telegraph office.

"They may have facts up there which they have been keeping from the public," Nick explained. "Even seemingly valueless facts may assume great importance in the light of what has happened down here, for that matter."

Meanwhile, one of Nick's fastest cars had been ordered around, and now the familiar honk-honk was heard.

"There's the machine," Nick announced. "Come on."

It was plain to be seen that both Nick and his assistant were laboring under unusual excitement. The chauffeur was instructed to push the car to the lawful limit, and although he did so, with his usual skill, the detective seemed to think the car was creeping.

For miles and miles they had to traverse the streets of the city which stretched out northward to the confines of the Bronx, and not until these were passed, did they feel free to risk a faster pace—and even then they had to slow down through the frequent villages.

It was not in reality a long drive, however, and in less time than Griswold had made the trip the morning before, they had covered the distance.

The chauffeur had slowed down considerably before entering the village of New Pelham, but they were still going at a rapid rate, and Griswold was obliged to raise his voice for his final instructions to the chauffeur.

"There's the machine," Nick announced. "Come on."

“The top of the hill!” he called out, leaning forward and pointing, while he held his hat on with the other hand.

The usually easy-going millionaire was having some unusual experiences, and had been pretty thoroughly shaken up in more ways than one.

Straight up the hill that led from the heart of the village, the great car raced, and Griswold added that it was the last house. A few moments later the machine came to an abrupt, but quiet, stop in front of No. 31 Floral Avenue.

Quickly the three men alighted and hurried through the gate. The door was opened almost immediately by the maid, and behind her stood Doctor Lord, who had evidently been impatiently awaiting Griswold’s arrival.

The doctor looked inquiringly at the others.

“Carter, shake hands with Doctor Lord,” he said informally. “Doctor, this is Nick Carter and this is Chick Carter, his assistant.”

“I’m very glad,” the young physician said heartily, as he acknowledged the detective’s greeting. “Frequently during the patient’s long stupor, Mr. Carter, he mumbled your name.”

“Just how is he?” Nick asked eagerly, and, for the moment, concern for his friend weighed with him more than anything else.

“He’s better,” was the reply. “He has taken the turn that I hoped for, and now, although he may be laid up for some time, I think I may safely say that the danger is over. You must not see him for long, however, and you had better come at once. I’ve been afraid that he might lapse into unconsciousness again before Mr. Griswold could get here.”

“You have questioned him as I suggested?” the millionaire put in, as they moved toward the door of the room in which Cray was lying.

“Yes,” was the answer, “but he’s stubborn. He refuses to tell me anything—said he would do so if he felt himself losing consciousness again, but that he wanted to say what he had to say directly to Mr. Griswold, if possible.”

They had reached the door of the room by that time, and Lord stepped aside to allow the others to enter.

A nurse in a trim, crisp uniform was sitting beside the couch, but rose and effaced herself quietly, thus giving Nick his first unobstructed view of his friend.

The burly detective seemed to fill the narrow couch, and yet he appeared, somehow, shrunken. His face was still very pale, and the big, hairy hand that lay on his chest had a suggestion of helplessness about it.

Cray turned his head slowly, and looked toward the door. Instead of seeing merely the millionaire, as he had anticipated, he beheld two other visitors, and identified them after a moment or two.

“Mr. Carter!” he exclaimed weakly. “And Chick, too! Is it really you this time, Carter? This is more than I hoped for.”

He tried to raise himself on one elbow, but sank back faintly.

“Lie still, old fellow!” Nick said, quietly stepping forward and taking Cray’s hand. “You are gaining, and must hold on to what you have gained. Take your time, though, about——”

“I can’t take my time, Carter,” Cray said, feverishly clutching at his friend’s hand with both of his. “This isn’t the worst yet. It was Gordon—Green-eye Gordon—who did this to me, and he’s made off with two suit cases crammed full of gold coins.”

Nick saw that it would be necessary to cut the interview short, but he wished to test Cray, if possible. It might be that Jack had forgotten about the fire and the reports of Gordon’s death. If he were reminded of that, he might not be so sure about the identity of his assailant.

“But Gordon is dead, you know—burned to death in prison,” Nick said quietly.

“No, no! Don’t you believe it, Carter!” the patient insisted. “There’s no mistake about it. I forgot about all those reports when he struck me; they don’t cut any ice. I have thought about them since I woke up, and I’m just as sure as ever that it was Gordon.”

“What makes you so sure?” inquired Nick.

“He forgot himself when he cursed me ” was the reply “and I thought I

He forgot himself when he cursed me, was the reply, and I thought I recognized the voice; then I caught a glimpse of his eyes, and I was sure. There's only one man with eyes like that—cat's eyes. They looked green as he glared at me. He knows I recognized him, because I said his name just before I got my knock-out. Probably he thought he had killed me, for I don't believe he would have left me to tell the tale."

He paused for a moment, and one hand wandered weakly to his injured head.

"I'll never get over the way I was taken in," he went on, more faintly. "Most humiliating. Must say, he's a wonder, though. Never imagined anybody could pull off a stunt like that. The car is an electric—a coupé, two or three years old, I should say. The gold was in a couple of suit cases which had been buried in the ground. Can't tell you any more, I'm afraid—just about all in, you see."

He looked about helplessly, and in a frightened sort of way, then, with a sigh, lapsed into unconsciousness once more.

CHAPTER XL.

NICK OUTLINES HIS CAMPAIGN.

In a moment Doctor Lord and the nurse were back at the patient's side.

"I must ask you gentlemen to go," the physician said crisply. "This has been too much for him, as it is, and any further excitement might cause serious complications, if nothing worse."

There was nothing for it but to withdraw, and to hope that the effect of the interview would not be as serious as the doctor suggested.

Fortunately, the detective instinct had been strong in Cray, notwithstanding his condition, and he had covered the ground pretty thoroughly—surprisingly so, in view of the few words he had spoken. His statement about the suit case, and his description of the car might prove particularly valuable.

Nick took pains to interview Simpson, his wife, and the servant before leaving the house and then paid a visit to the garage.

He smiled as he noted the subterfuge of the underground gasoline tank.

"Quite clever, on the surface," he remarked, "but Simpson seems to be a queer mixture. He impresses you at one time with his cleverness, at another with stupidity."

"I don't see anything stupid about this," Griswold objected. "It strikes me as very ingenious. It permitted him to dig up the ground to his heart's content without arousing suspicion."

"True," conceded the detective. "The ordinary person would have seen nothing strange about it; but doesn't the presence of a gasoline tank underground, or any other kind, strike you as a little peculiar when a man owns an electric?"

The millionaire looked very sheepish. "I'm afraid I must plead guilty to stupidity as well," he confessed. "That didn't occur to me, and I doubt if it ever would."

The two detectives made a thorough examination of the little garage, the ground about it, and the pile of lumber, as well as the road at the rear

about it, and the pile of lumber, as well as the road at the rear.

They found some finger prints, and photographed them carefully, after bringing out other details by artificial means. They were inclined to believe that some of them belonged to Gordon, and if so, their discovery would prove valuable. Beyond that, however, they learned little.

“Well, we had better part company here, Chick,” Nick told his assistant. “I’m going to let you pick up the trail of the electric car and follow it, if you can. See if you can locate the machine. Probably it has been abandoned long before this, for it would have to be recharged before it could go very far. Doubtless, Green Eye remembered that, and deserted it before such attention was necessary. Still, if you can find where he dispensed with it, you can get a clew to his subsequent movements, especially as he was burdened with a couple of very heavy suit cases.”

“Consider me on the job,” was Chick’s ready reply. “I’ll start work right away, and keep going as long as the going is good. How about you, though? What are you going to tackle?”

“I shall return home at once,” Nick replied, “and go through the safe. I must find out which records are missing, and when I have learned that, I ought to be able to catch the rascal sooner or later.”

“You mean that he’ll be sure to visit some of the people interested, or write to them, and that you can nab him in that way?” his assistant asked.

“That’s the idea. If Green Eye hasn’t learned of our return—and I sincerely hope he hasn’t—he won’t lose much time in getting to work at the blackmailing business, and you may be sure he’ll choose some of the most tempting of the local people for his first victims.”

Chick held up his hand. “I get you,” he said. “That’s just what will happen, unless he’s scared off, and he’ll work quickly, for fear you may return earlier than you had expected, and get wind of the whole thing. Alongside of that, my job seems pretty punk, but you’re the general.”

“Your job is a necessary one, and we may need all the dope on Green Eye’s movements that we can get,” Nick told him.

Very shortly afterward they separated. Chick remaining behind, while Nick and

the millionaire reentered the car and started back to the city.

Very little was said on the journey. To be sure, Griswold seemed willing enough to keep the conversational ball rolling, but he soon found that Nick was of a different mind. He was glad, therefore, when the detective's house was reached, and Nick stepped out of the machine, after instructing the chauffeur to take Griswold wherever he wished to go.

"You think you can catch him, then?" the millionaire asked in parting.

Nick gave him a strange look. "If I fail in this, I'll shut up shop," he replied.

It was said rather lightly, but Griswold was a shrewd student of character, and knew that famous Nemesis of criminals was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XLI.

WAITING FOR A NIBBLE.

Nick Carter hardly knew what to do about the members of his household. They had not yet been informed of the way in which they had been taken in, and it was difficult to decide whether they should be or not. After some reflection, however, the detective decided to say nothing about it, for the present.

They accepted his presence as a matter of course, just as they had done in the case of the impostor, and if he told them the truth, they would be plunged into a state bordering on panic.

Moreover, if Gordon should take a notion to return to the house, after such a revelation, it would be almost impossible for the butler, housekeeper, and the rest to be their natural selves in his presence. If they betrayed their knowledge, they might scare him off just when Nick wished him to be most at his ease.

Nick entered his study, and, after walking up and down for a few minutes, seated himself in his desk chair.

There was a tenseness about his look and every movement he made. He was like a perfectly trained athlete, crouched for a start of some record-breaking dash.

The famous detective was well acquainted with danger, and to risk his life was an easy matter of everyday occurrence. He took up the most serious and dangerous cases without a thought of the possible consequences to himself. Here, however, was something different.

This came nearer home, perhaps, than anything else had ever done, for, through him the honor and peace of mind of numbers of persons—conspicuous targets, all of them—were threatened.

Too late the detective recognized that his reputation was not enough to protect his house and his private safe from violence, and that he had no right to keep such records there. They should all be in a safe-deposit vault.

The reports of his ordinary cases might continue to be kept in his steel filing cabinets, where they were available for ready reference, but those concerning

persons of wealth and position—men and women who were tempting prey, and whose secrets, if revealed in the newspapers, would cause a widespread sensation—must be better protected in future.

That, however, would not help the present situation which Nick was now forced to face.

He actually shrank from going over the disarranged papers which Green Eye had left behind, but after a little delay he forced himself to open the safe, empty the remaining pigeonholes, et cetera, and dump their contents on the desk. That done, he sat himself down and went to work.

Fortunately, there was a comparatively small number of papers of that description in the safe, therefore it did not take very long to go through them and check off those which remained—for the methodical detective had a list of all of them.

In this way, by a process of elimination, Nick quickly learned the ones which had been stolen, and his expression grew grimmer than ever as he realized the shrewdness of Gordon's choice.

Most of the missing papers concerned individuals or families in and around New York, which seemed to imply that a quick clean-up was contemplated. Some few, though, involved persons farther away, and these appeared to have been selected because they had offered particularly tempting bait to the blackmailer.

It needed only the brief entries in the index to bring back to Nick's mind all of the important details of each case, and he ground his teeth as he pictured the scoundrel gloating over those same details, and cleverly scheming to demand the top price for their suppression.

"What a haul!" he murmured aloud. "All those papers, and seventy-five or eighty thousand in gold, to boot! If it's really Ernest Gordon with whom we have to deal—and I'm morally certain it is—he must be drunk with joy, for he has made blackmailing an art, and he could not ask anything bigger or more promising of that sort. In his calmer moments, though, he must realize that he won't have the chance to hold up many of these people.

"Doesn't he know that the first man he approaches will in all probability come running to me to demand an explanation, if nothing more? And hasn't it

occurred to him that I would receive an urgent summons home under such circumstances? Well, if it has, he'll see all the more reason for striking while the iron is hot."

He had put the papers away temporarily, intending to find a safer place for them at the earliest opportunity, when the butler entered the study with a telegram. It proved to be from the warden at Clinton prison, and was a long one—sent "collect," of course.

It contained certain new and significant, though minor, details concerning the supposed death of Green-eye Gordon, and the escape of the yegg from Buffalo, which served to confirm Nick's suspicions, but the most striking thing about the message was the tone of it. It gave the impression that the warden had been doubtful, or was doubtful now concerning the identity of the man who had been burned. He did not say so, of course, but Nick could read doubt between the lines.

Obviously, the identification had been a very careless one, or else the prison authorities had deliberately winked at the misleading statement which had found their way into the newspapers. Very likely they took it for granted at first that the partially burned body was that of Gordon, and afterward preferred to hush the thing up rather than let it be known that there was any reason to believe that the redoubtable Green Eye had escaped.

"Well, that settles it, I think, for all practical purposes," the detective told himself. "Cray's identification was a very hasty one, made under very unfavorable circumstances, but when it's taken in connection with this transparent telegram, and especially in connection with the nature, daring, and adroitness of the crime itself, it seems safe enough to conclude that Ernest Gordon is the man I must look for—and find."

Which would be the best course, though? To warn those who might be expected to be approached by the criminal, or to wait until they came to the detective?

After some thought, Nick decided on the latter course. Naturally, he did not wish that every one concerned should know what had happened, for that seemed unnecessary. He believed that Gordon would concentrate on a few intended victims at first, and if the detective could discover who those persons were, he ought to be able to trap the rascal without allowing the others to know what had threatened them.

It was his confident belief that practically every one who might be visited or written to by the blackmailer would try to get in touch with him—Nick Carter—at once. That made him willing to play this waiting game—at least, for a time.

“The first one who communicates with me,” he thought, “should give me a line on the fellow’s methods and plans. No one is likely to yield to his demands on the spot, and if I can learn of a proposed rendezvous or two, the rest should be fairly plain sailing—unless the scoundrel learns of my return and plays dead for a while.”

He had reached this point in his musings when he heard a furious ring at the doorbell.

“Possibly that’s the first of the victims now,” he thought. “If it is, I must prepare myself for some more or less well-grounded reproaches. I can stand them, though, if in addition I’m put on the track of the man I want to lay my hands on more than I ever wanted to lay them on any one else.”

CHAPTER XLII. THE FIRST VICTIM.

Shortly afterward the butler knocked at the study door and opened it.

“Mr. Chester J. Gillespie to see you, sir,” he announced.

Before Nick could reply, or the butler could get out of the way, for that matter, the young man named pushed into the room, his face pale with agitation.

“You must help me, Mr. Carter!” he cried excitedly. “I——”

He paused as Nick motioned the butler to withdraw and close the door. When the servant had complied, Nick said quietly:

“Sit down, Mr. Gillespie. I’m very sorry to learn that some one has attempted to blackmail you, but there’s no necessity for such great haste.”

His caller had started to take a chair, but paused with his hand on the back of it, and stared at Nick in the greatest amazement. Presently, a spot of angry red appeared in each pale cheek, and his rather weak jaw thrust out aggressively.

“By Heaven!” he breathed. “I believe you are in league with the fellow. I’ll swear I do! How otherwise could you know that——”

“That will be about enough of that, Gillespie!” the detective said sternly. He had heard too many such accusations in the last few hours. “If you have come to me for help, as your rather abrupt opening words would seem to indicate, let me warn you that you are not furthering your case by insulting me.”

“I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Carter,” the bewildered young man stammered. “I didn’t mean it, of course, but you are positively uncanny, and I could not understand how——”

“It’s very simple, though,” Nick told him. “I’ve been robbed of some papers, unfortunately, and those dealing with your case are among them. Naturally, therefore, when you rushed in in that fashion, I concluded that the thief had tried to bleed you.”

“Oh! So that was it?” Gillespie murmured somewhat sheepishly. Again his anger and sense of injury got the upper hand. “Then it’s you I have to thank for this, after all!” he cried. “I supposed my secret safe with you, as safe as if it were buried with me. Now, you calmly announce that it has been stolen from you. This is too much, Carter! Can’t you keep your papers where they will be safe? What right have you got to preserve such records, anyway? Why don’t you destroy them for the sake of your clients? It’s unbearable! This will be the ruin of me! If Florence finds out about it, she will refuse to marry me, and——”

The detective held up his hand commandingly, and the young man—he did not appear to be over twenty-five—lapsed into silence.

“I have already told you, Gillespie, that I profoundly regret what has happened. You are forgetting yourself, though, and wasting time. I already know who made away with those papers, and, with your assistance, I hope to lay a trap for him that will bring his schemes to an end very quickly. I think I can promise you that there will be no publicity, and that nothing need interfere with your approaching marriage. Now, tell me precisely what has happened.”

Young Gillespie was several times a millionaire, having inherited a large fortune from his father a year or two before. The responsibility thus imposed upon him had sobered him down in a remarkable manner, and he was looked upon in certain quarters as one of the coming leaders in the financial world. Before his father’s death, however, he had sown a lot of wild oats of one sort or another, and it was in connection with one of these youthful escapades that Nick had been called in about four years previously.

The affair threatened to be very serious, for the time, but the detective’s skill had been brought to bear in a surprising manner, with the result that everything had been smoothed out as well as possible without the vaguest rumor having got abroad.

The young man fumbled in his pocket with a gloved hand, and produced a sheet of notepaper, the top of which had obviously been cut away.

“That was found under the door when the house was opened up this morning,” he said. “Here’s the envelope. It was not stamped, of course.”

Nick smoothed out the sheet of paper and looked at the sprawling, uncertain writing that covered it. He read:

“I know all about the affair of four years ago. My price for silence is one hundred thousand dollars. Have it ready when I call, or pay it to any one who may present an order from me. Don’t think you can stop this by trying to have me arrested. You will fail, and the whole story will come out. I have fully arranged for its publication, no matter what happens to me. The money is the only thing that will buy my silence. Pay it, and your secret is safe. What is more, you will never hear from me again. Refuse to pay it, and—ruin!”

It was a bold letter, but Nick saw that it was nothing but a bluff. He said as much.

“I hope you haven’t been deceived by this,” he remarked, tapping the sheet. “This fellow is working alone, you may be sure, and, therefore, it isn’t at all likely that he has ‘arranged’ anything of the sort in case he should be arrested. By this, as you ought to know, the newspapers would not publish a story about you without warning. You have too much money and too many friends. You would have an opportunity to bring your influence to bear, and the story would be killed.”

“That sounds plausible enough,” Gillespie admitted. “That’s what I would tell any one else in my position, if he were similarly threatened. When this sort of thing comes home to a fellow, though, it makes a lot of difference.”

“I know,” the detective replied, with a nod. “That’s the sort of mood such a scoundrel counts on.”

He paused and thoughtfully fingered the letter.

“I must confess that this is a disappointment,” he resumed slowly. “I had hoped that the blackmailer would set a definite time for his call, or ask you to take the money to some specified place. This, however, avoids anything of that sort, and leaves me nothing definite to go on. All it tells us is that he expects to call at some unnamed hour—perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps not for several days. I think we need not bother about the hint that he may send some one with a written order, for if such a person presented himself, I feel sure it would be the blackmailer, and no other. This absence of details, however, makes it rather difficult to know just what to do.”

“How would this do?” Gillespie said hesitatingly. “You are a genius at make-up. Why don’t you pass yourself off for me? Go to my place on Fifth Avenue and

wait for this fellow, whoever he is, to call? The chances are that he won't put it off very long, and even if you had to remain there a couple of days, you would not mind, would you, if you could nab your man at the end of your wait?"

CHAPTER XLIII. AN ASTOUNDING RUSE.

Gillespie went on more confidently: "It ought to give him the shock of his life to think he's dealing merely with me, and then to have you reveal yourself to him. Of course, we could both stay there, and you could walk in and collar him while he was holding me up, but I'm afraid he may be watching the house. In that case, he would be suspicious if he saw any one else going in and not coming out again, no matter whether he recognized you or not."

Nick smiled slightly. "You must have been reading detective stories lately, Gillespie," he commented. "However, it isn't a bad idea, and I'm inclined to try it. There are certain other advantages about it which make it appeal to me. How about you, though? You would have to remain here as long as I found it necessary to stay at your place."

"Oh, that's all right. I don't mind. I'll promise to keep out of sight, and if I have to stay overnight, I suppose I can find a bunk somewhere, if you'll explain my presence to your servants."

"You certainly can," Nick assured him; "and let's hope that you won't have to kick your heels here very long."

The detective conducted him into another room, and, seating him in the light, proceeded to busy himself with his make-up materials and appliances. At the end of half an hour, the transformation was complete.

"Will this do?" asked Nick, turning from the glass and facing his visitor.

"By Jove, marvelous!" Gillespie cried enthusiastically. "By the time you've got into my clothes, you'll be able to pass for me anywhere. Luckily, there's only my old butler, Simms, and his wife, at the house, as I've been abroad, and was not expected home as yet. The chauffeur outside is a new man, and has never seen me before."

"Good!" Nick answered. "Now for the clothes."

Soon the disguise was complete, and after another careful inspection of himself,

Nick was ready to leave.

“I’ll explain matters to my people here as I go out,” he said. “Come this way and I’ll show you the room you may occupy in my absence. I hope you’ll find it comfortable. Don’t hesitate to ask for anything you want, and I’ll let you know as soon as there’s anything to report.”

After conducting his guest to one of the spare bedrooms, the detective parted with Gillespie, and ascended the stairs. Five minutes later he stepped into the waiting car as if he owned it.

“Home!” he ordered, and the machine whirled away in the direction of upper Fifth Avenue.

Meanwhile, from behind one of the curtains at the front of the detective’s house, the young man had seen the car drive off, and as it passed out of sight, a remarkable change came over him. He threw back his head and laughed in a curiously noiseless way that many an ex-convict has.

He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and at last flung himself into a chair and fairly panted for breath. At length, he recovered himself and wiped his eyes. Simultaneously, his face took on harsher lines.

The fresh complexion of youth seemed singularly out of place now, for age and experience—and evil—peered through the veneer.

Had there ever been any doubt about Green-eye Gordon’s daring, there could be none any longer, for this was the criminal himself.

In some manner best known to himself, he had managed to learn of Nick’s return, and had taken this extraordinary means of fooling the detective—an example of supreme audacity, in which he was manifestly taking the greatest delight.

He expected to kill more than two birds with the one stone.

“Oh, what a sell!” he thought. “How are the mighty fallen! You don’t happen to know, my dear Carter, that the real Chester Gillespie is still abroad, and that while you are waiting for your bird in that gloomy old mansion across from the park, your enterprising little friend Ernest will be tapping the various other sources of income as rapidly as he can.”

SOURCES OF INCOME AS RAPIDLY AS HE CAN.

Nevertheless, when the first flush of triumph had passed, there seemed to be an undercurrent of uneasiness in the scoundrel's mood and manner. Doubtless, he knew that in boldness lay his only hope, but perhaps he allowed himself to fear for the time being, that even boldness would be insufficient in the long run against such an antagonist.

Apparently, the great detective had been completely taken in by this latest astounding ruse, but very likely Gordon realized that he was in the lion's mouth, and that there was no knowing when the jaws might close with a snap.

Some time after Green Eye returned to Nick's study, the door opened, and Chick entered. He did not look any too well satisfied with his work thus far.

"I beg your pardon," he said, halting at sight of the supposed Gillespie. "I didn't know any one was here. Are you alone?"

"Yes," Gordon answered coolly. "Mr. Carter has gone out. I think he left word for you with the butler, but I might as well explain that he's absent on an errand for me, and that I'm to remain in more or less close confinement here until he returns."

And in response to a look of surprise on Chick's face, he explained a little further: "If you wish to call him up——"

"No, not now," Nick's assistant interrupted quietly. "I have nothing to report as yet."

That was good news to Gordon, for he felt sure that Chick had been trying to pick up some clew to the whereabouts of the electric car, and if so, it was plain that he had failed to make any headway.

"Well, I'll leave you in possession here and go into the room Mr. Carter placed at my command," Green Eye remarked easily, rising to his feet and helping himself to another of Nick's cigars. "If there's no objection, I shall appropriate some writing materials."

Chick supplied him with paper, envelopes, et cetera, and assured him that the study was his to use if he wished, but the visitor would not consent to "be in the way." Three minutes later, he was in the bedroom, with the door closed.

Quickly he removed the tapestry cover and droplight from the small table between the windows, and, drawing up a chair, set to work.

It was clear that his desire to write some letters was genuine enough, and the fact that he cut the engraved headings from several sheets of paper suggested that the privacy of the room was welcome.

At the end of an hour he was still writing, and beside him were several sealed and stamped envelopes addressed to a number of well-known names. The campaign was going forward.

“I shall have to find some means of getting rid of this man Chick Carter, though,” Green Eye told himself, as he finished one of the letters and leaned back in a chair. “These fellows I have written to will come flocking here before long, and I must be Nick Carter again, in order to receive them properly.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

NICK'S SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.

If the criminal could have read Nick Carter's mind about that time, he would have been still more uneasy—and with good reason.

Ernest Gordon had not been the only one who had played a part during the interview which had ended in the detective's act of copying his caller's features, and borrowing his clothes.

For the first few minutes, it must be confessed that the detective was completely deceived. He knew Green Eye to be a master of surprises, but it had not occurred to him to suspect that the clever rascal would resort to anything so spectacular.

Besides, Gordon had placed himself so that the light did not fall strongly.

It was not until the caller suggested a change of identities that the detective began to question. It was very seldom that a client presumed to offer such assistance, and Nick's knowledge of Chester Gillespie had not prepared him for such a proposition. He gave no evidence, however, that the seed of suspicion had been planted, but fell in with the suggestion, knowing that in carrying it out, he would have the best possible opportunity of studying his visitor.

He noted a slight hesitation on the latter's part when he had asked him to take his place in the brightest light obtainable, and the subsequent scrutiny had soon confirmed his suspicions. "Gillespie" was plainly Ernest Gordon.

No make-up could have stood that test—at least, with Nick Carter at the observer's end.

"What fools the cleverest of us are sometimes!" the detective thought, with an inward chuckle. "Gordon has such a good opinion of himself, and is so certain that a man needs only to be daring enough in order to carry everything before him, that he's actually willing to undergo this sort of thing—and he thinks he's getting away with it!"

It was no part of the detective's plan, however, to reveal his knowledge of the deception. He wished to give the masquerader as much rope as he could, in order

to find out just what Gordon was trying to do. Moreover, he was curious to visit Gillespie's house and find out how Green Eye had succeeded in making himself at home there.

Gillespie might have been overpowered and stowed away somewhere, or even murdered—though that was unlikely, unless the crime had been committed owing to an accident or miscalculation on Gordon's part.

When the detective reached Gillespie's house on Fifth Avenue, he found the situation just as Gordon had described it. An aged butler answered the bell, and, save for him, the big house seemed deserted.

Nick was about to question the old man in a roundabout way in order to discover, if possible, whether there had been anything which might seem suspicious or not. Before he could do so, however, the butler offered a couple of letters on a salver.

Nick took them after a second's hesitation, studying the butler's face as he did so. From the man's squint and the lines about the eyes, he saw that the butler was nearsighted. Probably he had been in the family for a long time, but this defect in his eyesight explained his failure to detect the deception.

But where was the real Chester J. Gillespie, whose second double was now entering his house, and calmly inspecting his letters?

Gordon had given Nick certain necessary particulars concerning the arrangement of the house, and, thanks to these, the detective mounted the stairs with the utmost assurance, leaving the nearsighted old butler bowing in the lower hall.

He found his way to Gillespie's private room easily enough, the letters still in his hand. After looking about him curiously, and noting the certain evidences of recent occupancy, he sat down and glanced mechanically at the letters.

One of them obviously was a business communication, but the other was not.

The envelope was unusually large, and of the finest texture. As for the writing, it was big, heavy, and sprawling.

In the lower left-hand corner were the words, "Important—please forward," and they were heavily underscored.

All is fair in love and war, they say, and if that is so, all is fair in detection as well, especially when the detective is trying to safeguard the man whose identity he has temporarily appropriated.

Under the circumstances, therefore, Nick felt justified in opening any of Gillespie's correspondence that seemed to promise a solution of the mystery, just as he would have ransacked the house for a similar clew.

There might be nothing in it, of course, but this letter appeared to be somewhat out of the ordinary, and might be valuable.

Consequently, after a little hesitation, Nick ripped the envelope open without the slightest attempt at concealment, and drew the inclosure out. Soon he was very glad that he had done so, for the letter read as follows:

“Dear Old Lunatic: You do not seem to have improved in the matter of memory or level-headedness. You write me from some unpronounceable place in South America—I judge solely from the postmark—and do not tell me where to find you. How the dickens can I join you down there for a month's shooting, if you do not give me more particulars? I know you too well, you see, to imagine for a moment that you stayed more than a day or two at the place from which you wrote. That was nearly two weeks ago, and by this time you may be thousands of miles away from there.

“Your letter was forwarded to me up here in Maine, and the best thing I can think of doing is to send this to your New York address, in the hope that it will be forwarded to you with as little delay as possible.”

There was a little more of it, but the rest does not matter. It was signed by a well-known young man about town.

So that was it, was it? The only original Chester Gillespie was still down in South America, and only about two weeks before had written to a New York friend, inviting him down for a month's shooting. That argued that he did not expect to return for many weeks. In some manner, Gordon must have learned that interesting fact, and, seemingly, had disguised himself as Gillespie, with the aid of a photograph or photographs of that young man.

So much for the way the trick had been sprung. For the rest, there was no doubt in Nick's mind as to Green Eye's further intention. The criminal had learned of

the detective's return, and had guessed what Nick's plan of campaign would be.

In other words, he had concluded that Nick had the index of the records in the safe, and could easily find out which ones were missing. Knowing by that means where danger threatened, Nick could set a trap for the blackmailer, with the help of one or more of the latter's prospective victims.

"He knew just about what to expect," the detective mused, "and when he found that Gillespie was out of the country, having left only a couple of old people in charge of the house, he hit upon this scheme of circumventing me. If he's left alone, he'll find some means of sending Chick off on a wild-goose chase, or otherwise dispose of him, and then he'll impersonate me once more, and in that disguise he'll probably advise his victims to pay the sums demanded.

"Oh, it's a pretty smooth scheme—one of the smoothest anybody ever thought out! I'm afraid, however, that he's inclined to underrate my intelligence, and to overrate his own ability."

CHAPTER XLV. COMPARING NOTES.

It was not until dusk that Nick Carter left the Gillespie house, and when he did so, it was on foot. He had not gone more than a block or so, however, before he hailed a passing taxi, and ordered the chauffeur to drive to a certain corner of Madison Avenue. The corner named was only a block from his own house.

Some hours had passed since Nick had read the letter which revealed the whereabouts of the real Chester J. Gillespie, but he had been in no hurry to act. For one thing, he wished to give the scoundrel a sense of security in this new and climax-capping adventure.

Nick was still disguised as Gillespie, but he was wearing a golf cap, which he had pulled down over his eyes, and a light overcoat, with upturned collar. His purpose was to get in touch with his assistant in one way or another, and his only anxiety concerned the possibility that Gordon had already got rid of Chick.

Fortunately, that was not the case, and, after a wait of no more than half or three-quarters of an hour, the young detective left the house, and unconsciously approached his chief, who was lounging at the corner.

As he passed Nick, the latter said quietly: "Go around the corner and wait for me."

Chick stiffened slightly at the well-known voice, but that was the only sign of surprise he gave. With a grunt and a nod, he turned about at right angles into the side street, and along this Nick presently followed him.

A short distance beyond the corner, well out of sight from Nick's house, Chick paused, and there his chief overtook him.

"I haven't made any headway yet," Chick announced, without any preliminaries. "I located the car late this afternoon, but there I came to a dead stop."

"Never mind about that," Nick said quickly. "It doesn't matter in the least. I can lay my hands on Green-eye Gordon at any moment."

"That's all right," Nick said, "but I don't want to hear any more about it."

“The deuce you can!” ejaculated Chick. “Then I should certainly say you don’t need me—for the sort of legwork I’ve been doing to-day, at any rate.”

“What about my double, though?” Nick put in swiftly, without giving Chick time to ask any questions. “Is he still at the house, and if so, what has he been doing?”

“He’s there, all right. He’s been writing letters in the bedroom. He declined to use the study.”

“Ah!” Nick murmured, in a peculiar tone. “Letters, eh? Has he mailed them?”

“No. I offered to do it for him a little while ago, but he said he would be going out himself later on.”

Nick thought over this information for a minute or two, while his assistant watched him questioningly.

“Did you happen to see any of the letters?” Nick inquired at length, rousing himself from his abstraction. “I mean, could you tell whether they were stamped or not?”

His assistant nodded. “I got a squint at a little pile of them,” he admitted. “The top one was stamped, but I could not say as to the rest.”

This required further thought on Nick’s part. He was tempted, of course, to end matters then and there, before those letters could reach their destination, and cause the consternation they were certain to create. On the other hand, he felt it necessary to give Gordon a little more leeway, and in order to do that, it seemed essential that the letters be mailed.

He had searched Gillespie’s private rooms, on the theory that Green Eye might have left the stolen papers there, but he had found nothing of the sort. Yet, it was imperative that these papers be recovered, if possible, at the same time the rascal was captured.

Unless that were done, the precious records might not be returned at all, for certainly Gordon could not be counted on to restore them voluntarily.

To be sure, the fact that he had been writing those letters—doubtless, blackmailing ones—under Nick’s own roof, suggested that he had the

documents there to refer to. That, however, was by no means certain, for he might have put the records in some remote place, perhaps a safe-deposit vault, after making a list of the names and addresses desired.

Therefore, it seemed wise to give the fellow his head, for the time, and meanwhile to keep him under observation, in the hope that his movements would give some hint as to his possession or nonpossession of Nick's papers.

The detective was about to explain this to his assistant when the latter broke in excitedly.

"For the love of Pete! What's up?" he demanded. "What are you cooking up in that brain of yours, and why are you so curious about Gillespie's doings?"

"Gillespie is down in South America," Nick returned quietly. "That's why. Our friend back there in the house is—well, you can guess, I imagine."

And then he proceeded to give his instructions to the dumfounded Chick.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GORDON'S LETTERS REACH THEIR MARK.

Ex-Senator William Deane Phelps smiled complacently as he stood before a glass in his dressing room.

He was a tall man, and the sixty years that had passed over his head had left him his rather slim and upright figure. His hair was white, but abundant, and on the whole, he had good reason to consider himself a handsome and well-preserved man.

“Is there anything else, sir?” his valet asked respectfully.

“No,” the ex-senator answered. “It’s probable that I shall be very late, so you need not wait up.”

“Thank you, sir. Shall I ring for your car?”

“No, no! A taxi will do.”

Possibly the ghost of a smile curved the lips of the valet, but if so, it was quickly gone. If his employer chose to keep his movements secret, that was his employer’s business.

Ex-Senator Phelps took the light coat and silk hat that were handed to him, and strolled toward the door. He was a single man, but his position in the world had made it necessary for him to keep up a rather pretentious establishment.

He stood in the doorway holding a cigar as the taxi drove up, but at that moment his valet, who had followed him as if to close the door, spoke up in a surprised tone.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” he said, “but this was lying on the floor. You stepped over it just now without knowing it. It’s addressed to you, and marked ‘Urgent.’ It’s stamped, but not postmarked—looks as if it had been slipped under the door instead.”

Ex-Senator Phelps took the envelope with a careless air, and no premonition chilled him as he stepped back into the light of the hall and tore it open. As he

opened it as he stepped back into the light of the hall and tore it open. As he glanced at the single sheet of paper, however, his face turned ghastly, and he reeled against a small statue that stood on a pedestal, throwing it to the floor and breaking it.

“After all these years!” he muttered hoarsely to himself. Then his eyes fell upon the amazed face of his valet, and, as he crushed the letter in his hand, he made a great effort to pull himself together. “I—I shall not be going out, after all,” he said, in a curiously dead voice. “I’m not—feeling well.”

Every year of the sixty seemed to weigh heavily upon the ex-senator as he pushed open the door of the room on the left. His feet dragged across the thick carpet so that he stumbled, and when he dropped into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

* * * * *

The Forty-second Street Theater had been famous for years as the home of light comedy of the more brilliant sort.

That night was to witness a new production, for which great things were expected—for had the play not been written by one of America’s cleverest and most experienced playwrights, and staged by a production wizard? And was not the star Harold Lumsden?

Already the cheaper parts of the house were packed, and the orchestra was filling up. Here and there a pair of white shoulders gleamed in one of the boxes which would soon be filled—for it was a foregone conclusion that the S.R.O. sign would have to be displayed in the lobby that night.

Harold Lumsden himself was peering through a peephole in the curtain at that moment, idly surveying the nucleus of what he knew would prove to be an unusually brilliant first-night audience. For years he had enjoyed great prestige, and this was to be his first appearance following a successful invasion of London, which had added greatly to his laurels.

“This is going to be some night, Harold!” his manager remarked impressively, coming up from behind and putting his hand on the star’s shoulder. “Dressed early, didn’t you?”

“Yes. I felt restless.” was the reply. “Hanged if I know why. This sort of thing

ought to be an old story to me by this time, if it's ever going to be."

As he turned about to face the portly manager, he noticed an envelope in the latter's hand. Knowing the manager's absent-mindedness, he inquired:

"That letter isn't for me, is it?"

"Why, yes, it is," was the reply. "I had forgotten it for a moment. It's marked 'Urgent,' but I suppose it's only from some friend of yours—or, more likely, some friend of a friend—who aspires to the deadhead class."

"Probably," Harold Lumsden agreed, as he glanced at the handwriting for a moment, and then ripped the envelope open. "We haven't needed to 'paper' our houses for the last few seasons, have we, old man? What's this! Great heavens!"

The distinguished actor clutched at one of the wings for support, and the letter fluttered to the ground. The manager stooped to pick it up, but with an oath the star forestalled him, seizing the letter hastily and thrusting it into his pocket.

"Bad news?" the manager asked anxiously.

"A rather disagreeable surprise," Lumsden managed to say, making a strenuous attempt to control himself. "It's nothing you know anything about, you know, and I'll be all right, never fear."

Harold Lumsden played the part that night, for there was nothing else to do, and the traditions of his profession demand that an actor or actress should always appear, unless ill in bed, no matter what news may have been received, or what tragedy may have been left at home.

But some idea of the sort of performance the famous star gave on that memorable occasion might have been gathered from the newspaper comments the following morning, for all the critics seemed to agree that Lumsden was far from himself, and that his conception of the part was strangely heavy and lifeless.

Such was the effect of Green-eye Gordon's second demand. There were other letters—several of them, in fact—but we need not trace their influence here.

There was no doubt that the blackmailer had struck some stunning blows,

expecting that gold would flow from the wounds thus inflicted.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BLACKMAILER ADVISES HIS VICTIM.

Ernest Gordon was inclined to consider the world a pretty good place, as he finished his breakfast in Nick Carter's dining room the following morning. Everything had gone very well, thus far, and he seemed to have reason for self-congratulation.

He had peddled the letters around himself the night before, thus saving time, and making it more difficult to trace them, as he believed. He did not know that he had been shadowed throughout by Chick, who thereby knew just what victims the blackmailer had chosen for his first broadside.

Later he had returned to the detective's house, and so had Chick; then there had come a telephone message to the latter from Nick sending the young detective out of town for at least twenty-four, if not forty-eight, hours.

That unexpected turn of affairs had caused Gordon great satisfaction when Chick gloomily confided the news to him.

"The chief seems to think that fellow Gordon has doubled back, and is hiding not far from New Pelham," the assistant informed "Gillespie." "He still hopes he'll turn up at your place, and is going to wait there all of to-morrow, if not longer, but he wants me to get busy, and see if I can locate Gordon independently. It seems unnecessary to me, but what he says goes. The worst of it is, though, I've got my orders to pull up stakes at once."

Of course, Gordon did not know that this was all a put-up job. Nick, by seeming to play into the rascal's hands, had worked out this scheme, in order to get Chick out of the way, so that Gordon would not feel compelled to take strong measures to accomplish the same object.

As a result, Green Eye had slept alone at Nick's house that night—except for the servants—and now, after a good breakfast, looked forward to a day of undisturbed peace and freedom to do whatever circumstances might require.

First, however, it was necessary for him to absent himself temporarily, in order to make up as Nick once more. Therefore, he made a flying trip to One Hundred

and Twenty-fifth Street, and there disguised himself, returning as fast as the taxi could carry him.

When he reentered the detective's residence, it was in the character of the owner.

"Has any one called up or been to see me?" he asked the butler.

"No, sir," was the reply, a welcome one to the scoundrel, for it meant that none of his victims had yet sought the detective.

He did not have long to wait, however, for hardly more than half an hour later the butler entered the study, and presented a card, which bore the name of ex-Senator William Deane Phelps.

"Show him up," the supposed detective said.

The butler turned on his heel to obey, and if Green-eye Gordon grinned behind his back, his face was serious enough in expression as the ex-senator nervously entered and closed the door behind him.

In the few hours that had passed since he had received the threatening letter, a great change had come over this man, whose name was known from one end of the country to the other. It was plain that he had not slept, and there were heavy, loose bags of skin under his eyes. His face was almost gray in hue.

"I feared that you would feel compelled to come here before long, senator," the impostor said gravely.

"Then you know?" his visitor asked, in surprise.

"Yes," Gordon answered. "Some one knows the facts in regard to—well, we need not go into the case—and is attempting to blackmail you."

Phelps sank into a chair and drew a sheet of paper from his pocket.

"The infernal scoundrel demands one hundred and fifty thousand—no less!" he said hoarsely. "It isn't so much the money, but I—I naturally assumed that you alone held my secret."

Green Eye rose to his feet, and his face was very solemn.

“Until a short time ago that was the case,” he answered, and crossed to the safe. “The records were here, and you will see that it has been burgled. If it’s any comfort to you, though, I’ll tell you that you are not the only one who will suffer.”

“I care nothing about that,” Phelps said angrily. “It’s my own plight that interests me to the exclusion of everything else. Do you wonder? This is terrible, Carter, terrible! I thought I could trust you, and now, after all this time, I find that I’ve been living in a fool’s paradise.”

The criminal interrupted him with a dignified gesture.

“I don’t think I deserve that, senator,” he said quietly. “Nicholas Carter has never yet betrayed a secret. Much as I regret this unfortunate occurrence, however, I don’t see how I can be held responsible for it. I didn’t rob my own safe, and certainly I wouldn’t have chosen to have it robbed, if I could have helped it.”

“That’s neither here nor there!” declared the ex-senator. “Why didn’t you destroy the records?”

“Do you expect me to destroy my stock in trade, or burn up the reference books I have had occasion to consult countless times?”

“I hadn’t thought of it in that light,” Phelps confessed. “Even that doesn’t make it any easier to bear, however. What can I do?”

“I’m sorry to say that I see nothing for you to do, except to pay,” Green Eye answered, fingering the letter which had been handed him.

Phelps looked at him in amazement. “*You* actually give me that advice!” he murmured.

Green Eye nodded. “I know I’m disappointing you,” he said, “but that’s the best advice I can give under the circumstances. It may sound strange, but we must face the facts. I know perfectly well who is at the bottom of this, and I have to confess that he’s one of the shrewdest men who ever defied the law. He’s amazingly daring, senator, and you may be sure he means exactly what he says. He’ll drag this whole unsavory business into the light, if you don’t stop his mouth with gold, and stop it without delay.”

“But aren’t you going to——”

“Of course, I’m going to do everything I can to catch him, senator,” the criminal interrupted, in a tone which seemed to imply that that was a matter of course. “If possible, I shall try to trap him just after you have met his demands, and while he has the money on his person. I cannot promise, however, to catch him to-day, or this week, and, knowing his methods as well as I do, I know that you can’t afford to risk any delay. The chances are, of course, that I can make him disgorge, and that you’ll get your money back, but the important thing is to play safe, isn’t it?”

Ex-Senator Phelps nodded slowly and hopelessly.

“I suppose you’re right,” he agreed. “I had hoped for immediate help, Carter, for something that would put new hope into me. Evidently, I expected too much, though. I’ll do as you say, of course, and try to believe that everything will come out all right. Good morning.”

And with that he left the room, walking as if he were seventy instead of sixty.

“Number one!” Green-eye Gordon chuckled as he leaned back in his seat. “A hundred and fifty thousand isn’t bad for a starter. I wonder who will be the next?”

CHAPTER XLVIII. UP AGAINST IT.

A few minutes later, the front-door bell rang again, and this time the salver which the butler presented to his supposed employer bore the card of Harold Lumsden.

Gordon nodded impassively. "Very well," he said.

"I only hope he'll prove worth the trouble," he told himself, as the butler left the room. "He's a spendthrift, of course. Money turns to water and runs through his fingers, no matter how fast it comes in. He's just back from London, however, and I hardly think he has already squandered everything he picked up there."

Then the door opened, and a tragic figure entered. The caller's face was haggard, his eyes wild, his hair disordered. Even his clothing seemed carelessly worn and ill-fitting, though Lumsden had always been considered one of the best-dressed men in the profession. Certainly he did not look like a matinee idol now.

"Something terrible has happened!" he burst out. "Mr. Carter, I am being blackmailed! Somebody has learned the secret which I thought safe with you, and has demanded an enormous sum of money. It means my ruin, unless——"

"I know all about it, I am sorry to say," the bogus detective interrupted.

Once more he gave a brief and very unsatisfactory explanation, pointing to the rifled safe, and winding up with a statement of his belief that there was nothing to do but to pay—"just as a temporary expedient, of course."

Naturally, that advice did not appeal to the actor any more than it had to ex-Senator Phelps, but Gordon adroitly argued him into a somewhat less impatient mood.

"How much does he want?"

"A cool hundred thousand," was the bitter reply, and it did not convey any real news to the man in Nick's desk chair. "And I haven't more than eighty thousand to my name!"

“Gladly,” Green Eye said, with alacrity, reseating himself in the vacated chair, and taking the pen from his visitor’s trembling hand.

The masquerading criminal held down the cover of the little check book with his left hand, while he began to write with the other. Lumsden leaned over his shoulder, watching him, as if ready to try his luck at signing his name as soon as the rest of the check was filled in. His hand slipped into his pocket, however, and when it came out silently, there was something in it which had a metallic gleam.

“Ah! Thanks!” he exclaimed, a moment or two later. “You have made it very easy for me, Gordon!”

Simultaneously there was a sudden, unlooked-for swoop, followed quickly by the click of a pair of handcuffs as they closed on Green Eye’s wrists.

And the voice which uttered the mocking words was not the voice of Harold Lumsden, but that of Nick Carter himself. Gordon knew it after the first word or two, and even if he had not done so, the action which went along with it would have been enlightening enough.

“Nick Carter, by Heaven!” the rogue cried hoarsely, jumping to his feet and overturning the chair.

“Nick Carter—exactly,” the detective agreed, removing the wig which had played such a large part in transforming him into Harold Lumsden. “You didn’t think you were going to have this little masked ball all to yourself, did you?”

After the first dazed shock—a merely momentary one—had passed, Gordon’s face seemed to grow actually black with rage and hatred.

“You may think you have me, curse you!” he snarled. “But I’ll show you——”

He leaped forward, his manacled arms raised to strike together. Nick quietly sidestepped the mad bull-like rush, but Green Eye turned and charged him again.

There was one more surprise awaiting him, though. The door opened, and Chick entered, coolly fingering an automatic.

“Pretty neat weapon, isn’t it, Gordon?” he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone, then stopped in feigned surprise. “Oh, you and the chief are having an argument? Hope you don’t think I’ve butted in. Now that I’m here, though, I think I might

as well stay. You look as if you needed your wrists slapped, and the chief may not care to bother with it.”

The escaped convict had halted in his tracks at the first interruption, and was now looking from the detective to his assistant with baffled rage. He would have liked to fight it out to a finish, but his shrewdness told him that he would gain nothing by such a course, and it was one of his rules never to exert himself unnecessarily. The consequence was that he merely shrugged his shoulders.

“So be it,” he said quietly. “You fellows can trump my ace, I see. Let me remind you, however, that you haven’t got that gold that our mutual friend, John Simpson, took such a liking to. Likewise, you’re a long way from the possession of those papers which you were foolish enough to keep in a more or less ordinary safe.”

The detectives looked at each other and grinned.

“Think so?” queried Nick. “I’m afraid, in that case, that you are scheduled to receive another disagreeable surprise or two. I located the gold yesterday afternoon—in one of Gillespie’s closets. As for the missing records, I feel very sure that we shall discover them on you.”

And they did.

Therefore, there was no need of delay, and No. 39,470 Clinton was shipped northward to Dannemora the next day, under escort.

“Lucky for us that he belonged to the ‘Gray Brotherhood,’” Nick remarked to Griswold, when he turned a little over seventy-five thousand dollars in gold over to him. “Otherwise, he would have gone scot-free, just as in the case of Simpson. As it is, he’ll get something extra for his escape, at least, and I don’t believe he’ll have a chance to slip away again.

“But another case like this would give me heart disease, I’m afraid,” he added to himself.

THE END.

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