



The Man who Passed

Wallace, Edgar

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About Wallace:

Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace (April 1, 1875–February 10, 1932) was a prolific British crime writer, journalist and playwright, who wrote 175 novels, 24 plays, and countless articles in newspapers and journals. Over 160 films have been made of his novels, more than any other author. In the 1920s, one of Wallace's publishers claimed that a quarter of all books read in England were written by him. (citation needed) He is most famous today as the co-creator of "King Kong", writing the early screenplay and story for the movie, as well as a short story "King Kong" (1933) credited to him and Draycott Dell. He was known for the J. G. Reeder detective stories, *The Four Just Men*, *the Ringer*, and for creating the Green Archer character during his lifetime. Source: Wikipedia

Also available on Feedbooks for Wallace:

- *Four Just Men* (1905)
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- *Room 13* (1924)
- *The Avenger* (1926)
- *Mr J G Reeder Returns* (1932)
- *The Green Rust* (1919)
- *The Daffodil Mystery* (1920)
- *The Angel of Terror* (1922)
- *The Mind of Mr J G Reeder* (1925)
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Chapter 1

MR. MANNERING was called "the Captain" in the village of Woodern Green, which is on the southern edge of Buckingham. Possibly because of his military appearance and the frigidity of his manner; though why captains are supposed to be frigid nobody knows.

He lived at Hexleigh Manor, which was a small house in a large park, and by all accounts he was a gentleman who had no great store of money. The Manor was something of a derelict when he rented it at a ridiculously low sum. The repairs upon which previous would-be tenants had insisted were apparently executed by the new tenant without the assistance of local builders, according to their account.

The captain had a staff of three, two of whom lived in the house and the third in a cottage within the grounds. They were three hard-faced men, who never came to the village, and it was believed that they were old soldiers who had served with the captain during the war.

It was to the cottage that all the provisions were delivered by local tradesmen—none of them was invited to go farther. The bills were paid weekly by cheque on a London bank.

One curious circumstance: no letters, save the inevitable appeals by secretaries of local working men's cricket, football or other clubs, were ever addressed to Captain or Mr. Mannering. He seemed to have no friends.

He had been there a year when he blossomed forth into something grander than an impecunious military gentleman. Vans arrived from London filled with expensive furniture; the dour man at the cottage engaged three gardeners; a local builder was called in to decorate the house, and an era of prosperity set in.

Mr. Reeder, of the Public Prosecutor's Department, became acquainted with Hexleigh Manor in a peculiar way. His hobby, as all the world knows, was chickens. He had a big poultry farm in Kent, and raised the choicest and the rarest birds in the kingdom. The stocking of the Hexleigh Manor poultry farm—a new branch of Captain Mannering's activities—brought down Mr. Reeder in his capacity of poultry expert.

Captain Mannering was in town—he drove to London almost every day in his closed sedan car—and the caller saw only the new poultry man, who was talkative. When the business was at an end Mr. Reeder climbed up into the seat of the little van which had brought him and his birds from London, and drove down the drive. His profit on the transaction was microscopic, but the satisfaction he had as a poultry fancier was of infinitely greater importance.

They passed the cottage, outside which the surly servant of the establishment was smoking. He looked up and Mr. Reeder saw him. He did not notice the angular man who sat beside the driver.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Reeder, mildly surprised, for he had seen the cottager before.

He had a motto, which was that one should live honestly and let others live honestly, which is not quite the same as the less elaborate adage. But he was also very curious, and curiosity can be a nuisance to all sorts of people.

At Scotland Yard they called him "lucky," and pointed out amazing coincidences that had helped him to the solution of important mysteries; but Mr. Reeder used to suggest that he was responsible for all the coincidences that helped him.

In his spare time he came to Woodern Green and made a few inquiries, not because he expected that the results would be of any service to him, but because he wished to know. Knowledge was his working capital, and he would go to great trouble in its gathering. He hoarded facts as some women hoard scraps of silk, or mechanics hoard nuts and screws and odd nails and useless scraps of machine parts, not because they were of any immediate use, but because, some day...

His chief asked about his visit to Bucks, and Mr. Reeder sighed.

"Unfortunately I have—um—a very bad mind. I see—er—the worst, as it were, in everybody and the most—um—sinister meanings in the most innocent things—in fact, I have the mind of a criminal. Had I the courage, which of course I have not, I should have made—um—an interesting lawbreaker."

His superior smiled.

"Good. Go down and see that pompous gentleman at Mabberleys tomorrow and expound what your criminal instincts suggest for the better protection of his business."

So Mr. Reeder, in his mild way, quarrelled with a great man and later was by premeditation offensive to one who was not so great. The great man was Sir Wilfred Heinhall, K.B.E., and the rest of it. He was director

of seventeen corporations and chairman of eight of these. He knew everything about business and economics, and trade balances and world conditions, but he didn't know much about men.

Mr. Reeder went down to the City, representing the Public Prosecutor, and in the course of a conversation which had as its subject the prosecution of an unfaithful servant, suggested that the methods of this particular corporation were rather antiquated.

"If I—er—may be permitted to offer the view—um—your checking system leaves—er—much to be desired."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Sir Wilfred. "Are you telling me how to conduct my business? Did the Public Prosecutor send you down here to lecture ME on Filing Systems? Good heavens!"

He said a lot more, and Mr. Reeder said nothing much. There were few opportunities. He went meekly forth into the city street and boarded a bus that deposited him near to the Home Office.

It was in the afternoon, when he was leaving Whitehall, that he had occasion to stop a gentleman in the street. The gentleman did not wish to stop, but Mr. Reeder hooked his arm with the crook of his umbrella and pulled him back. It was a shockingly undignified action on the part of a reputable man, but Mr. Reeder did it with all the aplomb of a music-hall performer.

"What are you doing in town, Mr. Higson?" he asked.

The good-looking man of forty, brought to a standstill so unceremoniously, looked murder and smiled.

"Hallo, Reeder—"

"Mister Reeder," murmured the detective. "What is the game—snide or just ordinary thieving?"

Higson was well dressed, but that was part of his graft. Nobody could remember seeing Hymie Higson looking anything but in the bandbox class. He had a gold cigarette box in his pocket, and his watch-guard looked platinum and probably was.

"I'll tell you." Hymie's tone was neither respectful nor humble. "When you put me in with your damned perjury I had a snug bit of money put away. That breaks your so-and-so heart, you dirty old something-or-other! Fifteen thousand quid! I've done my time and you can't touch it. I'm going straight because I can afford to go straight—if I couldn't afford to, I'd be selling snide fivers and making a good living, and this time you wouldn't catch me, you old—"

Mr. Reeder tapped him on the ear with the heavy handle of his umbrella. It wasn't a heavy tap, but it was painful, and Hymie's hand went up with a cry.

"Don't be rude," said Mr. Reeder mildly, "or I'll trip you on to your back and push the ferrule of my umbrella into your right eye—or left eye, whichever is most convenient."

There was in Mr. Reeder something cold-bloodedly ferocious which Hymie suddenly remembered. He blinked at the detective, still holding his ear, and then abruptly turned and hurried away.

"Very curious," said Mr. Reeder.

But it was not so curious as the incident of the parlourmaid.

Few people would have given a thought to the parlourmaid. Certainly there was nothing in her appearance or manner to stimulate an interest in her relations. She was plain, long-faced and anaemic; her legs were broomsticks, her feet grotesquely large. Mr. Reeder was conscious of her long before she was completely conscious of Mr. Reeder.

She dusted his room with amazing caution, broke nothing that was valuable, made no attempt to tidy up his desk, was never in the way. She thought of him as "elderly," wondered why he was so old-fashioned as to wear square-topped felt hats and square-toed boots, and why he didn't shave his side-whiskers. All this in a vague way. She was never really interested in Mr. Reeder until his housekeeper told her he was a detective.

"Him?" incredulously.

"Mr. Reeder," said the housekeeper, more correctly.

"A copper?" definitely sceptical.

"Not a policeman, though he goes to Scotland Yard a lot—he's in the government."

"Good Gawd!" said the housemaid.

Her name was Elizabeth, and she was of the class that shortens that stately name to Lizzie.

She pondered on Mr. Reeder after that, surveyed him furtively, craned her head out of upstairs windows to see him "come from business," dangling his closely furled umbrella and playing with his eye-glasses.

The question of Ena very naturally came into close association with Mr. Reeder. Ena's Ernie was Lizzie's absorbing problem. Ena was lovely, with a skin like ivory and teeth like white porcelain. She had the figure of a sylph and legs that people used to turn in the street to look at again. She was Lizzie's sister—nobody quite understood how this came about. Ena had worked in the City, where she had earned some fifty shillings a

week for typing letters all of which began: "In reply to yours of even date." Now she didn't work anywhere; lived at home in a room which she had had specially furnished; drove hither and thither in taxi-cabs, and once or twice had come home in a beautiful car. On her fingers were two all too lovely diamond rings. She had three evening dresses, and withal was respectable. For Ena was engaged to be married to a young gentleman of fortune named Ernie Molyneux. He lived in the country, and came to town or to Brighton only for week-ends.

There was nothing odd about this engagement. Mr. Molyneux was a young and pallid man of twenty-six, slightly chinless but otherwise goodish looking. He was madly in love with Ena, whom he had met at a cinema and had brought home by train, calling upon her parents and being asked into the parlour and asked his views about the weather and the state of trade. And since he had given satisfactory replies to these questions, and had passed the test which mother always applied and had answered that he did not go much to church nowadays, but that he had sung in the choir, he was accepted. This was before his uncle in Australia died and left him all his money, and consequently before the taxi-cabs and the diamond rings.

There was nothing about this which worried Lizzie Panton. It was the advent of the gentleman from the West End which had disturbed the Panton household. He was a gentleman wearing evening dress and a heavy black moustache and dark-rimmed eye-glasses. He had come to Friendly Street, where the Pantons lived, at twelve o'clock one Saturday night. The Pantons were all in bed except Lizzie. She was washing out some stockings and things—being a "daily" she had little chance of doing her own work—and she it was who answered the knock.

"I'm sorry to bother you," said the stranger in a deep, aristocratic voice (the description is Lizzie's); "but is this Mr. Panton's house?"

"Yes," said Lizzie.

"Is that Ena?"

The stranger took a step into the passage and peered at her.

"No—Lizzie."

"Oh!"

A pause.

"You're the slav—the servant girl?"

Lizzie knew that he had been on the point of saying "slavey" and bridled.

"I'm parlourmaid at Mr. Reeder's," she said.

After a longer pause he made her repeat that. "At Mr. Reeder's—which Mr. Reeder?"

"In Brockley Road."

She heard the quick intake of his breath. "Really! Is Ena at home?"

"She's just gone to bed. Is anything wrong with Ernie?"

The stranger hesitated.

"No; you're her sister, aren't you?" And, when Lizzie admitted the fact: "Ernest and she wrote out a paper to-night—a sort of advertisement. That must not appear."

Ena had come home early that night and the advertisement had been very completely discussed. As a matter of fact, it was Lizzie's idea originally to announce the engagement. "It will tie him down," she had said. And it had been "agreed," as the lawyers say, in this form:

"A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Mr. Ernest Jakes Molyneux of Overdean, Birmingham, and Miss Ena Panton of Brockley."

Now, Friendly Street is distinctly in Deptford, but Ena thought Brockley was more respectable. "Has it been posted?"

"No, it hasn't," said Lizzie. "Wait a bit, I'll see Ena—won't you come in?"

No, he wouldn't come in. He preferred the unlighted passage way. Presently Ena came down in her new dressing-gown. She was a little peevish, for Ernie had been rather trying that night—shilly-shallying about the notice.

"Who are you, anyway?" she demanded. "I am Ernie's guardian," said the stranger.

It was evident to the shrewd Lizzie that he was controlling his impatience with an effort.

"I think the announcement is absolutely unnecessary, and it may spoil his chances with his other uncle, who doesn't want him to marry."

Ena was impressed. Her young man had not mentioned any other uncle, but uncles are an unlimited commodity.

"All right, I'll tear it up," she said reluctantly. "I was putting it in the *Kentish Mercury*, but if you don't think it's right—"

"May I have the paper that Ernest wrote?"

She had it upstairs, and, going up, brought it to him. Lizzie watched him walk back to the end of the street, where a taxi-cab was waiting for him, and then came in and shut the door.

"It's very funny," she said.

"It *is* funny," agreed her sister. "Ouch!" She gave a little scream.

"What's the matter?"

"I put my foot on a mouse or something!" panted the pretty sister, who was bare-footed. "Stuff! Mouse!"

Lizzie reached up and lit the gas. It was not a mouse—it was a furry something of familiar shape. Stooping down, she picked it up.

"A false moustache—why, that was what he was wearing!" she gasped.

The two girls looked at one another in amazement.

"That's funny," said Lizzie again.

Ena sat up half the night, writing to her boy. She often wrote, but he never replied by letter except once when she had had a note posted in mid-week in Birmingham. Her letters were invariably addressed to a place off the Haymarket which she discovered was a block of service flats. The "funniest" thing of all was that that same week came a letter from Ernie, saying that everything was a mistake, and that, though he loved her, it was best for everybody if they parted. He told her to keep all the presents he had given to her.

Ena wept, of course. She made a personal call at West End Mansions, to learn that Mr. Molyneux had given up his flat and had left no instructions as to where his letters were to be sent.

To Lizzie the crux of the mystery was that false moustache, until it was superseded by the second mystery. It was a letter addressed to Ena—a wild, more or less incoherent, adoring letter. It was from Ernie and bore the postmark, Birmingham Central, and no address. It was written on scraps of paper evidently torn from larger sheets.

"I love you more than anything... can't stop thinking about you... You alone could save my soul from the tyrant who is sucking my blood... If I could only see you and explain everything—but no, he stands behind me and it's all oil, oil, oil... Sometimes I wake up and say to myself suppose it's a lie. How can you tell if you're not on the ground? You can't *see* oil. I've read up the Encyclopaedia and it doesn't say anything like that. Only eight weeks to the thirty-first—what horrible thoughts possess me! It is the Inspector's fault. If he had done his duty the first time he would have seen through it, instead of which he was in a hurry to catch his train."

"I can't make head or tail of it," sniffed Ena.

"Except that he loves you," said her homely sister.

"I knew that," said Ena.

No further letter came from Ernie. One day Lizzie took her courage in both hands and carried the letter and the moustache to Mr. Reeder.

She chose an occasion which was favourable. It happened to be an evening off, and Mr. Reeder was dozing before the fire. She began an introduction which was full of "I hope you will excuse me, sir's" and "I don't know whatever you will think of me's."

Mr. Reeder blinked himself awake.

"Dear me, what is all this about?" he asked benevolently.

He then observed the parlourmaid for the first time.

"It's about my sister, sir," said Lizzie breathlessly. Mr. Reeder straightened himself, drew up to his desk and put on his glasses.

"About your sister—yes?"

He had a very extensive knowledge of Lizzie's class, and realised that, though it might be a very small matter, it was tremendous for her. A very conventional tragedy, perhaps, the sort of thing that breaks hearts daily in small and unimportant houses.

"It's her young man," began Lizzie, and told her disconnected story, reserving till the last the grand denouement of the false moustache.

Mr. Reeder listened, forgot nothing, filled in gaps, and could have recited the whole history of Ena's love affair without flaw, and much more accurately than could her breathless sister.

"May I see the letter and the moustache?" he asked.

She produced these articles from her apron pocket and laid them on the table.

"I haven't told Ena about the letter—I mean, taking it away—but I knew she kept it in the top left-hand drawer... "

There were some things which surprised Mr. Reeder in the story; there were some which did not surprise him at all. The paper the letter was written on, for example. He would have been surprised if it had been any other kind of paper. The moustache set him frowning. It was very well made, something better than one can buy in shops, the product of an expert theatrical wig-maker. There was gum on the upper edge of it, unevenly applied, and not the spirit gum which should have been applied.

He asked her many questions, few of which she could answer. In fact, he never seemed to stop asking questions, about all sorts of odd matters which had no bearing upon Ena's lover and the false moustache. Had Ernie given the girl money? Had Ena ever met the man with the moustache in Ernie's company, or anybody who might be he? Did Ernie ever talk about going abroad, to America, perhaps?

Mr. Reeder was amazingly interested, much more than she had ever expected him to be, in the love affair of her sister. Ernie was a nice chap, she explained.

"Is that his writing?"

He tapped the letter.

"Are you sure it's his writing?"

Lizzie was absolutely sure; she had seen his writing before. No, Ena had never received letters from him, but once he had written something in Ena's autograph book.

"Did you see him write it?" asked Mr. Reeder eagerly.

She nodded.

"How did he hold his pen like this?" Mr. Reeder seized a pen-holder. "And before he wrote did he make one or two flourishes like this?"

He sent the point of the pen twirling round before it dropped to the paper, and Lizzie gaped at him.

"That's just what he did do!" she said. "I said to Ma at the time, by way of a joke, 'He doesn't know what to write, so he's sort of marking time—'"

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"That's what he was doing, marking time."

"Do you want to know what he wrote in the autograph book?"

Mr. Reeder hesitated for a fraction of a second. "Well—er—yes," he said.

It was quite unimportant, but he would be interested to know.

Ernie had written a little bit of poetry about the advantage of a young lady being good rather than clever, and doing noble things not thinking about them.

"Very—um—admirable," said Mr. Reeder,

Chapter 2

TO say that he was interested was to understate Mr. Reeder's emotions. There was no mystery here except the mystery of Ernie's identity. And the greater mystery, more difficult to probe, who was the man with the aristocratic voice and the moustache who came down to Deptford, knocking up respectable people at twelve o'clock at night in order to prevent the insertion of an advertisement? Had she a copy of this? Lizzie could claim triumphantly that she had written it down word for word in an old memorandum book, and had it at home.

"What I think is this, sir," she said. "This young man is trying to give our Ena the go-by. When I say 'him' I mean perhaps his father or his mother—especially his mother. You know what these people are—they think their sons are marrying beneath them, when really they're marrying a heart of gold. I always say there's more happy marriages amongst the lower classes than amongst the upper classes. Look at the divorce courts—"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Reeder absently. "I am sure. Though personally I—um—never look at divorce courts at all. But I am certain you're right."

He rose from his chair and began to stride up and down the room slowly, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders down, a frown on his classic face.

"Another thing," Lizzie went on, conscious of the impression she had made. "Suppose they stopped his allowance, they've got enough to live on in a quiet way for years—I mean, Ena's jewellery. It's worth two or three hundred pounds—"

"Could I see Ena? I suppose she knows you've come?" interrupted Mr. Reeder.

Lizzie felt and looked guilty.

"Well, to tell you the truth," she said awkwardly, "she doesn't. What she'll say when I tell her I've been to a detective I can't abear to think."

He nodded.

"Tell her," he said gently, "and bring her to see me to-morrow evening about this time. And ask her—um—to bring any other letters she may

have. I—er—shall read them with the greatest sympathy and understanding."

He wanted to keep the letters which Lizzie already had, but she was firm on the point, and carried them off with her.

She spent the greater part of the night sitting up in bed, persuading her sister to see Mr. Reeder. Ena had been shocked, rather shrilly reproachful, had accused Lizzie of being underhand and sly, finally had wept and surrendered.

The next night she came to see Mr. Reeder's house with greater willingness because in the course of the day a further communication, even more mysterious, had been received from Ernie. It was a registered letter, containing three notes each for a hundred pounds, and a very short letter.

"When you get a wire from me giving a certain address say nothing to anybody, burn the wire and come straight to me. I cannot live without you. Go to Cook's and get a passport at once. Don't tell mother or Liz, but the clouds are breaking."

On the back of the letter was scrawled in pencil a long column of figures, evidently written in haste. They totalled to 310,740.

Mr. Reeder was not the kind of man that Ena had expected to meet. In truth, he was not the kind of man that anybody expected to meet; and he had long since classified new acquaintances as those who were disappointed when they first met him, and those who were relieved. Ena was in the relieved class.

He was very kindly and gentle, and not at all the hectoring, bullying detective she had expected. He asked her a lot of questions, very delicately put; questions which she did not realise were questions at all until afterwards; and she told him much more than she had ever imagined she could tell anybody. She was very fond of Ernie; she liked him ever so much; he had always been the gentleman, and, except that she had once heard certain reports, had never displayed the least inclination to fastness.

"He only had to tell me he didn't want me, and I would have understood," she said.

"But he does want you," said Mr. Reeder gently; "although I am afraid—" He shook his head.

"You don't think he means that?" asked the girl anxiously. "I mean, about going out there to him, and the passport?"

"Yes, I think he means that," said Mr. Reeder slowly. "I was thinking of something else. Um."

"I don't know really why I should be making a fuss at all," said Ena, jerking up her pretty chin. "It seems awful to tell all these things to strangers. I suppose his parents are against the match. But after all we've got to live our own lives, haven't we, Mr. Reeder? I mean, I believe in honouring your father and mother, but you can carry that sort of thing too far."

J. G. Reeder neither agreed nor disagreed.

"Did he ever tell you he was taking you abroad?" he asked.

Ena shook her head.

"Or tell you any place where you were likely to spend your—um—honeymoon?"

Ena had to admit that they had never discussed honeymoons. She said vaguely that she had kept him off the subject.

Mr. Reeder rubbed his nose, a little embarrassed. "So you can't tell me anything about any foreign towns you were likely to visit?"

She shook her head, and was within measurable distance of losing patience with him; for it seemed to her that the question of a suitable spot for a honeymoon was a little superfluous in view of the fact that she might not be having a honeymoon at all.

She had all the propriety of her class.

"Naturally I couldn't go out to him unless mother came with me," she said.

"Naturally," murmured Mr. Reeder.

She knew nothing about Ernie except that he was a gentleman. He had never spoken to her about work; that he was wealthy, three hundred pounds' worth of bank-notes testified. He stayed in Birmingham because he "had something to do with works." But what those works were, or where he had his private residence, she could offer no explanation.

"The point is this," said Ena hotly; "I don't allow any man to make a fool of me. If Ernie's given me up because I'm not good enough for his mother and father, there's as good fish—"

"In the sea as ever came out," suggested Mr. Reeder. "I think you're perfectly right."

He took up the little moustache and fingered it, asked her a number of questions about the height, the voice and the dress of the visitor. He was in evening dress, she thought. She had never seen him before or since.

As she walked home with her sister she discussed, not without acerbity, the waste of her time.

"I must say he's not my idea of a detective," she said, "with his hums and his haws and his ridiculous questions. He never once so much as looked at my rings to see if they were genuine."

"You know they're genuine," retorted Lizzie tartly.

Her sister was rather inclined to agree that Mr. Reeder had been a disappointment. He had hardly looked at the false moustache, which she had hoped would have struck him all of a heap, and had said practically nothing about it except that it was well made.

"And he's got a nerve to keep my letters!" fumed Ena, her sense of grievance growing.

"It's only one letter, and I can get it in the morning by asking for it," said Lizzie.

"Did I get it to-night by asking for it?" stormed the pretty little virago. "If that's the kind of man you're working for, I should change my job."

Lizzie said nothing. Already there was moving in her mind a very uneasy suspicion, and it was not directed to her employer.

Mr. Reeder went to his office the next morning with quite a lot to think about. It was very rarely that he hadn't. All the way up to town—he invariably travelled by tramcar—he turned over and over in his mind the problem of the parlourmaid's sister and her eccentric lover. Though he could not place his finger at the moment upon Ernie, he knew all about him, and just what that letter meant.

He was at some pains to explain the situation to the Assistant Public Prosecutor, who listened with interest to the theories he expounded. When Mr. Reeder had finished he shook his head.

"One could initiate inquiries, of course, but I doubt if that's our job. You might pass a note over to the chief constable, who may care to pursue the matter, but it is certainly not for us. The question will come to this department quite soon enough."

Mr. Reeder agreed, but he did not send any particulars to Scotland Yard, not even when he was called in for consultation on a matter which was that day, and for many weeks, to be the top-liner in every newspaper which loved a good mystery.

In reality it was a group of mysteries, each having no association with the other. The first was the affair of the Eton master. Mr. Friston was a Master of Arts, a man who was known to hold very strong and definite views on most subjects, particularly on the question of trade with Russia. He had spoken on this subject at important meetings in London, and his views had become so pronounced, so uncompromising, that he had been requested by his college authorities to limit his oratorical activities.

The master was a man of forty-eight, strong, active, and in one sense eccentric. It was his habit to rise at an unconscionably early hour. It was his boast that the maximum amount of sleep he required was five hours a day, and since it was his practice to go to bed at about nine o'clock every night, he was usually to be found working in his study at three o'clock in the morning, after a brisk walk through the deserted streets of Windsor. The Windsor police knew his habits, and when he came swinging past them, with a cheery "Good-morning," at an hour when modern folks were calling upon a dance band for an encore, they offered him only the polite attention which they were prepared to afford to Windsor Castle itself.

On this particular morning there was a light ground mist, but Mr. Friston was recognised by a policeman who stood under the shadow of the castle wall as he swung down the hill towards Eton. He turned to the left, and was not seen again until the policeman who had originally seen him was patrolling towards the college. By this time the mist had changed into a slight drizzle of rain. It was a quarter-past three when the slowly patrolling policeman, smoking a surreptitious cigarette, saw, lying half on the sidewalk and half in the road, the figure of a man. He hurried forward and flashed his light on its face. To his horror, he recognised the master.

Summoning assistance and an ambulance, the unconscious man was rushed to the hospital, where he was found to be suffering from concussion.

Searching the roadway, the police made a sensational discovery. This was no less than a bloodstained spanner—a long, narrow tool, peculiarly suitable to the purpose for which it had evidently been employed. It lay within a yard of where the unconscious man had been found. It was immediately packed in tissue paper and reserved for examination.

The Chief Constable of Berkshire, who had been communicated with, called in Scotland Yard; and this precaution was justified, for Mr. Friston died at noon without ever regaining consciousness or giving the slightest clue as to his assailant.

Mr. Reeder went down to Windsor with a small party of C.I.D. men, saw the body and the weapon. There was no question whatever that the spanner had been the instrument employed. Considerable violence must have been used, judging by the injuries.

"This is the weapon all right," said the inspector in charge. "There's blood and hair on the end of it, and the doctor says that one end of the spanner exactly fits the wound."

Mr. Reeder examined the gruesome relic and put it down without a word.

He was puzzled, much more puzzled than any of the officers who were with him. Obviously this spanner had caused the injuries from which the unhappy master had died, but there were certain peculiar features of the case which made him reject immediately the theories which were put forward as to motive.

"It couldn't have been robbery," said the chief inspector. "He had about ten pounds in his pocket when he was found. No, he's got on the wrong side of somebody in the political world, and they've waited for him. He has been threatened several times. This case might turn into a very big political sensation. Don't you agree, Mr. Reeder?"

Reeder shook his head.

"I—um—am afraid I don't," he said gently. "A sensation, yes, but not a political sensation. It is a peculiar case."

"I thought you might think that," said the inspector sarcastically. "I've had a feeling it was something like that ever since I came into it."

"It's a peculiar case," Mr. Reeder went on. "When Mr. Friston was found, his soft felt hat was still on his head, badly cut and battered, but still on his head. His servant, whom I took the liberty of interviewing, said that that was an eccentricity of his master, to wear his hat pulled tightly down almost over his ears—it was so tightly wedged that it did not fall off when he fell."

"It was cut through," said the inspector.

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"Certainly. Part of the hat was embedded in the wound, and, as you say, considerable violence must have been used."

He looked from one to the other pathetically.

"I—er—hate interfering with your work, inspector, or even to advance my own humble theories. I admit I'm puzzled."

"We're all that," said the inspector good-humouredly; "but isn't that a feature of every case, Mr. Reeder; you're puzzled at first, but after a bit of hard work the whole thing becomes as clear as daylight. The man who did it—"

"That isn't puzzling me so much," said Mr. Reeder. "The question which is rather distressing me is this—who was the other man who was killed?"

The inspector stared at him.

"The other man? Only one body was found."

J. G. Reeder inclined his head.

"Yes, but there was another person killed by that spanner. For example, there is blood on it and hair."

"Well?" said Inspector Laymen. "You'd expect to find blood and hair after a murder like this."

"I don't think so," said Mr. Reeder gently; "not when—um—the actual weapon did not come into contact with the wound, and when the unfortunate gentleman is—um—bald."

Laymen gaped at him, ran his fingers through his hair.

"That's right," he said slowly, "there was practically no blood, and, as you say, he was bald!"

He unwrapped the spanner to make sure.

"It is all very disconcerting," Mr. Reeder went on. "Whoever killed the respected gentleman had already destroyed somebody else with the same weapon; or if he had not killed him, had injured him very severely."

Acting on this theory, the inspector ordered an extensive search of the neighbourhood, and the river bank for two miles was scrutinised carefully, without, however, discovering anything that might elucidate the second mystery.

Mr. Reeder spent the greater part of his day pursuing solitary inquiries; he did not rejoin the inspector and his party, but journeyed to London by train. At Paddington he bought all the evening newspapers and read the account of the tragedy with the greatest care, for newspaper men have sometimes a trick of picking up an odd and important clue which has escaped the official eye. There was nothing here, however, that helped toward a solution, and, after boarding his tram at Westminster Bridge, Mr. Reeder settled down to read the remainder of the news.

He was a careful and systematic reader of newspapers; no item escaped his attention. He read even the advertisements carefully, and had been seen secretly marking the cross-word puzzles with a stub of pencil.

The tram had passed the ganglion of the Elephant and Castle when he saw a headline: "Dollars in Hayrick. Farm Labourer's Surprising Discovery."

"A farm labourer named Ward, in the employ of Mr. John Carter, a farmer, of Farnham, made a remarkable discovery this morning. He had occasion to go to the top of a hayrick, the thatching of which had been blown off in last week's gale. He was about to begin work when he noticed a flat packet lying on the top of the hay. Picking it up, he carried it to his employer, being unable to read, and Mr. Carter found the packet to contain twenty-five thousand dollars. They were fastened together

with a rubber band, and, except that a few notes were sodden by the rain, they were undamaged. He immediately communicated with the Farnham police, who have taken charge of the notes and have instituted inquiries. There have been many burglaries in the neighbourhood during the past three months, and it is believed that this package was part of the proceeds, since several wealthy Americans were in residence here during the summer. Mr. Carter and his labourers made an exhaustive search of the hayrick, but no other valuables have been found."

Mr. Reeder kept a mental file of all important crimes, and though it was perfectly certain that there could have been burglaries in that neighbourhood, he could remember nothing of importance, nor could he recall the fact that any very important loss had been reported to the police.

He turned to the stop press and found two brief references; the first was to the hayrick discovery, and was headed:

DOLLARS IN HAYRICK (See page 1)

"A further packet containing twenty-five thousand dollars was discovered in a dry ditch within a mile of the first discovery."

"Humph!" murmured Mr. Reeder, and devoted his attention to the second item:

"MYSTERY OF BURNT CAR (See page 6)

"The car was bought by a man who gave the name of Stevenson at the Brickfield Garage, Waterloo Road."

He turned back to page 6, a little annoyed with himself that he had overlooked a news item so important that it called for further reference in the stop press. It was not a very exciting piece of news. A car had been found by the side of the road between Shrewton and Tilshead in Wiltshire. It was completely burnt out, and its owner or driver had disappeared. Neither the Shrewton nor the Tilshead police had had any report of the occurrence.

"Humph!" said Mr. Reeder again.

Half his success as an investigator came from his ability to build up stories from the flimsiest foundations. The truest and probably the cleverest thing that had been said about him was that he had an instinct for accurate association—accurate or not, he could join up disconnected incidents to make the most incredible stories. They were not only incredible but often fantastical, and more often than not had no other value than to afford him the interest and amusement which only the inventor finds in his creations.

All the way home J. G. Reeder made up stories, which brought in a burnt car, two packets of American bank-notes and an eminent master of

Eton College struck down in the middle of the night by an unknown assailant.

Mr. Reeder never pursued these dream stories of his, unless there came to him that queer sense of conviction which belongs rather to instinct than to reason. They served to fill an idle hour, to serve as mental gymnastics to amuse him.

He had reached Brockley and was munching his evening muffins when he began his second story, and he was half-way through the preliminaries when he had that eerie sense that he was telling himself something which was true. He put down an unfinished muffin on the plate, gulped the remainder of his tea, and, wiping his buttery fingers on a serviette, rang the bell. The housekeeper came.

"Clear all this away," said Mr. Reeder. "I'm going to work."

His idea of work was peculiar; for two hours he sat at his desk, his hands clasped on his waistcoat, staring fixedly at his blotting-pad. Only at long intervals did he pick up the pencil and scribble a note on a sheet of paper or strike out some memorandum that he had previously written down.

At half-past ten he went to his room and changed into evening dress. It was an unusual outburst of gaiety on the part of Mr. Reeder. His housekeeper was almost shocked.

Chapter 3

IT was a quarter to twelve when Mr. Reeder strolled into the Ragbag Club, which is situated in Wardour Street and is only heard of by the general public when it is periodically raided. In spite of the fact that he was a very rare visitor, he was recognised, and the head waiter found a corner table for him, and produced his inevitable bottle of Vichy and the as inevitable fried egg and bacon.

"Nobody here, Adolph?"

"Not yet, Mr. Reeder. They start coming in after the theatre."

The head waiter was a little nervous.

"Anything doing, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Reeder took a yellow carton of cigarettes from his trousers pocket, and lit one carefully before he replied.

"If you mean by that, Adolph, are the police raiding this speakeasy, I am unable to afford you any information. I should imagine, however, that you will be safe for to-night."

The head waiter looked his relief. Such a speculation on the part of his visitor was tantamount to a guarantee, and, indeed, Mr. Reeder had, before his arrival, notified Scotland Yard where he was spending the evening.

"Are you expecting anybody?"

The head waiter shook his head.

"Nobody you know, Mr. Reeder."

This was a mechanical assurance; Reeder had had it before.

He picked daintily at his bacon.

"Mr. Higson, now?" he suggested. "Mr. Hymie Higson?"

The head waiter looked uncomfortable.

"He hasn't been here since—"

"Let's have the truth," said Mr. Reeder softly. "If I deal fairly with a man I expect him to deal fairly with me. About a year ago"—he was devoting himself entirely to his supper, and apparently the story he now related was something to make conversation—"about a year ago there was considerable trouble, I believe, with a man whose name I forget for

the moment, but whose offence was the passing of forged money. The money was traced here, to this delightful club, and to its very nice, polite head waiter, who is also the proprietor. I investigated the matter on behalf of the—um—authorities, and I discovered that you were perfectly innocent in the matter. I could, of course, have made matters very unpleasant for you, but, being a perfectly honest man and having no desire to inconvenience the general public, I—um—did not bring you into court as witness."

The head waiter cleared his throat.

"That's true, Mr. Reeder. I told you then that if I could ever do anything for you—"

"Well?" Mr. Reeder looked up, and this time the head waiter was not uncomfortable.

"Hymie hasn't been here since last Sunday night," he said; "but I'm expecting him to-night. In fact, he telephoned to me and asked me to have a hot supper ready for him in the private room. But the private room has been booked, so he's got to take it in the restaurant. I'm expecting him every minute now."

"When did he telephone?"

The waiter thought.

"This evening. He said he was very anxious to have the private room."

"Is he bringing somebody?"

The man shook his head.

"No, sir, he said nothing about that. He's only ordered supper for one."

"I'll wait," said Mr. Reeder.

The head waiter looked at him, troubled.

"There's nothing wrong, is there? I mean, if you have to make any kind of pinch, I wish you'd do it outside the club, Mr. Reeder. We've got such a bad name lately with the police—"

"I'm not going to pinch anybody," said J. G. cheerfully. "I merely want to renew an old and unpleasant acquaintance."

His opportunity came five minutes later, when Hymie Higson came in. He was wearing a long overcoat, which he slipped off and handed to the waiter at the door. Evidently the occasion was not a festive one, for he was not dressed for any party. He glanced round the room and then his eyes fell upon Mr. Reeder. He was all for pretending that he had not seen his *bête noire*, and was turning away when Mr. Reeder beckoned him.

The room was still sparsely tenanted, and there was no excuse whatever for the newly arrived visitor to make a hurried exit, and reluctantly he came across to where the detective was sitting.

"All alone?" asked Mr. Reeder pleasantly. "Sit down."

"I'm expecting some friends." Hymie was very cool and watchful. He stood at the table, ignoring the invitation.

"I think you'd better sit down," said Mr. Reeder amiably.

With great reluctance Hymie sat. He was a wiry man, with a keen, dark face and abnormally long, thin hands.

"Well, get it over." His tone was offensive. "It doesn't do me any good being seen speaking to a copper."

"It doesn't do me any good or any harm," rejoined Mr. Reeder. "Anybody who knows you and me will imagine that I am questioning a second-class crook, and an amateur at that. A buyer and passer of snide notes, a forger of acceptances, a card-sharper who robbed his young brother officers and was expelled from the service which he never adorned, a born confidence man, possibly a murderer, certainly a wholly undesirable citizen."

He said this with the greatest blandness, and with every accusation Hymie's eyes grew harder.

"You'll be able to write the story of my life," he said.

"I shall be able to contribute many interesting items," said Mr. Reeder suavely. And then, without a pause: "You had very bad luck with the money."

Master as he was of his emotions, Hymie blinked quickly twice.

"I don't get that."

"Fifty thousand dollars." Mr. Reeder did not look up. "Ten thousand pounds. An awful lot of money to leave behind you in ditches and hayricks."

"Ditches and hayricks?" Hymie spoke slowly. "Is this a new joke or a new puzzle or what? I don't understand you." And then he chuckled. "Good Lord! You mean the stuff in the evening papers about the fellow in Kent who found some American money on the top of a haystack? That's funny—one of the funniest things I've heard. Why should I know anything about it?"

"It wasn't in Kent," said Mr. Reeder carefully; "it was a place called Farnham."

"I've never been there in my life," smiled Hymie, "and that you can take as gospel truth, Reeder. I've never been there in my life. If I had been there I should hardly have been chucking bundles of thousand

dollar-bills into hayricks. And if that's all you've got to talk to me about, you're wasting your own time and mine."

He rose abruptly, but Reeder's hand caught his arm.

"Sit down," he said. "There are one or two other questions I want to ask you."

"Ask 'em by letter, or better still go read an article I read the other day about the truth machine. You strap it on a man and when he lies you get a reaction. They tried it on a bird who'd murdered—"

He stopped suddenly. Reeder saw his face go suddenly hard and pinched.

"Who'd murdered?" he suggested.

Hymie laughed.

"I haven't come here to tell you granny stories," he said.

Hymie shook off the detaining hand and stalked away. He would have gone with less comfort if he had known that J. G. Reeder had also read that article on the truth machine which had appeared in an American magazine.

Hymie's meal was a frugal one, Mr. Reeder noticed. He was not in the restaurant long before he paid his bill and departed.

J. G. Reeder had a number of other inquiries to make, but none of these proved very satisfactory. He visited clubs less reputable than the Ragbag, dingy places where his evening dress excited guffaws of amusement; little upstairs rooms, clouded with smoke, where he was recognised and a deadly silence fell on his appearance. He buttonholed the most unlikely people and plied them with mysterious questions. He was a tired man when he got back to Brockley. The clock was striking three as he slipped into bed and pulled the coverlet over his shoulder, but he could not have closed his eyes before he heard the bell of the front door ringing. It rang incessantly, and, rising, he opened the window still further and looked out.

He saw an indistinct figure standing on the step. "Who's that?" he asked.

"It's Lizzie, sir. Can I see you? An awful thing has happened!"

"Wait a moment."

He closed the window, switched on his light, and, dressing hastily, went downstairs and admitted the sobbing parlourmaid. It was a long time before she became coherent, though he learned the object of her visit before she could relate the circumstances.

"Ena's gone... been took away... Oh, I'm sure something's happened to her, Mr. Reeder... "

He gave her some water, and after a while she became calmer and told her story. She had gone to bed at eleven o'clock. She and her sister slept in the front room, looking on to the street. They had talked for an hour on the inevitable subject of Ernie and his peculiar behaviour, and they must have fallen asleep somewhere about midnight.

At one o'clock Lizzie, who was a heavy sleeper, was awakened by voices. Stupid with sleep as she was, she sat up in bed and found Ena in her dressing-gown going out through the door. She had asked what was the trouble, and Ena had whispered: "It's Ernie. He's outside. He wants to see me for a minute."

Still half-asleep, Lizzie lay and waited. She heard no sound of voices, and presently she became wide awake. She heard the noise of a car driving off, and, getting out of bed, went to the door and listened. There was no sound. The narrow hall below was in darkness, and, lighting a candle, she went down the stairs in search of her sister. The front door was wide open, but her sister was nowhere visible.

Lizzie ran into the street and looked up and down. The thoroughfare was deserted. In the passage she found one of Ena's slippers, and, in alarm, she went upstairs and woke her mother. Ena had vanished. She had gone to the interview in a dressing-gown over her night-dress, had not even put on her stockings. The night was chilly, with a slight fog, not the kind of night that Ena would choose for a stroll, even if she were fully dressed.

"Have you notified the police?" asked Mr. Reeder quickly.

The woebegone Lizzie shook her head.

"Mother didn't want the disgrace of bringing in the police—" she began.

Mr. Reeder forced the disgrace upon this family by reaching for the telephone and calling the nearest police station. He had the good fortune to find the divisional inspector, and arranged to meet him at the house in Friendly Street.

As they walked together down Tanner's Hill Lizzie told him of her last talk with her sister.

"No, she said nothing unusual, but, naturally, the American money coming was a great surprise to us all."

Mr. Reeder stopped in his stride.

"The American money?" he said quickly. "What American money was this?"

"Dollars," said the girl; "foreign money—American—twenty-five notes for a thousand dollars, and a thousand dollars is worth more than two

hundred pounds... Ena was surprised, and so was I. We had never seen so much money in our lives. Five thousand pounds, Mr. Reeder."

"Tell me about this," he said as they walked on slowly.

"It came by express post, not registered or anything, yesterday morning by the first post. Ena didn't tell mother anything about it, because Ernie said, 'Don't mention this to a soul.' She only told me because it got on her mind."

"He wrote a letter with it, did he?"

"Not a letter, just a scrap of paper fastened inside the band that went round the bank-notes. Just that—'Don't tell a soul about this, not even Lizzie.' Those were the very words. I'll show them to you."

"What did she do with the money?"

The girl considered this.

"I don't know. Oh, yes, I do," she said suddenly. "She put it under her pillow just before she went to sleep. I'd forgotten all about it."

"Where was it posted?"

"In London," said Lizzie. "I specially noticed this—London, W.1. It was posted the night before. Ena said, 'It's funny, Ernie being in London and not coming to see me'—that's what we were talking about last night."

She was certain that there was nothing more than this admonition, written on a scrap of paper fastened to the notes by a rubber band.

"But you'll see for yourself," she said, "and the envelope. Ena kept the money in the envelope. She's a very careful girl, is Ena—poor darling!"

She began to weep softly, and Mr. Reeder was uncomfortable.

When they reached the house they found that the divisional inspector and one of his men had already arrived, and were interviewing the tearful mother. Reeder went straight upstairs to the bedroom, and his first act was to turn back the pillow, still bearing the impression of Ena's pretty head. There was nothing beneath the pillow, neither letter nor notes. He pulled over the mattress, but the money was not there; nor was it in the locked drawer where she kept her treasures.

"She didn't put it in the drawer," insisted Lizzie. "I actually saw her put it under the pillow just before she went to bed. She had a little joke about having money to fall back upon."

Mr. Reeder pursed his lips.

"Did you see her when she was leaving the room? Did she have anything in her hand?"

Lizzie was uncertain. The room was dark, the blind drawn. The only thing she was sure about was that Ena was in the doorway and had

spoken to her. She was so sleepy that she could not even remember the girl's exact words.

"I'm such a heavy sleeper," she confessed, "that Ena might have been having a long talk through the window. It was open; in fact, it was the cold air that woke me up."

One thing was clear to Reeder: whoever had called, and whatever was the whispered conversation they had held between window and pavement, the caller had asked her to bring with her the American bank-notes.

For whom would she go down in the middle of the night? He questioned Lizzie on this, but her memory was vague. It could not have been anybody who bore the slightest resemblance to the man with the false moustache, but, against this, Ena had not seen him.

The constable on the beat was found, and he was able to give a few vital details. He had seen a car drawn up at the end of the street, and had thought it belonged to a doctor. The only machines of importance that came into Friendly Street in the night were usually associated with births or deaths. He had spoken to the chauffeur, but, having no curiosity as to the ownership of the car, had asked him no questions. He had had the impression that there was somebody sitting inside the car, but he wasn't very sure about this, and when he had returned on his second visit, which was a quarter of an hour after Ena had disappeared, the "doctor's" car had gone.

A rough examination of the street by flashlight produced another clue—the second of Ena's slippers. It lay in the gutter, and had been run over, evidently by the car, for on the silken uppers was the mark of a diamond tyre tread. The slipper was found at a point midway between where the car had been seen waiting and the girl's home. The divisional inspector brought it into the house and examined it carefully, but it afforded them no assistance, the only suggestion it offered being that the slipper was kicked off between the house and the car by Ena in the course of a struggle.

The divisional inspector had a ready-made solution to the mystery, which was more flattering to Ena's enterprise than to her modesty, but this Reeder rejected.

"She didn't go willingly—of that I'm certain," he said, and here he was right.

Chapter 4

ENA PANTON did not fall asleep immediately her head touched the pillow. Her mind was excited. She was baffled by the amazing conduct of a young man towards whom she had pleasant feelings, though she could not, in the strictest sense of the term, regard herself as being in love with him.

Ernie was one of those indistinct and eager courtiers who impress not so much by their personality as by their sincerity. He had been in love, very much in love, and after the manner of her sex the girl had played on his emotions without finding them communicated to herself. She liked him; she was flattered by him. When he became munificent she was a little impressed by him. But she had never loved this chinless young man, with his sleek hair and his tiny moustache. Now he was a factor in life that gave her tremendous importance. Under her head reposed a fortune. She put her hand beneath the pillow and touched the envelope to make sure she was not dreaming.

She heard the clock strike hour by hour, and she was wide awake when the first pebble struck the window pane. She got out of bed, pulled up the blind gently so that she should not disturb her sister, and looked out. She saw a motor car standing by the kerb a little way along the street, and beneath the window a man muffled to the chin by the collar of his overcoat. Foreshortened as he was, and in the darkness—the house stood midway between two street lamps—she could not distinguish him. But it might be Ernie. She raised the window carefully and looked out.

"Is that you, Ena?" said a voice.

"Who is it?" she asked in the same tone. "Jack—Ernie's brother."

She had never known till then that Ernie had a brother.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Ernie wants to see you; he's in the car. Can you come down for a second?"

She hesitated, looked towards her sister, who, if the truth be told, was snoring.

"I don't know if I can," she said. "Can't you tell me?"

"It's about the money," whispered the voice urgently. "Bring it down with you and I'll explain. The police are after Ernie, and they may be after you."

This was a terrific shock to the respectable Ena, and threw her off her balance. A greater shock, since she had had some doubt as to whether any person in the world could possess so vast a sum as five thousand pounds without having acquired it dishonestly.

"I'll be down," she said, put on her slippers and her dressing-gown and, taking the money from under her pillow, opened the door.

It was at this point that Lizzie woke.

"It's all right. It's a man who wants to see me about Ernie," whispered the girl, and went pattering down the stairs.

She took off the chain, unlocked the door and opened it.

"I can't ask you in—" she began.

Nevertheless, he took a step into the passage and before she realised what had happened, a strong arm closed round her, a hand covered her mouth and nose.

"If you make a noise I'll kill you!" breathed an unpleasant voice in her ear.

Momentarily she was paralysed with fear, allowed herself to be led out into the cold street, and was only conscious that she had lost a slipper when her bare foot touched the pavement. This brought her back to sanity. The hands were still over her mouth, and with a jerk she tried to free herself. For a moment there was a breathless struggle, until he lifted her bodily and ran with her to the car. The chauffeur had opened the door, and the man got in, dragging her after him and flung her on the seat by his side.

"If you make a fuss I'll kill you," he said again. "I mean that. I could break that little neck of yours as easy as breaking a stick."

She subsided into the corner, sick and trembling, and, stooping, he picked up a rug and flung it over her, pulled down the blinds and settled himself by her side.

She could not see where the car was going. She felt it breast a hill, and guessed they were going into Lewisham. She began to cry and wail, and this her captor tolerated. Then suddenly she remembered.

"What have you done with the money, you thief? You're not Ernie's brother Jack... He has no brother."

The man laughed.

"What do you know about Ernie or his brothers or sisters or aunts or cousins?" he asked flippantly. "But you're quite right about the money;

I've got it, in my pocket. I've lost too much through that damned fool's stupidity."

"Where is Ernie?" she asked.

He made no reply to this.

"What are you going to do with me?" she demanded after a long silence.

"It's not what I'm going to do, it's what you're going to do," he said. "You're going to write a letter to your mother or sister or your friend Mr. Reeder, and tell them that you've gone abroad with Ernie, and that you're perfectly happy, and that you'll be coming back in a year—and—"

"I'm not going abroad with you or Ernie," she stormed. "You'll be locked up for this—taking me out of the house—"

"You must be very pretty," said her captor cynically. "I haven't had a good look at you, but you must be very pretty. You're so damned unintelligent that there must be some points about you that would attract even a nit-wit like that copper-hearted bird."

The mention of Mr. Reeder gave her an idea.

"Mr. Reeder will find me," she said. "You'll not get away with it. He knows everything about Ernie. I showed him the letters that Ernie sent—"

"What letters?" asked the man quickly, and she realised she had made a mistake.

"One letter, anyway. The letter he sent from Birmingham."

She heard him gasp.

"Did he write to you from Birmingham? Was—was there any address on the letter?"

She hesitated, and she heard his sigh of relief.

"There wasn't," he said. "Reeder's got the letter, has he?"

She did not reply, and leaning over, he caught her by the shoulders and shook her roughly.

"When I speak to you, answer," he said. "Now, tell me all that Reeder knows."

She began to cry softly.

"If you snivel I shall be sorry for you, and if I'm sorry for you I shall kiss you," he said, and she sat bolt upright, stiff with fear.

There was nothing subtle about Ena. She had not even a native cunning.

"Lizzie took the letters to him, and he asked her a lot of questions as to how Ernie wrote, whether he made—you know—little circles in the air before he started to put his pen on the paper."

She heard the man whistle.

"He asked that, did he—the old devil!"

She realised she had to propitiate him, and it was not difficult for Ena to propitiate men, even men met under the present distressing circumstances.

"It was awful of you to take me away like this," she said. "You'll get into ever such trouble—"

"Never mind about that," he said curtly. "Go on telling me what Reeder said."

There was very little she could tell him, he realised after she had been talking for a little while.

"Does he know about the money—the money that was sent to you this morning—yesterday morning?" he corrected himself.

"No, but Lizzie will tell him."

"Was she awake when you left?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, she was—and I'll bet she took the number of this car, so the best thing you can do is to say it's a joke and take me back."

"That is not my idea of a joke," he said.

They did not speak again for the greater part of an hour. The car was flying through the country. Twice it passed over a long bridge. She asked where they were going. It was the third time she had put that question.

"You're going to a nice, quiet, country spot," said the man. "You'll have a little suite of your own, and if you've any brains you will sit down and amuse yourself with knitting. I'll get you some clothes to-morrow and if you don't make any attempt to escape you'll be treated decently. If you do try to get away—" He did not finish the sentence.

She fell asleep in the last half-hour of the journey, and was awakened when the car stopped. He took a large silk handkerchief and bound her eyes before he assisted her into a house which smelt close and musty, and guided her feet up the stairs which were so broad that, reaching out her hand, she could feel no balustrade.

He kept her waiting for about a quarter of an hour in a small, unfurnished room, and here she sat shivering on a chair, with a rug round her shoulders, until he came for her, and showed her into a bigger room that had evidently been hastily furnished with a bed. The windows were covered with wooden shutters. The room had been newly papered, and had the luxury of a small bathroom which led from the apartment, a bathroom which was apparently entirely without windows.

"I'll get you some food, and to-morrow I'll bring you books and anything you need."

He stood revealed now in the light he had switched on; a tall man, lithe, keen, good-looking. It was the first time Hymie Higson had seen the girl, and he could admire and approve Ernie's choice.

"You're a good-looker but dumb," he said good-humouredly.

"I can talk if I want—" she began.

"I don't mean that kind of dumbness." He tapped his head. "Maybe we'll improve your mind down here; and in the meantime I'll give you my word for what it is worth, that you won't be molested unless you attempt to escape. There's a man on guard below your window; there will always be somebody up in the house, and your chance of getting away is practically nil. What is more important, you'll be very sorry if you attempt to make your escape. I'm telling you."

He went away and came back with some hot tea and sandwiches, which he put on a table.

"You're a sensible girl, and you don't need me to tell you that if I'd go to the trouble of abducting you, which carries a sentence of ten years penal servitude, there's very little I'd stop short at. When I told you I'd break that little neck of yours I meant it. It would be harder to do now I've had a good look at you—but I'd do it! Will you please regard me as a sleeping dog and let me lie! And don't kick me!"

There was a certain refinement in his tone. She thought it was rather "aristocratic," and then in a flash remembered the man who had come in the false moustache, and promptly charged him with that visit. He nodded.

"That's true. I was trying to do you a turn. You didn't know it, but I was. If your sister hadn't gone to that"—he checked himself—"that man Reeder, if she hadn't spilt the beans to him, you wouldn't be in this mess. I wouldn't have minded the money the treacherous little dog sent you—after all, you're probably entitled to your cut."

Since she did not realise the significance of this innuendo it passed unchallenged.

He left her, and after some hesitation she drank the tea and finished the sandwiches, in some trepidation.

It was not until the first streaks of dawn showed through the cracks in the shutters that weariness overcame her, and, lying down on the bed, she pulled a rug over her and went to sleep. She must have slept throughout the day, for it was dusk when she woke up and, switching on the light, pushed the bell which Hymie had shown her.

It was some time before an answer came, in the shape of Hymie himself, carrying a tray.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," he said with mock humility; "but as I'm head cook and warder of this establishment, and I've no lady's maid to wait upon you, you'll have to be satisfied with the best I can give you."

The best was boiled eggs and new bread, and delicious butter. Being young and healthy, and with a young and healthy person's appetite, she was more concerned in the satisfaction of her hunger than in her immediate danger.

He went out of the room and came back with a bundle of clothes, which he threw on the bed.

"They're all new, and they've all been collected with considerable trouble from a dozen London stores. I guess old man Reeder has been circulating warnings to outfitters. If they had all been purchased at the same place, some copper-hearted chicken would have blown the works."

"What do you mean by 'copper-hearted'?" she asked curiously, and he was pleased to explain that a copper-hearted was one who had an affection for policemen and was predisposed to supply information to these indispensable servants of civilisation.

"That's all there is to it, baby."

"Are you American?" she asked, and he smiled, showing his white teeth.

"English by birth, American by education. I had the honour of spending my eighteenth birthday in an American college called Sing-Sing—you may have heard of the establishment."

"It's a prison, isn't it?" she said, and he chuckled.

"This growth of education on the part of the lower orders can be traced to the movies. Yes, my child, the college was Sing-Sing, and the actual form I was in was located in the death house, from which a well-directed 'life-boat'" (Footnote: i.e., Pardon.) "rescued me in time to serve with distinction in the Great War."

He waved his hand to the clothing.

"There's everything there that a lady requires," he said. "Not that you're a lady, but no doubt you dress like one. If I have omitted something, I hope you'll be immodest enough to tell me."

He went away after this and she bolted the door on him and dressed. Beyond the fact that the shoes were a size too large, the clothing fitted her, and she felt more at her ease. It was when he came back that he discovered that the door had a bolt.

"I overlooked that," he said when he was admitted.

He went to the door and called a name. Presently a man came in, who, without so much as looking at her, proceeded to remove the bolt.

"It isn't necessary if you play square," said Hymie, "and if you didn't play square that bolt would be no more use to you than post-cards in hell!"

Chapter 5

MR. REEDER'S views on the deplorable state of his mind were familiar to most people, but he was never quite so much a criminal as he was in the twelve hours which followed the disappearance of Ena Panton.

He had suspicions amounting almost to certainty. But Scotland Yard is a very cautious machine, not easily set in motion. "Maybe's" and "Very likely's" do not send the wheels grinding. More important, it is very careful to hide from those on whom suspicion falls that they are suspect, and this care often arrests too close inquiries. But Mr. Reeder was not at Scotland Yard. He was an extraneous force that moved sometimes independently of, and sometimes in conjunction with, that establishment, but he was not entirely bound by the methods and formula of Scotland Yard.

He interviewed the Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions, and this gentleman said all that Mr. Reeder expected him to say, which was that he should pass any exact information he had to the Criminal Investigation Department.

Between conjecture and exact information yawns a deep, wide gulf. Mr. Reeder might suppose all manner of things, but the only fact he had to go on was that a little typist, living in the poorest part of London, had left her house, scantily attired, in the middle of the night and had disappeared. There was not even definite information upon which the police could act that she was in possession of five thousand pounds in dollar currency. They had only the evidence of her sister, who admittedly knew little or nothing about foreign currency, and, in addition, there was a peculiar want of title to the money, supposing it had been under the girl's pillow as Lizzie had stated.

All that he could say in his minute to the C.I.D. was that the girl had disappeared, and all that Scotland Yard could reply politely, yet with a hint of flippancy, was that young ladies had heretofore walked out of their houses in the middle of the night, and even in the middle of the day, and flown to mysterious love nests which were of a quite innocuous character.

Inspector Grayson, who came over to consult with Mr. Reeder, put the matter from his point of view.

"There may be something very big behind it. On the other hand, you know how these people romance. For all you can tell the girl may have been fully dressed and waiting for the arrival of this young man. The fact that her old clothes were found in the room may mean nothing more than that she had something better to wear. This is disappearance six hundred and seventy-three, and against that you've got to balance four or five hundred that have turned up, very sorry for themselves, and hoping that everything will be forgotten and forgiven. The money part of it is a bit of a puzzle, but I think I've found the explanation of that."

He took out his pocket-book and produced some newspaper cuttings. They dealt with the finding of the two packets of bank-notes near Farnham.

"That is what started this yarn. She has read this in the paper and has probably invented the rest. You know what liars these people are—they'll do anything to get themselves into the limelight."

Mr. Reeder sighed. He always sighed when anybody else took a low view of human nature.

It had been a bluff on his part to connect Hymie Higson with the discovery of the money on the hayrick, part of one of his fantastical stories, which had once seemed real and now had gone back to its old perspective. He rather wished he could see Higson again, because there was something about the man...

Was it Higson? Was Higson the abductor? He asked why he should be, and found no satisfactory answer.

Mr. Reeder sat down at his desk and fell to storytelling all over again, imagining the worst of everybody, imputing motives far from commendable to every man and woman associated in his mind with the case.

Ena might turn up again and make them all look foolish. He had only the evidence of a sleepy girl, not too intelligent, possibly not too truthful; a young lady whose passion for sensationalism had been stimulated by her devotion to the pictures.

On one point, however, he was certain; when the blow fell, as he knew it must inevitably fall, he was prepared for an event which shocked ten millionaire directors to their core, if indeed they possessed such a moral stiffening.

He was sent for the next day as soon as he reached the office. The Assistant Director was very perturbed.

"I want you to go down to the City and see Sir Wilfred Heinhall. It's very important, Reeder, so please don't go by bus—take a taxi."

"Certainly," said Mr. Reeder. "I will go the quickest way."

Actually he went by tube.

They were waiting for him in the stately anteroom to Sir Wilfred's palatial boardroom; two managers and a managing clerk escorted him into the gilded room with its crystal chandeliers and priceless paintings.

"Mr. Reeder, Sir Wilfred," they announced in hushed voices, and left him.

Sir Wilfred was pacing up and down a large and expensive Persian rug. His hands were thrust into his pockets, his whitish, sandy hair was disarrayed in a picturesque and alarming manner. He looked like a man who had not slept for a month.

"Sit down, Mr. Reeder," he said in a hollow voice. "Sit down! A most dreadful thing has happened, and I cannot help but recall your fateful words—yes, I think I could describe them as 'fateful'—the last time we met. I refer to our business system, with which I was all too satisfied—all too satisfied!"

He made a gesture of despair. Mr. Reeder sat down on the edge of the chair, his umbrella between his legs, his hands grasping the knob, and waited.

"When you told me, Mr. Reeder, that the system on which the Central and Southern Bank is run was archaic and out of date, I admit I scoffed. I have a distinct recollection of scoffing. I may have been rude to you."

"You were," murmured Mr. Reeder.

"I am sorry! I can say nothing more than that—I am sorry. A terrible thing has happened—the most terrible thing in the history of the bank. Mr. Reeder, we have been robbed of a fortune. Not here in London, Mr. Reeder, but—" He paused dramatically.

"In Birmingham?" said Mr. Reeder, and Sir Wilfred opened his mouth wide.

"In Birmingham? I have not told a soul where it was. I did not even tell the Public Prosecutor. I have not mentioned it even to my managing director—it was Birmingham, yes."

Mr. Reeder nodded slowly.

"By a clerk. I don't know what his surname was, but I imagine his Christian name was Ernest." Sir Wilfred sat down heavily.

"You knew?" He almost squeaked the words. "You knew that we were being robbed? His name is Ernest Graddle—an awful name, one which of itself should have sown suspicion in the mind of any careful manager."

Ernest Graddle! A clerk earning a few pounds a week, who has been robbing the bank systematically for the past twelve months, beginning, it seems, with small sums, and gradually increasing until his last act was to convert a sum of eighty-five thousand pounds to his own use! Eighty-five thousand pounds!"

Mr. Reeder was not impressed.

"I thought it would be a pretty big sum. What is the total?"

"Three hundred and ten thousand pounds," said Sir Wilfred huskily. "An enormous sum. And we have been robbed by the simplest of tricks. One of our customers, a retired steelmaster, is something of an eccentric. He is also unfortunately something of a recluse. Instead of his money being invested he maintains a large current account; his balances sometimes are as much as half a million. Although banks are not supposed to pay interest on current accounts, we do allow him a small percentage—three per cent. It is on this account mainly that the money has been drawn. Our client, as I say, lives a retired life. He is extremely religious. I almost said that he was a religious maniac. He may not be a religious maniac, he may be just simply a maniac. No man would keep such an enormous sum on a current account. The bank manager has expostulated with him, but has received no reply to his expostulations. We have, I might say, taken every precaution, and yet this"—he tried to describe the absent Ernest, but failed—"this wretched fellow, scarcely more than a boy, has managed to take the money under the very eyes of our inspectors, under the eyes of our managers, under the eyes of the district manager! It is the most appalling thing that has happened in the history of banking."

Mr. Reeder knew better. More appalling things had happened in the history of banking, but he made a certain number of allowances for Sir Wilfred's natural indignation.

"I presume it will not affect the credit of the bank?" he asked, and Sir Wilfred swelled indignantly.

"Affect the credit of the bank, my dear sir? Stuff and nonsense!" He was quite his old self. "We have ten millions of reserve. The sum involved is, so to speak, a fleabite—in a sense. In another sense it is a colossal loss."

He would have enlarged upon the stability and security of the bank, but Mr. Reeder turned the conversation to a more practical direction.

"When was all this found out?" he asked.

It had been discovered two days before, explained Sir Wilfred. The clerk in question, Ernest Graddle, had not turned up to work. The

manager, thinking he was ill, sent a message to where he was lodging, and then heard for the first time that Mr. Graddle, though he maintained the address, was very seldom in the habit of sleeping at home. He had left for London the previous night, taking with him all the possessions he kept at his lodgings. He had paid his landlord and had gone away about eight o'clock in a small, black motor car which he himself drove. The manager became suspicious, sent for an inspector.

"We had the auditors in, and of course, the moment these incompetent jackasses got down to the situation, they discovered what had happened. Graddle handled the account from which the money was stolen, and two or three hours' work on the books showed us just what had happened. Naturally, I have notified the police, who are now searching for him, and I have sent for you, Mr. Reeder, to take complete control of the case on behalf of the bank."

Mr. Reeder smiled.

"I'm afraid you can't do that," he said quietly. "I shall probably take a limited control of the case on behalf of the Public Prosecutor."

He could excuse Sir Wilfred's error, for he had spent many years of his life in the service of the Bankers Trust, and in the course of that association had saved them so many millions that when he retired from his position he was presented with a piece of plate which must have cost nearly twenty pounds.

He explained just where he could help, and Sir Wilfred for once took an intelligent view of the situation.

The manager, accountant and bookkeeper of the Birmingham branch were within call, and these J. G. Reeder took into the sub-manager's office, one by one, and questioned. The manager was quaking. The hour of an honourable retirement was near at hand. It looked to him as though the whole of his career with the bank must go for nothing, for Sir Wilfred had hinted to him that the handsome gratuity which the Central and Southern Bank paid to their managers on retirement might be withheld.

"I know nothing whatever about it. I am responsible, of course, for the account, but Graddle was immensely capable, and I don't know anybody I would have trusted sooner than him. The truth is, Mr. Reeder, our system is wrong. I've pointed this out to Sir Wilfred a dozen times. By the present method it is quite easy for a young clerk, especially if he has a confederate, to wipe out the entire branch balance!"

"Had Graddle any vices?"

The manager thought not. He was a quiet young man, a member of a debating society, and there was no breath of scandal against his name.

"Did he bet?"

Here the manager was emphatic. Graddle abominated gambling, and at local societies had twice given lectures on the evil effects of sweepstakes. There was no woman in the case; Graddle did not drink, nor had he any other objectionable habits.

"He was very ambitious, and often told me that if he were a very rich man he would play on the Stock Exchange as a man plays on a piano. He said that fortunes could easily be acquired, and it was only the lack of capital which kept any man poor."

"That is probably true," said Mr. Reeder gravely, and the manager hastened to explain.

Graddle was keenly interested in the oil market, though there was no evidence to prove that he had ever speculated a shilling on that or any other mart. His interest, however, was such that he had attended technical evening classes on oil engineering, was something of an authority on oil lands, or, if he was not, pretended to be.

It was his practice to spend his week-ends in London, and most of his spare cash went in this luxury. In his desk at the bank they had discovered a number of letters from people who had advertised interests in oil properties. Apparently he never passed an offer of oil lands without writing to the advertisers to discover the strength of it, though again there was no evidence that he had invested money.

Armed with this information, Mr. Reeder made the rounds of the City, and after a while he came to the London offices of an American bank, and discovered where the last eighty-five thousand pounds had been exchanged for American currency. Some four hundred and twenty odd thousand dollars had been paid to a young man, who had brought a covering letter from the Central and Southern Bank, and who had paid for his purchase in English notes. The bank had been warned days in advance that a customer was requiring a large sum in American money, so they were prepared. The description of the youth who made the exchange corresponded with the description furnished of Ernie.

Boiled down, it was a vulgar, commonplace bank theft, an "inside job" readily engineered, because of loose clerical systems, by an employee. It had its hundreds of parallels, and differed in only one respect from a score of similar cases.

In that one respect, however, the difference was marked. Ernie had no vices. He did not bet, he did not speculate. Mr. Reeder, however, knew differently. He interpreted that reference to oil in his letter to Ena, and it was not so difficult to see how the clerk had fallen into the toils. A large

number of oil properties are advertised in the agony columns of the leading daily newspapers in the course of the year, and not all of these are genuine. A sensible proportion are inserted by sharks who are quite happy if they touch the little money of the hazardous speculator. Who was the shark?

Later in the day all the documents which had been collected from Ernie's desk were sent by train to London, and Mr. Reeder examined them very carefully. He had already sent a clerk to search the files of the leading dailies for advertisements extolling the potentialities of undeveloped oil-fields. Happily, he had English newspapers to deal with; had this happened in New York a few years before, not a clerk, but an army of clerks would have been required to check up these flattering offers.

Ernie's interest in oil had begun less than twelve months before, if he could judge by the letters, and had probably started with his reading of books on the world's oil production. A copy of one of these was found in his lodgings, well thumbed and annotated—he had left it behind when he had made his hurried flight. Mr. Reeder had therefore been fairly accurate in putting a year as the period to be covered by the searcher after alluring newspapers.

It made a formidable and voluminous collection of documents when it came into Mr. Reeder's hands that night. By the morning these would be checked up and the advertisers traced, if they were traceable.

Descriptions of the wanted man had been circulated by telegraph especially to motor-hire companies and to garage proprietors. At eight o'clock that evening Mr. Reeder was called on the telephone by the Chief Constable of Scotland Yard.

"We've traced that boy, Mr. Reeder. Do you remember the case of a motor car being found on the side of the Shrewton road, burnt out?"

Mr. Reeder almost jumped out of his chair. One of his stories was coming true!

"Yes."

"Well, that was his! He gave the name of Stevenson. The garage proprietor recognised the photograph."

Chapter 6

J. G. WAITED up till three in the morning to hear the report of the officer who had been sent specially down to examine the car and to gather fuller particulars. The car had been deliberately set on fire. That had been the police theory from the moment they found two empty petrol tins thrown into a near-by ditch. The number-plate had been broken off, and the machine had been identified by the chassis number. The newest discovery that the police made was that the car had been set on fire by a delayed fuse, and probably did not burst into flame until nearly half an hour after the man had deserted it.

Stevenson had also been identified by the proprietor of an inn at Andover. The boy had arrived late at night, driving the car which was afterwards found burnt, and had ordered supper, which was served to him in the coffee room. He carried with him a small suit-case, was very pale and agitated, and one of the waiters had remarked to the manager of the inn that he thought the visitor had been crying! He was certainly in a state bordering upon hysteria.

After he had finished and paid for his supper, saying that he was going on to Bournemouth, something went wrong with his car. He could not start it, and he behaved like a lunatic, screaming and raving at the motor mechanic who tried to put the matter right. The car required very little treatment; Mr. "Stevenson" had forgotten to switch on the ignition.

All the time he was at the inn he did not let go of his suit-case, and when he drove off it was between the steering column and his left knee.

At first the burnt-out car had not been connected in the mind of the motor mechanic with the Stevenson car. It was not until he saw it in a police station yard that he recognised it and reported his suspicions to the local inspector.

Now, to make Mr. Reeder's story true, this young man *had* to be hysterical! If he was calm and collected and in full possession of his senses, what had happened that fatal night was impossible. Certainly no packets of bank-notes would have been discovered on the tops of hayricks and in

ditches; no eminent master of Eton would have been struck down and destroyed without warning.

Mr. Reeder could claim, though he never made such a claim, that he had known from the very beginning that Ernie was a bank clerk. He had an extensive knowledge of business papers; he knew the paper of the Central and Southern Bank, because the lower right-hand corner was invariably cut off as bank-notes are cut; and he knew that Ernie was a clerk, because bank clerks have a trick of making flourishes with their pens before they write, the reason being the necessity for making absolutely sure of the statement or figures they are copying, the flourish giving them just that amount of time to check up.

But bank clerks are not necessarily thieves because they possess money and give expensive presents to girls. Mr. Reeder was certain that if the explosive Sir Wilfred had been aware that he was in possession of these facts he would have regarded him as an accessory; but Sir Wilfred did not know, and Mr. Reeder's conscience was clear. That was one of the peculiar qualities of Mr. Reeder's conscience, that nothing clouded it.

He secured a powerful car from the police, and went alone on a voyage of discovery, the area of his search being Buckinghamshire. A search of the records of a certain ministry had told him practically nothing. Mr. Mannering, who was also Mr. Hymie Higson, might have a real name—it was certainly neither Mannering nor Higson.

Reeder made many calls. If he had a weakness it was for working alone; and if he had a vice it was that he was uncommunicative. There were Scotland Yard officers who complained bitterly that he worked for "solo glory." But to do him the barest justice, Mr. Reeder never bothered about glory, any more than a man who plays a difficult game of patience takes any comfort from the thought that his success will win the plaudits of the crowd.

That was his system, to play patience in a closed room for the satisfaction of his own curiosity. If he failed, as he sometimes failed, he published his discredit; if he succeeded, he often hugged his triumph to himself, and none knew how great it was.

So that when he went down into Buckinghamshire he told nobody, and at the end of the day, after he had been deposited in Whitehall and the car dismissed, he stopped only long enough to eat muffins at a nearby restaurant before he strolled away to Paddington and travelled by train to Maidenhead. Here he chartered a cab, and in the darkness of the night was deposited near the home of Mr. or Captain Mannering.

The iron gates were closed; the wall in their vicinity was formidable. A quarter of a mile along a side road the ground was more vulnerable. In the dark of night Mr. Reeder found himself trudging through dead bracken to his objective.

Ena Panton might, as her keeper said, be "dumb," but she had the power of shrewd observation. One of the first things she observed, after she had settled down to her captivity, was that her prison had been most carefully prepared for her. It was as though her gaoler had planned her abduction weeks before he carried her away. The windows were shuttered, and the shutters were screwed into place so that they could not be opened. A ventilator grating had been recently placed in a wall high up out of reach, and a certain number of books had been provided for her entertainment. They were not books in which she herself was greatly interested, being mainly elementary works of science, two or three books about oil and oil-fields, and an amount of other literature equally dry and equally unappealing.

A day after her arrival a new set of books made their appearance, more to her liking. With them came magazines, fashion papers and the more interesting of the illustrated weeklies.

She challenged Hymie, with whom she was now on almost friendly terms.

"You've been planning to get somebody here for a long time."

"How did you know that?"

"Look at all the preparations you've made," she indicated, and he smiled.

"True, O dumbell!" he said. "Fancy you noticing that! Yes, I've been looking forward to the pleasure for a month."

She shook her head.

"No, you haven't. You had this place prepared for somebody else—for Ernie."

He stared at her.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I don't know. I've got a feeling. Where is Ernie?"

"He's gone abroad."

"Why?" she asked, and he sighed wearily.

"How many times have I told you not to ask questions?"

He went to the end of the room, pulled aside a curtain that hid a heavy door, and unlocked it.

"Come along for your little walk," he said. "Put your coat on—it's cold."

She struggled into the coat he had bought for her, and together they passed through the door on to a landing and down an outside staircase into the dark grounds. At first she had refused to go out with him, and he had not insisted.

"If you want to keep well you've got to take some exercise," he said. "If you prefer to live inside you can—the only thing I can tell you is that you're not going out by yourself."

She saw the wisdom of the arrangement, and the second night when he invited her she went with him meekly. She could see nothing except trees, and far away a dull red glow in the sky. She asked him where this was, and he refused to tell her.

"London?" she suggested.

"Very likely," was the answer.

On this, the fourth night, he took her out and she was feeling at her friendliest, was curious rather than frightened, questioned him as to what he intended doing with her and how eventually she was to be disposed of. He would have liked to supply a practical answer, for he was already feeling the embarrassment of her presence.

They were returning after a longer walk than usual. She had reached the foot of the stairs, when suddenly, without the least warning, he picked her up in his arms and kissed her. She fought back at him like a tiger cat, battling with wild rage. He said nothing, followed her when she went up the stairs and locked the door upon her. When he brought in her supper she retreated to a corner of the room, watching him.

"It's all right, you fool," he growled. "I lost my head, that's all—too much moonlight in my system."

If she could only get the key of that door! He carried it in his side pocket, making no attempt to hide the fact. She practised picking pockets, hung a woollen jacket over the back of a chair and filched from the pocket nuts that she had saved over from her meal. In a few hours she felt herself an adept, but he never gave her another opportunity, kept away from her, and she dared not risk a closer approach.

That night she went to bed with a sense of apprehension, fastened a chair under the knob of the main door leading to the building. It was nine o'clock when she retired. She woke two hours later suddenly and instantly. She had heard a sound, the stealthy movement of a key in a lock, and it came from the direction of the door that led down into the grounds.

In an instant she was out of the bed, switched on the light and slipped into her dressing-gown. She was white and shaking; her knees all but gave way under her as she moved stealthily across the room in the direction whence the sound had come.

There it was, a queer, tinkling noise, the fumbling of steel against steel.

"Go away!" she called shrilly. "If you come in I'll kill you. I have a knife."

The noise ceased. She waited tensely, listening. There was no other sound, but when she put her ear to the door she thought she heard feet moving.

There came another sound that sent her spinning round. A key had been thrust in the main door at the other end of the room, the lock snapped back, and Hymie came in, glowering.

"What are you trying to do—make a getaway? Go back to bed."

"Wasn't it you... trying to get through that door?" She pointed.

"That door?"

His voice changed. Crossing the room swiftly, and taking a key out of his pocket as he came, he unlocked the door and pulled it open. Nobody stood on the landing outside, nor was any person visible on the narrow stairs.

"Is this a fairy story or are you—"

He saw something, and, stooping, touched the landing. It was a wet footmark; his fingers, when he examined it, were muddy. Somebody had been there recently.

Locking the door, he hurried from the room and was gone a few minutes. When he returned he was wearing an overcoat and carrying a hand-lamp, and with this he examined the landing and the stairs. He tried the door at the foot of these; it was unlocked, and he was certain that he had locked it behind him when he had come in. It was raining; the ground under his feet was wet.

Hurrying back the way he came, he passed through the girl's room, and along a passage down the wide stairs to the hall. A man was sitting there, reading by the shaded light of a lamp. It was the thick-set man who had torn off the bolt in Ena's room.

"Wake up the boys," said Hymie. "Get Janny up from the cottage."

"What's wrong?" asked the man, putting down his newspaper.

"Somebody tried to get into the house through the outside staircase."

The man grinned.

"Burglars?" he asked sardonically, and Hymie showed his teeth to him.

"Do as you're told, will you!" he snarled.

Mr. Reeder's visit to the neighbourhood had not passed unnoticed. It had been disconcerting, but there was no immediate cause for alarm. He did not doubt for a moment that Reeder knew he was living here under the name of Captain Mannering; but Reeder would not suspect that the girl was here, and Hymie's greatest secret of all was hidden beyond fear of discovery.

Hymie was no ordinary criminal; he maintained an intelligence staff in unsuspected places. No search warrant could be applied for and issued without his knowledge—he banked upon this. The very hint that such a warrant was on its way would be sufficient to start him moving. But he had questioned his informant only that night over the telephone, and had been completely assured that Scotland Yard was not taking the step he most dreaded.

Reeder was different. Hymie knew the detective by repute. He did things which officialdom would never sanction, and a search warrant, for J. G. Reeder, was an absurd superfluity. It was Reeder; nobody but Reeder would dare... Reeder had probably watched him as he had come from the stairway.

When he had got his men together Hymie explained his plan.

"I'm taking this girl to France to-night," he said.

"She ought to have gone there first. I'll arrange to have her looked after and be back by to-morrow night. Have a car ready, and 'phone the hangar."

Hymie had served in the Air Force during the war, and he owned a powerful little two-seater 'plane that had been very useful to him. He housed this in a field behind Wycombe, but, as Mr. Reeder had suspected, the flying licence he held was issued neither to Mr. Higson nor Captain Mannering.

"I'll bet you that's what he's been looking for," said one of the men, and Hymie turned on him sharply.

"Who do you mean—Reeder?"

"He hasn't been snooping around the country for nothing," the man went on. "Didn't you say that when you met him at the club he was asking you why you left bundles of bank-notes lying around?"

"That was a guess," said Hymie hastily.

The man shook his head. It was the gardener who lived at the cottage, and he had excellent reason for knowing Reeder.

"He came here the day we got those damned chickens in," he said, "and I was sitting at the door of the cottage when his van passed. He couldn't help recognising me—he had me for a snide job four years ago,

and that fellow is camera-eyed! If he knows you, he knows your record. He knows you're an airman, and that's why he's been down here—looking for the hangar. And if he's down here to-night, he's looking for the girl. If you take my advice, guv'nor, you'll have all the cars round and beat it."

Hymie considered this proposition, and it seemed reasonable. He had been a fool ever to hamper himself with this brainless little typist. On the face of it, this dangerous adventure had the appearance of a supreme act of folly. It is possible that Hymie thought there might be a pleasant solution, for he was not without his attractions.

"Get the cars ready. I'll go up and tell her," he said.

He ran up the stairs, along the passage, and, unlocking the door, flung it open. The room was in darkness.

"Get up and dress," he commanded. "We're going a little trip."

There was no answer.

He took a step to the left, felt for the light switch and turned it.

"Don't move," said Mr. Reeder's amiable voice.

He was sitting at the table, his square hat on the back of his head, his woollen muffler untidily disposed about his neck, and in his mittened hand was a long-barrelled automatic.

Chapter 7

FOR a second Hymie stared at him, dazed, shattered. He was paralysed to inaction for just the time it takes a man to count twenty.

"The young lady is waiting for me outside the other door—" began Mr. Reeder.

Hymie moved swiftly. With one hand he knocked up the light switch and the room was in darkness. In another second he was flying along the corridor and down the stairs. There was nobody in the hall. Hymie jumped for the front door, and, flinging it open, flew out into the night. He wore thin slippers and a dressing-gown. He scarcely noticed the gravel under his feet as he tore down the drive just as the first of the cars backed out of the garage behind the cottage.

"Get the gate open!" he roared

One of the men flew to the gate, turned the key and pulled, but the iron barrier moved only a few inches and then stuck. Somebody had slipped a handcuff around two bars, that effectively held it.

"Get an axe," breathed Hymie; "quick!"

One of the men ran into the garage and came back with a crowbar. It would seem a simple matter to smash one steel link, but it was nearly three minutes before the connecting handcuff was broken and the gate swung open.

"Your tyres are flat," said a hateful voice from the darkness. "I—um—took the liberty of deflating them. And even if I hadn't—"

As he spoke there came a whirr of wheels. A big car drew up with a jerk opposite the gate and across the path, barring all escape. Hymie turned and fled across the little park. He saw a dark figure standing by the side of the drive and fired from his hip. It was all that was necessary for Mr. Reeder, for he was a law-abiding man and could not bring himself to shoot unless he were shot at. Two sharp reports followed; Hymie felt the sting of a bullet in his thigh; one leg gave under him and he went crashing to the ground.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Reeder apologetically, "I am afraid I did go down into Buckinghamshire without notifying Scotland Yard. But being, as I have always insisted, a—um—timid man, I did take the precaution of telephoning to the Buckinghamshire police, telling them what I was doing, and asking them to send a squad car to pick me up in an hour's time.

"I have always known that this pleasant country retreat was occupied by at least two crooks. The prosperity of Mr. Hymie Higson was such that I should have been foolish to the point of recklessness if I had not detailed one of my assistants to trail him; and once he was trailed, there was no difficulty at all in establishing the fact that Captain Mannering and Hymie were one and the same person.

"I was puzzled as to why Hymie should purchase a country estate, even though that estate was purchased very cheaply, until I made an examination of his American record, and found that his favourite pose was that of country gentleman, in which role he had fleeced quite a number of distinguished but unintelligent young men of the *jeunesse dorée*—a foreign expression meaning, I believe, the golden youth.

"Whether Hymie originally intended to try that method of earning a livelihood in England on his release from prison, or whether it was forced upon him by the circumstances of finding the mug—if you will pardon the expression—I have not yet discovered. It is certain that he was in the habit of advertising oil properties for sale, and that he was by this means enabled to secure quite a considerable sum of money from various dupes. When first he heard from the unfortunate Ernest Graddle, he may not have realised the extent of his good fortune. Later, when they met, and Graddle handed to him a sum which he knew no bank clerk could have obtained honestly, it is possible that, under the threat of exposure, he learned the system by which Graddle had been robbing the bank of small sums for many years.

"Once he knew this, the rest was easy. Graddle made a systematic attack upon the account of a rich man who entrusted his money to the bank, and by a method so simple that a child of ten could have defeated it, was able to go on deceiving his manager, hoodwinking the inspectors—the reference in his letter was obviously to a bank inspector—and extracting huge sums, which he, like all people engaged in embezzlement, imagined he would be able to return when fortune smiled upon him, and delivering instantly the bulk of these monies to Mr. Hymie Higson.

"They were never seen together in London after their first meeting. Hymie was too clever to associate himself physically with a thief who,

sooner or later, would be found out. They had certain rendezvous where they met; a flat in the Haymarket, a Maidenhead pleasure garden, and one or two other places which I have not yet been able to trace.

"On one of his excursions to London Ernest Graddle met a girl with whom he fell violently in love. She was undoubtedly pretty, and although she was poor, that fact would not weigh heavily with this young man who, if he had lived on his salary, would have been in her class. He bought her presents, gave her sums of money, and when the strain of his deception began to grow on him, made arrangements to marry her.

"The girl had social instincts, and asked that the engagement might be announced. Ernest agreed, I imagine, with some reluctance, and must subsequently have told Hymie, who would be furious. Such an announcement might attract attention to the girl, and indirectly to the young man. Immediately he obtained the offending advertisement, and in the course of his visit to Deptford learned that Ena's sister was in my employ. That, I—um—flatter myself, must have been a shock to Mr. Higson. I may be taking an immodest view of the—um—terror of my name, but I think I am right in saying that he was shocked.

"Naturally, he disguised himself when he came. In no circumstances must he be identified as having the least connection with Ernest Graddle. I imagine—though he will not confess this much—that he insisted upon the young man making one big steal and bolting. Then it was that Ernest was obstinate, insisted that he could not live without Ena Panton, though it was probably not until the night before he bolted that he confessed that he had broken his promise, and had again communicated with Ena and had sent her a portion of the stolen money, which he had changed into American currency.

"When Hymie learned that he had sent a package of bills to the girl he must have been beside himself with fury. The bills could be traced and the inevitable exposure precipitated. He must also have been having a very trying time with Ernest Graddle, who was love-sick, mad with fear and remorse, and in a state bordering upon dementia.

"The only evidence we have is the evidence given by the motor mechanic at Andover, and his description of Ernest is, I should imagine, a fairly faithful one.

"Hymie's plan was as follows. He would fly in the afternoon to Salisbury Plain, land in the dark—he is one of the cleverest night fliers that ever was thrown out of the Air Force—and Ernest was to go by road and pick him up at an agreed spot which was a quarter of a mile beyond Stonehenge. Hymie seems to have landed on the plain without attracting

any attention. There is a big aerodrome within a few miles, and the appearance of a plane, even late at night, would not be regarded as remarkable.

"He must have told Ernest that he was taking him out of the country, probably to the South of France. In reality he had other plans. Ernest was too dangerous a man to be left at large in France where, when the robbery was known, his description would be circulated, and where most certainly he would be free to telegraph the girl to join him.

"A room had been prepared, a prison room, at Hymie's country house, and after the car had arrived, the baggage transferred to the plane, and the car saturated, and left with a delayed action firer, the machine took off without mishap. They could not have gone far before Ernest made the discovery that the 'plane was going in the wrong direction, and then Hymie must have told him the truth—that it was too dangerous for him to go abroad, and that he was taking him to a safe hiding place.

"What happened after this one can only conjecture. The boy was hysterical, mad with fear and fury. He may have suspected Hymie and threatened that none of the money in the suit-case should be his. He certainly opened it, with the intention of flinging its contents over the side of the 'plane. Two packets, and probably more, were actually jettisoned, before Hymie turned upon the demented young man and struck him with an iron spanner which lay to his hand. There was probably a struggle, in the course of which the spanner fell over the side of the aeroplane—with tragic results, as we know, for it struck an unoffending Eton master and killed him.

"If you take a map of the south of England and you draw a more or less straight line from the place where Hymie picked up his passenger to the hangar, you will see that it crosses Farnham, Windsor and Cookham, the slight deviation in those tracks being caused by a heavy ground mist which lay over a portion of Wiltshire, and which the airman was at some pains to avoid.

"I don't know how many times Ernest was struck. He was undoubtedly dead when the 'plane came to earth at the flying field which Hymie had first rented and subsequently bought.

"What was done immediately with the body it is impossible at the moment to say. It may have been left all day in the hangar. The evidence I have is that the shed was locked throughout that day, and that a man sat outside or wandered about it, not attempting to seek shelter, though the day was very wet and gusty.

"Higson's danger was not yet over. There remained the girl, and that ill-fated package of twenty-five thousand dollars, which was all the more significant since the mysterious discovery of similar packages on a Hampshire farm. It might be that he was even more concerned with the possibility that the young man had written very fully to his sweetheart, giving particulars of his crime, or, what was as bad, naming a rendezvous where they could meet. If I may be allowed the immodesty, the situation was further complicated by the fact that I was already in the case, and had seen both Ena and her sister. When I met Hymie at the club he was on his way to perform this bold stroke.

"The need for silencing the girl was an urgent one. This young lady tells me that he threatened to kill her, and I have not the slightest doubt that if she had been less attractive he would have put his threat into execution. As it was, she has taken no harm, and has something to talk about for the rest of her life, besides figuring—and this will give her the greatest pleasure—in an interesting murder trial. The moment her portrait is published in the newspapers she will receive hundreds of offers of marriage from that half-witted section of the population which exists for no other purpose than to offer marriage to notorious persons. So that, generally speaking, I do not think we need waste our sympathy on this young lady, and I am especially asking the bank, in view of the information she was able to give to me, to refrain from demanding the jewels which were donated to her by her unhappy lover. Oh, yes, she knows he is dead, and she has paid him the tribute of her—um—lamentations.

"Hymie went down to Deptford and carried out his plan as arranged. It was easier than he had imagined, and, as he had a hiding-place already prepared for her lover, there was no insuperable difficulty about finding some place where she could be hidden. Exactly what he intended doing eventually, I do not care to think.

"That gentleman is the solution of many minor mysteries, and, incidentally, releases from suspicion the three violent socialists who on a certain occasion had threatened Mr. Friston, and are, I believe, at this moment under police observation."

Mr. Reeder had an audience consisting of the heads of Scotland Yard, the chiefs of the Berkshire police and the Assistant Public Prosecutor. There was also an official stenographer.

"That's all right, Mr. Reeder," said Grayson. "A very interesting story, and I have no doubt we shall be able to check up every point. You've done marvellously, though I've always had in my mind the possibility

that the discovery of the money at Farnham had something to do with the murder of the Eton gentleman—"

Mr. Reeder murmured something; whether derisive or not, nobody could quite gather.

"I think, sir"—Grayson addressed the Assistant Public Prosecutor—"the matter may be left now in our hands."

"Where is the body?" asked Mr. Reeder. There was a little glint in his eyes, as though he were enjoying a secret joke.

"We'll find that—I had a talk to Hymie in the cells this morning, and of course he denied everything, and said exactly what you're saying: 'Find the body. You can't prosecute a man for murder without a body. I think that's the law.' But we'll find it—with the assistance of our friends from Berkshire," he added politely.

Mr. Reeder scratched his chin.

"You won't want my assistance in that respect? I have made a few inquiries—"

"No, no, no, you can leave it to us, Mr. Reeder."

There is nothing malicious about a Scotland Yard officer, very little petty jealousy, but since an official of that institution depends for his very living and his promotion upon discoveries for which he himself can take credit, he was not unnaturally desirous of coming in at the end. The Chief Constable said as much to the Assistant Public Prosecutor as they were walking along Whitehall to lunch.

"We'll have to come back to old Reeder. He's a sly old dog, and if Grayson hadn't been so cocky we should have known all the facts by now," he said, and here he was right.

Mr. Grayson had undertaken the most difficult problem of the case. An army of detectives searched house and grounds, dug up foundations, overturned hearth-stones, dragged the river, made examinations of garage floors, but the body of the murdered man was not discovered. It was the one secret which J. G. Reeder had not revealed.

He was an assiduous reader of American magazines and especially those lurid representatives of the magazine press which dealt with crime. And had not Hymie Higson once most incautiously mentioned the truth machine? And had not Mr. Reeder read the very article?

"There is only one place to hide a body," he said, when the Assistant Public Prosecutor hinted that for his own private information he would like to know his assistant's theory. "Have you ever heard of an elderly tramp named Peters? The name is unfamiliar to you, sir? It was unfamiliar to me. I never met the man in my life, partly because I do not associate

with tramps, and partly because I did not know tramps had names. But there was such a person—Peters the tramp."

"You're being mysterious," smiled his chief.

Mr. Reeder shook his head. He was a little indignant that such a charge should be brought against him.

"There's no mystery except the peculiar workings of my mind. I have heard of the man Peters and of Hymie's great generosity to him—perhaps if you mention this to Scotland Yard, sir, they will immediately leap at the solution. As it is, I fear it is going to be difficult to bring home to Mr. Higson, or Mannering, or Brates—that is the name in which his aeroplane licence was issued—the responsibility for the death of this unfortunate young man."

Hymie held the same view. His confidence grew with the remands which were ordered of his case. Neither the wheedling, the threatening nor the bluff of police officers shook him. Eventually Mr. Reeder was sent for—Scotland Yard had capitulated.

"We can't get this bird to talk, and all our efforts to find the body have come to nothing," said Grayson irritably.

Mr. Reeder produced from his overcoat pocket a magazine with an horrific cover.

"You may not have read this publication," he said; "but I subscribe to it, and so apparently does Mr. Higson or Mannering or Brates. Indeed, I learned some years ago that with the big shots of American crime this is the most favoured publication. It tells of past murders and of interesting developments in criminal detection. Not the least interesting of these is an article on the truth machine, the invention of a young Chicago scientist. A band is placed round the chest, another round the arm, and a cardiograph is taken. A man so treated is asked a question, and if he tells the truth the little pointer on the ribbon shows no visible sign of agitation. If he lies, the pointer swings left and right, and the farther it swings the bigger is the lie. If you peruse this article you will read the story of a young motor salesman who disappeared, and was suspected of being murdered. The man so suspected was arrested and put under examination. The inquiry was never completed, because the criminal, realising his danger, secured an injunction from a Supreme Court judge to stop the experiment. But before it was arrested he had revealed several interesting facts. First, that he had killed the man he was supposed to have killed; secondly, that he had buried him in a certain section of space; thirdly, that the place he had chosen for burial was—a cemetery!"

Grayson gasped.

"A cemetery?"

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"I can imagine no more suitable place," he said. "It is certainly the last place you would disturb in your search. On the day following the murder of the young clerk, a tramp named Peters who had died in the neighbourhood was to have been buried in a common grave. Some unknown benefactor bought the plot, so that he should rest alone. That same night the grave was re-opened, and the body of Ernest Graddle was also interred."

About three months after Hymie Higson was effectively disposed of by the officers of the law, Lizzie the parlourmaid asked Mr. Reeder for a day off.

"Ena's getting married," she said, "to such a nice boy! She's ever so fond of him, and after all the poor girl's been through, it's a blessing! And do you know, Mr. Reeder, that the police won't give her back all those bank-notes that were taken away from her? They say the money belongs to the bank, although Ernie gave it to her, and if they took away the notes why didn't they take away her rings?"

Mr. Reeder was too weary to discuss a matter of ethics.

"Take your day off, Elizabeth," he said, "and be so kind as to bring me some muffins."

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